

Updated: 17 January 2012 | 11:00 pm in [Crime](#), [Local News](#)

One-time suspect in unsolved Cedar Rapids homicide dies in prison

McKee was serving a life sentence for an unrelated sexual crime in Linn County

FORT MADISON – A convicted rapist once considered a prime suspect in the 1979 unsolved stabbing death of Cedar Rapids teen Michelle Martinko died this week in the Iowa State Penitentiary Hospice Care Unit, where he was serving a life sentence for an unrelated sexual crime.

Dennis Lee McKee, 61, died a natural death from metastatic colon cancer on Sunday, according to the Iowa Department of Corrections. His sentence for first degree sexual abuse out of Linn County began Aug. 6, 1980.

He was convicted in that case on evidence that he broke into a woman's Cedar Rapids' home Nov. 12, 1979, held a knife to her neck, threatened to kill her sleeping children and then taped her hands behind her back and gagged her.

McKee raped and abused her in ways that caused pain more severe than child birth, according to court documents.

Cedar Rapids police, while taking a fresh look into the unsolved Martinko homicide in 1987, told The Gazette that they again were considering McKee, who had been a suspect earlier in the investigation. Specifically, they were comparing hair taken from McKee's car shortly after the homicide with the rabbit fur coat that Martinko was wearing the night she died.

McKee, in a 1987 phone interview with The Gazette, dismissed any connection to the homicide, calling officers crazy or desperate.

“I didn’t do it, I never did,” McKee said. “They are just showing their incompetence.”

Police never charged McKee in the case, which remains unsolved.

Investigators on Tuesday declined to comment on the status of the Martinko investigation. But Cedar Rapids police Sgt. Cristy Hamblin said detectives had access to McKee’s DNA through the prison system, and he would have been charged had his DNA matched evidence recovered from the scene of the Martinko homicide.

Police discovered Martinko’s body early Dec. 20, 1979, in the parking lot outside Westdale Mall. The Kennedy High School senior had been stabbed to death in the family Buick. She had driven to the mall on the previous night to shop for a winter coat after a school choir banquet.