

## On the subject of...

# The Mississippi Mafia Strikes Again

By Viki Eggers Mason



# The Aberdeen Advocate

There's good news, bleak news and still bleaker news, dear reader friends.

With Aberdeen's primary election behind us, for the most part, we look ahead now to the upcoming runoffs and the general election. Based on the prosecution of the primary election, I don't hold much hope for us Aberdeenians.

I did promise you good news though, so here goes: In a field of seven offices, we have effectively replaced five of our former, impotent leaders. When all is said and done in May, we will have a new Chief of Police, a new Mayor and new aldermen in Wards 3, 4 and 5. Yippee!

This upset tells me we are ready for change in Aberdeen. The good voters have spoken and the status quo, for the most part, has gone by the wayside.

The bleak news is, we still seem to be stuck with Ward 1's Alonzo Sykes. Bleaker still, there is still an outside chance that Cloyd Garth may manage

(by hook or by crook—as is his usual practice) to pull off a win in his runoff with seasoned Monroe County leader Wilchie Clay, leaving us with the two worst offenders still seated around our boardroom table.

Contrary to what you might think, the success of these two candidates has almost nothing to do with the voters' wishes. Instead, their success in the primary election is a direct result of their very clever manipulation of the system. What we have here is a sinister re-election plot. One might even go so far as to call it a conspiracy.

Let me 'splain it to you. It is the job of the aldermen to appoint a municipal election commission whose job it is to "purge the voter rolls." This isn't a small job and requires attention each and every week of every year. These folks are responsible for removing the names of the deceased, those who have married (changing their names) or who have

moved elsewhere in the city or elsewhere in the world, for that matter. This commission is a vital part of an ethical and legal election process.

Guess what? Aberdeen hasn't had an election commission for most of the last four years. The members of the commission who served during the 2004 election have each resigned, leaving the board vacant and useless.

Late last spring, my good friend George Morrow asked to be appointed to the municipal election commission and was unanimously appointed by the board.

At least one other citizen volunteered to serve on that commission, one John Finn, who was deemed by the board to be "over qualified." Now I don't know what sort of statement THAT is supposed to be. Given Mr. Morrow's history, his resume and his

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## The best laid plans....

By Contributing Editor Don Rowe

"The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry" is a well-known saying adapted from a line in "To a Mouse," by Scottish poet, lyricist and writer Robert Burns.

With all due apologies to Mr. Burns, I am going to use his "best laid plans" line to break a promise and justify a change of plans this week. As the half-dozen or so readers who read my piece last week on the Aberdeen High School Booster Club already know, I had promised a follow-up article with even more damning allegations (emphasis on the

word "allegations") concerning the club and its officers.

But circumstances dictate that I put that follow-up article off a week in order to focus on a more current event which is being billed by some as a monumental occasion here in Monroe County – the demise of two established newspapers in order to make way for the birth of a new publication.

The birth, of course, was the debut of a new local newspaper called the *Monroe County Journal*, a carbon copy of the *Northeast Mississippi Daily*

*Journal* – owned by the Journal Publishing Company of Tupelo. Unfortunately, in order for this new venture to come to fruition, two once-proud newspapers were laid to rest – the *Aberdeen Examiner*, a 142-year old institution, and the *Amory Advertiser*, in existence for almost 80 years.

Like any new venture, the *Monroe County Journal* kicked off its existence with a great deal of fanfare. Articles have appeared in the now defunct local papers explaining the decision to combine the *Examiner*

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# The Mississippi Mafia Strikes Again

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impressive credentials, I should think he is at LEAST as overqualified as Finn! My guess is, there was the assumption that Mr. Morrow's black skin would lead him to make "appropriately black" decisions. (I guess they don't know this fine gentleman as well as I do.) In this case, I also fear that John Finn was simply too white to qualify for a position on that board.

After months of unsuccessful pleas for the aldermen to make the necessary appointments of two additional commissioners, George Morrow resigned from the election commission and, eventually, two black females were appointed to the commission. The appointments were made before the election, but after the deadline for purging, therefore it was too late for them to actually do the work for which they were appointed. Since they were unable to make any changes, we went into the recent election with a scandalously neglected master list.

Among myriad other errors on the list, there were roughly 900 more voters on the city's voter list than appeared on the County's list of Aberdeen voters.

On the official city list of voters, candidate Ed Rayfield (Ward 2) discovered an incredible number of dead folks and registered voters who claimed to reside in in-viso-houses located on vacant lots. Quite naturally, he took his evidence to the City Clerk and, predictably, Cloyd Garth immediately kicked up a fuss. "You can't go changing the voter rolls this close to an election!" he announced.

He is, of course, correct.

The trap snapped shut. Our devious aldermen, whose careful plan it was to allow dead and absent people to vote, have managed to (you'll

excuse the expression, please) screw the citizens once again.

All is not lost, though. Two candidates who did their homework and who observed the election day shenanigans have filed official complaints with the Democrat Executive Committee which is bound by Mississippi law to investigate the facts surrounding the allegations and to make a determination.

I've spoken with a few of the members of the committee and believe them to be reasonable and ethical humans. (Even though, for reasons I cannot begin to imagine, they allowed City Attorney Robert Faulks—who is appointed by the board of aldermen and who serves at their pleasure—to be present at the initial meeting with one of these candidates and allowed him to interrogate the candidate as if he were the accused!) I want desperately to believe these people will do their duty and call for another primary election.

If, on the other hand, they do not, we are faced with an enormously urgent problem. How do we get our notoriously lazy fellow

citizens off their backsides and out to the polls next week?

The chart below left tells us just how little we think of our civic obligations. In most cases, fewer than half the registered voters turned out for the election earlier this month. That is a shameful showing!

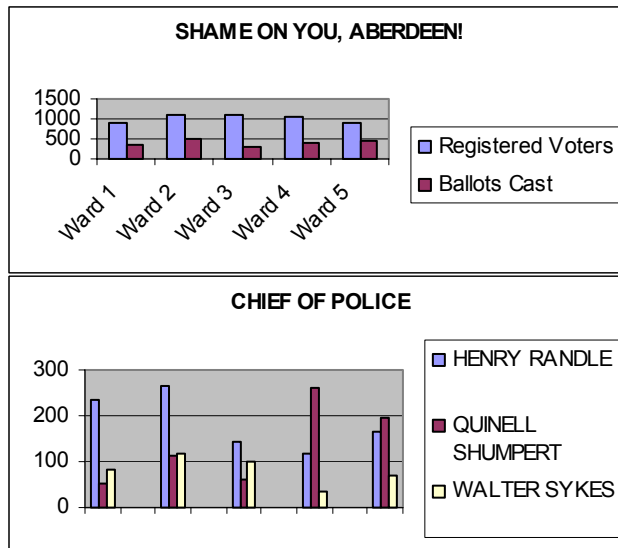
As you look at the chart, you must also remember that lots of the folks *who did turn out* are actually either dead or living elsewhere—the phantom vote was a big factor in the primary and will continue to influence the general election if we allow it to do so. We must do our part to get the LIVE voters of Aberdeen to the polls. We must do our part to bring enough legitimate electoral ammo to the voting booth in order to dilute the dead/deadbeat vote.

It makes me shudder that known drug dealers were passing out handbills urging voters to elect Cloyd Garth, Alonzo Sykes, and here's the saddest part—they were also supporting Henry Randle as Chief of Police. The second chart to the left reveals that Henry's strong suits are the most crime-ridden communities in Aberdeen. It makes one wonder what kind of voters were casting their ballots over in Wards 1 and 2. (Here's a clue: One voter who filed an affidavit ballot was actually incarcerated in the Monroe County Jail on election day. Houdini is alive, well and voting in Aberdeen, Mississippi.)

Finally, my friends, we have a higher obligation. Someday, we will leave Aberdeen to our children. Is this the sort of gift we wish to leave behind us? Do we leave our progeny the rotten system we have now which is full of decay and deceit, or do we want to pass on a cleaner, more legitimate system? We get to choose, you know.

We can insist on integrity in all elections, or we can sit back and let the Mississippi Mafia have its way.

You must take it from here, Aberdeen. Will you lead, follow or be trampled upon?



## THE RUNOFF—TUESDAY, APRIL 22, 2008

**WARD 2**  
**CLOYD GARTH, SR**  
**VS**  
**WILCHIE CLAY**

**WOULD YOU BUY A USED CAR FROM THIS MAN?**  
**(I DIDN'T THINK SO.)**  
**PLEASE DON'T VOTE FOR HIM EITHER!**



**CHIEF OF POLICE**  
**HENRY RANDLE**  
**VS**  
**QUINELL SHUMPERT**

# The best laid plans....

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and the *Advertiser* into one county-wide publication, and the premier edition of the *Journal* has no less than three articles (two columns and one editorial) extolling the virtues of the new enterprise.

Entitled, "Only the BEST for Monroe County," the editorial claims what we are seeing this week is "the culmination of months of study and planning to provide Monroe County a more comprehensive newspaper (most of which you'll remember was spent denying the change).

"Our goal is to be the BEST of both the *Aberdeen Examiner* and the *Amory Advertiser*, only bigger and better." The editorial, actually a combination "pat ourselves on the back/plug for new subscribers" effort, ends as follows: "That's our commitment to Monroe County – to be the BEST."

That same theme was repeated in self-congratulatory ads scattered throughout the paper. In a house ad peddling \$15 subscriptions found on page three, the *Monroe County Journal* proclaims in large, bold type: "New. Bigger. Better." and then attempts to make the case the new publication is "bringing you the best of the best from *The Aberdeen Examiner* and *The Amory Advertiser*." Worse yet, the entire back page of the Classified Section echoes the same self-serving theme: "What's new? What's bigger? What's better?" Elsewhere throughout the publication there are at least three other house ads utilizing the same general theme, not to mention no less than a half-dozen self-congratulatory ads bought by gullible local advertisers.

So, how did our new *Monroe County Journal* fare in its debut this week? Did our new paper live up to its hype? As an obviously biased onlooker, I'll let you make that determination for yourselves. But before you make that assessment, permit me to point out some obvious shortcomings with the new product.

Before we get to the "newer, bigger, better" theme, let's take a look at the layout – an eye-pleasing effort which, in my estimation, has a very professional look to it with adequate color on the front page of all four sections, headlines which draw the reader to each of the stories and the attractive use of graphics. But don't let those front pages fool you (kind of like our presidential candidates – slick packages with little or no substance). Just as it is unwise to judge a "book by its cover," I don't want you to be fooled by a sleek-looking front page.

Back to the "newer, bigger, better" theme pushed by the *Journal*, let's now take an objective look at each talking point and, to be fair, I will admit that the *Monroe County Journal* is "new." That is a given, so one point is conceded to the *Journal*. However, it's all downhill from here on and, as they say, the "proof is in the pudding," so permit me to point out some obvious shortcomings with the new product.

As far as "bigger" is concerned, the final *Examiner* which was published a week ago contained two sections of just 12 pages (not including a special Pilgrimage tab) and the last *Advertiser* had two sections which totaled 16 pages which, if combined, add up to 28 total pages (26 if you don't count an almost identical classified section).

The *Journal*, on the other hand, had four sections totaling 32 pages for what appears to be an increase of six pages. However, if you take out a page and a half of house ads extolling the so-called improvements to be found in the new publication, plus almost two full pages of congratulatory ads the *Journal* had the nerve to sell to gullible advertisers (both of which are one-time advertising opportunities), we're left with a net increase of maybe two and a half pages. (A representative of one local business told me his company refused to take out an ad, saying the *Journal* should have run an ad thanking them for their past support rather than charging them for a pat on the back.)

And now, my favorite pet peeve – the overall inability of the paper staff to publish a weekly newspaper free from numerous typos, misspelled words, incomplete sentences, factual errors and just plain ignorant mistakes. One would think the creators of a highly controversial new newspaper would go to painstaking lengths to be sure the premier edition was as error-free as humanly possible. But sadly, I'm here to tell you folks that isn't the case (in other words, the *Journal* still had the same idiotic errors we've had for almost three years).

Let me say up front that I did not read the entire edition of the *Monroe County Journal* cover to cover. Generally speaking, I don't usually waste time looking for mistakes in stories authored by Barbara Harrington, Alice Ortiz or Chris Wilson for, by and large, they are generally free from errors. I do, however, read stories with no by-lines, wedding announcements, births, deaths, captions and cutlines, ads and the sports section – all of which have for the past couple of years contained the aforementioned typos, misspelled words, incomplete sentences, factual errors and just plain ignorant mistakes. Unfortunately for the

new *Journal*, it's painfully obvious that no one took the time to proof it before it was sent to press, for the same careless mistakes were printed and published throughout the paper.

Without a doubt, the most egregious mistake can be found on page 5A where two similar but different obituaries can be found for the same person (I first picked up on the mistake in the obituaries box on the front page which contained two listings, with slight variations, of the same name which led me to believe that a father and son had somehow died the same week.)

What was printed on page five, however, was probably the worst obit ever carried in the local paper. Separated by just one column, the dual obits contained conflicting information, differences in the deceased's name, survivors' spouses' names and several careless typos. Worse yet, both his parents were listed as survivors in one obit, but he was preceded in death by his mother in the other obit. He also had a daughter in one obit and a step-daughter in the second obit, both with the same name.

The Sports Section, as it has the last several years or so, lived down to its usual mediocrity, featuring no less than 55 typos, misspelled words, incomplete sentences, statements and/or phrases which made absolutely no sense and other mistakes – the best of which was a headline, a scoring graphic and a story which claimed Ackerman beat Hamilton in baseball which was offset by a cutline which claimed (along with the word "befre") that Hamilton had beaten Ackerman.

Too, valuable space was wasted on a story on former Nettleton standout Bill Hall, while there was absolutely no coverage of the baseball team at Aberdeen (as has been the case all year), high school tennis and track and only passing mention made of Smithville and Nettleton baseball, and Aberdeen, Hatley and Smithville softball teams.

Nor was any mention made of Kansas' NCAA championship this past weekend which featured the sad tale of a fifth-year senior who shattered his kneecap in a dunking drill at the conclusion of practice Friday. What you'd never read in the local Sports Section was the fact that the player in question, Rodrick Stewart, was born right here in Aberdeen and is the son of 11-time world champion and 14-time national drug-free power lifting champion Andrew "Bull" Stewart.

So, is the new and improved *Journal* an improvement over what we had? Read it for yourselves, make note of all the stupid mistakes and then decide for yourselves.



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