

The News-Journal

'If it happened, it's news to us'

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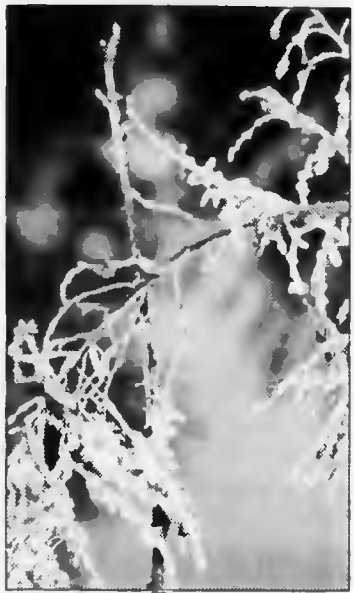
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Wednesday, December 30, 1998

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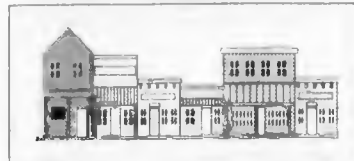


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Around Town

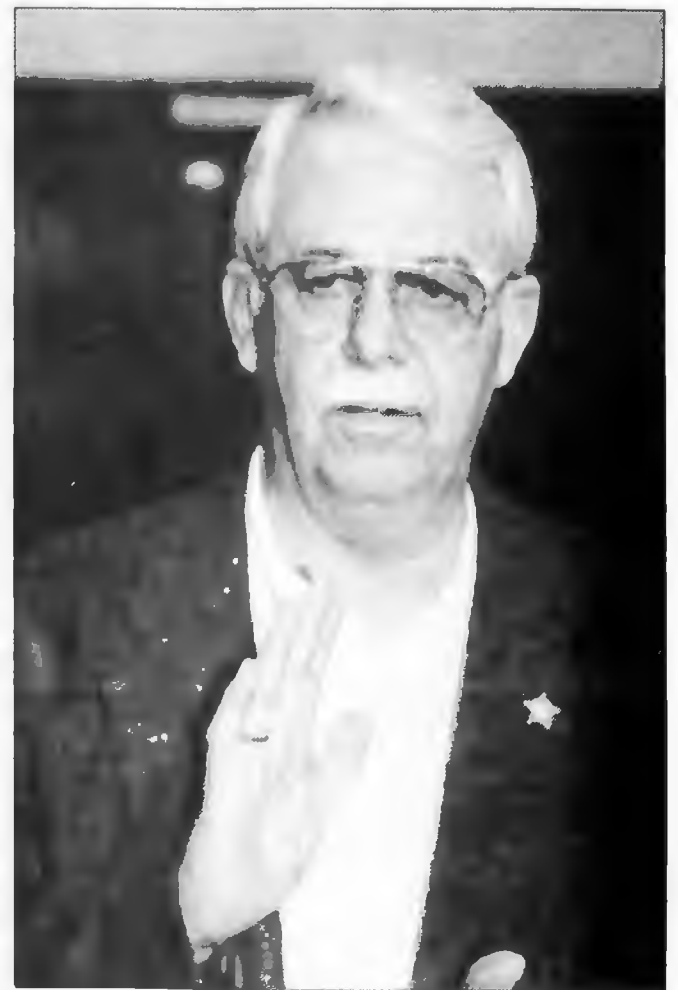


By SAM C. MORRIS
Contributing Editor

We didn't lose power over the Christmas holidays, but we did have ice on trees and cars. The ice was around for three days. We also had one and a third inches of rain during that time. On Christmas day the only time I went out of the house was to pick up the paper and to take out the garbage. We have had a trace of rain on Monday and more was forecast for Monday night and Tuesday morning. The temperature was in the 50s Monday afternoon.

The forecast for the remainder of the week, Wednesday through Saturday, calls for the highs to be in the 40s and the lows to be in the low 30s or high 20s. There isn't any rain in the forecast.

As stated above I didn't leave the house on Christmas day. The bad weather kept my daughter and her husband in Virginia over the holidays. She will come this weekend. John and his two boys came Saturday and returned to New Bern on Sunday. So it will take a couple of weekends for Mary (See AROUND, page 10)



From left, Jim Davis takes the oath of office as Hoke County Sheriff; Brittany Lynn Locklear in happier days; Sheriff Wayne Byrd deals with the media in the days following Brittany's death. (File photos)

Davis, Brittany and Byrd 1998 was a tumultuous year in Hoke County

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Staff writer

Just a few days into 1998, a five-year-old girl was abducted, raped and murdered. So began a tumultuous year for Hoke County. It might be said that the year started with fear, and it is in such an atmosphere that 1998 is drawing to a close.

Sheriff Wayne Byrd, whose department led the investigation, was defeated in the May primary — some say because he did not find Brittany Lynn Locklear's killer — and Jim Davis, who faced Byrd's chief of deputies in November's general election, became sheriff. One of Davis' campaign promises was to arrest the little girl's murderer.

As we look back at the top stories of 1998, the office of Hoke County sheriff has to be at the center in both the investigation of Brittany's murder and the bitter race that has somewhat divided this county.

Other top stories include elections results, the dismissal of

voluntary manslaughter charges against a Hoke County deputy, economic changes in the county, changes within county government, and we celebrate our wonderful senior citizens who have each lived a century — or almost.

Legacy of hugs

Brittany Locklear was the youngest and the smallest student at West Hoke Elementary School, where she attended kindergarten. Teachers there say she was usually late for classes because she had to stop all the teachers in the hall for hugs.

Hugs have become Brittany's legacy, that and the fact that the man who grabbed her as she waited for her bus on an early January 7 morning has not been apprehended.

Witnesses saw a man in a truck, believed to be "brownish," stop, jump out and grab something moments before her bus arrived, slowed down and did not stop. A neighbor, alarmed because the bus continued on, notified Connie Chavis,

Brittany's mother, who had been watching her daughter through a window until she made a fateful trip to the bathroom. Mrs. Chavis went to her daughter's school, where she learned Brittany had not boarded the bus.

It was first believed that Brittany's disappearance might be linked to a domestic dispute, but two hours later her book bag was found alongside Ryan McByde Road, less than three miles from Brittany's Gainey Road home in southwest Hoke. Even later that day, her overalls and shoes were found in a wooded area about 50 yards from where the book bag had been thrown.

A search was begun with every available officer, aircraft, helicopters carrying heat sensor equipment and tracking dogs. Byrd called in the SBI and the FBI, but by 7 p.m. the search was called off, to be resumed on Ryan McBryde Road at daylight the following day.

Despite the cold, rainy miserable weather, more than a thousand people turned out to help

search for the three-foot tall, 35-pound Lumbee girl. Many more helped with food and drink and other support. Sometime during the afternoon searches were called back, and shortly after 4, Byrd announced, "It's sad news that I bring. We have recovered the body of Brittany."

The child, clad only in t-shirt and socks, had been found in a concrete drain pipe which contained water. She had been sexually molested and drowned.

Shock turned to outrage. Law enforcement machinery went into motion to try and catch Brittany's killer. Road checks were set up along Gainey Road and U.S. Highway 401 south of Raeford. An 11-member team consisting of three deputies and four each FBI and SBI agents followed leads "around the clock," according to Byrd. A hotline number was set up, and the FBI Child Abduction and Serial Killer Unit in Quantico, Virginia put together a profile of the murderer which officers have yet to release. Governor Jim Hunt

authorized a reward for the apprehension and conviction of the killer.

Byrd and his officers left the county many times to follow up on leads that look promising, but always they come back without a suspect. The latest suspect — in November — was a Kannapolis man accused of taking indecent liberties with children and who had attempted to grab a girl and put her in his pickup in Concord. The circumstances were similar to Brittany's case, but there was no match, according to Byrd.

More than 1,000 turned out for Brittany's funeral held in the large auditorium of Turlington School. In his sermon, the Rev. Tony Hunt warned the killer that he should "be afraid, not of Sheriff Byrd or the FBI, but of God—the Highest Law Officer of all."

The weekend after Brittany's murder was a warm one but children were not playing outdoors. **First black sheriff**

It was an election year for county offices and also a year for (See YEAR, page 9)

Driver totals pickup, charged with DWI; auto driver vanishes

By PAT ALLEN WILSON
Staff writer

The driver of a new pickup that collided with a tree late Christmas Eve morning was charged with DWI.

Aron Wayne Gore, 33, Raeford, lost control of the 1999 Chevrolet pickup he was driving southeast on Pittman Grove Church Road near the Jones Road intersection.

The truck ran off the road to the right, spun around several times, and overturned when it hit an oak tree.

Gore and his passenger, Andrea Barringer, 44, of Raeford received minor injuries but re-

fused treatment.

The accident happened shortly before noon.

Emergency and safety personnel were called to the scene of a single car crash Christmas night only to find no one there.

A car had crashed through a bridge railing on Old Maxton Road and had glided over a stream to land upside down on the bank.

The accident was reported at 10:40 p.m. by a passer-by.

Arriving officers found the license plate did not match the vehicle it was on, leaving one to believe either the car or the tag was stolen. A green jacket was (See WRECKS, page 10)



The driver of this truck was charged with DWI after this Christmas Eve wreck. (Pat Allen Wilson photo)

Probe continues into house burning

FROM STAFF REPORTS

One week after Robin Byrd was arrested and charged with setting fire to an unoccupied North Main Street home, the investigation into the crime continues.

Byrd was released on \$5,000 bond.

The 35-year-old son of former Hoke County Sheriff Wayne Byrd was charged with setting fire to a home Greg Thompson bought but has not yet moved into. The house is under renovation.

Thompson, an attorney, was the campaign manager for Sher- (See PROBE, page 10)