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O. Max Gardner—One of NC's Best Governors

- Oliver Max Gardner is regarded as one of North Carolina's ablest governors. A Shelby attorney and textile mill owner, Gardner served as lieutenant governor and governor, was a friend of President Franklin Roosevelt, was a top Washington lobbyist, served as U.S. treasury undersecretary and was named U.S. ambassador to Great Britain by President Harry Truman shortly before he died in 1947.

He was also the boss of the state Democratic Machine -- called the Shelby Dynasty -- and helped make several allies, including his brother-in-law, governor. During much of the 1930s and 1940s he controlled Tar Heel politics by telephone from his apartment in Room 770 of Washington's Mayflower Hotel.

(He also holds the distinction of having been captain of the football teams at both N.C. State University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as a law student, at a time when sports eligibility requirements were much looser. When Carolina played State, Gardner declined to play against his old teammates.)