

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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No Wetlands, No Seafood

"No Wetlands, No Seafood" reads the bumper sticker distributed by the North Carolina Coastal Federation.

Pressures on our beautiful coast are mounting; already one fourth of North Carolina's waters are closed to the taking of shellfish and still more are closed on temporary schedules.

Here in Brunswick County most inshore waters are already closed to shellfishing. The latest closing, in Lockwood Folly River, makes it abundantly clear that Tar Heels, whether they live at Varnamtown or in Charlotte, can't, as the federation notes, "take clean water, good fishing, unspoiled beaches and healthy industries for granted."

While on the one hand, land developers and their associates are protesting measures to protect the environment, on the other, if the local election is any indicator at all, the general public appears to want more done to protect fragile and irreplaceable coastal resources.

Federal and state government currently appear to be doing little on behalf of the environment. Agencies may make sympathetic noises in public, but behind doors, they aren't always even communicating with each other. In fact, these agencies sometimes appear to be working at cross purposes. For example, the Environmental Management Commission is charged with monitoring water quality and protecting existing water uses. However, the EMC does not keep routine track of waters closed to shellfishing harvest by its fellow agency, the Division of Marine Fisheries.

Matters are complicated still further at the state level by political appointments weighted toward land developers.

At the national level, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers cannot agree on management of wetlands. The EPA is charged with monitoring compliance with wetland regulations, but has one person doing wetlands inspections once handled by a staff of 20 Corps employees. In turn, the Corps says it isn't mandated to protect inland swamp or pocosin wetlands and sees nothing wrong with telling a developer that to avoid getting a wetlands permit all he has to do is drain the pocosin.

Meanwhile the coastal marshes that produce our seafood are being drained and dredged, the surface waters polluted, in North Carolina and elsewhere. In a 20-year period more than half the nation's swamps and marshes have simply disappeared. These wetlands serve as natural filters, slowing runoff and cleansing it, and providing the critical transition from fresh to salt water.

Now, with a void in governmental leadership so evident, organizations like the North Carolina Coastal Federation and, in Brunswick County, Save Our Shellfish (SOS), are stepping in and pulling people together so their voices will be stronger and stand a better chance of being heard by public officials.

Once considered a fly-by-night phenomenon, NCCF has proven itself on the field of battle with its fight on behalf of Permuda Island, its efforts to pull together organizations all across the state concerned about the future of the coast, and its efforts to educate officials and the general public alike on coastal issues.

NCCF's efforts are beginning to pay off, at least in terms of public opinion. The public wants change, and knows that government has the power to initiate the steps needed to save what is left of our wetlands. The public expects fewer decisions which benefit the few over the many and it expects government to begin enforcing regulations already in existence.

President Bush, Congress, Gov. Jim Martin and the N.C. General Assembly must all do their part. And in Brunswick County, county commissioners and town boards can help local residents do theirs, by the types of land use and waste disposal regulations they enact and enforce.

Add your voice to the NCCF-SOS; help save what's left—while there's still time.

Local Democrats Are Voting Independently

Susan Usher



Like it or not, North Carolina has become a two-party state, and Brunswick County a two-party county. The revolution was gradual, not sudden or unexpected, the shift occurring over the past 16 to 20 years. As analysts hash out the why and what difference does it make, the only other fundamental question remaining is just how much of a two-party system have we got?

The GOP's candidate for President has carried the state in every contest but one since 1968, as well as winning two races for governor and four races for U.S. Senator. Republicans hold four of N.C.'s 11 congressional seats, has held both Senate seats and hold about 30 percent of the seats in the General Assembly.

You know the local voting results. This in a state and a county long dominated by the Democratic Party.

How did it happen? Voter registration and demographics, according to a special report by the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research and the University of North Carolina Center for Public Television. The same factors can readily be seen at work in Brunswick County.

Democratic registration has been growing, but Republican registration has been growing much faster.

Since 1966, a Democrat to Republican voter registration margin of nearly 4 to 1 has been cut to more like 2 to 1. Add to that the rapidly growing number of unaffiliated voters and you've got the mix on which change is based.

In 1966, in Brunswick County, 10,696 or 83 percent of the county's 12,886 voters were registered as Democrats and 2,101 or 16.3 percent as Republicans.

Twenty years later the total number of voters had nearly doubled, to 24,239 and only 69.2 percent of them were registered as Democrats.

By fall of 1988, with 28,300 voters, the ratio was 1.95 Democrats for every Republican. Add the unaffiliated voters to the Republicans and the local ratio of Democrat registrants to non-Democrat is closer to 1.75 to 1.

It's clear that more Tar Heels and more and more Brunswick Countians see themselves as Republicans. Records show they also vote Republican, especially in years when a strong national ticket is running. This year some GOP and Democrat party regulars claimed this "trickle down" phenomenon had a strong effect while others claimed GOP success simply reflected voter disenchantment with the incumbency and a willingness to vote for individuals, not party. It was probably some of both.

It's for sure that performance of GOP candidates once in office will not only affect their individual chances of re-election, but also the ability of the party as a whole to get its candidates elected.

Democrats Elect GOP

The voter registration tables and voting results also explain another trend: Republicans managing to gain election in counties with a Democratic majority of voters. Brunswick County Democrats, like many of their counterparts statewide, are learning to split a ticket.

Widespread ticket-splitting was first evident, the experts say, in 1968,

when some North Carolina Democrats voted for third-party presidential candidate George Wallace and others voted for Republican Richard Nixon. That was the year Brunswick County joined the ranks of the counties who voted "mixed results."

It was even more obvious in 1972 when Democrats elected Republican Sen. Jesse Helms (a former Democrat, by the way) to his first term.

But the records show something else. Republicans candidates can talk about voting for the individual candidates, not the party, but the talk is aimed at Democrats, not within the GOP itself.

Pollster Walter DeVries of Wrightsville Beach reported after the 1972 election that 51.4 percent of the registered Democrats voted for some Republican candidates (excluding the Presidential race). But of the Republicans, only 14.8 percent split their ticket.

Again, the question remains, not whether a two-party system exists, but to what extent?

Ken Eudy, a fellow UNC School of Journalism graduate and now executive director of the N.C. Democratic Party, believes the record is still developing on the two-party system. He told the Center for Public Policy Research, "I don't think we have enough history and precedent yet to say there's a realignment."

"In fact North Carolina may be going to a de-alignment, where people don't have a particular allegiance to one party or another."

He believes many performance-oriented young voters have been drawn by the top of the ticket. Eudy adds, "It will be interesting to see how that shakes out over the next 12 years."

Where the two-party system is going, we may not be able to predict. But we can safely say the Democratic stranglehold is disappearing, and perhaps is long gone.

Change Predicted

The rise of a two-party system was boldly predicted by a visitor to Brunswick County in 1962, the shock softened with an encouraging word for the Democratic Party.

Here's how the pronouncement was described in The Shallotte Press in one of its early editions before being named The Brunswick Beacon. Under the headline "Demos Breaking?" the paper reported as follows:

"Will wonders never cease? At the North Carolina Young Democratic Club meeting held in the Ebb Tide Restaurant in Holden Beach last week, the president-elect of the state group, David Reid, a Greenville (N.C.) attorney, predicted that the state will boast a definite two-party political system 'within the not too distant future.'

"In Brunswick County, if not in Pitt, this amounts almost to heresy. Our reporter said that, whereas no one fainted, there was a great shuffling of feet and a mass clearing of throats from a stricken audience.

"Reid, blanching a little, hastened to soften the blow with the following observations: 'Although the handwriting is beginning to be faintly visible on the wall of public opinion, the Democratic Party will remain the strongest and continue to provide excellent leadership.'

"But the damage was done. Reid never really recovered the enthusiasm, or the attention, of those to whom the word 'Republican' is gall and wormwood on the tongue."

And that, readers, was the way it was in Brunswick County in December 1962. The times they are a'changing.



BROWN PELICANS are good at trying to steal fish from a net or grab a fish being brought in by an angler.

PHOTO BY BILL FAVER

Pelicans Adept At Stealing Fish From Net

BY BILL FAVER

On a Thanksgiving Day walk toward the sunset we came upon Acie Robinson's gill net being pulled to shore filled with fish. There is nothing unusual about that this time of year. What was unusual were the many birds very interested in the catch!

Gulls and pelicans were crowding the water and the shore for the menhaden delicacies Acie would throw them. The gulls were picking at several fish right at the water's edge. Pelicans would get braver each moment and move in to take a whole fish in the large bill. Once in the pouch, we could see the fish silhouetted against the setting sun. Then back would go the head with the bill pointed upward and the fish doubled the size of the Pelican's neck as it eased down the throat.

Some pelicans were trying to take

fish out of the net and several were successful. One became entangled in the net and needed some help from several of us to get the small mesh out of its feathers. Once it was freed, the big bird seemed to forget about fish for a while and sailed off toward

the sunset. Oftentimes, I wonder where the long strings of pelicans moving across the late afternoon sky are coming from or where they are going. Usually they are probably on their way from their feeding grounds

to their nesting sites near the mouth of the Cape Fear River. This group of 30 or more that stopped to help Acie bring in his net afforded us a great chance to see them up close, to laugh at their awkward acrobatics, and to watch them stealing fish.



Faver

Who Needs Nametags Anyway?

I know you're all waiting with baited breath to hear about my five-year high school class reunion, so I'll just dive right in and cut out the standard introductory malarkey.

To begin with, I guess you could say it felt kinda weird seeing the old classmates again. It felt almost like a dreamworld. (Notice I didn't say nightmare.)

The faces were almost exactly as I remembered them. But strangely enough, everyone looked five years older, and dare I say, more mature.

I can't speak for everyone there, but I know I had a lot of trouble remembering names. And since we

Doug Rutter



didn't have nametags, it made for an interesting evening.

Unfortunately, looking through the yearbook before going off to the gala affair really didn't help matters. It just put a lot of jumbled names in my

head, and I ended up getting them backward when I went to say hello.

I saw this one girl, for instance, who had been in my class since the first grade. When we saw each other at the reunion, neither of us recognized the other.

After about five seconds of staring and squinting and straining our eyes, it became very apparent that we knew each other. We still couldn't figure out the names, however, until we both gave in and asked for a little help.

It took me a few hours Friday night, but I think I've learned how not (Continued On Following Page)

Best Wishes And Thanks For The Memories, Guys

I really feel bad that I didn't ask Jim Poole for a Kiss last Tuesday night just for old time's sake. Of course, Jim is such a friendly fellow that I could have sneaked one without even asking.

Before you get the wrong idea about either of us, though, I'm talking about the chocolate Hershey Kisses that Poole faithfully brought to county commissioners' meetings during his tenure on the board—not for himself, mind you, but for anyone else in the chambers with a sweet tooth.

Especially when the board went into one of their interminable executive sessions, Poole's candy jar was the only source of sustenance for tired, hungry reporters who didn't have enough change for the snack machines in the lobby. Lord knows,

Rahn Adams



I'll miss those little glops of chocolate.

As a matter of fact, there are a couple of things—besides candy—that I'll miss if Poole and fellow Commissioner Chris Chappell's proverbial shoes aren't filled properly on the board. Last Tuesday night's meeting—both men's last—was a case in point.

Like 99.9 percent of the commissioners' meetings I've covered since

August 1987, Poole opened the session with prayer, asking the Almighty to help the five board members "carry out our duties for all the people of Brunswick County." As usual, he put special emphasis on the word "all."

Poole's invocation also ended with the same request: "Enter into our hearts and minds so that the decisions we are about to make will be both just and compassionate." The prayer always was a nice touch, even if some folks argue that God didn't answer it in every decision made by the old board.

Now I can't help but wonder who will be responsible for the opening prayer after newly-elected Commissioners Gene Pinkerton and Kelly Holden join the board. If the commissioners can't find a willing soul among them to handle the task on any given night, they should table the

invocation until the next meeting or until they hold an executive session, whichever comes first.

Also, a policy could be adopted to require that the commissioner who calls for a secret meeting must also say the prayer. Since we, the public, aren't always allowed to know what goes on behind those closed doors, the policy also should stipulate that the prayer be for us instead of the commissioners.

And then there's Chappell, who also acted no differently last Tuesday than he did at any other commissioners' meeting I've covered. He walked into the chambers with a broad smile and personal greeting for those of us waiting for the session to begin.

"Rich... Rahn... Alison... Mr. Medlin—how are you doing

tonight?" he asked in his deep, booming voice, before taking his chair next to County Attorney David Clegg at the end of the table.

Then turning to Holden, who was sitting in the audience with Pinkerton, Chappell smiled again and said good-naturedly, "Enjoy it while you can, Kelly. This is when it's fun," or something to that effect. His intonation was that the fun would stop when Holden began sitting on the commissioners' side of the table.

To be completely honest, what I liked most about Chappell—as a commissioner—was also what I sometimes disliked most: He was a good politician, which to some people is a contradiction in terms anyway.

Whenever he was faced with a crowd of riled constituents—whether they had complaints about roads or water or taxes—Chappell had the

ability to defuse their anger with the simple assurance that he would get to the bottom of their problem. And often he did get results.

Like with Poole's prayer, I'm curious to see who assumes Chappell's former role as the amiable, smooth-talking politician on the board. After all, every group needs a good public relations man. The trick is being able to back up words with actions.

Hopefully all five commissioners—old and new—will strive to deal openly and honestly with each other and the public, and make decisions that are "both just and compassionate" for the good of Brunswick County.

I hope that isn't too much to expect, because they already have a mighty big candy jar to fill.