

Son slaughtered family, ransacked home, police say

BY FRANK WOLFE
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

FURLOW — Police arrested 20-year-old Heath Stocks late Saturday and charged him with three counts of capital murder in the shooting deaths of his parents and 18-year-old sister.

A Lonoke County sheriff's deputy found the bodies of Joe Stocks, 46; his wife, Barbara, 43; and daughter Heather at the family home about 11 p.m. Friday, about 15 minutes after a 911 caller from the home hung up, police said.

Heath Stocks, being held without bond in the Lonoke County jail, is to be arraigned this week on the charges.

Heath Stocks and his father had a tense relationship, which may have led to the slayings, police said.

"At this point, we think there'd been a time frame to where there had been some serious differences between the son and the father about lifestyles and other things that had taken place," said Col. John Bailey, director of the Arkansas State Police. "It happened several times. The atmosphere was just so volatile that when it all came to a flash point, that's when the violence occurred."

On Sunday afternoon, divers from the Pulaski County sheriff's office found a pistol in the Ouachita River near Arkadelphia that police believe was used in the slayings. All three victims had been shot more than once, police said.

Police would not say whether Heath Stocks has confessed to the shootings.

Bailey said that various law enforcement agencies coordinated their efforts: the Lonoke County sheriff's office, the Arkadelphia Police and Fire departments, the Pulaski County sheriff's office, the Henderson State University police and the Arkansas State Police.

Bailey said authorities think the younger Stocks may have dropped out of Henderson State at Arkadelphia, and his schooling may have led to conflict between father and son.

Heath Stocks was not a suspect at first, Lt. John Morrow, a state police investigator, said at a news conference Sunday afternoon at the Lonoke County Courthouse. Shortly after the slayings, police began looking for Heath



Heath Stocks

Stocks' gold Mercedes, which was missing, Morrow said.

"We had a concern about his well-being initially," Morrow said.

Arkadelphia police found the Mercedes at the home of one of his friends in Arkadelphia after the Lonoke County sheriff's office let other agencies know they were looking for it, Morrow said. Further interviews and evidence led police to Stocks, who was arrested at 11:30 p.m. Saturday, Morrow said.

Although police are still unsure of a time line behind Friday's slayings, Bailey said that Heather Stocks may have arrived home be-

See **SLAYINGS**, Page 4A

Slayings

• Continued from Page 1A

fore her parents did after the three attended a basketball game between Lonoke High School and Oak Grove High School.

It appears that Heather Stocks may have stopped at a local restaurant in Lonoke off Interstate 40 to eat with her friends before heading home, while her parents may have stopped at a friend's house, Bailey said.

When Heather Stocks arrived home at 10:40 p.m., she found her brother ransacking the home, Bailey said. Indications are that Joe and Barbara Stocks came home shortly after their daughter, and the three discovered Heath Stocks taking jewelry, he said.

"They confronted him with what he did, and it went out of control," Bailey said.

"As I perceive it right now, it was a conflict within the family," Bailey said.

Morrow said, however, that investigators are still trying to confirm that time line. "Based on the evidence found in the house, it appears there was some ransacking," Morrow said.

At the Sunday news conference, Bailey read a statement from a family spokesman. It read: "Our families have lost loved ones but the loved ones still with us have all our love and support. As we deal with our sorrow, we hope all families will love each other more and help us deal with this tragedy with their prayers. We know that families will understand and respect our need for occasional moments of privacy."

Heath Stocks was an offensive lineman for the state champion Lonoke High School football team in 1994.

Family friends said that Heath Stocks and his father had conflicts. At one time, Heath Stocks went three months "without saying 10 words" to his father, said a family friend.

Asked whether he was sur-

prised that Heath Stocks had been arrested, the friend replied, "Not really."

The home was filled with a "volatile vapor," Bailey said. "It just took a match," he said.

Heather Stocks was the captain of the Jackrabbits cheerleading squad at the school, a regional president of the Future Business Leaders of America and president of the student advisory council of the Arkansas Youth Suicide Prevention Commission.

Attorney General Winston Bryant founded the commission. This was her second year on the commission's student advisory council, and she was president this year, Bryant said.

"She was outstanding in every regard," Bryant said. "Not only was she an outstanding young lady, she was an outstanding student."

The council had a meeting scheduled for Saturday afternoon and members became concerned when she did not show up, Bryant said. Participants were called once news of her death had been released, he said.

Memorial services for the family are tentatively scheduled for 10:30 a.m. Wednesday at the Lonoke High School gymnasium.

Joe and Barbara Stocks stood out in this community of 700, a crossroads where former United States Sen. Joe T. Robinson grew up.

Joe Stocks was a self-employed trucker, while his wife, Barbara, worked in the computer laboratory at Lonoke High School and for the Lonoke County 4-H Club. Both were devoted to their family and their church, the Concord United Methodist Church, just a short drive away from their home.

On Sunday morning, the Rev. Robert Marble and about 100 church members held a service that departed from the Sunday routine.

There were no programs, no

Sunday school and no Sunday dinner at the church.

The community is still trying to come to terms with the deaths of three of its best-loved members.

"I would ask you how you are, but I know how you are," Marble said to begin the service, his voice cracking. "This is a trying time for us all."

Below a golden cross at the church chancel, weeping friends knelt to pray. An elderly woman patted a young boy's head next to her. A teen-age girl rested her head on the shoulder of a teen-age boy next to her and stroked his hair.

"We have been through a tremendous quake in the last 36 hours, which has shaken our beliefs and our ideas," Marble told parishioners. "I want to give you a couple of rocks to stand on." Marble then told the congregation of five such rocks: the rocks of courage, calm, compassion, new commitments and comfort.

"Nothing will ever be the

same," he said.

Bennie Finch, a sergeant-at-arms for the Arkansas Senate, a church member, led the congregation in five songs: "I'll Fly Away," "Jesus, Hold My Hand," "I'll Meet You in the Morning," "The Church in the Wildwood," and "Amazing Grace."

"The Church in the Wildwood" was one of Heather Stocks' favorite hymns, while "I'll Fly Away" was one of Joe Stocks' favorites, Morrow said.

During that hymn, the congregation sang: "When I die, hallelujah, by and by, I'll fly away."

Information for this article was contributed by The Associated Press.

