

Town looks back on teen-ager's abduction, indictment of officer

The Associated Press

GILMER, Texas — Robert and Cathy Carlson don't expect their 17-year-old daughter will ever be coming home.

She disappeared one rainy night two years ago and apparently no one in this East Texas community of nearly 5,000 people has heard from her since.

The silence and the town's peace of mind were shattered last Friday when a grand jury indicted eight people, including Gilmer Police Sgt. James York Brown, on charges of kidnapping, sexually assaulting and imprisoning Kelly Wilson before she was stabbed to death.

The girl's body has never been found.

Residents of the close-knit community about 110 miles east of Dallas have been helplessly drawn into a scandal that is casting a shadow over an otherwise quiet town.

Brown's supporters maintain the 35-year-old lawman never would have gone along with such a diabolical scheme.

"I work with him and I don't believe it," said Becky Skinner,

secretary for the Gilmer Police Department. "I would trust him with my own kids."

Brown's devotion to the case makes it hard to believe he was involved in her death, Kelly's stepfather said.

Kelly Wilson disappeared on January 5, 1992. Around 8 p.m., she left the video store where she worked to deposit the night's receipts, according to police reports and the store's manager.

"We drove by a couple of times that night," Carlson said. "Things were busy so, we didn't stop."

Authorities say that Kelly apparently returned to the store. Police later found her car and her purse in front of the store. The tires on 1985 Dodge Charger had been slashed.

Michael Biby, 17, pleaded guilty to slashing the tires and served 90 days in jail. He insisted he knew nothing about the girl's disappearance and was not named in Friday's indictments.

Always at the center of the search for Kelly Wilson was Brown, who made the rounds of the town distributing fliers that display a smiling, girl who once was a member of the Gilmer High

School dance squad.

Later, it would be a case already under investigation that would provide investigators with a crucial break in Kelly Wilson's disappearance.

On May 29, 1993, Eugene W. Kerr, 67, his wife, Geneva Kerr, 62; their sons, Danny Kerr, 41, and his common-law wife, Connie Martin, 27; Wendell Kerr, 45, and Wendell's wife, Wanda Kerr; Roger Holeman, 44, a former Gilmer police officer, and his girlfriend Tammy Smith, 25, were arrested on child molestation charges.

Scott Lyford, a special prosecutor for Galveston, said it was during his investigation of the child molestation case that he first received evidence implicating Brown. The most damaging blow to Brown came from Martin.

"We have concluded that she is reliable based on other evidence in other cases," Lyford said Wednesday.

Martin told authorities that she and her co-defendants were responsible for Kelly's murder. In exchange for her cooperation, Martin will not be prosecuted in connection with Kelly Wilson's case.

Fraternity to sponsor Miss Black and Gold scholarship pageant Saturday

By Angela Neaves

THE BATTALION

Eleven Texas A&M women will compete for the title of Miss Black and Gold Saturday at 7 p.m. in Rudder Theater.

The pageant is the last event during Alpha Phi Alpha Week.

Brian Williams, a chairman of the Miss Black & Gold pageant and member of Alpha Phi Alpha, said the pageant is the fraternity's biggest event of the year.

"The Miss Black and Gold pageant showcases talented African-American females," Williams said. "It also provides the winners with scholarships at the local, regional and national levels."

The contestants were chosen on the basis of personal interviews and have been rehearsing for the pageant eight hours a day.

Contestants are judged in evening gown, talent

and modeling competitions. They are also judged on their answer to an impromptu question.

Kathy Polk, a sophomore accounting major and contestant, decided to compete in the pageant after attending last year's pageant.

"I'm not a very talkative person, and Miss Black and Gold has made me more outgoing," Polk said. "I've also made eleven new friends."

Another contestant, Audra Robertson, a senior chemistry major, said she is really excited about competing in Saturday's pageant.

"All of us have progressed beautifully and built such a strong sisterhood through working on the pageant," Robertson said. "I'm more excited than nervous about competing. I'm with friends."

The title of Miss Black and Gold offers contestants a chance to be role models for African-American women and children, Robertson said, and encourages them to continue their education and become community leaders.

Richards comes under scrutiny

Governor's office regularly shreds phone bill records

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — A spokesman for Gov. Ann Richards on Thursday branded "a tempest in a librarian's teapot" a newspaper report that Richards' long distance phone calls and those of her staff are destroyed as soon as the bills are paid.

"We have been operating under the same set of circumstances, the same rules, that (former Gov.) Bill Clements adopted in 1989. And we have been fulfilling the law," said Bill Cryer, Richards' press secretary.

The Houston Chronicle reported Thursday that while other state agencies keep records of phone calls for at least three years, Richards' aides regularly destroy her itemized long-distance records after each monthly bill is paid.

Richards' staff says the action is legal under a law and procedure that outlines how state records may be destroyed.

"There is no conspiracy over here," said Cryer. "I doubt Ann Richards even know what that (records) retention schedule even looks like."

Richards, in Houston on Thursday, called the report "much ado about nothing."

"I think the whole deal was that a reporter thought that we should keep our phone records longer than the archives people required either Bill Clements or me to do," she said.

"I've always said anybody can see anything we do in my office," the governor told reporters. "Unfortunately, I haven't got any secrets."

Cryer said that since Richards took office in 1991, the schedule for retaining the records had been reviewed twice by state lawyers and archivists.

"They never raised an issue about whether those records were being kept. This is silly," Cryer said.

The Chronicle reported that a state archivist said itemized long-distance telephone records are supposed to be kept at least three years.

William L. Dyess, director of records management for the Texas State Library and Archives, told a newspaper that archivists intended that itemized long-distance records be kept for three years.

"The billing detail in our opinion probably should include the detail listing," Dyess said.

However, Dyess conceded how confusion over the retention schedule could be made.

There is a three-year record-keeping period for "billing records" and a billing verification destruction allowed for "long-distance telephone logs."

The only long-distance record now available for the governor's state telephones at her office is October 1993.

November and December bills have not yet arrived from the General Services Commission, which serves as the state government's telephone company.

A spokesman for U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison contended that a political double standard is at work.

"Kay Hutchison has kept and turned over to the press and prosecutors the records of every single telephone call made at the Treasury during her year term," David Beckwith said.

"Yet she is prosecuted for destroying records while Democrat office holders are ignored," Beckwith said.

Hutchison, a Republican, is scheduled for Feb. 7 on ethics charges from her tenure as state treasurer.

She is charged with four felony counts of misusing state employees and equipment and of tampering with governmental records and physical evidence in an attempted cover-up.

The state records-tampering law makes it a crime if someone "intentionally destroys, conceals, moves or otherwise impairs the verity, legibility or availability of a governmental record."

Violation is a misdemeanor or third-degree felony.

Republicans try to stop March 8 primary

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — A federal lawsuit filed by seven Republicans seeks to halt the Texas March 8 congressional primary, claiming "racial gerrymandering" has made U.S. House district boundaries in Texas illegal.

The suit, filed Wednesday in Houston, wants the primary elections to be put on hold until the Legislature draws new district lines that cluster neighborhoods rather than ethnic groups.

The plaintiffs are seven Republicans from Houston and Dallas who belong to a larger group called the Texas Coalition for a Color Blind Texas.

The current Texas map "represents an unconstitutional effort to segregate the races for purposes of voting," the suit says.

Although the suit targets all 31 congressional districts in Texas, it is aimed more specifically at districts like those represented by U.S. Reps. Gene Green and Craig Washington, both Houston Democrats.

Green's 29th District, sprawling from Spring Branch through southeast Houston to Baytown, was created for the 1992 elections to include much of the area's growing but geographically dispersed Hispanic population.

Washington's 18th District, created in 1970, contains mostly black neighborhoods in Houston's inner city. It was redrawn for the 1992 elections to accommodate a new "Hispanic" district, leaving it about

half black and running in patches.

Both districts were created under the Voting Rights Act, which ended the practice in some Southern states of weakening the power of minority voters by spreading them into mostly white election districts.

The lawsuit protests the moves.

The U.S. Supreme Court signaled support for such an argument last May when it ruled in a North Carolina case that white voters' rights may have been violated with the creation of two majority-black districts.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote that district maps deserve court scrutiny when they are "so bizarre" that they appear "unexplainable on grounds other than race." The new districts, she added, "bear an uncomfortable resemblance to apartheid."

And in December, a federal appeals court threw out a Z-shaped, majority-black district in Louisiana, using the same reasoning as in the North Carolina case.

But state Democratic Party executive director Ed Martin said the Texas congressional districts have already been cleared in court and the Justice Department for compliance with the Voting Rights Act.

He also said it was incorrect to compare the Texas districts represented by minorities with those that were challenged in North Carolina.

"The districts in Texas don't stretch hundreds of miles across the state. They represent people who work, live and worship in one community," he said.

The Texas lawsuit was filed by lawyer Paul Hurd of Monroe, La., who worked on the Louisiana case.

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