

Seawell, Herbert Floyd, Jr. (Chub) ^[1]

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by Jonathan Houghton, 1994

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Herbert Floyd Seawell, Jr. (Chub), attorney, after-dinner speaker, editorial writer, and religious lay leader, was born in Carthage, the son of [Herbert Floyd, Sr.](#) ^[2], and Ella McNeill Seawell. A graduate of [Wake Forest College](#) ^[3] and of the Wake Forest law school, he joined his father's law firm upon graduation but had to wait until he was twenty-one to receive his license to practice. In 1926 he was an unsuccessful Republican candidate for solicitor in [Moore County](#) ^[4]. From 1927 to 1941 he was U.S. referee in bankruptcy, and in 1928 he worked for his father's gubernatorial campaign. Active in town affairs, he served as town attorney in the period 1935–40.

Seawell treated friend and foe with a jolly form of respect, playfully calling them "Cousin," followed by a long string of colorful adjectives before saying their name. He was well known throughout the state because of his nonstop stream of letters to newspaper editors and a busy schedule of after-dinner speeches. Perhaps because of his appearance he was nicknamed "Chub" and seldom referred to by his given name. In editorials and speeches he combined his flair for humor and right-wing criticisms. During [World War II](#) ^[5], while running for the state senate, Seawell advised citizens: "Don't talk around strangers, there is a government agent in every crowd and before you know it you may be off to jail for violating some [New Deal](#) ^[6] rule you didn't know existed." He described himself as a local Will Rogers or Mark Twain style humorist. As a lawyer he thrived on captivating juries. He would appear in court wearing sneakers and a cap that proclaimed "Jesus is Lord,~" then would preach to the jury, punctuating his points by yelling every fifteen to twenty minutes. He won most of his cases.

In 1952 as the [Republican](#) ^[7] nominee for governor against [William B. Umstead](#) ^[8], Seawell advocated "Ike in the driver's seat and me in the rumble seat." He attacked the notion that North Carolina was a progressive state, pointing to glaring social problems that he said the [Democratic](#) ^[9] party virtually ignored. Calling himself a "consecrated layman" of the [Baptist](#) ^[10] church, he also spoke out in favor of [Prohibition](#) ^[11]. Despite "campaigning as though he could win," Seawell attracted just over a third of the vote, although that was more than the past three Republicans had received. Proud of his efforts, he was deeply angered when his party rejected him for the patronage position of U.S. district attorney for the [Piedmont](#) ^[12]. Consequently he captured headlines by publicly lambasting the GOP for its "fascist rule" and "carpetbagger" politics, then quit the party.

Seawell published two books, *Sir Walter: The Earl of Chatham* (1959) and *Satire in Solid Sketches* (1974). Both consisted of folksy essays with pearls of Chub's wisdom and sketches (or "skitches," as he termed them) of local leaders. References to state leaders such as Governor [Daniel K. Moore](#) ^[13]—"Dan Klan Speaker Ban Moore"—inevitably were branded with Seawell's distinctive style. His colorful phraseology caught the eye of [Jesse Helms](#) ^[14], who invited him to fill in for him on radio station WRAL when the editorialist went on vacation. His comments, however, increasingly took on the cast of racial diatribes, and on occasion Helms had to rein in Chub.

In the early 1970s Seawell joined the right-wing [American party](#) ^[15] and in 1976 ran for governor on that ticket. He devoted the final years of his life to the Gospel Chapel Mission (of which he was president in 1952) in Carthage and to conservative politics.

In 1926 Seawell married Jane Bloxham, and they were the parents of a daughter, Betty Jane (Mrs. Paul E. Freed). Following the death of his first wife, he married Mrs. Harriett McGraw.

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Herbert Floyd Seawell Papers (Manuscript Department, East Carolina University Library, Greenville).

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Who's Who in the South and Southwest (1963).

Additional Resources:

Herbert Floyd Seawell, Jr., Papers, 1926-1983, (Manuscript Collection #496). East Carolina University Libraries:
<http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/special/ead/findingaids/0496/> [16]

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