

# TRIANGLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, November 21, 2008

## Gov. Gardner made major changes to North Carolina during Depression

Triangle Business Journal - by [Lee Weisbecker](#)



Photo c/o North Carolina State Archives  
N.C.'s Depression governor, O. Max Gardner.

[View Larger](#)

As governor of North Carolina from 1929 to 1933, O. Max Gardner was dealt the hand of confronting the effects of the Great Depression.

He took control of a state saddled with debt, responding by commissioning a report by the Brookings Institution on how to cut government costs as well as cut local property taxes.

He pushed through many of the institution's recommendations. Those included the takeover of financial responsibility for roads and schools from counties and the creation of the consolidated [University of North Carolina](#), now the UNC System.

Gardner was a pro-business governor who took a stand against unions during a period of labor unrest. Paradoxically, he pushed through the legislature passage of a workers' compensation law.

"He was a personal force, a charismatic leader," says Kim Cumber of the North Carolina Archives, who has written about Gardner and his administration. Almost by force of personality alone, Cumber says, Gardner was able to forge personal relationships with New York bankers, who extended the credit the state needed to ward off hard times.

Under state law at the time, Gardner was allowed to serve only one term as governor. At the end of that term, he went to Washington, D.C., where he worked as a lawyer and lobbyist and also as an adviser and speechwriter for President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

A native of the western North Carolina town of Shelby, Gardner founded the influential "Shelby Dynasty" of politicians, who controlled the state's Democratic Party – which, at the time, meant

control of state politics. He earned a chemistry degree at what is now [North Carolina State University](#) and then earned a law degree at UNC in Chapel Hill.

Gardner played football at both schools and is, in fact, the only person ever to captain the football teams of both the NCSU Wolfpack and the UNC Tar Heels.

*All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.*