

Three Girls Are Slain in an Oklahoma Scout Camp

LOCUST GROVE, Okla., June 13 (UPI) —Three girls, 8, 9 and 10 years old, were beaten to death early today in an apparent sex attack at a Girl Scout camp in north-eastern Oklahoma's brushy lake country, the authorities said.

Sheriff Pete Weaver said that the bodies had been found about 150 yards from their tent at Camp Scott, partly wrapped in bed clothing and zipped into their sleeping bags.

They were identified as Lori Lee Farmer, 8, and Doris Denise Milner, 10, both of Tulsa, and Michele Guse, 9, of Broken Arrow, a Tulsa suburb.

Other children were sent home without being told about the killings and the camp closed temporarily.

"Until they apprehend the person or persons that did this I don't feel it's safe for any person," said Barbara Day, camp administrator, who found the bodies at about 6 A.M.

Mr. Weaver said that he had examined one of the bodies and "there was evidence she had been sexually molested." He said there also was evidence the girls had been strangled with a cloth as well as beaten.

He said that the killing occurred without alarming anyone else in the party of 100 scouts and 40 staff members. Mr. Weaver expressed belief that there was only one killer, but would not say whether he had a suspect in mind.

"I don't think he was being selective of the girls," he said. "I think he was

being selective of their tent. It was an end tent and the closest one was 50 to 75 feet away."

Four girls normally are assigned to each tent, only three were assigned this tent.

Rain had fallen on the campgrounds until about 10 P.M., but there were no tracks to indicate a vehicle had driven into the compound, Mr. Weaver said. The girls were slain between 2 A.M. and 4 A.M. and carried away from the tent, he added. All of the girls were accounted for in a bed check at 11 P.M., Mr. Weaver said.

The camp is 1.7 miles south of here at the junction of Spring Creek and Snake Creek, tributaries of the Grand River, which forms a string of lakes. The Markham Ferry Dam spans Lake Hudson.

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Tulsa Mourns 3 Girl Scouts Murdered in Camp

By JOHN M. CREWDSON

Special to The New York Times

TULSA, June 16—Little Doris Denise Milner came home for the last time today inside a short white coffin that was carried into the church two blocks from the home she left last Sunday on her way to summer camp.

Family friends stopped at the Milner house to comfort the dead girl's mother, Bettye Milner, before gathering at the Antioch Baptist Church. Wynatte Burrell said that she remembered 10-year-old Denise, as she was called, as "quite a pleasant little girl."

Mrs. Burrell added that the deaths of Denise and two other girls murdered with her only hours after they had arrived at the Girl Scout camp made her worry about her own 8-year-old daughter, Bridgett, who, like Denise, had looked forward to attending the camp with her friends. "I have signed papers up for her to be in the Girl Scouts," she said, "but I've changed my mind because of what happened."

"Nobody be going back there," said Mrs. Harriet Smith, another friend of the Milner family.

As florists' delivery trucks pulled up in front of the small red-brick church in this poor and nearly all-black Tulsa neighborhood, the three women puzzled together over the same questions that were being asked again and again throughout the city this week.

"It's a mystery to everybody," Mrs. Smith said. "A lot of people have the idea that it was not a man who did it. You know, people are doing everything nowadays."

There has been some speculation that the killer may have been a woman, because of the district attorney's refusal to elaborate on his initial statement that the three girls were sexually abused, but not raped, before they were murdered.

At least one of the other Girl Scouts among the 150 who were attending the two-week camping session reported being awakened by screams about 3 A.M. Monday, but older camp counselors in a tent several yards away said that they had heard nothing.

Even if they had, Miss Adams said, they should not have been blamed for not responding. "I remember when we went to camp," she said, "we were up all night screaming. We were screaming because we were pillow-fighting. But then we had locks on the doors."

Victor and Nathaniel Burrell, age 13

and 15, and their friend, Tom Samilton, said they had all known Denise Milner and thought her a friendly but not outgoing girl, someone who, as Tom put it, "kept to herself and didn't mess with nobody."

Nathaniel said that he had heard that the camp, if it reopened, would post "a man, a policeman, by every tent." But Tom said a camping trip with a policeman by every tent did not sound like much fun. "Not to me it wouldn't," he said.

Suspect Physically Agile

Among the 400 or so mourners at the girl's funeral were some officials of the Girl Scouts of America and several representatives of the Tulsa Police Department of which Walter Milner, Denise's father, is a member. Most of those at the simple half-hour service today were black, many of them children who had known Denise.

Law enforcement officers, including several from the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, are investigating the slayings. Yesterday, German shepherds were brought here from Pennsylvania to hunt for what the police believe to be

a "physically agile" man capable of having strangled Denise, killed the other two girls with blows to their heads and then carried their bodies more than 100 yards from the small tent they shared.

Denise's body, with a rope and towel knotted around her throat, was the first one discovered early Monday by Carla Emery, an 18-year-old counselor at the camp. The bodies of Lorrie Lee Farmer and Michelle Guse were found nearby, their mouths sealed with black electrical tape.

The police are withholding most of the details of the investigation. It has been widely reported, however, that a bloody footprint made by an oversized rubber-soled shoe was discovered on the floor of the girls' tent, along with a large flashlight and a roll of electrical tape.

The police are also believed to have found signs that the killer had stayed, either before or after the murders, in a deserted house on a 110-acre ranch that adjoins Camp Scott, the Girl Scout facility, which is near the town of Locust Grove in eastern Oklahoma.



United Press International

WILDERNESS MANHUNT FOR SCOUTS' KILLER: Members of a SWAT team of Oklahoma Highway Patrol climbing through fence during search near Skunk Mountain in northeastern part of state for Gene Leroy Hart, escaped convict who is suspect in killing of three Girl Scouts. Rain later caused a halt to ground search, but planes continue to fly over area.

The New York Times

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Florida Girl Scout Abducted at Camp By a Male Intruder

SARASOTA, Fla., June 29 (AP)—A 15-year-old girl who was abducted from a Girl Scout camp by a man who ripped through the back of her tent at dawn today telephoned her father late tonight and said that she was all right and would be released soon, the authorities said.

The girl, Charlotte Grosse of Nokomis, Fla., was apparently in good condition 17 hours after her abduction, according to the Sarasota County Sheriff, Jim Hardcastle.

"The father just got a telephone call from his daughter," Mr. Hardcastle said. "She said she was in Bradenton" with a man who was "going to get rid of her at a telephone booth" where she could call home.

Bradenton is about 30 miles north of the wooded campsite in Oscar Sherer State Park where the girl was abducted about 5:30 A.M.

Sheriff Hardcastle said that when the girl called from a telephone booth she did not sound frightened or alarmed. He added that she and her father apparently had been able to improvise a hasty code.

Miss Grosse told her father that her abductor was wearing blue jeans, sneakers and had a mustache, the sheriff said and was driving an old blue car. Earlier, investigators had found prints from a sneaker-clad foot at the rear of the torn tent.

"She said she was all right, that he just wanted to get rid of her," said Cpl. Ray Pilon.

Miss Grosse, clad in a Mickey Mouse T-shirt and underclothes, was dragged out as her sister, Eleanor, 14, and another Scout screamed for help.

Eight Scouts and two adult counselors were spending the night in the park, which covers 460 acres on the edge of a vast unpopulated area stretching east for nearly 200 miles. The seven other girls were sent home after the attack was reported.

The abductor was described as 6 feet tall with dark hair, a deep voice and wearing dark clothing. Deputies said that they knew of no motive for the attack.

On June 13 three Girl Scouts were sexually assaulted and murdered at a camp in Locust Grove, Okla. The authorities have charged a 33-year-old prison fugitive, Gene Leroy Hart, in the slayings and are still searching for him.

Today's abduction touched off an immediate manhunt. A hundred law enforcement officers, volunteers, a mounted posse and service trucks of the Florida Power & Light Company joined the search that was set up under the sheriff's specialized weapons and tactics unit known as SWAT.

The New York Times

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Slayings, Abduction Lead Girl Scouts To Tighten Security

MIAMI, July 2 (AP)—Security precautions at summer Girl Scout camps around the country have been tightened because of the abduction of a teen-ager at a Florida state park and the slayings of three girls in Oklahoma.

Richard Knox, a spokesman for the Girl Scouts of America's national headquarters, said yesterday that extra security measures in many camps included more frequent bed checks, added chaperones and extra police patrols.

He said parents had been calling regional offices to see what they could do to help patrol campgrounds.

"We've added all-night guards at our campsites," said Cherie Pierce, head of the Girl Scout Council of Tropical Florida in Miami, the largest of Florida's 10 councils.

In some areas, professional guards from private security agencies were hired to patrol campgrounds at night.

The Oklahoma incident involved the killings of three Girl Scouts at a campground June 13. The police are still searching for the suspect, a convicted rapist.

In Florida, Charlotte Grosse, 15 years old, dragged out of her tent at dawn Wednesday, escaped to freedom yesterday after being held two days by her abductor. A Siesta Key man was charged in the case.

In Miami, Miss Pierce said that security measures have always been good but that extra steps were being taken to reassure parents and the girls. Camp counselors said that it was difficult to assess the girls' mood in the camps but that they seemed pleased about the extra guards.

"We feel that the security measures we've always had were very good," she said. Park rangers live at the camps operated or used by the Miami-based council, which serves Dade and Monroe Counties.

The police in the Florida Panhandle are making additional patrols at the camps, said a spokesman for the Northwest Florida Girl Scout Council. "We took a few extra measures," she said, "mainly to reassure parents."

Similar steps have been taken by the Gulf Coast Girl Scout Council in Sarasota. Officials said that extra counselors had been added and police patrols had been increased.

In Alabama, a spokesman for the Cahaba Council of Girl Scouts in Birmingham said that Girl Scout camps "are probably more secure than any other type of camp—we require one adult for every six girls."

Town in Oklahoma Still Tense and Angry 2 Months After Slaying of 3 Girl Scouts

Special to The New York Times

LOCUST GROVE, Okla., Aug. 22—

People in this small northeastern Oklahoma town normally spend free August afternoons taking a dip in Spring Creek or fishing for bass with crawdads, but for the last two months the swimming holes have been deserted and the fishing poles have been tucked into closets.

The slaying of three Girl Scouts near here on June 13 frightened this sleepy community of 1,019 people. Visitors are met with cold stares. For the first time in their lives, residents bolt their doors at night and keep loaded guns nearby.

The situation has intensified the underlying hostility between some whites and Indians and has included such elements as murder clues hidden in secret caves, a volunteer posse in pickup trucks equipped with civilian-band radio and a manhunt by jungle-trained Vietnam veterans.

But the drama is real, and it has turned neighbor against neighbor as arguments erupt daily about the identity of the killer.

The bodies of Michelle Guse, 9 years old, Lori Lee Farmer, 8, and Doris Denise Milner, 10, all of the Tulsa area, were discovered at dawn June 13 outside their tent at Camp Scott about a mile from here. They had been sleeping in one of the few tents without an adult counselor when they were attacked on the first night of a two-week campout.

Dragged from their cots, they were sexually molested and beaten. Two died from the blows, the third was strangled.

Tracking Dogs Brought In

Three days after the slayings, two specially trained tracking dogs were flown here from Pennsylvania to find the killer's path. Within a week, one of the dogs died of heat prostration and the other was struck by an automobile.

More tracking dogs were brought in and they led detectives to a small cave, about a mile from the death scene. Inside, the officials found empty food cans and two tattered photographs. The authorities considered the pictures their first real clues.

Newspapers printed the photographs, showing three women, across the top of their front pages. The captions read: "Who are these people?" Within 24 hours, telephone callers had identified the three as guests at the 1969 wedding of a prison employee's daughter.

A prison trusty named Gene Leroy Hart, who worked as a darkroom assistant at the prison, had attended that wedding, and the authorities believe the pictures belonged to him.

"He's got to be our man," Sheriff Glen Weaver of Mayes County said.

Escaped in 1973

Mr. Hart, a 33-year-old Cherokee Indian, was serving a 10-year sentence for the kidnapping and rape of a pregnant Tulsa woman when the wedding was held. He was paroled in 1969 but was arrested again months later on a burglary charge. Mr. Hart escaped from Sheriff Weaver's jail at Pryor, Okla., in 1973 while awaiting a court hearing.

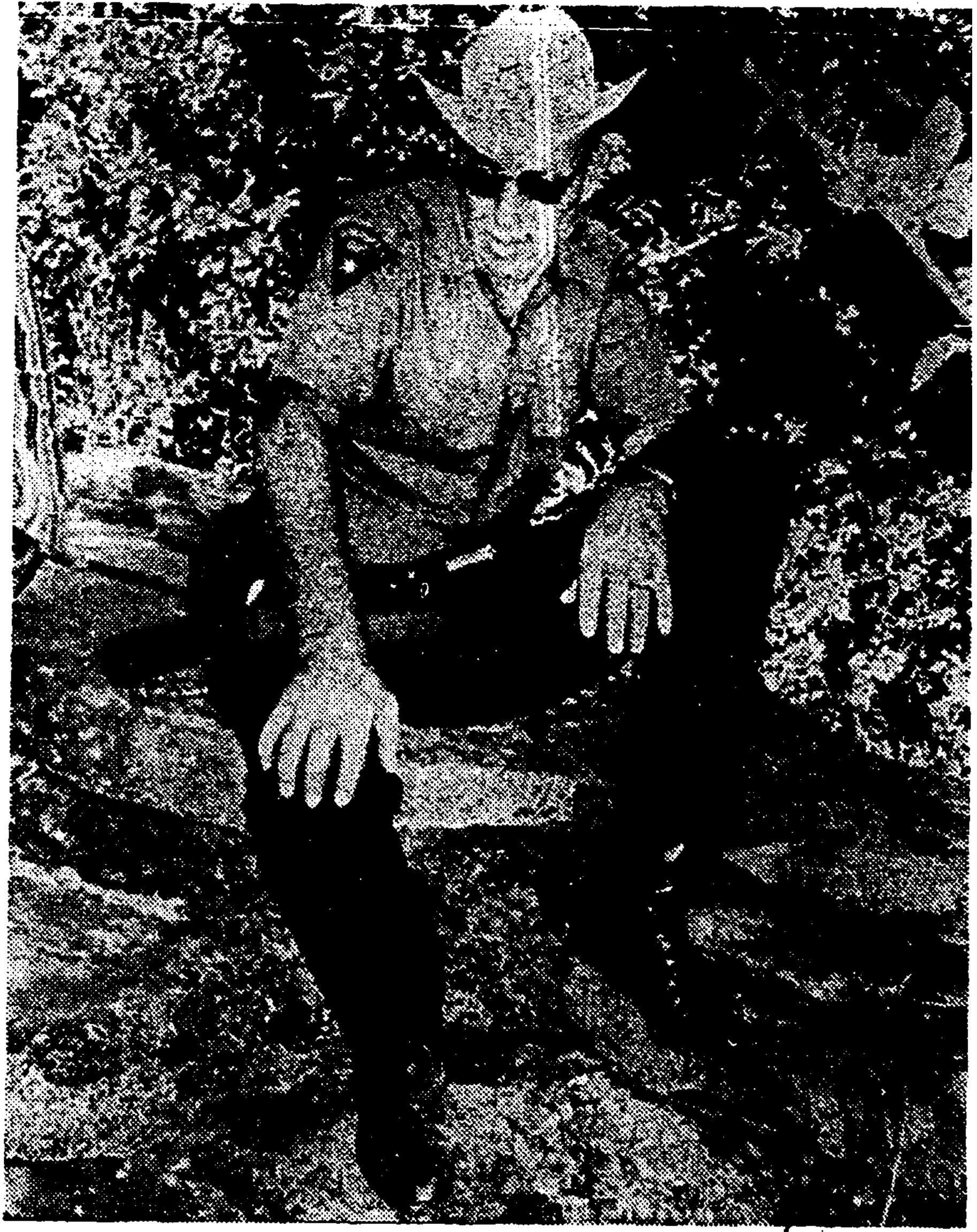
"I knew he had returned to this area," Sheriff Weaver says. "People would call us and say they had seen him, but I only got four deputies and every time they came this way Hart would take off into the hills—he is an expert backwoodsman.

"Besides," the sheriff adds, "he's related to half the people in these parts."

Sheriff Weaver contends that Mr. Hart has been living with his mother, Ella Mae Buckskin, about a mile from Camp Scott.

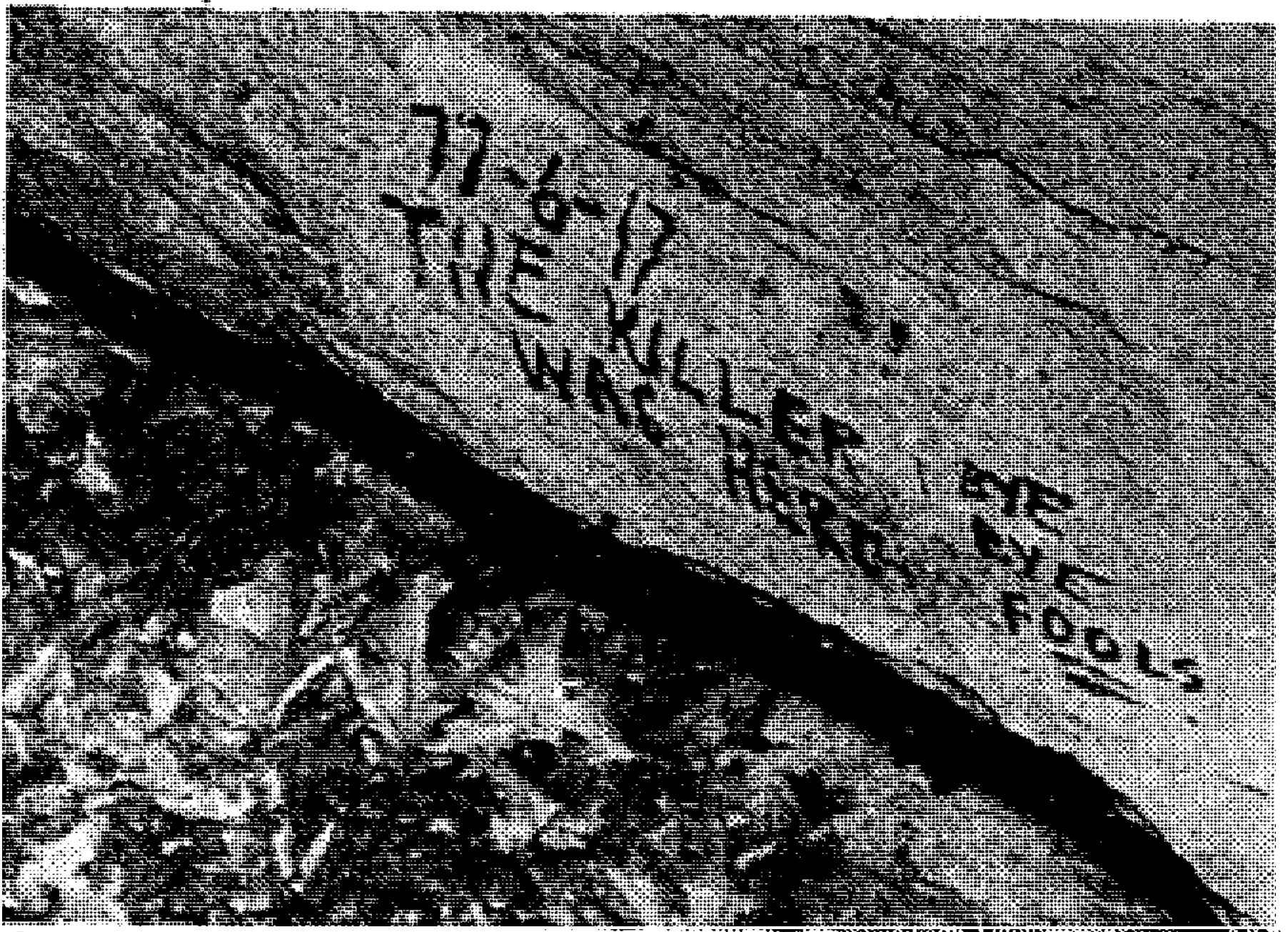
After finding the photographs, the authorities filed three charges of murder, punishable by the death sentence, against Mr. Hart. A few minutes after announcing the charges, Sheriff Weaver jumped into his squad car and raced from the camp. A farmer had seen a man matching Mr. Hart's description hiding in a cave.

It was almost dusk so the sheriff asked for volunteers to seal off a four-



The Tulsa Tribune

Sheriff Glen Weaver resting during one of many searches for Gene Leroy Hart, suspect in the slaying of three Girl Scouts near Locust Grove, Okla.



Cryptic message was found in a cave near the camp where girls were slain

mile area where Mr. Hart was believed hiding.

More than 200 lawmen and 400 farmers, teen-agers and businessmen responded. Most had heard about the posse on their citizens band radios.

Some of the volunteers were armed. Others were drunk and were sent home, and six others were charged with possession of marijuana.

Watch Out for Trees

With the warning, "Watch out, he might be hiding in the trees," Sheriff Weaver ordered the remaining volunteers to seal off the area. The men turned on their vehicle headlights that night to make sure no one could slip through the perimeter.

In full battle gear, city, county and state policemen began moving through the thick timber and brush, but they found nothing but ticks, snakes and chiggers.

By early morning, many of the volunteers had deserted their posts, breaking the human chain surrounding the forest. A helicopter equipped with a heat-sensing device was flown in, but it found no one.

"He must be in a cave again or hiding with friends," Sheriff Weaver said. The frustrated sheriff decided to try an old approach. He pulled out the massive search party and announced a \$5,000 reward for Mr. Hart, no questions asked.

Little happened until July 30, when tracking dogs stumbled upon another small cave about a mile from the slayings. Written on the wall of the cave in black ink was a taunting message, "The killer was here. Bye bye fools. 77-6-17."

The coffee-cup critics down at the local drug store laughed when Sheriff Weaver said that he believed the killer had written the message. Few felt the slayer would be hiding out in the woods with supplies that included a black ink pen. But Sheriff Weaver is confident. "It's just like someone signing a painting," he said. "If the cave was easy to find I might think it was a prank, but it was hidden and hard to get to and it was a long shot that we ever found it."

While the cave provided few clues, it supported the theory that the killer was still hiding in the woods. Bounty hunters swarmed in.

The "Spooks," a group of Vietnam veterans, announced they would capture Mr. Hart in 24 hours. Tom Kite,

the group's leader, explained that the seven former jungle fighters planned to set up ambush positions. "We'll get him coming or going by us instead of trying to search for him," Mr. Kite contended.

The "Spooks" left after 24 unsuccessful hours. Some of them were covered with as many as 75 ticks.

Members of the American Indian Movement were furious about the jungle fighters. A spokesman, Ben Hyatt, called the investigation a "circus," and warned that the Indians might bring in A.I.M. warriors to protest.

Mr. Hart's mother, Mrs. Buckskin, asked for the movement's help. She said she had been threatened with death if she did not reveal where her son was hiding.

"The police is awatching me everywhere I go," said the 51-year-old Mrs. Buckskin. "They follow me into the store and ask me why I buy chewing tobacco. 'Is it for him?' they say, and I say, 'No, it's for me,' then I take a bite and spit a gulp of it at them." She says that she has not seen her son since 1973.

"I got down on my knees last week and I prayed and prayed and prayed and God, he showed me my boy, Gene, and Gene says to me, 'Mama I didn't kill those girls and I ain't in Oklahoma but I know I'll never see you again, nevermore.'

"They are breaking my heart," Mrs. Buckskin says, sobbing. "They're going to kill my Gene."

Threat by Indian Group

Mr. Hyatt says that national leaders of the American Indian Movement are ready to move into town if more bounty hunters show up, adding:

"Someone is going to shoot someone else around here and we don't want the dead person to be an Indian."

"This is getting ridiculous," says Wiliard Stone, a prominent Oklahoma Indian woodcarver. "I was afraid to get out in the woods and hunt my cows last week because I was afraid some slap-happy fool would shoot me."

Business is down 50 percent in town and many residents are angry about the prospect of Indian leaders coming here. Few people are swimming or fishing on Skunk Mountain where the authorities believe Mr. Hart is hiding.

"It is going to be a long time before people unbar their doors and start smiling again," Mr. Hyatt says, "an awful long time."

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microfilm.

Associated Press

Gene Leroy Hart arriving at state prison in McAlester, Okla. At right is Bud Ousley, an agent of the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation.

Court Delay in Scout Slaying Case

PRYOR, Okla., April 7 (AP)—Gene Leroy Hart, who was arrested yesterday in the July slayings of three Girl Scouts, today was sent to a jail from which he had twice escaped.

He was ordered held without bond in the Mayes County jail by District Judge William Whistler. He appeared before the judge for arraignment today, but it was put off until Tuesday to give him time to find a lawyer.

Sheriff Pete Weaver said that security at the jail would be tightened. He added that there had been telephoned threats against Mr. Hart. The suspect, who is 34 years old, spent last night on death row in the state penitentiary in McAlester for, the authorities said, "his own protection."

He was apprehended earlier yesterday when agents of the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation kicked down the door of an isolated two-room house just 50 miles from Camp Scott, where the three slain girls were on an outing. He is accused of strangling Doris Denise Milner, 10, and beating Lori Lee Farmer,

8, and Michelle Guse, 9. The girls, all from the Tulsa area, had been sexually assaulted.

Sought since shortly after the slayings, he had eluded hundreds of searchers by hiding out in the rattlesnake- and tick-infested woods of Cookson Hills in eastern Oklahoma. "This is one of the most remote areas you've ever seen," said Dick Wilkerson, assistant director of the state Bureau of Investigation.

He was captured in the home of Sam Pigeon Jr., a 60-year-old woodchopper. Investigators say they do not believe that he knew Mr. Hart was wanted and doubt he even knew about the killings.

In February, an anonymous caller told the authorities that Mr. Hart was hiding in a cabin owned by a man who "received some type of check," determined to be a Social Security check.

The authorities had decided earlier to look for Mr. Hart, who had escaped from the county jail in 1973, when they found two photographs near the Girl Scout camp and determined that Mr. Hart had printed them.

The New York Times

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Medicine Man Charged as Abettor

TAHLEQUAH, Okla., May 20 (UPI)—William Lee Smith, an Indian medicine man, will be tried on charges of helping Gene Leroy Hart hide from the authorities who were trying to arrest him for the sex slayings of three Girl Scouts last summer. At a hearing yesterday, Larry Bowles of the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, testified that Mr. Smith admitted aiding Mr. Hart. Mr. Bowles said Mr. Smith, 58 years old, told him of transporting Mr. Hart from his home near Vian to the house where Mr. Hart was captured April 6.

The New York Times

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Controversy Surrounds Suspect in Girl Scout Deaths

By JOHN M. CREWDSON
Special to The New York Times

LOCUST GROVE, Okla.—When a camp counselor on her way to an early-morning shower stumbled across three small, mutilated bodies, a lot of people in this dusty village figured that sooner or later the authorities would begin asking themselves whether Gene Hart had had anything to do with the stunning crime. It happened even sooner than they thought it would.

Barely two days after the bodies were found, at a Girl Scout camp outside of town, Glenn Weaver, the Mayes County Sheriff, was telling reporters that he would like to talk to Gene Leroy Hart about the murders of Lori Farmer, 8 years old, Michelle Guse, 9, and Doris Milner, 10.

That was last June, when Gene Hart was still on the loose, a fugitive who had escaped four years before from Sheriff Weaver's jail and who, most people presumed, had been living up in the northeastern Oklahoma hills in ways that a full-blooded Cherokee Indian knows well.

Gene Hart is in custody now. He was captured in April, after the longest and fiercest manhunt in Oklahoma history, 32 miles from the camp where the murders took place.

What evidence there is against Mr. Hart has yet to be made public, and it remains to be seen whether he will be judged not guilty or guilty of the crimes. Some light will be shed on that question at a hearing Wednesday to determine whether there is enough to bring him to trial.

Many Know the Suspect

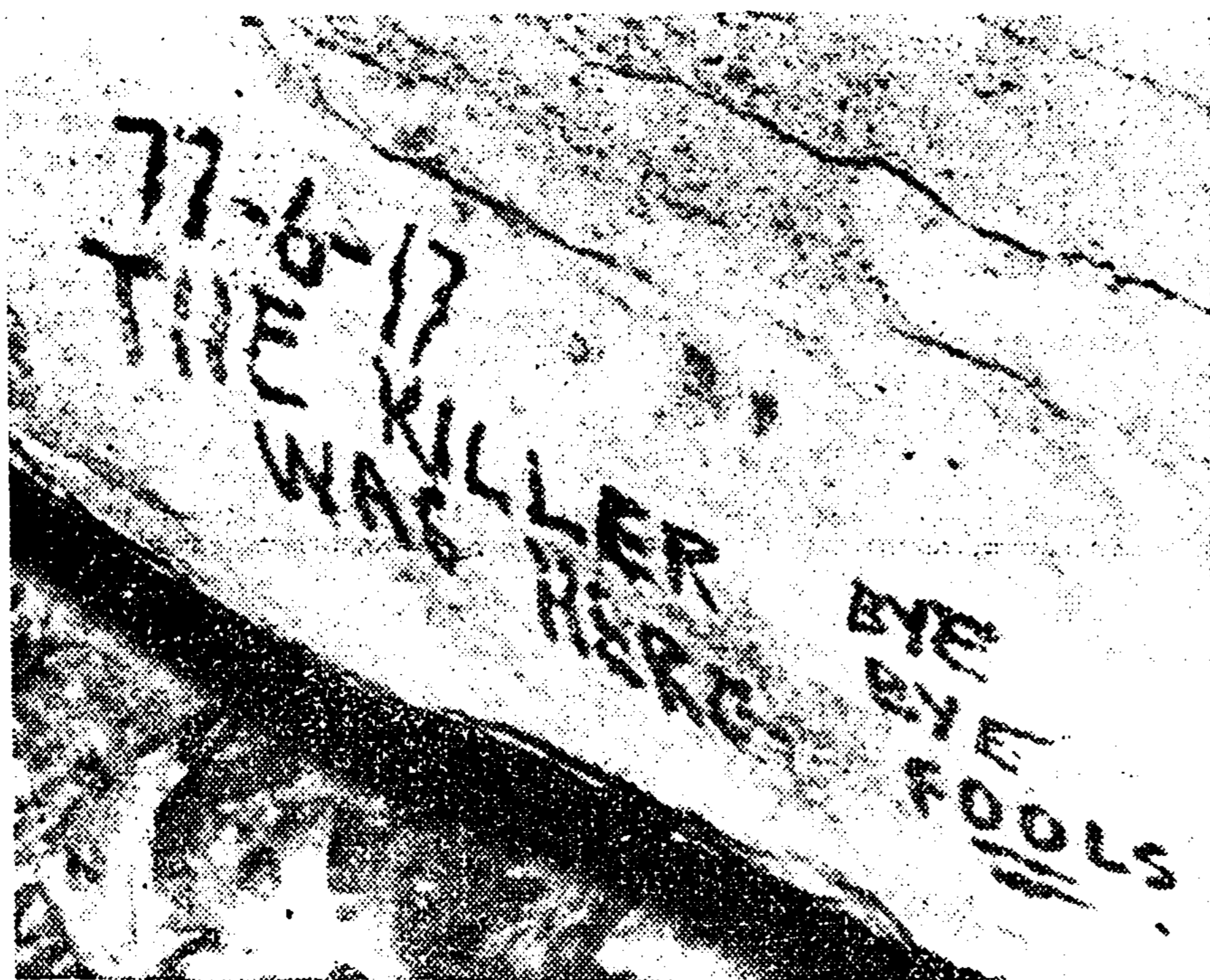
Among the thousand or so residents of Locust Grove, many of whom also claim Cherokee ancestry, it is easy to find those who knew Gene Hart, now 27 years old, as a big, good-looking high school fullback whose talent and gains brought him offers of college scholarships. Many of them refuse to believe that he is capable of molesting three little girls, then beating and strangling them.

Over in Tulsa, 30 miles to the west, where the families of the three girls live, people are more certain that Sheriff Weaver had his eye on the right man from the start. More important, it is Sidney D. Wise, the Mayes County District Attorney, who will prosecute Mr. Hart.

To Mr. Wise, Gene Hart is a hardened and twisted criminal, a man who had the chance to make something of himself early in life but never did, a man with a criminal record that includes convictions for kidnapping, rape and burglary. He has the details of Mr. Hart's record committed to memory: Convicted in 1966 of forcing two teen-age Tulsa women into his car, driving them here to Locust Grove and then raping one of them, Mr. Hart served 28 months of a 10-year sentence at the Granite State Reformatory. Given an early parole, he was back in jail a few months later, charged with four first-degree burglaries.

He was convicted of all four and sentenced to a maximum of 305 years in prison, the second-longest term ever meted out by Tulsa courts. He started serving the sentence at the penitentiary at McAlester and was being held at Sheriff Weaver's jail during a transfer when, five years ago, Gene Hart and two other men broke out. He was recaptured a few days later and then, in September 1973, broke out and fled out.

Here in Locust Grove, people will tell you that "Pete" Weaver has not



A message found on a rock in a cave near the site of the murders

felt kindly since then toward the only man to escape twice from the Mayes County Jail.

Mr. Wise says that his campaign for State Attorney General has nothing to do with what happens to Gene Hart. "I'm a prosecutor not a politician," Mr. Wise said in an interview.

He would not discuss the evidence he has assembled, except to say that it would not be an open-and-shut case but one that "promises to be a lengthy and complex procedure involving highly technical evidence."

In the first few days after the murders it seemed as though the case would be clear-cut. Investigators reported having found not only the weapon that was used to bludgeon two of the girls to death but also a bloody footprint inside their tent and a single, perfect fingerprint on one of the bodies.

A farmer said he had seen a stranger fleeing through the hills. And in a cave a few miles from the camp where the girls died, the investigators picked up what looked like the killer's trail—some empty food cans, a taunting message on a rock that called the searchers "fools" and two curious, weather-beaten photographs that looked as though they had been made at a formal party.

In less than a day these were identified as photographs of three women who had attended the 1968 wedding of the daughter of an employee of the Granite Reformatory, where Gene Hart was serving his rape and kidnapping sentence.

As a trusty and photographer's assistant, Gene Hart had attended that wedding. Moreover, he had developed and printed those very pictures. Up to that time investigators had been considering one or two other men as suspects in addition to Mr. Hart, but the identification of the photographs changed all that.

Mr. Wise issued a warrant, based mainly on the discovery of the photographs, charging Mr. Hart with the three murders 10 days before.

The manhunt that followed at times assumed the proportions of a circus and military exercise in one. Posses of hundreds of armed, sometimes inebriated, civilians were formed. Scores of state and local officers and dozens of Federal agents were brought

in. So was a National Guard helicopter with heat-seeking devices, specially trained dogs and a team of Vietnam veterans who called themselves the "Spooks" and boasted that they could bring Gene Hart back alive inside of eight hours.

On April 6, 10 months after the murders and five years after he had escaped, Gene Hart was back in Pete Weaver's jail, having been found hiding in a cabin in Cherokee County, in the limestone foothills of the Ozarks, with an Indian medicine man named Sam Pigeon.

Mr. Pigeon, who said he had allowed Gene Hart to live with him because "I don't think he done it," was charged with harboring a fugitive. Mr. Hart was formally arraigned in the murder case. He pleaded not guilty.

As the preliminary hearing in the case, the hearing at which Mr. Wise must display his best evidence, draws near, questions about Mr. Hart's guilt or innocence grow more insistent in Locust Grove.

The questions concern whether one man, acting alone, could have committed the crime and why Mr. Hart, who had apparently been hiding in the area for years without disturbing anyone, would suddenly molest three young girls.

And there are people who say that some of those who served time with Gene Hart recalled that the photographs were in general circulation inside the Granite Reformatory.

Garvin Isaacs, Mr. Hart's principal attorney, refuses to discuss what he knows of the state's case against his client or to say what information will be offered in his defense. But interviews with others provided some clues to evidence that does not exist, to questions that a trial must answer and to some evidence that may prove to be in Gene Hart's favor.

The autopsies performed on the three bodies, for example, showed that although each had been sexually abused in some way there was no direct evidence of rape.

Despite the early reports that a murder weapon had been found, investigators now say they do not have one. The fingerprint that the authorities at first said had been taken from one of the bodies proved to belong to a police officer who had inadvertently touched the photographic plate on which it was found.

And the tests on the blood, hair and saliva samples that were taken from Gene Hart after his arrest apparently proved inconclusive because investigators say they may have to ask for more.

Mr. Hart is said to be so certain he can establish his innocence that he wants to take the witness stand in his own behalf, an unusual move in any criminal trial and especially in one involving a capital offense.

If Mr. Hart does testify, his criminal record can be introduced into evidence against him. On its face, such a move would appear advantageous to Mr. Wise, the District Attorney, who has criticized those who in his words have tried to make Mr. Hart out to be a "Robin Hood" and a "Sunday school teacher."

Each of Mr. Hart's four convictions for first-degree burglary was marked by procedural tangles, including an automobile search to which Mr. Hart said he had never legally consented and a "confession" that he swore he never made.

According to court records, the incident that led to the earlier conviction on charges of rape and kidnapping took place on the night of June 4, 1966, when Mr. Hart, then 22 years old, left a sleazy bar in Tulsa with two teen-aged women.

The next morning, the women telephoned the police to say that Mr. Hart had forced them into his car, driven them to the outskirts of Locust Grove, raped one of them and left them tied up in the woods, but that they had broken free.

At the trial that followed, the prosecutor conceded that there was no medical evidence that either of the women had been raped. Mr. Hart, who at first had entered a plea of not guilty, changed his plea to guilty. He later



Gene Leroy Hart in custody in Pryor, Okla., last April after he was arrested in connection with slayings of three girl scouts.

appealed, maintaining that he had not understood what he was doing. The appeal was pending at the time of his escape.

Among the mysteries that swirl around Gene Leroy Hart, however, the most intriguing have to do with the case at hand. People here wonder, for example, about rumors that there was a witness to the murders that dark night, a witness who could clear Gene Hart if he were not afraid of retribution from those he believed to be the real killers.

And they wonder about the note found in one of the tents of the Girl Scout camp in April of last year, two months before the young girls died, warning that three of the Scouts would be killed there "soon."

Asked about the note, Mr. Wise

paused for a moment. "Oh," he said, "that was probably a prank."

Funds Raised for Defense

LOCUST GROVE, Okla., June 3 (AP)—About 400 people attended a dinner last night to help raise funds for attorneys' fees, court transcripts and expert witnesses for Gene Leroy Hart. It was not known how much was collected toward those costs, which Mr. Hart's attorneys said could reach \$35,000.

The dinner was held only a few hours after Special District Judge Jess B. Clanton in Pryor denied defense motions to postpone Mr. Hart's preliminary hearing, scheduled to begin Wednesday.

Hearing in Death Of 3 Girl Scouts Appears to Drift

By JOHN M. CREWDSON

Special to The New York Times

PRYOR, Okla., June 11—When Gene Leroy Hart walked into the Mayes County Courthouse here last Wednesday morning the fragrant spring air was heavy with expectation.

But in three days, the crucial pretrial hearing in Mr. Hart's case, the hearing that will determine whether he is bound over to stand trial for the murders of three young Girl Scouts, has evoked little more among the spectators than heavy eyelids and an occasional snore.

In fact, Mr. Hart's name was scarcely mentioned as Sidney D. Wise, the Mayes County District Attorney, led a dozen witnesses through detailed and, for the most part, previously reported accounts of the discovery of the three bodies and the police investigation that followed.

Nothing in their testimony has served to connect Gene Hart with the crime, and as the hearing adjourned for the weekend the people of Pryor and Vinta and Claremore and Locust Grove and even Tulsa, where the families of the three little girls live, were asking one another when, if ever, Mr. Wise would make a case against Mr. Hart.

The testimony so far has served primarily to show what evidence does not exist against him. On Friday, for example, the courtroom tensed as Mr. Wise entered into the record a number of items, including eyeglasses and a flashlight, that had been found near the three bodies.

Tension—for a Moment

The courtroom tensed as a fingerprint expert took the witness stand, but spectators slumped back in their seats when the expert testified that he had found no fingerprints on any of the objects that could be identified as belonging to Mr. Hart.

That sort of anticlimax has practically become routine. Earlier in the day, Dr. Neil Hoffman, the Tulsa County Medical Examiner, testified in detail about the autopsies he conducted on the three bodies but disclosed that his examination had not established that the attacker of the three little girls, all of whom were sexually abused, had been a man.

The families of the three girls, slain a year ago tomorrow on their first night at summer camp, appear to be as puzzled as the other spectators about the direction Mr. Wise's case is taking. "I don't know where it's going anymore than anybody else," said Bettye Milner, whose 10-year-old daughter Doris was one of the victims.

As befits a case that has attracted non-stop publicity in this part of the country from its beginnings a year ago, the Hart hearing last week became the first judicial proceeding in Oklahoma history to be televised, even if only over a closed circuit.

Suspect Takes Notes

The television monitors have been set up in the banquet room of the Pryor City Hall, across the street and down the block from the red-brick courthouse where Gene Hart sits, watching the prosecutors closely, conferring with his lawyers and taking what appear to be copious notes.

The courtroom was filled to overflowing on Wednesday, the day the hearing began, but it has had several empty seats since then. Nonetheless, an army of spectators, housewives, children on summer vacation and farmers in their straw hats and overalls continues to arrive at City Hall each morning, preferring to watch the hearing in the casual living room atmosphere there rather than the stricter formality of the courtroom.

Also descending on Pryor last week were lawmen brought in from out of town to help provide security in the courtroom and the jail across the street, and reporters, so many reporters that the favorite greeting in this part of the world, "Hi, how you?", has temporarily been replaced by "What network are you with?"

Motels where the "No Vacancy" sign hasn't been turned on in ages are filled. At Don's Grille, where the daily luncheon special is a kind of fried meat loaf called Brown Derby, it is harder to get a table than at "21." Down the street at Bynum's General Store, where a suit of clothes sells for \$19.95, they haven't seen so much business in years.

Mr. Hart's Cherokee heritage has played virtually no role in the case, which has so far attracted little attention from groups such as the American Indian Movement that have turned similar trials into political causes in the past.

Indians and non-Indians alike have taken pains to explain to outsiders that, whatever elements have led to Mr. Hart's current plight, racism is almost certainly not among them. That may well be the case, for the Indian population of Oklahoma—the name itself means "Home of the Red Man" in Choctaw—is the largest of any state in the country.

Former Indian Territory

It is especially large here in eastern Oklahoma, an area that until the turn of the century was known as the Indian Territory. There are no reservations here and full-blooded Indians, though mostly poor, have been assimilated into the general population. Indeed, most people in these parts, including the prominent and powerful, have some Indian blood in their veins and are quick to boast about it.

That is not to say that there are not problems, however. A few miles away in Locust Grove—where Mr. Hart grew up, became a football star and married his high school sweetheart—cowboys and Indians retain distinct identities, even down to the bars they drink in and from which they occasionally emerge on Saturday night to do battle, something that, one local resident said the other day, "most people think only happens on television."

Trial to Open for Suspect in 3 Oklahoma Girls' Deaths

By JOHN M. CREWDSON

Special to The New York Times

PRYOR, Okla., March 18 — Testimony is expected to begin here tomorrow in the trial of Gene Leroy Hart, a 35-year-old Cherokee charged with the slayings of three young Girl Scouts at a nearby camp two summers ago.

The opening of the trial follows a struggle by the prosecution and the defense to select a jury from residents of this closely knit community, many of whom have said they are acquainted with Mr. Hart or his family or have fixed opinions about his guilt or innocence.

The final juror was seated Thursday after more than 100 people were examined and rejected. The jury of six men and six women, all white and most employed in blue-collar occupations, will be sequestered for the trial, which is likely to take a month or more.

Selection of the jury was rendered more difficult than usual in part because the case has attracted nearly nonstop publicity in Oklahoma since the June 1977 killings. The girls — 8, 9, and 10 years old — were bludgeoned and strangled.

Captured Last April

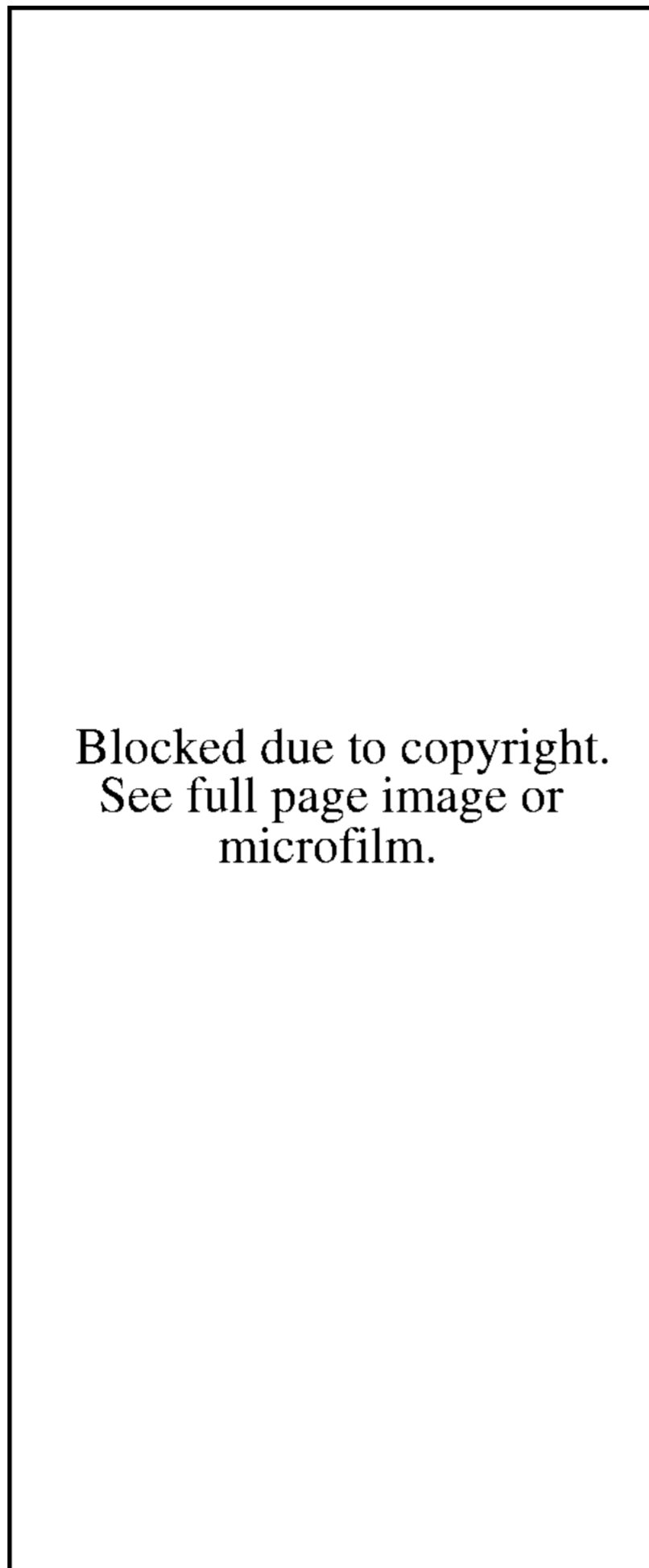
At the time, Mr. Hart was a fugitive from the same Mayes County jail where he is now being held. He was accused of the killings less than two weeks after they occurred, and much of the attention accorded the case stems from Mr. Hart's reputation as a popular local figure.

Mr. Hart, once a high school football hero from nearby Locust Grove, was captured last April after a 10-month statewide manhunt that attracted a small army of law officers and civilians.

It was disclosed at a preliminary hearing last June that the authorities had had no evidence beyond their suspicions that linked Mr. Hart to the killings when the charges against him were filed by Sidney D. Wise, then the Mayes County District Attorney.

The evidence presented at the hearing, virtually all of it gathered after Mr. Hart was captured, was highly technical and circumstantial.

Much of the state's case is expected to turn on expert scientific and forensic testimony. Garvin Isaacs, the principal defense attorney, told the court last week that his client was at a disadvantage be-



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Associated Press

Gene Leroy Hart

cause he had no funds to pay for other expert witnesses to rebut the state's evidence. The main contribution to Mr. Hart's defense has been a grant of \$12,500 from the Cherokee Tribal Council.

Two of the key points at issue are certain to be the state's contention that hairs and semen recovered from the girls' bodies were similar to samples taken from Mr. Hart after his arrest.

One pathologist testified at the hearing that none of the girls had been raped, and another expert said he had found evidence that two of the three had. But none of the scientists who took the stand said

that either the hairs or the semen could be positively identified as Mr. Hart's.

Mr. Isaacs has so far been frustrated in his efforts to obtain copies of investigative reports prepared for the prosecutor by the State Bureau of Investigation, reports Mr. Isaacs believes might contain evidence that is exculpatory to his client.

Book Connection Revealed

It was disclosed in court last November that Mr. Wise had given copies of some of the reports to Ronald L. Grimsley, then editor of a Pryor newspaper, who had planned to write a book on the case. Although Mr. Wise had denied any interest in the book, Mr. Isaacs produced a copy of a contract showing that Mr. Grimsley had agreed to give Mr. Wise 75 percent of the book's profits.

Judge William J. Whistler, who is presiding over the trial, said Mr. Wise had shown "very poor judgment" in allowing Mr. Grimsley to have the reports but would not order them turned over to the defense.

Mr. Wise later withdrew from the prosecution and has been replaced by S.M. Fallis, the District Attorney from neighboring Tulsa County.

A main argument of the prosecution's case is that the defendant, while a fugitive, lived for a time in a cave in the foothills a few miles from the camp where the scouts were slain.

Objects found by law enforcement officers near the cave have been linked with others recovered from the scene of the crime, but none of them were found to bear fingerprints that could be identified as belonging to Mr. Hart.

The defense has never disputed that Mr. Hart remained in the area after his escape from jail in September 1973, at a time when he was facing a 130-year sentence for four burglary convictions.

But Mr. Isaacs has rejected the portrait of Mr. Hart as "the Tarzan of Mayes County," saying that his client had been more inclined to stay in the homes of friends and relatives during the period than to live off his wits in the wilderness.

The prosecutors believed their case was strengthened considerably by one witness, 16-year-old Darren Creekmore, who told them he had visited Mr. Hart at the cave in the weeks after the killings. But at the hearing the youngster said he

had lied about the visit, hoping to collect a reward.

Another key witness, Jimmy Don Bunch, who became acquainted with Mr. Hart at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary, had been expected by the defense to testify that authorities offered him a parole in return for implicating Mr. Hart in the killings. Mr. Bunch signed a statement to that effect for Mr. Isaacs.

However, when he took the stand at the hearing he surprised Mr. Isaacs by renouncing the signed statement and testified instead that Mr. Hart had told him he "didn't know" whether he had committed the murders or not because he had "been smoking reefer and drinking wine for three days."

The defendant, Mr. Bunch went on, had told him that "I woke up in a cave and I had blood all over me."

AN ALIBI IS CLAIMED IN 3 GIRLS' KILLINGS

At Oklahoma Murder Trial, Lawyer Says Suspect Was in Tulsa at Time of Camper Slayings

By JOHN M. CREWDSON

Special to The New York Times

PRYOR, Okla., March 19 — Lawyers for Gene Leroy Hart disclosed a key element of their defense strategy today when they asserted for the first time that Mr. Hart was nowhere near the rustic camp where three young Girl Scouts were staying when they were murdered two summers ago.

Garvin Isaacs, Mr. Hart's principal attorney, made the surprise declaration in his opening remarks to the jury as the defendant, a 35-year-old Cherokee who is charged with all three killings, went on trial for his life in the Mayes County Courthouse here.

The trial opened almost exactly 22 months after the bodies of the girls — Lori Farmer, 8 years old; Michelle Guse, 9, and Doris Milner, 10 — were found by camp counselors on the morning of June 13, 1977. Investigation by pathologists showed that they had been bludgeoned and strangled and produced indications that two of them might have been raped.

Mr. Isaacs told the jury that Mr. Hart left Mayes County for Tulsa, about 30 miles away, more than a week before the killings and returned to the house of his mother, Mrs. Ella Mae Buckskin, not far from the camp, four days after the killings.

At the time, Mr. Hart was a fugitive from justice, having escaped nearly four years earlier from the same Mayes County jail where he is now being held.

Mr. Isaacs said that members of Mr. Hart's family had agreed to "come forward and testify" about his movements before and after the killings even though they would be "putting their personal freedom on the line" by leaving themselves open to charges of having harbored a fugitive.

But the lawyer conceded to the jury that he was not yet sure he would be able "to produce some of the people who were with" Mr. Hart during the two weeks the defense will maintain he was in Tulsa.

The start of the trial appeared to be something of an anticlimax for this small town, whose residents have talked of little else for weeks. Though the cramped courtroom was full today, there were no crowds of Mr. Hart's supporters gathered outside. The main contribution to Mr. Hart's defense was \$12,500 from the Cherokee Tribal Council.

Defense Request Rebuffed

Mr. Isaacs, a young Oklahoma City lawyer who is given to touches of the dramatic, moved at the outset of today's proceeding to have Mr. Hart named as his own co-counsel so that he could read the opening statement himself to the all-white jury of six men and six women.

But S. M. Fallis, the Tulsa County District Attorney, who has been assigned as special prosecutor, objected on the ground that Mr. Hart, who is not a lawyer, could not be expected to know what was admissible in an opening statement.

The objection was sustained by District Judge William J. Whistler, who said that the unusual proposal seemed to him to be "fraught with too many possibilities for error."

Judge Whistler also rejected an attempt by Mr. Isaacs to produce testimony from a Kansas psychologist who had given Mr. Hart a battery of tests and who, the lawyer said, had concluded that the defendant was "not of the character that would molest small children."

In his opening statement, Mr. Fallis added little information that was new about the nature of the prosecution's case and mainly recounted for the jury the evidence assembled by the state, all of it circumstantial, that was disclosed at last year's preliminary hearing.

That evidence includes the state's contention that hairs and semen recovered from the three bodies bore characteristics similar to samples taken from Mr. Hart after his arrest.

In his rebuttal, however, Mr. Isaacs told the jury that he would "prove to you that that hair is not Gene Leroy Hart's," and he declared that the defense would also show that until the warrant accusing Mr. Hart of the murders was issued 13 days after they occurred "at no time did the thought ever enter his mind that he would be charged with this horrible crime."

Mr. Hart escaped from the Mayes County jail in September 1973, shortly after he had begun serving a minimum sentence of 130 years for burglary and nearly four years before the slayings of the three Girl Scouts.

He remained at large, and in late June 1977 he was charged with the killings. Prosecutors said later that their sole basis for the warrant naming Mr. Hart was the discovery, near a cave some four miles from the Girl Scout camp, of two weathered photographs that Mr. Hart had developed in 1968 while an inmate of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary.

Investigators later matched a roll of tape and a piece of newspaper found at the murder scene with other pieces of tape and newspaper recovered from the cave. But Mr. Isaacs cautioned the jury today to "watch the pictures — they're going to tell you a lot. They're going to tell you that Mr. Hart is innocent."

He did not elaborate, but sources familiar with the defense's case implied that the photographs, which they said Mr. Hart had had with him when he entered the Mayes County jail but had left behind when he escaped, had been planted at the cave to provide law officers with a reason to charge Mr. Hart.

Mr. Hart was captured in April 1978 after an informer led the police to the cabin of a Cherokee medicine man named Sam Pigeon Jr., where he had been hiding out.

The semen samples that have figured in the prosecution's case were recovered from undershorts that law enforcement officers said they found in the cabin after Mr. Hart was hustled away, but Mr. Isaacs suggested strongly today that some of the items allegedly found in the cabin had been planted there after the fact.

Suspect in Oklahoma Slayings Breaks Year of Silence

By JOHN M. CREWDSON

Special to The New York Times

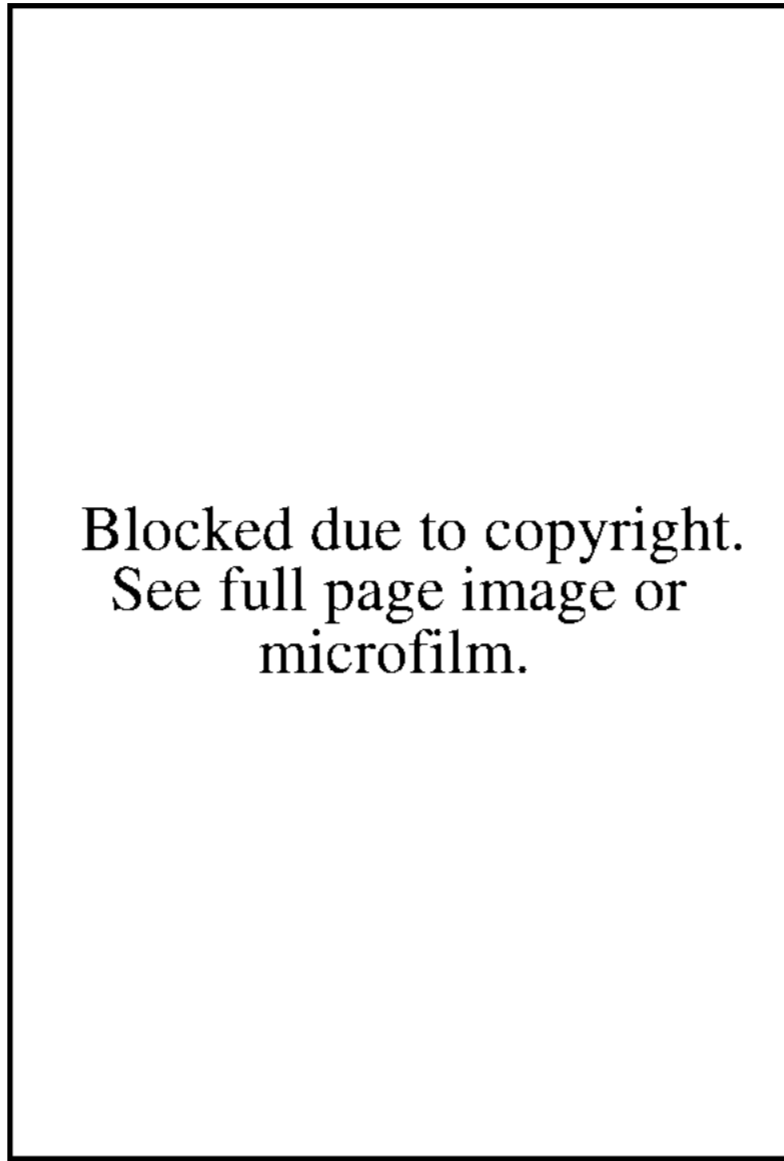
PRYOR, Okla., March 20 — After nearly a year of self-imposed silence, Gene Leroy Hart took advantage of a courtroom recess today to answer questions about himself and to discuss some of his thoughts and feelings as he stands trial for his life.

At the unusual news conference, which overshadowed the tedious progress of the prosecution's case against Mr. Hart in the murders of three young Girl Scouts two years ago this June, the 35-year-old defendant characterized himself as a deeply religious man devoted to his family, with a dream of someday studying for the law and a disinclination to view himself as either a hero or a villain.

Mr. Hart, who had declined in advance to discuss the substance of his case, acknowledged in response to a reporter's question that his case might have intensified "the fears and doubts that many people have about any system that has the means and the power to overwhelm each of us."

But he emphasized to the reporters who crowded into the tiny law library on the third floor of the Mayes County Courthouse here that he had "no desire to be a hero."

"This attention is not my doing," he said. "I didn't ask for this attention but I



Associated Press

Gene Leroy Hart yesterday

have it, so I have to live with it."

There is considerable sentiment in Oklahoma, which has a population that is about one-half American Indian, that Mr. Hart is being tried for the three murders as much because he is a full-blooded Cherokee as because of the circumstantial evidence that has been presented against him.

Mr. Hart did not endorse the theory that he had been chosen as a scapegoat, but he asserted that "prejudice isn't always open and obvious."

"Sometimes," he said, "it takes the form of subconscious attitudes that are the motivation for the way some people relate to other people."

"You can look all around you," he said. "This is Indian country, but it's obvious who owns the land. We have nothing left but our freedom and our dignity."

A Response to Requests

Mr. Hart, who was flanked during the 45-minute session by his attorneys, Garvin Isaacs and Gary Pitchlynn, said that he had agreed to the news conference as a way of responding to the numerous re-

quests he had received for interviews over the past few months.

His appearance was broadcast live by local radio and television stations, but it was not seen or heard by the jury in the case, which has been sequestered since the trial began yesterday.

Admitting that he was "a little excited and nervous," Mr. Hart turned aside questions about his childhood, his marriage and divorce and his 15-year-old son, Donald, whom he said he had not seen since the divorce took place nearly a decade ago. "My personal feelings and my personal thoughts are just that, personal," he said.

He also dismissed with "no comment" questions about a report in yesterday's Tulsa Tribune that a 32-year-old nurse from Corpus Christi, Tex., had developed a correspondence with Mr. Hart and had moved here a few months ago to be near him.

Shows Low-Key Humor

Mr. Hart, who was wearing a well-cut, dark-blue suit and a brown vest, spoke in a soft Oklahoma drawl and displayed several touches of low-key humor, as when he responded to the question about his treatment in jail by recalling, "My mama always told me never to say anything bad about your hosts."

He said that he spent most of his time working on his case, drawing, answering mail or reading. Although he said that many of the letters he received had been "supportive and spiritual," Mr. Hart said that his main source of support had been his family and his religion, which he described as a blend of Christianity and "our ancient and traditional Cherokee religion."

Mr. Hart also confirmed reports that his defense fund had now been depleted, but he allowed that "someone has looked over us since we started — we had no money from the start and we have no money now."

Mr. Hart declined to express an opinion about his chances for an acquittal in the case, but he did say that, in the event he ever became a free man, he would like to attend a school of law.

The New York Times

Published: March 21, 1979

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2 Chemists Challenge Evidence In Trial Over Girl Scout Slayings

PRYOR, Okla., March 26 (UPI) — Two chemists testifying for the defense today disputed the state's evidence against Gene Leroy Hart, who is accused of murdering three Girl Scouts in 1977. The two witnesses suggested that some of the chemical tests bordered on guesswork.

John T. Wilson, chief forensic chemist for the Kansas City Police Department's regional crime laboratory, told jurors that tests conducted on hair, blood and semen samples taken from Mr. Hart were unreliable.

Herbert Maxey, a chemist who formerly analyzed hair and semen samples for state law enforcement agencies, said the tests could show similarities, "but that's about as far as it goes."

Mr. Hart, 35 years old, is charged with first-degree murder in the deaths of the three girls at a Girl Scout camp near Locust Grove.

The New York Times

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Convict Acquitted in Death of 3 Girl Scouts

Special to The New York Times

PRYOR, Okla., March 30 — Gene Leroy Hart was found not guilty today of the June 1977 sex slayings of three Girl Scouts from the Tulsa area.

The jury deliberated seven hours before returning the unanimous verdict to thunderous applause in the tiny Mayes County Courtroom. Mr. Hart, a 35-year-old Cherokee, covered his eyes and sobbed.

He had been charged in the deaths of Lori Farmer, 8 years old; Michele Guse, 9, and Doris Milner, 10. Their mutilated bodies were found at Camp Scott near Locust Grove the morning after their first night in the 410-acre camp.

The Farmer and Guse girls had been beaten to death and the Milner girl strangled. All three had been raped.

Mother Bursts Into Tears

The mother of Lori Farmer burst into tears and buried her face in her husband's shoulder after the verdict was read. Later, all the family members, obviously shaken by the verdict, broke down in the office of the Mayes County District Attorney.

Mr. Hart was ordered transferred to the state prison at McAlester to continue serving sentences of up to 300 years resulting from previous convictions for rape, kidnapping and burglary. He could also face charges stemming from parole violations and from his escape from the Mayes County Jail in 1973. He was still a fugitive when he was charged with the slaying of the three Girl Scouts.

Jury deliberations began yesterday. The chief defense attorney, Garvin Isaacs, stunned the courtroom earlier this week by introducing testimony at-



United Press International

Gene Leroy Hart being led from courthouse in Pryor, Okla., Thursday night

tempting to link the murders to Bill Stevens, a convict who is now serving time in a Kansas prison for raping a 53-year-old woman.

'He Was Awful Nervous'

Dean Boyd, a waitress at the Midway Cafe in Choteau, Okla., 12 miles from Camp Scott, told the jurors she saw Mr. Stevens's picture on television Tuesday night and remembered that he visited the cafe the day the girls were killed.

She said that Mr. Stevens drove up to the Cafe between 5 and 6 A.M., took off his shirt outside and put another one on.

"He was awful nervous, his actions would have scared anyone," she said. "He'd look at his hands, and then he'd put them in his pocket and then he'd look at them again."

She said that she had become suspicious and called the police, but the man left before an officer arrived.

The Stevens photograph was televised after Joyce Payne identified a flashlight found near a slain girl as one she had given Mr. Stevens in 1977. Mrs. Payne testified that he visited her home in Okmulgee the morning the bodies were discovered and had claw marks on his arms and reddish brown stains on his boots.

Hair Samples Cited

The prosecutor, S. M. Fallis Jr., produced several witnesses in an attempt to offset the impression that Mr. Stevens could have killed the Girl Scouts.

The strongest rebuttal testimony came from a chemist with the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation who said that hairs found in the death tent and on tape binding Doris Milner did not match hair samples from Mr. Stevens. Other wit-

nesses testified that the hair samples could have been Mr. Hart's.

A human reproduction expert testified that he had compared sperm from Mr. Stevens with sperm found in the bodies of the girls and found that the patterns of the sperm structure were not similar. The sperm link with Mr. Hart was made by John MacLeod early in the trial. He said that his test had shown "it would not be unreasonable" to infer that the sperm in the victims had come from Mr. Hart.

However, all of the expert witnesses said that hair and sperm comparisons could not be used as positive identification of an individual.

PRISONER ACQUITTED IN SEX SLAYINGS DIES

Gene Leroy Hart, Cleared in 3 Girl Scout Killings, Collapses at Penitentiary in Oklahoma

McALESTER, Okla., June 4 (AP) — Gene Leroy Hart, acquitted in March of the sex slayings of three Girl Scouts, died tonight while exercising in the Oklahoma State Penitentiary yard here, a prison official said.

Mr. Hart, 35 years old, collapsed after lifting weights and jogging, said Nancy Nunnally of the State Corrections Department. She said he was taken to the prison infirmary and then to a local hospital. Doctors attempted to revive Mr. Hart for about 20 minutes before pronouncing him dead of a massive heart attack, she said.

She said that Mr. Hart was athletic and did not have a history of heart trouble. An autopsy was scheduled for tomorrow.

Faced Circumstantial Case

Mr. Hart was serving sentences totaling 305 years for rape, kidnapping and burglary convictions in Oklahoma. But late last March, a jury in Pryor, Okla., found him not guilty of still another crime — the 1977 sex slayings of the three Girl Scouts at a summer camp.

The murders were committed while Mr. Hart was out of jail, following an escape. But the case was based on circumstantial evidence, and the defense argued that some of it had been planted by the state.

A witness for the defense testified to that effect, and another witness indicated that a better suspect in the case might be a Kansan already jailed for rape.

It was a former jailer who said that some of the state's evidence had been in its possession up to three years before the crime was committed. And a Girl Scout tentatively identified the Kansan, William Stevens, as the man lurking outside her tent a few days before the murders.

Back to Jail After Trial

The trial over, Mr. Hart was sent back to jail while his relatives and friends celebrated with champagne.

At the time of the trial, there was considerable sentiment in Oklahoma that Mr. Hart had been tried as much because he was a full-blooded Cherokee as because of the evidence against him. At a news conference during a courtroom recess he did not claim that he had been chosen as a scapegoat but asserted that "prejudice isn't always open and obvious."

Mr. Hart was charged with the June 1977 murders of the girls — 8, 9 and 10 years old — in a case that attracted nearly nonstop publicity in Oklahoma since the girls were found bludgeoned and strangled in a camp near Pryor. Autopsies showed that all three had been sexually abused.

Mr. Hart was a fugitive at the time from the same Mayes County jail where he was being held for the trial. But Mr. Hart also was a popular local figure, having been a high school football hero from nearby Locust Grove. He was recaptured in April 1978 after a 10-month manhunt that attracted a small army of law officers and civilian volunteers.



United Press International

Gene Leroy Hart

The New York Times

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Heart Attack Is Blamed in Death Of Convict Cleared in Scout Case

Special to The New York Times

OKLAHOMA CITY, June 5 — Gene Leroy Hart, the 35-year-old Cherokee Indian acquitted March 30 in the slayings of three Girl Scouts from the Tulsa area, died yesterday of acute coronary disease, according to Dr. A. J. Chapman, Oklahoma's chief medical examiner.

Dr. Chapman, who released the findings today after an hour-long autopsy, ruled out foul play.

Mr. Hart collapsed about 6:45 P.M. Monday after a rigorous routine of exercise, jogging and weight-lifting in the exercise yard of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary at McAlistar, Okla., where he was serving sentences totaling 305 years for rape, kidnapping and burglary convictions and parole violations.

Dr. Chapman said that Mr. Hart had apparently suffered an undiagnosed heart attack in the past and that his heart could not take the strain of such exercises. He also said the results were tentative and that a complete "toxicology scan" would be run before a final report would be issued.

Mr. Hart was charged with the Girl Scout murders 10 days after the bodies of the three girls were found in June 1977 at Camp Scott near his hometown of Locus Grove, Okla. The three girls, who were 8, 9 and 10 years old, had been sexually molested.

Object of Massive Manhunt

Mr. Hart was an escaped prisoner at the time of the killings, and was the object of the state's most massive manhunt before he was captured in April 1978. Last March 30, after a month-long trial, a jury in Pryor, Okla., acquitted him of the girls' murders, and he was returned to the state penitentiary to serve out his sentences for previous convictions.

At the time of Mr. Hart's trial, there was considerable sentiment that he had been tried as much because he was a full-blooded Cherokee as because of the evi-

dence against him. Much of the evidence was circumstantial, and the defense argued that some of it had been planted by the state.

Although much has been written about Mr. Hart, he had refused a number of requests from the press for interviews. However, only hours before Mr. Hart collapsed and died, a reporter for The Tulsa Tribune received a letter from Mr. Hart offering a brief glimpse into his fears and frustrations about the case and denying any responsibility for the murders. The letter was in response to a request for an interview.

'Entire Process Was a Sham'

"The record has been set straight as far as I'm concerned," Mr. Hart wrote. "The jury voted right when they voted 'not guilty,' and my family and supporters knew the entire process was a sham from the start."

"It may be easy for you or others from the media to forget that the state was trying to execute me for something that I had nothing to do with," he continued. "I, and my friends and relatives, will never forget or forgive such an injustice."

Despite the bitter overtones of the letter, Mr. Hart's attorney, Gary Titchlynn, described his client as "bright, articulate and optimistic for the future," adding that he thought Mr. Hart was a misunderstood victim.

"Gene's attitude was not rooted in bitterness," Mr. Titchlynn said, "but Gene was a victim and he didn't believe he owed anybody anything."

Sheri Farmer of Tulsa, mother of Lori Lee Farmer, the youngest of the three victims, said she still thought Mr. Hart was the one who killed Lori, but added: "I feel shaken about his death — I feel torn."

The New York Times

Published: June 6, 1979

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