

Mothers plead guilty in deaths of 7 children

GALVESTON (AP) — Two women interrupted what was stacking up to be a hung jury Thursday and pleaded guilty in the fire deaths of their seven children, officials said.

The two El Campo women — Jacqueline Williams, 24, and Marsha Taylor Owens, 30 — were at a bar in a nearby city when their unattended children perished in a house fire Feb. 13.

Jurors had entered their second day of deliberations Thursday and were snagged 11-1 on whether to convict the women on the injury-to-a-child charges, said court coordinator Anita Irwin.

But shortly after noon, the two women abruptly changed their minds and entered guilty pleas on all seven counts, Irwin said.

State District Judge Daniel Sklar set sentencing for June 16 in Wharton County. Each charge carries a maximum prison term of 10 years.

During closing arguments, a defense attorney said prosecutors were trying to analyze the case from hind-

sight and convict the two women for doing something they thought was acceptable.

Both women testified that Williams' oldest daughter, Monica, 8, was left in charge of the six children,

ranging in age from 2 months to 8 years.

One defense witness explained that leaving children unattended is nothing new.

The Rev. G.L. Griffin told District Attorney Daniel Shindler, "Let me

break it down for you. You're white. My race of people have been leaving children with the oldest in charge for a long time. You all have babysitters because you can afford it. The only babysitters we have is ourselves."

Report says Mexican economy hard hit

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The government's fresh report on the 1985 economy confirms what many had thought: The Mexican economy grew at a modest pace but was strapped by high inflation, a widening federal budget deficit, sluggish export sales and a weakening currency.

The report, released this week by Bank of Mexico, the nation's central bank, also said the international reserves held by the government tumbled to \$5.8 billion

by year's end. A year earlier, they were \$8.1 billion.

Up until last year, Mexico had been widely viewed as a model for other heavily indebted countries in its battle to restore the economy to health. The government had adopted belt-tightening measures that cut the inflation rate and revived the stricken economy.

The report said the economy grew at an inflation-adjusted rate of 2.7 percent last year. It ad-

vanced 3.7 percent in 1984 after contracting 5.3 percent in 1982.

The gross national product, the value of all goods and services produced by the economy, was about \$91.2 billion last year.

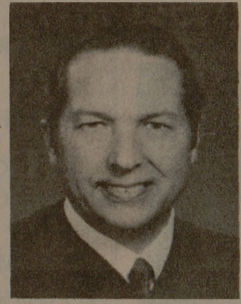
Private economists have forecast that the economy will slip — or perhaps already has — into a recession this year, a decline driven partly by the recent collapse of oil prices in the world market.

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