

Gardner-Webb lecture series returns with a look at O. Max Gardner, NC politics

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[Cassie Tarpley](#)

BOILING SPRINGS — From his childhood, O. Max Gardner of Shelby dreamed of politics.

“He had decided he had political ambitions and set his sights on the governor’s mansion,” said his grandson, Shelby attorney O. Max Gardner III.

He made it. In the process, Gardner became “the most fascinating unheralded political figure” that journalist Rob Christensen has studied.

Christensen will share some of what he learned Wednesday, Feb. 24, as the Joyce Compton Brown Lecture Series presents its first program for the spring semester at Gardner-Webb University.

Christensen, a political reporter for the Raleigh News and Observer, authored “The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections and Events That Shaped Modern North Carolina.”

The book, in its second printing by UNC Press, won the N.C. Literary and Historical Association’s Ragan Old North State Award Cup for the best work of non-fiction in 2008.

The lecture will include discussions from the book that focuses on “The Shelby Dynasty” as he shares little known facts about Gardner, for whom (along with his wife, Fay Webb Gardner) the university is named.

Other Dynasty members:

• Clyde Hoey, the Bible quoting, womanizing governor from 1936-1941 and U.S. Senator from 1944-1954, famous for his swallowtail coats

• Brothers and fellow judges James L. and E.Y. Webb, the latter also a congressman and confidant of President Woodrow Wilson

• O.M. Mull, a strong education advocate and force behind Wake Forest University

• Longtime Shelby Star Publisher Lee B. Weathers

Christensen has covered N.C. politics for 35-plus years at the News and Observer.

“Politics in North Carolina was like stepping back in history, and I saw all these little threads and I wanted to put it all together and answer some real questions about several political paradoxes,” Christensen said in a UNC-TV interview.

“(Gardner) was a textile plant owner and a lawyer who pretty much invented state government as it exists today,” Christensen said. “After leaving office, he moved to Washington to become one of the first of the super lobbyists. But for 20 years, he continued to run the state from his suite in the Mayflower Hotel.”

Other Brown Lectures are planned for March 2 and April 7. Programs will be announced soon.

The scholarly lecture series is named for Dr. Joyce Compton Brown, professor emeritus, who retired from the University at the end of the 2004-05 academic year after almost 40 years of service in the department of English.

Questions: Office of University and Media Relations, 704-406-3221

Learn more:

A conversation with Rob Christensen, author of “The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, And Events That Shaped Modern North Carolina” (University of North Carolina Press, Spring 2008). The text of this interview is available at:

<http://www.ibiblio.org/uncp/media/christensen/>

What: Joyce Compton Brown Lecture Series

Who: N.C. journalist Rob Christensen

When: Wednesday, Feb. 24, 7 p.m.

Where: Blanton Auditorium, located in the Hamrick Hall, GWU campus

