

Commissioner “Massa Eddie” Holbrook didn’t invent corruption in Cleveland County!! Massa Eddie just Covers-up the Corruption Better!! Part I of a Series Reports updated by Robert A. Williams

Editor’s Notes: Folks, most of you probably already know that Cleveland County Government is rife with corruption and cover-up. Most likely all the way back to 1841 when Cleveland County was formed from splitting off portions of Lincoln and Rutherford Counties. For the purposes of this series, we only go back 30 years with this article and work our way forward to this very day.

The article shown below was published in 2002 but goes back to 1989. This is a good starting place because many of you might remember the subjects as things actually happened. One thing of note is the original Commissioner land scam of taxpayer dollars was totally recorded in public records down at the Register of Deeds Office. Since I disclosed this scam, the Commissioners have not gotten any less corrupt, only better at covering up. Unfortunately, it appears as you go back to 1989, the crooks back then were way more honest than the crooks of today.

Gardner-Webb University
The Real Scandal
By Robert A. Williams

The Smoke Screen.

A smoke screen has been thrown up around the real scandal at Gardner-Webb University. Professors are resigning. Students are protesting. Lawyers and others are writing letters to the Shelby Star. The GW President is under fire and giving interviews. Board members are covering up and giving interviews. On and on. They say it's about integrity and honesty. They say it's about one little change of grade so a basketball star can play basketball for GW. It's all a smoke screen for the real scandal at Gardner-Webb and Cleveland County. The real scandal is about money!!! And who gets it!!!

Lets start from the start.

Gardner-Webb University has been bragged about for many years. A small Baptist college that hit the big time. A standard of excellence, honesty and integrity beyond reproach. And other such accolades and pats on the back. The Charlotte Observer's Sunday (Sept. 15, 2002) front-page story instantly destroyed Gardner-Webb University's "do-no-wrong" image for about a million readers to see. Gardner-Webb's reputation hit the dirt just like the Sheriff's Department after the latest death in the jail. Only thing wrong with the Observer's story is it's chicken feed compared to the real corruption at Gardner-Webb. And beyond. Things are coming out though. And it's about time.

The present scandal at Gardner-Webb is about the GW President ordering a grade change for a star basketball player that kept him playing ball in a GW uniform. GW President Dr. Chris White is used to playing ball too. He over-ruled Gardner-Webb's own rules when he ordered a failing grade removed from the star basketball player's record so his grade point average would be high enough for the star to keep playing basketball for GW.

This kind of thing probably goes on everywhere, but "Goody Two Shoes" Gardner-Webb has pumped themselves up so high that when they got caught it just "popped their bubble." A bubble mostly

full of hot air. The rest being manure. What the Charlotte Observer really caught Gardner-Webb doing was the **cover-up**.

The cover-up is where Gardner-Webb shows its corruption. Just like the rest of the Cleveland County IN-Crowd. Why not, they're mostly the same people.

The Observer Story quoted name after name of people who let the unethical behavior go unreported and unchallenged because of one thing. They were afraid they would be fired. They were afraid they would be blackballed in the high society of Cleveland County. They were **afraid**-Pure and simple.

These were smart people with good educations. We have all heard the admonishment to "get an education, they can't take that away from you." No they can't take your education away from you, but they can sure take your job away. These people were smart people and they knew what would happen if they blew the whistle.

They are still afraid. For good reason.

The G-W Board is backing Dr. White and his doings. They have to. There is more to hide. It goes back a long time and it's much worse than changing a grade for a basketball player. The latest news out of Gardner-Webb is that the Board backed white and demoted two Deans for trumped up reasons. All of this goes to show that the **fear** of coming forward was real and **the cover-up continues**.

It started with the sale of school property that cost Gardner-Webb and Cleveland County hundreds of thousands of dollars. Read the following story that was written several years ago but swept under the rug. Dr. White was at Gardner-Webb when all this happened. In County government, so was the County Manager and so was the same County Attorney. The lawyer that handled the land scam for the moneyman was James W. Morgan. Presently Superior Court Judge James Morgan.

Here goes the story:

Land Scam Partners

Gardner-Webb and Cleveland County

Taxpayers foot the bill!

By Robert A. Williams

This must be the “worst” kept secret in Cleveland County history. Half a million taxpayer dollars went to political insiders on the sale of Gardner-Webb land and all the records were public and filed with the Register of Deeds. No “insider” feared the Cleveland County news media would tell this story. Until now, they haven’t!

First, a description of how land scams work. The multi-billion dollar rip-off the taxpayers took in the Federal Savings and Loan failures worked the same way, except some bankers were prosecuted and jailed in those deals. Will the Whitewater land deals involving President and Mrs. Bill Clinton be the next land fraud episode to hit Federal Court.

Anyway, this is how it works. A piece of land is identified. Purchases or options to purchase are made at inflated prices. Additional purchases or options to purchase are made to inflate prices even more. Loans are taken out using the inflated land prices as collateral. The sellers pocket the money and then don’t pay the S&L, which forecloses on the overpriced land. The land is worth much less than the loan value, so the S&L takes a loss. Enough losses and the S&L goes bankrupt. Taxpayers pay off S&L depositors and cover the loss. The land sharks who shredded the paper work laugh all the way to their Swiss banks. A few “sloppy” ones go to jail.

The Gardner-Webb land scam worked even better. The inflated prices went straight to the taxpayers and nobody asked any questions. The proposed taxpayer funded industrial park deal has some major similarities to this story.

For the Record:

There it was, officially recorded in the Register of Deeds office for anybody to see. Cleveland County Tax Map 3162-1-5. Cleveland County DEED BOOK 1079; pages 360, 364 & 580 and DEED BOOK 1080; pages 716 & 720. A quick trip to the library and the front page of the December 5, 1989 SHELBY STAR told the rest. County Commissioner Meeting Minutes Book #19 proves it all.

The county supposedly wanted to expand the landfill. Gardner-Webb University owned the land the County wanted. A member of the Gardner family had bequeathed the property to Gardner-Webb years before. The 1989 SHELBY STAR report said the County Commissioners went behind closed doors for 40 minutes to discuss Gardner-Webb and other issues. The SHELBY STAR did not report anything about the "wheeling and dealing."

The DEED BOOK records show that 500 acres left Gardner-Webb's ownership at 12:39pm on December 20, 1989. The tax stamps indicate a price of \$425,500 was paid to Gardner-Webb. At 12:40pm on December 20, 1989, Cleveland County took possession of 378.3 acres of that land. The price paid was \$568,000 according to the tax stamps.

The DEED BOOK records show that a person well known inside Cleveland County political circles, Robert F. Morgan, owned the 378.3 acres for that one minute interval between 12:39pm and 12:40pm on December 20, 1989 and picked up a cool \$142,500 for his sixty seconds of ownership.

It did not stop there. Other DEED BOOK and County Commissioner records show a few weeks later about 37 more acres were needed to "square up" the property line. \$55,000 more to the political insider. It didn't stop there either. For the short period of ownership, Robert F. Morgan also got the rights to cut the timber off all the county property and he still had 85 acres left over.

LUCKY?

Let's count up what Mr. Morgan got for being so "lucky" for being at the right place and at the right time. \$142,500 plus \$55,000 plus timber off 415 acres plus 85 acres. That pushes a half million dollars pretty hard. That's more that Gardner-Webb got and they owned the property in the first place! The luckiest part about the deal is that the insider option was for only 180 days, yet the deeds were interred 211 days after the option was recorded. Why did the County Commissioners Joe E. Cabiness, Jack Spangler, Joyce Cashion, Coleman Goforth and Charlie Harry, who were in office at that time, seal a land deal that may have included an expired or soon to expire option? Was the County Commissioners gift of a half million dollars to Robert F. Morgan in the best interest of taxpayers?

Why was this story not reported when all this information is public record?

INFLATION?

How much was the 378 acres the county bought actually worth? The county paid \$568,000, but what was it really worth? County tax records show the county valued the land at Approximately \$168,000 in the year prior to buying the property. Considering land next to landfills typically depreciates, the large increase is strange indeed. The tax value at the time of sale was approximately \$328000. Twice the value the year before, but still \$240,000 less that what taxpayers paid for the land. Taxpayers timber, valued at \$250,000, was given away too. Almost a half million dollars went to the middleman. More money went to Robert F. Morgan than Gardner-Webb University actually received from the sale. And Morgan only owned the land for sixty seconds, according to public records, when his profits started rolling in.

Officials Respond:

County officials who participated in this land purchase were asked to respond concerning their role in this action.

County Manager Lane Alexander responded by sending copies of the documents and information already obtained.

Former County Commissioner and presently a candidate to retake his old seat, Jack Spangler, did not respond at all to a written request for information.

Former County Commissioner Chairman when this land purchase took place, and also a convert to the Republican Party for a run at his old post, Joe E. Cabiness responded to a written request for information. Mr. Cabiness's response is included in full:

"My recollection is that the land acquisition to which you refer in your letter of February 29th was handled ethically, prudently, to the letter of the law and in the best interests of the Citizens of Cleveland County."

PS The attorney who drew up the papers for Robert F. Morgan was Jim Morgan, Presently Superior Court Judge Jim Morgan.

The story didn't end here and wait for the present grade change scandal to surface. Other things happened.

Remember the Industrial Park land purchase. \$1.4 million that just happened to be the same amount that the Hospital coughed up for rent. Guess who pays the Hospital's rent? You and me when we get sick or injured. But that's another story for another day.

The Commissioners, led by Jim Crawley and his buddy Joe Cabiness decide that the County should buy some property and build an Industrial Park. Let's forget that this Industrial Park didn't help one bit when the economy took a down turn. Everywhere else around Cleveland County the unemployment went to 6 or 7 percent while ours went to over 13 percent. Despite a brand new Industrial Park.

The real story was that the land the Commissioners were going

to buy from the very start happened to have an option on it. This option happened to be a secret option. No more having anyone poking around in the Court files and spilling the beans. This option was a secret according to Commissioners. Even the Commissioners didn't know who had the option according to Crawley and Cabiness.

Hokum! What are our County Commissioners doing dealing with a secret middleman? If it was so secret, how did they even know the land was for sale and a secret middleman had an option? Well, the rest is public record. The Commissioners bought the land and the secret middleman made a killing. It took the School Merger fiasco for Cleveland County to vote Cabiness out in the primary election of 2000. Crawley then quit the race for re-election when he realized he was going to be beat in the fall General Election. Probably worse than Sheriff Dan Crawford in this years primary.

Also one must ask, Where were Dr. Chris White and the rest of the Gardner-Webb Board during the land scam? Right there doing nothing. Except keeping quite and covering-up. Where was the District Attorney Bill Young? Right there doing nothing but keeping quite and covering up. Where were the Commissioners on the Industrial Park land scam? Right there keeping quite and covering up.

Now you know the rest of the Story about Gardner-Webb and Cleveland County. Money changing, conspiracy and worst of all-the cover-up. Anybody says anything and he or she gets fired. Well, It's election time. It's time for the voters to do some firing. DA Bill Young has got to go in the November election. That's the only way the citizens of Cleveland County can take back their government.

Gardner-Webb can handle their own mess anyway they can.

Editor's Note: The GW land scam records can be found at the Register of Deeds office in the County Administrative Offices

on East Marion Street.