

DEFENDANTS INCLUDE PUBLIC FIGURES

Brooks' Arrest Was First In Cocaine Investigation

BY SUSAN USHER

An inquiry that ultimately led to 300 indictments against 32 defendants by a special investigative Brunswick County Grand Jury last Thursday actually began in 1985, though the jury's special role only spanned four months.

Though the investigative grand jury was dissolved Thursday, the inquiry into cocaine dealing in Brunswick County isn't over. However, it will take a different form in the hands of law enforcement agencies. The jury was limited to investigating cocaine trafficking. Possession and related charges must still be handled, according to District Attorney Michael Easley.

He said additional indictments could be expected in July.

Special Agent Mike Grimes of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration said Thursday's indictments stem from the July 25, 1985, arrest of Alan Dale Brooks of Shalotte following an undercover investigation of several months' duration. Officers arrested him in the act of selling and delivering 400 grams of cocaine (slightly less than a pound) to an undercover officer in the parking lot of a Seaside convenience store.

At that time it was the largest cocaine deal ever transacted with an undercover agent in the county's history. It was a joint effort of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department, Sunset Beach Police, the SBI, the Drug Enforcement Agency, Durham City Police and Cumberland County Sheriff's Department narcotics unit.

Since that arrest, Brooks has pleaded guilty to charges with a combined minimum mandatory sentence of 91 years. As of late Monday he remained a fugitive from justice.

He was indicted on one count

Thursday, the least of any defendant.

Figures Indicted

Along with members of the local business community, those indicted include two public figures: James D. Griffin Jr., a developer and a former

Holden Beach commissioner, and Virgil Roberts, a current member of the Holden Beach Board of Adjustments.

Also indicted was Tami Miller of Lillington, the former director of the

Brunswick Buddies program, which matches troubled youths with adult volunteers.

Each held his or her position at the time of one or more alleged offenses. Other than Brooks, they are all

charged with varying counts of both trafficking by possession of cocaine and conspiracy to traffic. They face minimum sentences of from seven to 40 years, and possible fines. These can be reduced through substantial

cooperation with the investigators.

As of Tuesday, all but three defendants were either in custody or otherwise accounted for.

Brooks is a fugitive, a warrant is outstanding for Ronald Lee of Dunn, and the warrant for another suspect, Francisco Navarro of Ft. Myers, Fla., has been returned as "not to be found."

Four were being held in the Brunswick County Jail. Lloyd Neil Strickland of Route 1, Winnabow, is being held on \$900,000 bond. Ronald Strickland of Tabor City and Ronald Dale Ward of Nakina are being held on \$600,000 bond each.

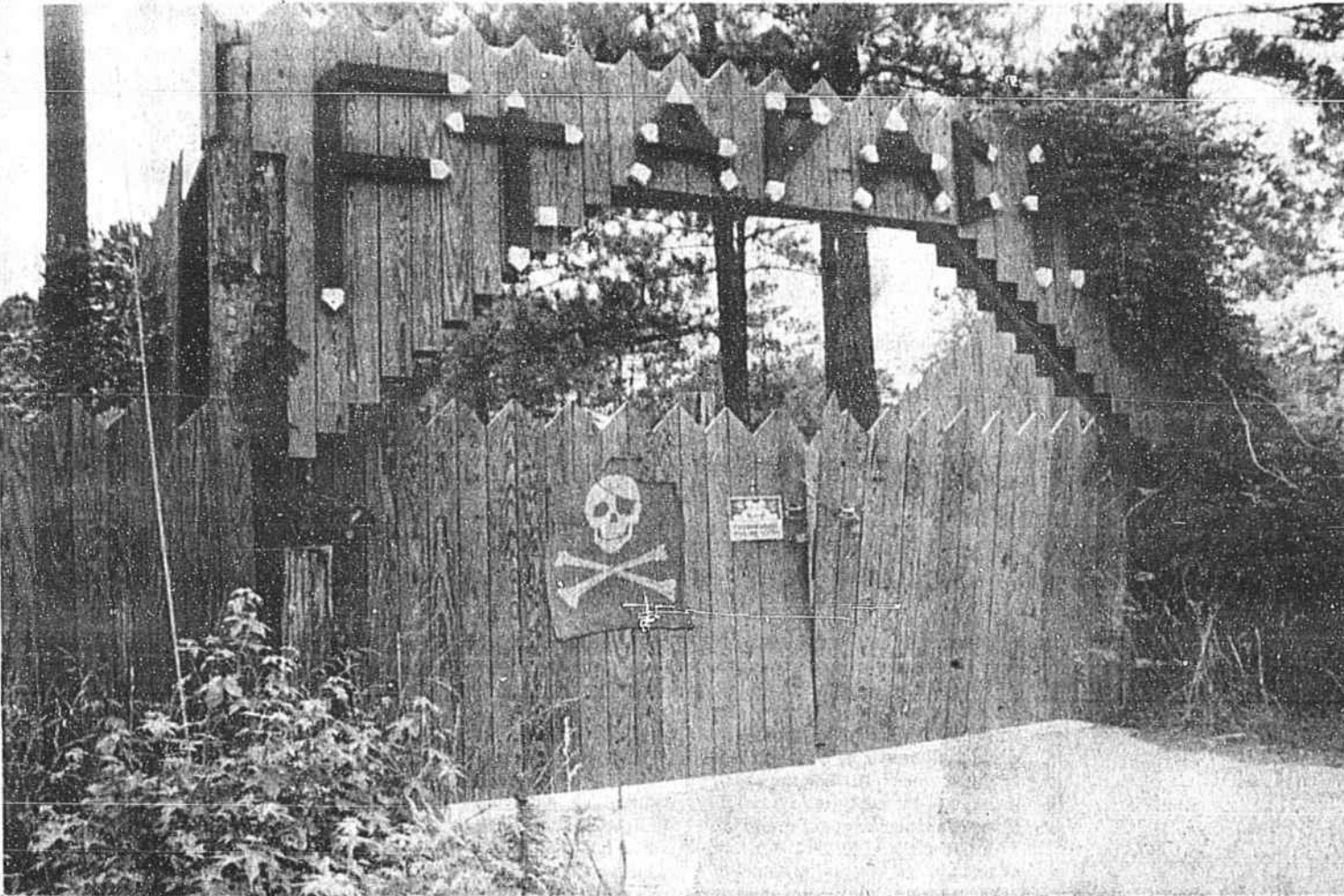
A fourth man not among the 32 indicted is also in jail, on \$150,000 bond. According to Sheriff John Carr Davis, 19-year-old Johnny Dale Wood of Route 1, Winnabow, was arrested June 11. Agents were positioned around the Neil Strickland residence about three hours in advance, Davis said, because he was "known to be dangerous." Then Strickland was called, told he was surrounded and asked to surrender. He did. Wood, however, fled through the nearby woods with more than a half-pound of cocaine in his possession, running directly into the path of a S.W.A.T. team of SBI agents.

A couple, Jack and Donna Truesdale, were brought to Brunswick County Wednesday. He is charged with 21 counts of trafficking and 12 of conspiracy, while she is charged with six counts of trafficking and three of conspiracy.

Except for the Truesdales and Brooks, the remaining defendants are charged with equal counts of trafficking and conspiracy.

Said 'Good Tool' The exercise pales in comparison

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A WOODEN STOCKADE topped with barbed wire fence is one of the distinguishing features of Ft. Apache, the Stone Chimney Road residence of

Dale Varnum, who was indicted last week on 23 counts each of trafficking and conspiracy to traffic in cocaine.

STAFF PHOTOS BY SUSAN USHER

Politics Divides Commissioners In Debate Over BTC Appointment

BY SUSAN USHER

Political differences—both partisan and personal—apparently split Brunswick County Commissioners Monday night as they rehearsed an earlier appointment to the Brunswick Technical College Board of Trustees.

The commissioners jostled, delving up old hurts with pointed references to past slights in appointments to other boards.

And while they didn't take back the June 4 appointment of Charles Lanier of Mill Creek community to the BTC board, they agreed to hold off further appointments until they reach agreement on their own policy.

At their June 4 meeting, commissioners reaffirmed their commitment to their policy of rotating appointments to boards to assure geographic representation from each district.

Afterward, Frankie Rabon of District 4, the only Republican commissioner, "called in" his appointment of Charles "Chuck" Lanier to the BTC board.

Lanier, also a Republican, will replace W.A. "Bill" Stanley Jr., chairman of the Brunswick County Democratic Party.

Monday, a motion to rescind Rabon's appointment failed 3-2, with Chairman Grace Beasley, Benny Ludlum and Rabon lined up against Chris Chappell and Jim Poole.

That vote, by a board with four Democrats and one Republican, has prompted Stanley to threaten resignation from his party post.

Stanley played a prominent role in the establishment of the college and has served on its board continuously, including a long stint as chairman. Recently, he had been defeated in a bid for the chairmanship, now held by David Kelly.

At the board's April meeting, Stanley publicly challenged BTC President Joseph Carter's salary level; a vote on his motion to have it reduced failed.

Lanier's appointment not only removes the Democratic Party chairman from the Brunswick Tech board, it also swings the political alignment of the board along new party lines. His appointment brings the number of Republicans on the board to five. Also this month, Gov. Jim Martin will appoint someone to fill Rep.

David Redwine's seat on the board. That appointee is expected to be a Republican.

Since the chairman, a Democrat, can only vote in a tie, with their six votes the Republican members could control the board if they were to vote together.

However, political alignments were not what commissioners argued over Monday. Instead, they argued over interpretations of the board's policy on rotating appointments—whether Lanier's appointment ran counter to the policy and how that policy is applied to boards with members appointed by other agents.

Commissioners appoint only four trustees to the college board, typically naming one of their own number (currently Benny Ludlum) and then three citizens.

As seats become available, the appointments are supposed to rotate from commissioner to commissioner, district to district, in an effort to strike a geographic balance.

Monday night, commissioners divided over whether the board's policy was intended to help balance only its own appointments or that of the entire BTC board.

A resolution adopted by the board in December 1984 indicated the next two appointments were to go to

Districts 1 and 3. Instead, the first county appointment since then, in June 1985, went to Clarkie Munn of District 5. It had only one other representative, governor's appointee Durward Clark.

Monday, District 3 Commissioner Jim Poole supported Chappell's contention this appointment should have gone to District 1. "Unless District No. 1 gets one, I'll never get one," he quipped.

Chappell questioned why the appointment, not due until June 30, was settled during his absence on June 4.

"I really see doubletalk in it," he continued. "With this motion you took the appointment and moved it where you wanted it."

He also acknowledged, however, that there had been other times when the rotation policy had not been applied to everyone's satisfactory interpretation.

Charged Ludlum, "If I left it up to you, you would have all the appointments staked out."

The policy states the board's intent to reapportion boards to five members with equal district township except where the law provides otherwise, and to rotate appointments in numerical sequence.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

OAK ISLAND RESIDENT Lee Presnell, left, shares his theories on the county budget with Commissioner Chris Chappell, right, while Commissioner Jim Poole, foreground, chats with another person. Turn-out at the hearing was light.

Commissioners Begin Final Budget Work

BY SUSAN USHER

Saying they wished more people had participated in a hearing last Thursday, Brunswick County Commissioners Tuesday night began their "page by page, line by line" review of the proposed 1987-88 budget.

It must be adopted by July 1.

Additional sessions will be held at 6:30 p.m. today (Thursday) and Friday in the Administration Building, continuations of Monday's regular meeting. They are open to the public.

Commissioners are looking at a budget with a recommended three-cents tax increase.

At last Thursday's hearing,

speakers fell generally into the same two categories as a year ago, talking for 20 minutes on behalf of either the schools or senior citizens programs.

Commissioners said they were disappointed at the low turnout.

"We'll hear about it (the budget) later," said Chairman Grace Beasley, noting, however, "This was

their chance."

Commissioner Frankie Rabon said he was surprised there was no discussion this year, as there was last year, of the parks and recreation budget. And Commissioner Benny Ludlum said of the proposed budget, "I tried to cut down on it."

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New County Manager Starts Work In July

A new manager for Brunswick County is expected to start work on July 1.

The Brunswick County Board of Commissioners unanimously voted Monday night to hire M. Thomas Barnes, 45, at a salary of \$42,500. He will also have use of a county car. The vote was a formality, since the board had earlier authorized Acting County Manager/County Attorney to offer Barnes the post and he had accepted.

Barnes fills the position vacated April 1 by William Carter after eight

years in office. A diabetic, he retired on medical disability.

A Wilson native, Barnes served as county manager for Halifax County for 8½ years, from May 1981 until December 1986, when he left to open his own business.

In Halifax County, Barnes was involved with a water extension project and a new Halifax County jail and courthouse construction project, indicated Peggy Hudson, county administrative assistant. According to a Brunswick County news release, he concentrated in the areas of person-

nel, finance, county water and industrial development, managing a budget of more than \$23 million and a work force of 300.

Barnes graduated from East Carolina University with a major in history and sociology. He is a U.S. Air Force veteran and a graduate of the Municipal Management Program of the Institute of Government, Chapel Hill.

Prior to his work with Halifax County, Barnes was affiliated with the Central Region Planning Commission of the Region L Council of

Governments.

He is married to an educator and they have a seven-year-old daughter. They are now relocating to Brunswick County.

Commissioners received more than 70 applications for the post and interviewed four candidates, including one from Brunswick County.

Before his retirement, Carter underwent surgery from which he suffered complications. He is now serving as a consultant to the board on the 1987-88 budget, which must be adopted before July 1.