

BASKETBALL

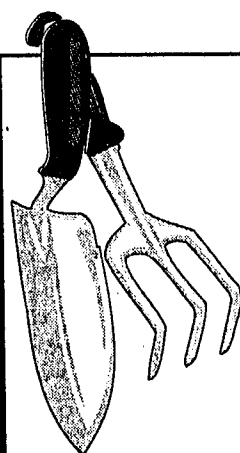
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(Details in Sports)



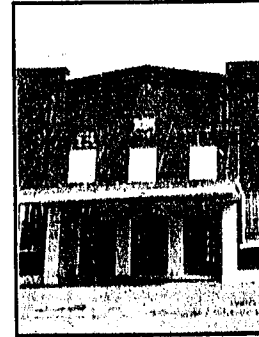
Gable's secrets to success

Coach reveals 12-step program that put U of I wrestling back on top (Sports)



Getting set for gardening

Planning pointers and seasonal tips for yard and garden (Home/Real Estate)



Theaters' glory days recalled

Silent halls were once the center of CR's entertainment scene (Iowa Today)

Sunday

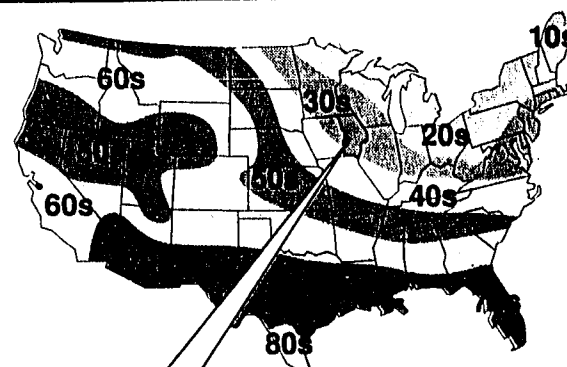
March 15, 1992

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The Gazette

A regional newspaper serving Eastern Iowa



FORECAST: Partly to mostly sunny today. Highs 34-39; lows 19-23. Today's daylight 11 hrs., 54 min. See 8A

MURDERED MISSING

UNSOLVED

Clues, answers prove elusive

For every mystery, there is someone, somewhere who knows the truth . . . Maybe it's you."

So TV actor Robert Stack often closes "Unsolved Mysteries," his weekly crime re-enactment show that has titillated viewers even as it has fueled a mini-revolution in the field of law enforcement.

Crime investigators are, by calling, the keepers of secrets.

But Stack's show, and others like it, have come to convince many crime investigators that a public airing of aging, unsolved cases can be a last, best hope for a solution that otherwise might remain forever elusive.

"It's all about information, whether physical evidence or from people," says Eugene Meyer, longtime Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation agent and spokesman who now holds the latter title with the Iowa Department of Public Safety.

"Those shows tend to bring those issues back up on the table, rekindle thoughts in people so they can rethink things," Meyer says.

In that spirit, Eastern Iowa crime investigators have agreed to return to the sites and traumas of some of the state's best-known or most-intriguing unsolved murders and disappearances of the last 20 years. Those cases will be presented in an eight-part series this week in The Gazette.

Anderson slowly picks up the pieces

Editor's note: AP Chief Middle East Correspondent Terry Anderson was kidnapped by Shiite Muslim fundamentalists seven years ago Monday. He was released Dec. 4, 1991. Since then, he has been vacationing in privacy in the Caribbean, where he remains. These are his thoughts on the anniversary.

By Terry Anderson
Associated Press

I should have known better. After 2½ years in Lebanon, you get to be able to smell danger. Unfortunately, my nose went numb.

The day before they got me, four men in a new Mercedes had tried to kidnap me as I drove back to work from lunch in my seaside apartment.

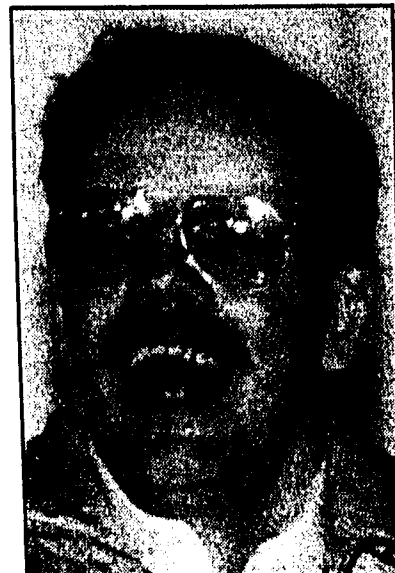
They screamed past me at a turn and tried to force my car to the curb. I whipped my car around theirs and kept going. They chased me and tried again, but I got away with a sharp right turn down a side street. They gave up as I neared a Lebanese army checkpoint.

The next day, I just got up as usual and went to keep a 7 a.m. tennis date with AP photographer Don Mell. I don't know why. Maybe too many chances taken successfully had made me too sure of my safety.

It didn't last. As I stopped to drop Mell off after the game at his apartment a few hundred yards from mine, the Mercedes reappeared. The men, armed with pistols, leaped out and yanked open my car door before I could move.

Mell was lucky. They wanted me. He was left at gunpoint, standing at my car as my unshaven young captors shoved me into their car.

It would be almost seven years before I would be a free man again. In that time, I was moved



Terry Anderson
Rejoices upon release in 1991

to nearly 20 places — underground cells, secret hiding places, even ordinary apartments with windows covered with sheet metal — in Beirut, South Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley.

Like all the hostages, I spent much of my time blindfolded and chained. Some were beaten. Some were psychologically abused. Several died of sickness or neglect — murder just the same.

The physical and verbal abuse was, of course, hard to take. But it was less difficult for me than for some of the others. Six years in the Marine Corps and 15 knocking around the world for the AP — Asia, Africa, the Middle East — had taught me to take whatever came along, good or bad. The first time I was beaten, by two armed and vicious guards, as I lay chained by hands and feet and blindfolded, I offered no resistance — just telling myself over and over "Do

■ Turn to page 5A: Anderson

Motel 'fling' deadly

Interstate 80, AMANA INTERCHANGE — Room 260 is the last room on the right. The hallway to it stretches so long that the ceiling appears to lower, the walls to narrow, the memory of the motel clerk's smile to dim as you go. It seems a remote place, a room of last resort.

On the early Friday evening of Sept. 12, 1980, Roger Atkinson and Rose Burkert were lucky to get Room 260. A convention of funeral directors had jammed the Holiday Inn almost full.

Actually, for an illicit weekend fling, Room 260 was perfect. It was nicely removed from Roger and Rose's hometown, St. Joseph, Mo.; from his wife; from her little daughter; from responsibilities.

Roger, 32, and Rose, 22, had driven three hours to the Holiday Inn from Kahoka, Mo., where Roger had spent the last week away from home installing telephones for General Telephone Co. and sleeping nights with his mistress, Rose.

Arriving at the motel about 7 p.m. that Friday, the couple apparently figured on a quiet night of rest and lovemaking. At some point during the evening, room service made a delivery. Either Roger or Rose moved their car from a handicapped zone sometime after 9 p.m. Rose may have stopped briefly in the motel's bar. There were three phone calls: two to or from Rose's baby-sitter back home, and a third, never identified.

For the guests in neighboring rooms, the night was a peaceful one. They heard or saw nothing unusual. They saw no sinister person or persons slipping in or out the motel's back exit that was close at hand.

'Hitchcock scene'

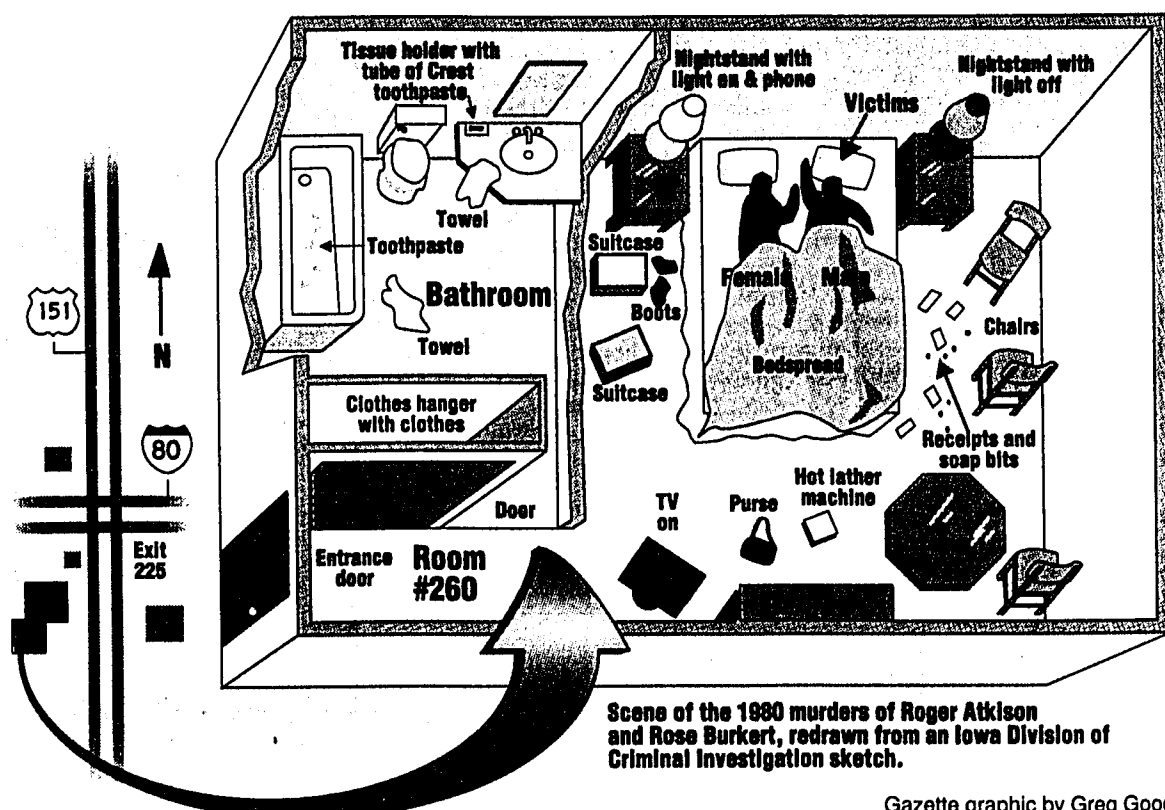
Roger and Rose were lying side by side, face down, in Room 260's double bed at 1 p.m. the next day, when the maid opened the unanswered door.

He was in undershorts, she fully clothed. Both were partly under the covers, and the TV was on. Blood and pieces of their brains were splattered on the bed's headboard, on the



Victims: Rose Burkert, 22
Roger Atkinson, 32
Hometown: St. Joseph, Mo.
Classification of case: Murder
Date of murder: Night of Sept. 12-13, 1980
Place of murder: Holiday Inn at Amana interchange of Interstate 80

Do you have information?
Contact Iowa
County Sheriff James Slockett
(319)-642-7307



Scene of the 1980 murders of Roger Atkinson and Rose Burkert, redrawn from an Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation sketch.

Gazette graphic by Greg Good

- Serial killer not tied to Amana murders, 10A
- Iowa tracks killers, 10A
- "Strangers" feared, 11A

well, the sheets and the carpet. The backs of their heads had been split open by multiple blows from a sharp, ax-like implement with a 3½-inch blade. The weapon likely was a roofer's hatchet, or maybe even some kind of machete.

A few of Roger's fingers had been severed from raising his hand to protect his skull.

"Alfred Hitchcock could not have come up with a better crime scene than this," says Iowa County Sheriff James Slockett, who places the time of death at about midnight. " . . . (What) with the morticians' convention there at the motel that day, you couldn't have

found anything more bizarre."

At Room 260, there was no sign of a forced entry, no sign of struggle. Chairs had been positioned as if the killer or killers had insisted on a chat before the fatal blows.

In the bathroom, toothpaste had been splattered around, and blood stained the sink where the ax-wielder washed up. A message was scrawled on the bathroom door in white motel soap, then wiped almost indecipherable.

The dead couple's belongings were rifled, and money stolen.

But this — what soon came to be known as the Amana Ax Murders — likely was no robbery, says Sheriff Slockett. Nor was this a random killing. This was revenge, he says.

Detective Jim Wright of the

■ Turn to page 10A: Ax murders

COMING UP

- **Monday:** A murderer who was murdered — the case of John Rose.
- **Tuesday and Wednesday:** The murders of two single young women — the cases of Michelle Martinko and Vicki Klotzbach.
- **Thursday:** The disappearances of three married women — the cases of Jane Wakefield, Lynn Schuller and Denise Fraley.
- **Friday:** The disappearances of two boys — the cases of Guy Heckle and Johnny Gosch.
- **Saturday:** Murders in the underworld of drugs — the cases of John Wall and Ron Novak.
- **Next Sunday:** Families of the murdered and missing tell how they cope with unsolved cases.

Broccoli chemical stems cancer, new study finds

WASHINGTON (AP) — Remember when your mother insisted that you eat broccoli? Well, scientists say they've proved that mother knows best.

Dr. Paul Talalay of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine said in a paper published today that studies in his lab show broccoli is rich in sulforaphane, a chemical that works as a powerful anti-cancer compound in laboratory mice.

A number of previous studies have shown that a diet rich in cruciferous vegetables, such as a broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage and cauliflower, can lower the risk for cancer of the bowel, stomach and breast. But just how those vegetables caused the effect wasn't clear.

Now, Talalay said, it appears that at least one anti-cancer ingredient in the vegetables is sul-

foraphane, and that it works by causing cells to expel cancer-causing toxins.

"This is the first time a compound of such high potency has been isolated from vegetables and has been shown to accelerate the detoxification process" in cells, he said.

Talay said his team isolated sulforaphane from broccoli, then fed it to a group of mice. When cells in the mice were examined after five days, the scientists found that the chemical had triggered enzymes known to neutralize carcinogens within cells.

Research will shift to the long-term cancer-fighting effects of the chemical, Talalay said. However, "our prediction is that sulforaphane will block tumor formation in animals and presumably in man."

TODAY'S CHUCKLE

In these confused times, the only people you can see eye to eye with are optometrists.

TOMORROW

NCAA madness

Check out Iowa teams
Look for pairings and analysis of both NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments, plus a package on the boys' state tournament. All in Sports in Monday's Gazette.

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Iowa tracks serial killers

By Rick Smith
Gazette staff writer

Iowa has not gone untouched by the serial killer, or at least the serial-killer-in-the-making.

Infamous sex killer John Wayne Gacy Jr. tops the list, says Steve Conlon, special agent with the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) and Iowa's point man in the fight against serial crime.

Gacy was living in Waterloo in 1968 when he was convicted of sodomy and sent to an Iowa prison for two years. Eight years later, then 36 years old and living in Des Moines, Ill., he admitted to killing 33 young men and boys after forcing them to have sex with him. One was an Iowa runaway, Conlon believes.

Gacy is on death row in Illinois, currently at Menard Correctional Center, Menard, Ill.

Next there is Robert Hansen, says Conlon. Raised in Pocahontas, Hansen spent two years in an Iowa prison for arson before moving to Alaska. There, when a

MURDERED MISSING UNSOLVED

10-year killing spree ended in arrest in 1984, Hansen, 44, confessed to picking up 17 prostitutes and topless dancers, flying them into the bush in his airplane and hunting them down like wildlife.

Hansen is serving a life sentence plus 461 years in the federal prison system.

Killed Iowa man

One little-known serial killer, Charles Hatcher, ultimately did admit to the 1981 killing of a man in the Davenport area. He was arrested twice that year in Iowa, after a knife fight in Des

Moines and after a failed abduction of an 11-year-old boy in Bettendorf. (Hatcher happened to be the "uncle-in-law" of the man killed in the Amana ax murders.) He hanged himself in prison in 1984.

Then there are the disappearances of Des Moines paper carriers Johnny Gosch and Eugene Martin. It's not unthinkable that both were abducted by the same man, officials say.

"It's certainly a possibility, but I don't know," says Eugene Meyer, spokesman for the Iowa Department of Public Safety. He calls the disappearances Iowa's greatest unsolved cases.

"There were similarities between them," says Meyer. "They both were close to the same age; both were Des Moines Register paperboys; both disappeared on a Sunday morning at the same time of the year."

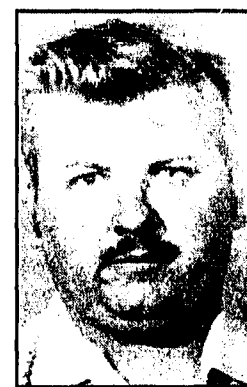
Computer watch

Iowa has been a pioneer among states in creating a high-tech attack on serial killers.

Conlon has devised a computer-tracking network at the DCI, called the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP), which helps identify relationships between murders, both solved and unsolved. An offshoot of the program tracks rapes.

Conlon says the idea behind the networks is that people tend to do some things in the same way, whether they are pheasant hunting, cooking breakfast or murdering people.

"One time a victim may be manually strangled, and the next time there may be a ligature involved. Some minor things may



John Wayne Gacy Jr.
Lived in Waterloo



Robert Hansen
Raised in Pocahontas

change, but generally, the basic behavior of the offender will remain fairly consistent," he says.

Conlon says most murders in Iowa are committed by people who know the victims. Cases are more easily solved, he says, when the killer can be found in the victim's background.

It is precisely that relationship, though, that often is absent in cases involving repeat murderers and rapists.

VICAP, which along with other state networks is tied in with the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime at the FBI, should begin to see patterns

emerge if a murderer or rapist has offended more than once, says Conlon.

So far, he has not been able to conclude that one Iowa murder is connected to another using VICAP. One day he will, he says. The program has helped point out dissimilarities between cases thought similar, he adds.

In addition to minding the computer network, Conlon and others at the DCI have been on the road in recent years interviewing serial killers arrested in other states. No unsolved Iowa murder has been solved that way, says Conlon.

Ax murders: Investigators speculate whether slayings were revenge or random

■ From page 1A

St. Joseph, Mo., Police Department, who spent long hours on the investigation, agrees with that analysis.

"It was someone who knew one or both of them," says Wright. "My opinion, after 29 years in the business, is that it was just some gruesome kind of a vindictive type of homicide."

Similar ax murder

But that is a conclusion investigator Bob Horton, sergeant of detectives for the Galesburg, Ill., Police Department, isn't so sure about. In his mind, he has the case solved.

Horton says the man who axed Roger and Rose to death was the same man who axed traveling salesman William Kyle to death 2½ months earlier in a Galesburg motel.

Horton's candidate for the murders: itinerant Raymundo Esparza, a Los Angeles native, with a long prison record, a violent streak, and addictions to alcohol and heroin, who was living in Davenport at the time.

Esparza, according to Horton, was seen in the Galesburg motel the day of the Kyle murder, and was at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Iowa City near Amana the day of the Amana murders.

Horton also believes Esparza committed a similar murder in 1970 in Meridian, Miss.

Horton failed in long interviews with Esparza to secure a confession, and the suspect ultimately died in the mid-1980s in Iowa City.

Slockett calls detective Horton "a good man, with a lot of good ideas," and admits the two murder cases, so close together in time, have much in common. Both happened in motels on interstates, without a forced entry or a struggle; money was taken and toothpaste splattered in both; a "Do Not Disturb" sign was left dangling outside each motel door; both involved ax-like bludgeonings to the back of the head, he says.

But there are dissimilarities in the cases, too, note Slockett and Larry Goepel, special agent for the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation, who also worked the Amana case.

The Galesburg killing, for one, had homosexual overtones absent from the Amana axings. Absent from the Galesburg case was the partial message left behind in soap.

Revenge motive?

Telephone installer Roger Atkison, says Slockett, had a penchant for improperly installing telephones at the homes of certain women. The tactic would get him back in a house for a second chance to make an impression. It worked with Rose Burkert. And she wasn't the first.

Atkison's sexual dalliances turned a pool of potentially vengeful boyfriends and husbands into possible murder suspects.

Over the years of the investigation, Slockett has come to believe that nearly everyone in St. Joseph, Mo., who knew Roger and Rose well, knew that Roger was cheating on his wife, and that Rose had spent several days with Roger in Kahoka, Mo.

The telephone company crew Roger was working with and Rose's baby sitter also made it known back home that the two were going to spend the weekend in Amana. Anyone seeking revenge likely could have found them, says Slockett.

Among the murder probe's entanglements was that Rose had walked into the St. Joseph Police Department in the weeks before



Gazette photo by Chris Stewart

Iowa County Sheriff James Slockett believes the killing of Roger Atkison and Rose Burkert at this Holiday Inn was a revenge murder. They were murdered Sept. 12, 1980, during an illicit rendezvous at the motel.

Editor's note:

Gazette staff writers Rick Smith and Jeff Burnham interviewed dozens of people over a period of three months for this eight-part series on unsolved law enforcement cases. Both writers found that nearly everyone they contacted was anxious to talk about the cases, in hopes that solutions finally would be found. If you have information about any of the cases, please contact the law enforcement agency handling the case.

the murder and announced that a former boyfriend would be responsible if she were ever murdered.

The one-time boyfriend passed a lie detector test and had a good alibi, notes Slockett.

Then there was the bartender at the Holiday Inn, who had been working at the motel and living in his pickup out in the parking lot. The day after the murder he vanished, leaving a paycheck behind. His truck was later found abandoned in Iowa City.

Investigators discovered that he had gone to North Carolina and joined the U.S. Army. By the time they got on his trail, he was with the Army in Germany. Only when he returned to the states did investigators interview him.

Slockett says it took nine tries before investigators concluded the bartender finally passed polygraph testing.

In the end, the bartender said he fled because he feared that his lifestyle and his pickup home would implicate him in the murders.

Case 'diversions'

Charles Hatcher also complicated the investigation. At the time, he was an active serial killer, and victim Roger Atkison's "uncle-in-law." Slockett says Hatcher had walked away from a Nebraska mental institution and apparently was seen in Omaha during the time frame that would have made him able to be

at the Amana motel the day of the murders. (See story on this page.)

Slockett concedes that the bartender and the serial-killing relative most likely are diversions in the case.

He keeps coming back to this: that Roger and Rose died because someone had had enough of lies, cheating or sharing a mate.

Roger Atkison's brother, Larry, an architect north of Kansas City, Mo., talked recently as if his brother had been murdered last night.

"It's incredible to us that a murder of this magnitude could go unsolved," says Larry.

Larry, and his wife, Elizabeth, continue to wrestle with the knowledge that at least one scenario of the ax murders places suspicion on Roger's wife, Marcella, or her family, the Hatchers.

At the time of the murder, they say, Roger's marriage was on the rocks. He wanted a divorce. Marcella, a born-again Baptist, had only barely managed to keep Roger in the marriage by using the Bible, they say.

Three things stick in the minds of Larry and Elizabeth: the day before Roger's murder, Marcella stopped at their home and, uncharacteristically, broke down crying.

"Did she know something was going to happen?" Larry now asks. Larry and Elizabeth are quick to note, too, that Marcella stood to cash in on life insurance policies.

And they can't get out of their mind that chairs were pulled up to the beds at the motel-room murder scene as if people who knew one another were engaged in conversation.

"Somebody, more than one person, sat there and talked before they did it," says Larry.

Wife: Affair a surprise

Roger's wife, Marcella, who still lives in St. Joseph and

asked that her new married name not be printed, remains a strong-believing Baptist.

She says her family had nothing to do with the ax murder in Amana.

During that period of her marriage to Roger, he and she, she says, would spend weekends baby-sitting at a home of church members who had to be away. She and Roger did that the weekend before Roger's murder, and she was baby-sitting without him the weekend of the murder.

Roger had called to say he was staying over in Kahoka, Mo., until his phone installing job was completed the next week.

Contrary to what Sheriff Slockett says, Marcella emphasizes she did not know that Roger had a girlfriend or that she had joined him in Kahoka, Mo., by midweek.

"It surprised me when I found out," says Marcella. "I did not know of this girl. I didn't even know she existed. I don't know of any of my relatives who knew he was doing that."

Marcella has come to believe that someone in love with Rose and vengeful of her affair with Roger might be the person who committed the murders.

She notes that Rose had a child by another man, and once had had a former boyfriend give her a wedding ring.

Marcella doubts her serial-killing uncle, Charles Hatcher, who she characterizes as

"sick and evil," had anything to do with the ax murders.

She says once her uncle was arrested in St. Joseph in August 1982, two years after the ax murders, she was the first to ask detectives if he might have been involved, somehow to get back at the family.

But she concludes that he would not have known anything about the family's affairs then because the family had rarely seen him over the years.

After Roger's murder, Marcella hired her own investigators, one of whom was Herald Martin,

a St. Joseph private detective now retired. He said recently that he was able to find out little to shed light on who committed the Amana murders.

He did have more success in securing double-indemnity life insurance money for Marcella that the insurance companies had not rushed to pay.

Court records from Iowa County District Court, in a wrongful-death lawsuit Marcella filed against the Holiday Inn for poor security, indicate that Roger's estate included payments of \$49,287, \$20,320 and \$71,000 from insurance companies.

The lawsuit ultimately was settled out of court for a sum the parties agreed to keep private.

Still sorting clues

Sheriff Slockett admits he's not sure what it will take to solve the case of the Amana ax murders. He's in the process of chewing over 14 volumes of investigative data in the case as he enters the best of it into his department's computer system.

There's the witness who thought he saw a third person riding with Roger and Rose when they stopped for gasoline on their way to Amana; and another who thought he might have seen a car following them out of Missouri.

And there's the one partial fingerprint, maybe a killer's, lifted from Rose's personal property at the murder scene. The print has been sent across the country, without success, in hunt of a match, says Slockett.

In the end, he's left with the fleeing bartender, the serial-killing uncle, the deceived wife and her family, maybe a jealous boyfriend or angry husband, and dead Raymundo Esparza.

Killer 'had enough'?

Galesburg detective Bob Horton, sure Esparza is the Amana killer, wants to make it nice and tidy for Slockett.

Maybe, says Horton, the message written in soap on the Amana motel door, then wiped out, was from a guilt-ridden Esparza trying to put detectives on his trail.

"Maybe he had had enough. Maybe he was trying to get us to help him," says Horton.

Serial killer not tied to murders

By Rick Smith

Some things simply happen coincidentally.

That's how investigators explain this: that the "uncle-in-law" of the man axed to death at the Amana Holiday Inn the night of Sept. 12, 1980, was still active serial killer Charles Hatcher.

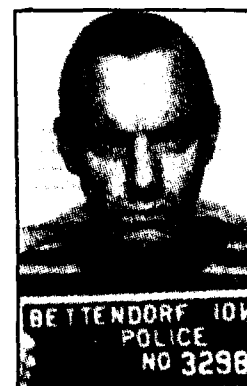
Hatcher, a lifelong criminal, was listed officially as having escaped from the Norfolk, Neb., Regional Mental Health Center four days after the ax murders. But Iowa County Sheriff James Slockett says Hatcher had walked away from the center before the murders. Still, Slockett says, Hatcher likely was not at the Amana motel that day.

Hatcher, who lived in Iowa at least during parts of 1981 and 1982, later admitted to the FBI that he committed four murders and had killed 12 other people who were never identified.

The Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation knows about Hatcher's travels but hasn't tied him to any unsolved murders.

Hatcher was convicted of murdering two St. Joseph, Mo., children: a 12-year-old girl in 1982 and an 11-year-old boy, who he admitted in 1983 to having killed in 1978. He was 55 years old when he hanged himself in prison in 1984.

His killings are the subject of a 1989 book, "St. Joseph's Children," by St. Louis Post-Dispatch writer Terry Ganey. The



Charles Hatcher
Admitted to 16 slayings

paperback version is titled "Innocent Blood."

In a recent interview, Ganey said Hatcher displayed a cunning that let him elude identification for many years. If arrested, he would act bizarrely, feign an inability to talk, and often would land in a mental hospital instead of jail.

Hatcher finally was caught after the staff at a mental ward in St. Joseph realized the newest patient matched the description police had of a fleeing murderer.

Among the four murders Hatcher admitted to was that of James Churchill, 38, of the Quad Cities. Hatcher stabbed Churchill, described as a small man with the mental capacity of a child, in June 1981 at a remote spot on the banks of the Mississippi River near Rock Island, Ill.

Ganey notes that young boys were among Hatcher's criminal targets. But Hatcher was in custody, never to leave it again, five weeks before the first of two abducted Des Moines paper carriers, Johnny Gosch, disappeared on Sept. 5, 1982.

Ganey says Hatcher told the FBI that at times he would become "overcome with a craving to kill." It didn't matter who the victim was.

"He was a lost soul and was responsible for some of the most terrible kinds of crimes somebody ever witnessed."

Investigators fear strangers who murder

But only a few cases remain puzzles long

By Rick Smith
Gazette staff writer

Unsolved. A mystery. Eastern Iowa law enforcement officers are far from eager to admit that a murder or disappearance has slipped from the front of the file cabinet to either of those unsettling statuses.

The slip likely has yet to happen if investigators are still keeping a tight lip.

Mum's the word, for instance, in Eastern Iowa's most recent unsolved murder — that of Thomas Mather of Springdale in September.

That was driven home last month when Mather's wife, Dawn, filed a lawsuit, saying an insurance company would not pay a \$50,000 life insurance claim on her murdered husband. Why? Because she should be investigated as the murderer, the insurance company implied.

Cedar County Sheriff Keith Whitlatch had no comment about that. As late as last week, he would say only that the Mather murder could have been committed by a crazed stranger, a rural robber or someone acquainted with the victim.

Fear of strangers

But one thing is certain about the Mather case. It illustrates perfectly a basic, if obvious, truth about all homicide investigations: Murder is committed either by someone who knows the victim or someone who doesn't. The former is easier solved than the latter.

"That's always our biggest fear," says Eugene Meyer, long-time Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) agent and spokesman who now holds that latter title with the Iowa Department of Public Safety.

"Anytime you begin a murder investigation and you have that convenience store clerk shot, or that female you find in a ditch someplace who was murdered and sexually assaulted, the first thing that enters your mind is, 'I hope that this just isn't someone who was wanting a ride, or her car broke down, or who got picked up off the street,'" he says.

"Because the minute you have that situation you don't have that relationship between the offender and the victim. And the places to go with that become severely limited."

Solving fewer cases

Perhaps the most troubling development in homicide investigations, says DCI special agent Steve Conlon, is the percentage of murders that remain unsolved is increasing nationwide.

That's attributable, in part, to the increased number of murders committed by strangers, says Conlon.

According to crime statistics from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, the United States averaged 8,920 murders a year between 1961 and 1965, and investigators solved 91.7 percent of the cases.

The number of murders has climbed and the clearance rate has plummeted since then. From 1986 to 1990, there were an average of 21,264 murders a year in the United States, and only 69 percent were solved.

"Stranger murder" can be the indiscriminate gang murder, the robbery turned murder, the rapist who kills or the true serial killer.

Two recently solved "stranger" cases in Eastern Iowa show just how tough these cases can be to unravel and how luck can play a key role.

Luck certainly played a part in October 1990, after Patrick McAmis of Cedar Rapids forced his way into a young woman's car in downtown Cedar Rapids, raped her in Cedar Rapids and rural Johnson County, and left her for dead on a gravel road near Solon.

McAmis ended up behind bars for life only because two men happened to pass in their car, heard the victim's cries and rescued her. She survived and identified McAmis.

In April 1989, Phet Baccam of Des Moines turned a random robbery of a Benton County convenience store into coldblooded murder. His chief undoing was that he told friends what he did, and they turned him in.

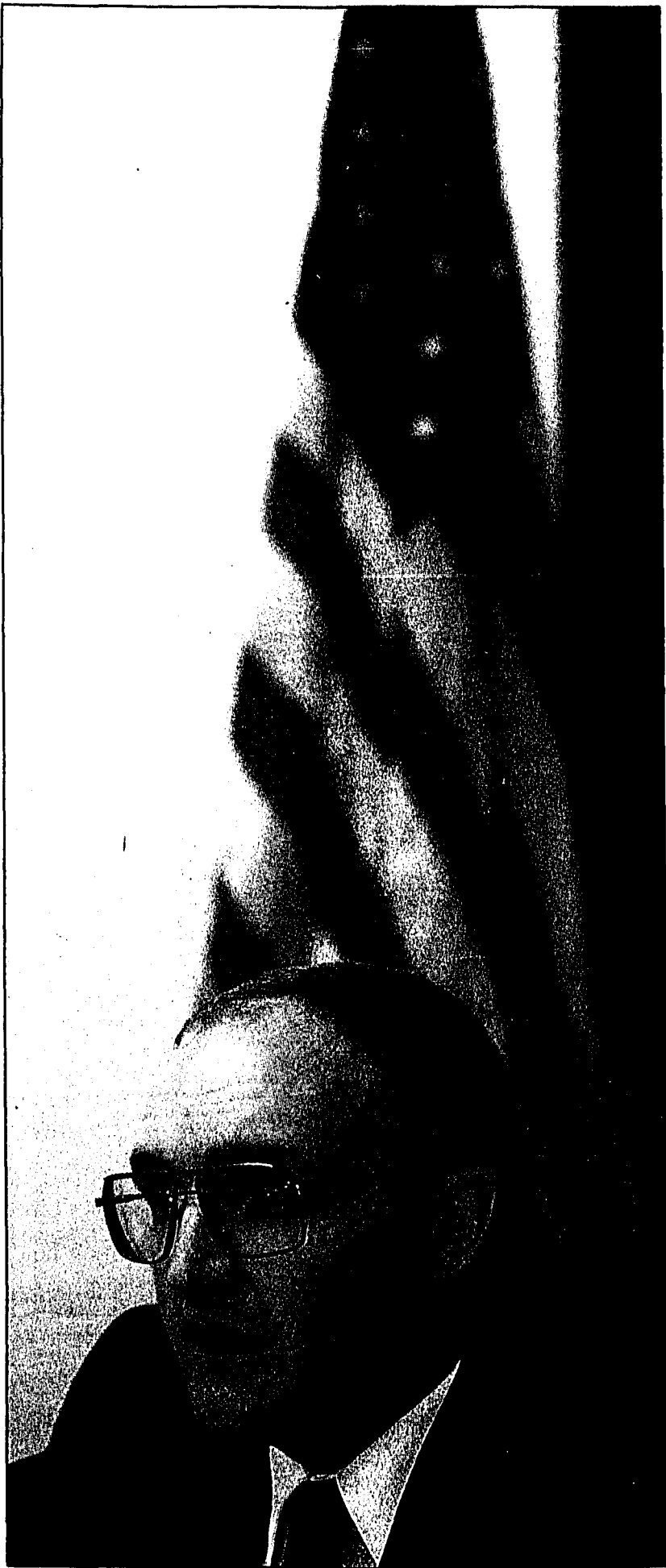
Over 100 unsolved

In a nation with about 22,000 murders a year, Iowa remains a relatively civilized place where human life is valued and news of murder still appalls residents, says Meyer.

Iowa averaged about 50 mur-

MURDERED MISSING

UNSOLVED



Gazette photo by Christ Stewart

Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation special agent Steve Conlon says the percentage of murders that remain unsolved is increasing nationwide. The reason for that, in part, is due to the increased number of murders committed by strangers, says Conlon.

ders a year in the 1980s. More than 80 percent of the cases were solved, according to FBI statistics.

"Murder is still front-page news in the state, because of our quality of life here, and thank goodness," says Meyer.

True puzzles

A noteworthy revelation, after recent talks with dozens of Eastern Iowa detectives, investigators, special agents and county sheriffs, is that, in their minds, only a fraction of the state's unsolved murders remain true puzzles.

Investigators say most of Iowa's unsolved murder cases — which number more than 100 in the last 20 years, says Conlon — continue unsolved, with killers unarrested and unprosecuted, because of the demands of the U.S. criminal justice system.

Of Cedar Rapids' most famous unsolved case, the Michelle Martinko murder, for instance, Assistant Cedar Rapids Police

be. Where do investigators go, for instance, if a prime suspect declines to talk to them, declines a lie detector test; if a friend or relative supplies an alibi; if there are no eyewitnesses; if the crime scene leaves virtually no clues, no fingerprints, no body hairs, no blood or semen.

"If you don't have physical evidence and you can't disprove an alibi, you don't have anything. You can't prove your case," says Linn County Attorney Denver Dillard.

That truth can make an observer wonder, what with crime so frequently the topic of news stories, television shows and movies, if today's worst criminals easily can school themselves in the art of crime.

Meyer scoffs at any suggestion that murderers are getting more sophisticated.

What has become more sophisticated, investigators say, is the technology that can be used to nab criminals:

- A computerized fingerprint identification system today can check a fingerprint against thousands on file in a matter of minutes, a process that would have required years in years past.

- Fingerprints today can be found in places never imagined before: on bodies and from the

"If you don't have physical evidence and you can't disprove an alibi, you don't have anything. You can't prove your case."

Denver Dillard,
Linn County attorney

insides of plastic gloves.

- DNA testing of a person's hair or body fluids can positively identify a perpetrator where long-used blood comparisons could not.

- A computer data base is being built to find similarities between murders and rapes in Iowa and across the country.

But not forgotten

Still, Waukon barber Ken Krambeer's biggest fear is a correct one: Unsolved murders, like his sister's in 1991 in Des Moines, ultimately do land on the back burner.

But if an unsolved murder hits the back burner, that doesn't mean it is forgotten.

Unsolved murders remain de-

fining moments for the investigators who work them.

Iowa County Sheriff James Slockett looks up from his big desk in his cramped office in Marengo, in his folksy department-in-a-house.

Fourteen thick red binders — the investigative chronicle of the Amana ax murder case — stare back from the bookshelf in front of him.

One senses that where other people dream the dreams of lottery wins in the middle of the night, Slockett dreams in occupational terms.

He sees the fingerprint computer scoring a hit, matching some creep with the one partial fingerprint lifted from the Amana crime scene. The murderer is arriving in handcuffs as he wakes up.

"I want to solve it," says Slockett. "Just to think something like that could happen in someplace like Iowa County."

The DCI's Conlon calls himself the eternal optimist. He likes to think, whether it is tomorrow, or next year, or the year he dies, that one day many of the unsolved cases will be solved.

"But certainly that's not going to be true," he says.

"Some will remain mysteries forever."

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