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national news

**Hate crime
in Mississippi**

*A youth is charged with the murder of
two gay men in Laurel, Miss.*

by Bob Roehr

Continued from page 1

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, founded by Martin Luther King Jr., has joined the call for outside intervention in the case on behalf of McLindone, citing Mississippi's abysmal record on "race and the criminal justice system."

"The case of the execution-style murder of two alleged homosexuals and the 16-year-old arrested for their murders includes a multitude of inconsistencies and raises more questions than it answers," said the Rev. Joseph Lowery, SCLC president.

Laurel is home to about half of the 25,000 residents of rural Jones County. Camp Sister Spirit, the controversial feminist retreat, lies in Overt, about a half-hour drive to the southeast.

Jones County Sheriff Maurice Hooks, who is white, acknowledged the fact that the murder victims were gay and has downplayed it as not relevant to the investigation. He denies that the murders were a hate crime and theorizes that robbery was the motive. He asserts that \$100 was missing from one of the deceased men. The sheriff does not explain how he arrived at that sum, nor does he discuss the facts that the victims were found wearing watches and diamond rings and that their blood-spattered truck was discovered a short distance away.

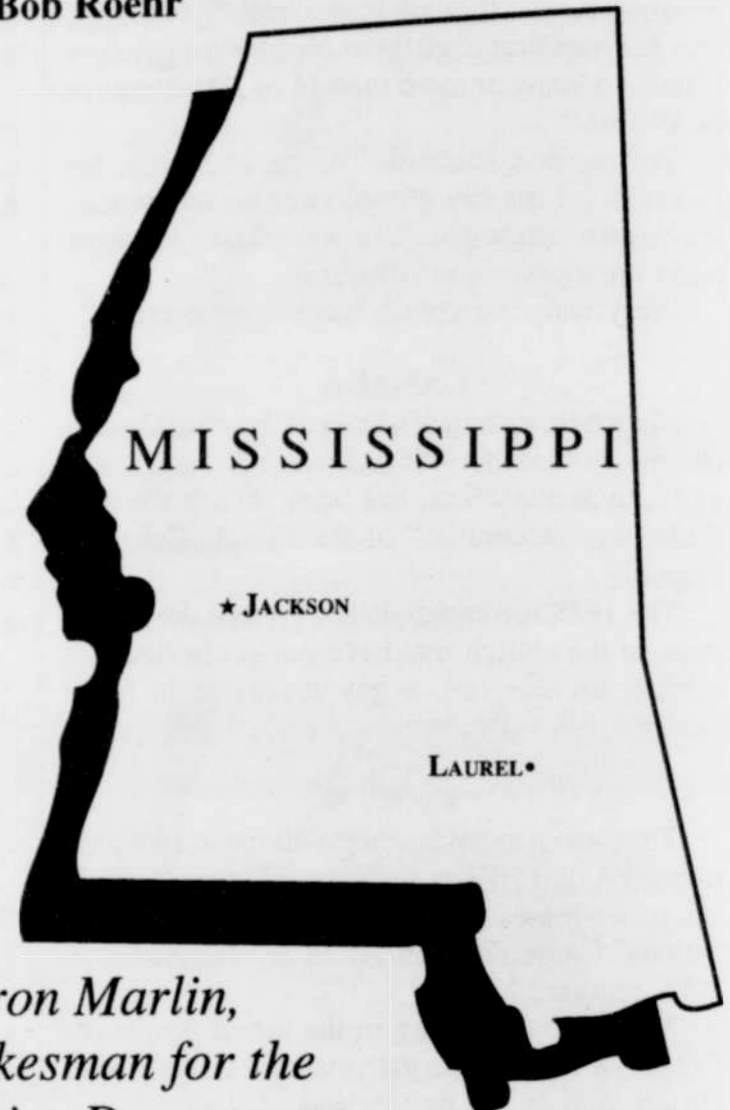
Those facts do not support a robbery motive. The single bullets at close range are the mark of an execution-style, premeditated murder, not a robbery gone awry.

Rex McKey, identified by the local newspaper as a friend of Walters (and by some as his lover), said that the family and friends of the murdered men are upset with the national attention the case is attracting. Their nervousness can be read as a barometer of the local reaction to the media attention as the insular community circles its wagons.

Todd Emerson and April Richard are leaders of G.L. Friendly, a lesbian and gay community center on the Gulf Coast. They traveled north to Laurel after receiving several phone calls about the murder. They want to ensure that the murders are not covered up but are thoroughly investigated. "If that's not done, we could be next," said Emerson.

Emerson and Richard have remained in Laurel, pressing the sheriff on point after point of the investigation.

"The local folks are just scared to death and not talking," said Richard. That sentiment was echoed by residents at Camp Sister Spirit. They reported numerous phone calls from lesbian and gay Mis-



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spokesman for the
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issippians expressing fear of further homophobic violence.

The version of the incident that Emerson and Richard have been able to piece together is that Walters and Shoemaker worked together. They were attending a potluck dinner with their respective lovers and other local lesbians and gay men. Reportedly, they left to purchase additional supplies for the gathering. That was the last time they were seen alive.

The perilous position of Emerson and Richard was reinforced when, during a phone conference with eight others at NGLTF, a housekeeping crew

knocked at the door demanding they clear out within the hour. Emerson and Richard felt that the crew were actually sheriffs, as one wore a watch that was labeled "highway patrol."

Richard said that police had followed them as they drove, and

that Sheriff Hooks had warned them not to "stir up things" or he would "drive them out of the county."

Myron Marlin, spokesman for the Justice Department, said regarding FBI intervention, "We are aware of the situation and are trying to determine if there is any federal jurisdiction. There is no federal law outlawing violence against individuals on the basis of sexual orientation."

Renee LaChance contributed to this article.