

Jury gave man life term in 1980 trial

MURDER, from Page 1

jumped his parole in Kansas to start a new life in Louisiana, where he married a senator's daughter and had two children. But he couldn't escape.

In February 1980, Louisiana officers flew to an oil rig where Schlicher worked in the Gulf of Mexico. They said they were bringing him in for the parole violation, but he wasn't fooled. "No, that's not it," he told the officers. "They want me for something that happened 10 years ago."

Schlicher's expression was indifferent when a jury in Goodland found him guilty of first degree murder six months later. He didn't flinch when he was sentenced to life in prison, though his wife and Patton's sobbed in the background.

Jurors, lawyers and officers who knew Schlicher say they doubt he has changed. They think he deserves to die behind bars.

After the trial, he threatened to come back and kill those who sent him to jail, jurors and law officers alike.

But the convicted killer is entitled to a parole hearing this month, and has had a fairly good prison record for the past five years. He could be set free as soon as February.

A night of horror

There is a cardboard box at the Sherman County courthouse filled with files about the Schlicher case, including transcripts of testimony at the trial. Though it's been more than 20 years since the trial and 30 since the killing, many people in Sherman County remember details.

Jack Armstrong, who was elected sheriff in 1969, about two years before Patton was killed, said he kept after the case for a decade.

"There wasn't a week that went by," he said, "that I didn't work on some part of it."

In his 28 years as sheriff, Armstrong said, he investigated five murders, and the Schlicher case stood out because it was so long and complicated.

It was also memorable, he said, because he got to know the young killer so well. Armstrong described him as cold-hearted and dangerous, and said Schlicher threatened him with a gun when he went to arrest him for burglary.

Goodland lawyer Perry Warren, who was the county attorney in 1980, said it was a difficult but interesting case

because Schlicher was tried so many years after the crime.

"It was amazing everyone was still around," he said, "and their memories were still good."

Information from court records, newspaper articles and people involved in the case tells the story of the crime that landed Schlicher in jail for what the state at the time referred to as life — a minimum of 15 years to his first parole hearing.

On the afternoon of Nov. 7, 1970, Schlicher, Kauffman and Seigrist met at Schlicher's basement apartment across from the county courthouse and spent most of the day talking.

The three were classmates at the Northwest Kansas Area Vocational Technical School, and may have been students in the Manpower Development and Training Program, a "Great Society" era social program which no longer exists.

Larry Keirns, long-time director of the school, said the program was created by a federal law in the early 1960s that sought to help young, unemployed, disadvantaged adults enter the work force. While Keirns said he can't remember Schlicher being in the program, Armstrong and Warren said they believe all three were. All appear in the school's 1971 yearbook, Schlicher in the automotive section, Kauffman in electronics and Seigrist in the Manpower program section.

The men had a history of mental problems, Armstrong said, and had spent time in the Larned State Hospital, which was and is where Kansas houses criminals in need of psychiatric treatment.

Armstrong said he doesn't think there was any extra supervision or restrictions for students in the Manpower program, because he remembers Schlicher and his friends "running all over town" most nights. Keirns said students in the program didn't attend class at the technical school itself, but in a building the school had rented.

Seigrist, who told officers he didn't participate in the actual killing, received immunity for his testimony against Schlicher. He told the jury that on the night of Nov. 7, he, Schlicher and Kauffman loaded rifles into the trunk of Schlicher's car and put a .22-caliber pistol under the front seat.

The trio reportedly arrived at the Mobil Service Station, just north of the east I-70 exit in Goodland, where there

is now a closed-up Conoco station, shortly after 1 a.m. on Nov. 8.

Court records say the victim, Patton, had talked on the telephone to his wife Helen at 12:30 a.m., and a police officer had driven by between 12:30 and 1 a.m. and seen him working. Motorists who stopped at the station found the attendant missing and the cash register open right after 1 a.m. and called police.

Seigrist told jurors he waited in the car while Schlicher and Kauffman went inside to rob the station. He said Schlicher put the pistol in the waistband of his pants as he was walking inside and then pulled it on Patton.

Armstrong said Patton told the young men he wasn't going to let them rob the station and that he knew who they were. He said that scared Schlicher and Kauffman.

"They apparently decided they would do away with him," Armstrong said.

He said there was less than \$100 in the register, and Patton told the boys he wouldn't turn them in if they put the money back, but they kidnapped him anyway.

Seigrist said he couldn't see what was happening inside because the group went behind the cash register for a while before Kauffman and Schlicher forced Patton out. Kauffman told Patton to get on his hands and knees in the back seat of the car, he said, and put his face in his hands.

Schlicher then drove to the alleyway behind the Cummings Apartments in Goodland, Seigrist said, and sent Kauffman in to get Larry Theleman, an acquaintance of Schlicher's who still lives in Goodland. He said they wanted to kill Patton and thought Theleman was "crazy enough to do it."

But he wasn't. "Bill got out of the car and went over to talk to him," Seigrist testified. "Theleman shook his head and went back in."

Seigrist said they then drove to the Watters Hotel at the south end of Main Avenue, where Jim Hoard, another classmate, worked. He said Schlicher went inside briefly to talk with Hoard.

Hoard testified later that he had talked several times with Schlicher and Kauffman about details of the murder. He also said that he had committed armed robbery and burglary with Schlicher in 1972 in Burlington and Colby.

He told the jury that before those crimes, Schlicher said to him, "If something goes wrong and I have to shoot him, you're going to shoot him, too, because I'm not going to take the rap by myself."

Schlicher may have said the same to Kauffman before they murdered Patton, he said.

Armstrong said the men drove around Sherman County most of the night, going out near the state lake and parking along the side of gravel roads. At one point, he said, they parked by an irrigation well and drank a few beers and sodas, throwing the bottles out of the window.

Before the trial, Warren said, he and his assistant took Seigrist out to retrace their steps on the night of the murder 10 years earlier.

He said Seigrist basically lived off soda and candy and told them that he drank an orange soda and a Coke during the 45 minutes they were parked near the well.

Because the storm had washed away evidence at the scene and Seigrist was the state's only witness, Warren said they needed all the proof they could find. He said they decided to call the farmer who lived near the well, only a mile or so from where Patton's body was found.

"We asked him if he had noticed anything around that time," he said, "and this is amazing, he said he went down to the irrigation well about a week (after the murder) and found two pop bottles. And he told us what they were."

Thursday: The killer goes to prison for burglary, flees to Louisiana, but can't hide from his friend's conscience.

Economist says worst over here

OMAHA (AP) — The worst of the recession may be over for the Midwest, an economist said Tuesday.

Creighton University economics professor Ernie Goss conducts a monthly survey of purchasing managers in the nine-state region. An index above 50 signifies growth in manufacturing, while a figure below 50 shows contraction. December's overall index of 43.9 was only a slight increase from November's 43.1, but marked the second increase in three months and was a reason for some optimism.

With help from record short-term

Board will consider opinions on parole

William Schlicher, sentenced to life in prison in 1980 for murdering a Goodland gas station attendant in 1970, is up for parole this month and could be released in February.

A clerk for the Kansas Parole Board said Schlicher's hearing is scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 16, and if he is granted parole he will be released on Thursday, Feb. 28, the date his sentence began. He is being held under medium security at the Norton Correctional Facility.

The board will consider letters about the crime or criminal at any time. Bill Miskell, spokesman for the state Department of Corrections in Topeka, said Schlicher hasn't been "written up" for a rules violation in more than a year and has been punished five times since 1997 for minor, non-violent offenses. Schlicher jumped parole before when he was released from prison in the 1970s for committing burglary in and around Sherman County.

Colene Seidel, parole board administrator, said the board considers seven areas when deciding whether to grant parole including the crime, criminal history, program participation, parole plan, disciplinary record, comments from victims and the public and prison capacity.

Miskell said Schlicher first saw the board in 1995 and has been denied parole three times, the last time in January 2000.

The month before the hearing, Seidel said, the board holds public sessions to gather comments about the prisoner up for release. The last session was on Friday, but people can still send letters.

A clerk for the board said members review all letters they receive, and will consider any information, even if it comes after the hearing. However, he said, it's best if letters arrive at least a week before, which would be next Wednesday, Jan. 9.

Seidel said letters can be mailed to the Kansas Parole Board; Landon State Office Building; 900 S.W. Jackson Street, Room 452 S; Topeka, KS 66612-1220 or faxed to 785-296-7949.

The clerk said letters should include the inmate's name and number. Schlicher's is 24626.

Because he was sentenced to life, Seidel said, Schlicher will probably be supervised by a parole officer for the rest of his life if he is let out. She added that the board has released some sentenced to life from parole, but only if they have exemplary behavior on the outside.

doesn't expect the Federal Reserve to lower interest rates this month. Continued rate reductions can be expected if the recovery stalls, he said. The region's employment index increased slightly in December from 40 to 41.2, but Goss said he expects more job losses for most state in the region. About 55,000 jobs have been lost in the region since the start of the recession last March. "I do expect the job loss rate to decline significantly in the first quarter of 2002," Goss said.

Why?

Why advertise?
Because it works.
You're reading this aren't you.
Call us 785-899-2338

The
Goodland Daily News