

Tale of child's ritual slaying vexes lawmen

By BILL DISSESSA

Houston Chronicle

3-6-89

A-9

A Houston-area woman, who claims to be a former satanic priestess and has told audiences she witnessed the ritualistic murder of an 8-year-old Tomball girl, has left law enforcement officers frustrated in their attempts to investigate her allegations.

"We don't know where she is or if she is," Harris County Assistant District Attorney Casey O'Brien said of Marti Johnston, whose startling claims have roused the interest of several law enforcement agencies.

Their interest is tempered by skepticism, however, chiefly because local authorities have no reports of girls missing from the Tomball area on the Harris-Montgomery County line.

"We have no homicide to link it to. Why she would make those claims and then be hesitant to talk with authorities is reason to question her motives," said O'Brien, who is assigned to the DA's special crimes bureau and began his investigation at the request of Tomball police.

He said he repeatedly has tried to reach her through the Pasadena-based Cult Awareness Council, a

Woman, 64, faces charges in alleged sex assault of girl

FROM STAFF REPORTS

2/9/89
County authorities have charged a 64-year-old Houston woman with aggravated sexual assault in connection with the fondling of a 3½-year-old girl at a church nursery.

However, a pastor at the church where the woman remains employed said he does not believe the charges are true.

Mattie Perry Bryant, of the 1600 block of South Victory, an employee of the North Woods Presbyterian

an Church nursery, was free on \$20,000 bail, authorities said.

The alleged fondling incident occurred at the church nursery in May 1987, said Harris County Sheriff's Department Sgt. Bruce Williams, of the county's sexual assault division. He said there are no indications any other children at the nursery were involved.

"We have absolute faith in (Bryant). She is still employed. I do not believe the charges," said the Rev. Stewart McCall of North Woods Presbyterian.

P
17
43

Teen-agers sue, claim to be victims of 'witch hunt'

BY ELIZABETH MCKENNA
ANN ARBOR NEWS BUREAU

BAY CITY — Two former students at Unionville-Sebewaing Area Schools are suing three school officials claiming they were falsely accused of satanism and devil worship during what their attorney called a "witch hunt" last year.

The lawsuit, filed Friday in U.S. District Court, claims the girls were defamed and their civil rights were violated by school officials who were influenced by a Geraldo Rivera television show on satanism.

Carl Rutterbush, a Sebewaing Township resident representing Amanda Marie Rutterbush, 14, and Carla Jean Rutterbush, 16, also claims in a lawsuit on behalf of his daughters that the "witch hunt" by officials forced his daughters to transfer to another school.

The lawsuit names Victor Reister, former principal of the district's Area Middle School, USA Superintendent William D. Dodge and Robert Isenburg, a teacher, as de-

fendants. Dodge declined to comment about the lawsuit. Reister and Isenburg could not be reached for comment. The lawsuit alleges violations of the two students' rights under the First, Fourth and 14th amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

The 28-year-old Reister in April announced his resignation in the midst of a controversy over devil worship that plagued the district since October, 1988. Edward Spannagel, USA Board of Education president, said he learned about the lawsuit Monday and could not comment on its allegations.

The suit says Amanda was in the eighth grade and Carla in 10th grade in Oct. 25, 1988 when a national television special about satanism and devil worship was aired with Rivera as host commentator.

A state police investigation initiated at the request of Reister revealed no substance to the devil worship reports. Reister on Oct. 26, searched school lockers including

Amanda's and found and copied hand-drawn pictures, "doodles," poetry and song lyrics, Dodge and Robert Isenburg, a teacher, as de-

the lawsuit claims.

According to the lawsuit, Reister also questioned other students about rumors of satanism, and then called together Dodge, a state police officer, a counselor and two Huron County Probate Court officials to conduct an investigation and disciplinary hearing, the lawsuit says.

A hearing for Amanda and three other students led to all four being told they were on "house arrest" for the Halloween weekend with orders not to leave their houses or have any telephone or other contact with each other, the lawsuit alleges.

The suit also alleges that when Carla went Nov. 9 to the front of Isenburg's 10th grade auto mechanics class and requested a pencil, Isenburg told her in front of the class she could "just cut your finger off and write it in blood."

Because of "social ostracism, damage to reputation, and the pattern of disciplinary surveillance" Amanda and Carla left the district and enrolled in Caro Community Schools, Rutterbush says.

In his Oct. 29, 1988 police report, Trooper Bernard J. Bator of the Bad Axe post indicated he "did suspect cult activity" among the students.

But Carl Rutterbush claims there was no evidence his daughters were involved in satanic worship and that a "pattern of surveillance" of Amanda's activities and social relationships led to her being threatened with disciplinary action for casually hugging a fellow student in a hallway on Feb. 14, Valentine's Day.

The suit also alleges that when Carl went Nov. 9 to the front of Isenburg's 10th grade auto mechanics class and requested a pencil, after students told him that members of the alleged cult had planned or were involved in a possible suicide pact, that animal killings were occurring, and that the cult planned to sacrifice a popular student.

The state police report indicated Amanda admitted to being involved in satanic worship and found letters in her locker "indicating

LOCAL & STATE

Shell employee who says she's good witch files suit alleging harassment

By Patricia Mansen
OF THE HOUSTON POST

Houstonian Mary Silcox says life at the office has become miserable since co-workers discovered she is a witch.

Silcox says she kept quiet at first, but eventually revealed clues about her involvement in Wicca, a pagan creed whose followers believe in "white," or good, witchcraft.

"I started out hiding," Silcox said. "I guess after a while I let it slip out."

Some employees at Shell Oil Co. reacted with so much hostility that it affected her health and her ability

to do her job, Silcox said.

So she filed a lawsuit in Houston federal court earlier this month alleging she has been harassed and intimidated because of her religious beliefs.

In her suit, Silcox claimed co-workers have falsely accused her of worshiping Satan, and supervisors have denied her promotions and overloaded her with work. She also said the company has retaliated because she complained to federal authorities about the harassment.

Silcox is asking for at least \$2.6 million in damages and an order directing Shell either to promote her or pay her future lost wages.

Silcox, 40, a Shell employee for more than 15 years, works in the company's correspondence center near the Astrodome.

Bruce A. Coane, Silcox's lawyer, claimed Shell's actions toward Silcox violate Title VII, federal legislation that bars discrimination against employees because of their race, sex or religion.

Taylor said the company does not comment on pending litigation.

She said, however, that Shell has a policy prohibiting discrimination or harassment on the basis of religion.

Silcox's claim of religious bigotry is one not often heard by the courts

or the federal agency responsible for enforcing the nation's employment discrimination laws.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission gets relatively few complaints of religious discrimination, said enforcement manager Jerry Jensen of the EEOC's Houston office. The office handles cases from a 26-county area in southeast Texas.

Jensen said 16 claims of religious discrimination were filed with the Houston office in the first five months of fiscal 1989, which began Oct. 1. That compared to 409 claims of discrimination based on race, 250 on sex and 148 on

national origin, he said.

Silcox probably will have to wait a long time before her suit goes to trial, legal observers said. In court, Silcox faces an uphill battle with her claims of Title VII violations, they said.

Employees often lose Title VII suits even if they prove their employers' actions stemmed from religious bias, said T. Gerald Treace, a professor at South Texas College of Law. Employers still can prevail in such suits if they show an additional, legitimate reason for their action, he said.

Silcox, however, probably will not have trouble with her contention that Wicca is a religion, said Treace and Bruce Griffiths, staff counsel for the Houston chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that people do not have to belong to an organized religion to show they have religious beliefs Griffiths said.

Silcox said her interest in Wicca began 20 years ago. Followers of the Wicca creed believe in a universal supreme power and the oneness of all with nature.

"There's a lot of confusion about it," Silcox said of Wicca. "They've misconstrued what we're about. We're not Satanists..."

O K & COMPANY

MAIN



Seizure of ritual knife angers coven

SAN ANTONIO (AP) —

The planned destruction of a sacred ritual knife confiscated from a Wiccan high priestess at San Antonio International Airport has outraged members of her coven.

"It's a religious object, and it's been an integral part of this person's religious practices for the last several years," said Craig Pierce, high

7-24-89
priest of the Forge Coven of San Antonio.

Mary McConnell, 30, a member of the San Antonio-based Forge Coven, said the knife was taken from her the morning of Aug. 19 at the airport.

"We've got it, and we're probably going to destroy it," said M.R. Rose, airport police administrator. "We didn't confiscate a witch's ceremonial

nial tool. We confiscated a double-edged dagger. We weren't looking for witches' tools, we were looking for a prohibited weapon."

The dagger is never used for violence, because if it draws blood, its magic powers are invalidated,

Pierce said.

Wiccans say they practice a peaceful pagan nature religion.

— Ditas Set

I sent you an earlier
article on our on
this —

Jeff

Mexico El Paso Times 8/31/90 p 8-B

8 Indians freed in drug cult case

Judge says charges didn't have merit

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — A district judge has released eight Indians accused of participating in a drug cult that allegedly killed about 30 people, a lawyer for a government advocacy group said.

The action by Judge Jose Cuevas Zavala in Tepic, 400 miles northwest of Mexico City, represents another blow to the spectacular case launched by federal police in July.

In comments to reporters last month, the judge ridiculed police allegations that the Indians had killed about 30 people in satanic rituals.

Prosecutors in neighboring Durango state, where the killings allegedly occurred, refused to press charges in connection with the alleged deaths.

No human remains were found, and senior church officials in the area denied the existence of a satanic cult.

The National Indian Institute, a government organization to protect Indians, joined the case to help Tepehuano Indian defendants it said were being mistreated by police.

The institute attorney, Carlos Puga Quiroga, said the judge Tuesday ordered the eight released on their own recognizance. They still face the only charges filed against them — cultivating marijuana in their remote villages.

In addition, Puga said, five minors held in the case have been cleared of any charges and will be released to their parents.

Only one man, Olayo Soto Soto, remains imprisoned in the case. Puga said Soto is accused of owning the land on which police found a small marijuana patch, while the others were accused only of helping cultivate the crop.

In July, federal police in Tepic claimed Soto was the chief sorcerer of a cult that worshipped an idol called "El Amigo," or "The Friend." The cult allegedly had sacrificed 30 or more people to gain protection for their drug activities.

Members of the group initially confessed to the allegations during police questioning. But they recanted before the judge, saying the confessions had been beaten out of them.

Soto said he is a traditional Indian healer, but he denied practicing any sorcery. The institute also has appealed for his release.

In an earlier drug-cult case, police in April 1989 found 15 bodies buried on a ranch near the northern city of Matamoros across the U.S.-Mexico border from Brownsville, Texas. Among those slain was 21-year-old University of Texas student Mark Kilroy.

Police claimed those victims were slain by drug smugglers who believed human sacrifices would protect them from police.

Group leader Adolfo de Jesus Constanzo and his bodyguard died of gunshot wounds as police closed in on them in a Mexico City apartment in May 1989. Ten people still face charges in connection with the case.

ANGLETON, Texas — A woman accused of killing her 4-year-old daughter by stabbing her 23 times heard messages on radio and television broadcasts and believed she would disappear if she didn't follow God's will through killing.

Mother says God wanted child killed

Faeson had testified the woman appealed mentally ill at the time of the stabbing.

Faeson had testified that Houston psychiatrist Fred Wilson music box and tried to climb into a brother's crib. The girl broke an inexplicable silence into a throat and stabbed her with an Army knife after told police she slashed her daughter, Meera, Taylor with Nov. 8 detail of her sharon life. Taylor, 27, of Rockport, is on trial charged with the psychiatrist testified.

The woman's mother and a psychologist interviewed the woman with the killing.

Through it all, she didn't follow God's will, according to Rev. James Price, 42, pastor of the First Assembly of God Church, and brothers Robert Nixon, 42, and Alvin Nixon, 31. All are from Devine.

A Medina County grand jury indicted the three on charges of false imprisonment, a third-degree felony. The trial in state district court began Monday.

Testimony indicated Weimers, who had done construction work at the church, talked with the minister about being depressed and despondent over marital and financial problems. The preacher decided them just to let me go," Weimers testified Tuesday. "They slapped my face and said, 'They was possessed by demons that had to be beaten out

Man says he begged for 3-hour exorcism to stop

Associated Press

HONDOR, Texas — A 44-year-old man says he begged to be free, cried "I love Jesus!" and spoke in tongues while trying to escape a minister and two followers during a three-hour exorcism ordeal.

Everett Weimers testified the men beat him, pressed a Bible into his chest and slammed him into a concrete wall Jan. 29 at the First Assembly of God Church in Devine.

"They said, 'Oh God, take the demon from my brother Ray! Take the demons out! I begged them just to let me go,'" Weimers testified Tuesday. "They slapped my face and said,

"Come out of there, demons!"

Charged in the case are the Rev. James Price, 42, pastor of the First Assembly of God Church, and brothers Robert Nixon, 42, and Alvin Nixon, 31. All are from Devine.

A Medina County grand jury indicted the three on charges of false imprisonment, a third-degree felony. The trial in state district court began Monday.

Testimony indicated Weimers, who had done construction work at the church, talked with the minister about being depressed and despondent over marital and financial problems. The preacher decided him to the floor.

"They wouldn't react except to talk in tongues and pray to God to take the demons out of me," Weimers said. "Someone said to give me a Bible, and then someone else drove a Bible real hard on my chest."

He said the Nixon brothers held him down on the floor and poured oil on him.

Weimers' face were not from a beating, but were caused by "the spirits within him."

Weimers testified the Nixon brothers prevented him from leaving the church by tackling him, slamming him into a concrete wall and then dragging him to the floor.

Texas

\$4.00
CITY LIMITS
LUNCH SPECIALS
Mon.-Fri. 11-2 P.M.
Tee & Tax Included

Free Glasses

PUBLIC NOTICE

gill

Free spirits meet in the Texas woods

By Jeff Collins

OF THE TIMES HERALD STAFF

ANGELINA NATIONAL FOREST — It's early afternoon in "West Berlin" and Rainbow Family members have discovered intruders.

"Six Up!" a family member named Jonathan shouts as two Department of Public Safety troopers brake their car and get out. "Six Up on foot!" he shouts.

The expression signals that law officers are present; the 24-year-old Missourian explains. "They know where we are. We have a right to know where they are."

West Berlin — so named because it has been sealed off from other Rainbow encampments by U.S. Forest Service officers — is set deep in these East Texas woods, where latter-day hippies with names like Spirit White Eagle, Alura Faith and Warped Willey have set up camp.

The 10-minute trip from Zavalla is like passing through a time warp. Volkswagen microbuses and spray-painted vans are parked beside tarplike tents and campfires.

Colorfully dressed women and shaggy-haired, bearded men pass the time rolling tobacco cigarettes, sometimes with marijuana instead. They are the vanguard of the 17th annual gathering of the Rainbow Family of the Living Light, '80s-style free spirits who meet early each July in national forests around America.

The gatherings began in Colorado in 1972 and have been held each year since, from California to the Carolinas, from Washington to West Virginia. It's Texas' turn now, and between 5,000 and 20,000 people are expected to converge on the Lone Star State this weekend.

Although the gathering is held in the name of world peace, this year's fest has been far from harmonious.

The Rainbows at West Berlin are angry and complain of harassment.

Roadblocks and court orders have pre-

vented them from installing latrines and water systems needed for the gathering. The poles of the meditation tepee are undraped, leaving people like Prophet, of Kansas City, Mo., exposed to the harsh Texas sun.

Regular patrols by sheriff's deputies and DPS troopers make the Rainbows feel uneasy.

"We need armed law enforcement like we need a hole in the head," said Kalif Beacon, 46, who calls himself a nomad.

As in past gatherings, the government has vowed to block the event unless permits are obtained and health and sanitation rules complied with. The Rainbows have

CONTINUED

vowed to hold their "tribal council" regardless of government action, claiming a constitutional guarantee for the right to peacefully assemble is their permit.

They say efforts to block them have intensified in the past two years.

"Last year's gathering started a pattern. Last year they started coming down on us hard," said Jonathan, who wears long reddish hair and a beard. "They have decided that whenever they can to make us uncomfortable. They're harassing us."

Residents of Zavalla, population 762, likewise are uneasy.

"I believe they have the right to meet. I do not believe they have the right to go into our churches and push their devil worship on us," said one resident, who didn't want to be identified. She said the Rainbows have been well-behaved, but some residents were upset when a small contingent offered a local minister a crystal.

Rumors have spread through town of satanic worship, nudity and drug abuse, the woman said.

"There seems to be a good deal of fear, not knowing what to expect or what will happen," said the Rev. Aubrey Foster, pastor of First Baptist Church. "Anytime you have people that are outsiders that walk up and down the street of a small East Texas town without a shirt and without shoes, and their hair is matted, people will be upset."

Then there's the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Justice Department, which say lack of proper sanitary facilities at last year's gathering near Robbinsville, N.C., caused an outbreak of a contagious form of diarrhea.

The national Centers for Disease Control identified about 200 cases of the diarrhea and projected as many as 8,000 cases may have occurred. About 20 people who didn't attend the gathering but had contact with those who did later developed "culture confirmed" cases, officials said. Other secondary cases were identified but were unverified by lab tests.

Fearing a similar outbreak this year, federal officials want to require the Rainbows to get a permit and outline their plans for latrines and waste disposal in advance.

Government lawyers have vowed that unless health and sanitation rules are met, the gathering will be stopped, and they will go to court to block an unlicensed gathering. If the government lawyers win, Rainbows who refuse to obey dispersal orders may face arrest for contempt of court, assistant U.S. Attorney Kenneth Dodd said.

The complicated legal case is pending before the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans. A decision is expected this week.

While more intense than previous years, this year's battle is sticking to the script of past gatherings.

On previous occasions, the Forest Service or some state agency has filed suit for a court injunction to stop the gathering. Roads have been closed and hearings have been held. Attorneys hired by the Rainbows have reached agreements with authorities setting out elaborate rules for the gatherings, but because the group has no formal structure and no leaders, there's no way of enforcing them.

'There are a million different stories about how the Rainbow Family was formed.'

Jonathan

Trying to stop the Rainbows' gathering is "like taking the mist out of the Smokey Mountains," Garrick Beck, a Rainbow spokesman, told The Charlotte Observer last year. "We're a natural part of the environment."

Larry Daves, a Tyler attorney hired to represent the Rainbow Family in court this year, said a lack of leadership is part of the family's problems.

"There is nobody in charge until they meet, so there's nobody to make decisions for them," he said. "You've got a group of people highly opposed to hierarchical organization, highly opposed to delegating authority. They don't have any employees, they don't have any paid personnel. To me, it's just an experiment in pure democracy, and the price is it's almost impossible to negotiate with them."

Dodd sees it differently. He says the Rainbows keep their structure "loosey-goosey" as a deliberate tactic to "always have their way."

CONTINUED

Their way, family members say, is to hold a gathering in the "Cathedral of Nature," where there are only two rules: "keep peace in the camp and don't make no stupid rules."

The Rainbow Family exists year-round but is scattered across the land so that its network is almost imperceptible. It's only in July, when they hold their reunion, that the Rainbows' presence is felt in a meaningful way. Whatever site they pick becomes "home," and all who arrive, whether they be first-time participants or aging veterans, are greeted with a hug and a salutatory "Welcome home, brother," or "Welcome home, sister."

Rainbows pass the "magic hat" to collect money for food they eat in communal kitchens with names like the "Absolutely No Politics and Religion Cafe." They attend workshops on such topics as natural childbirth, recycling, herbal medicine, tepee construction and erotic massage.

Drug and alcohol use is not encouraged. But on at least one occasion, a "Drug Testing Center" was set up to screen for bad dope. The man behind the counter told a Miami Herald reporter the center's workers would test anything — on themselves — and let customers know whether the substance was good or bad.

The gatherings have at times been quaint, comical and, predictably, there have been moments of ugliness.

Many gatherings featured arrests and protests. The gatherings in 1978 and 1980 were marred by deaths. Two people reportedly jumped off a cliff in 1978 after ingesting bad drugs, one participant told the Charlotte Observer.

In the mid-1980s, two men who had nothing to do with the Rainbow gathering were convicted of the 1980 murders in West Virginia of two women Rainbow members who were hitchhiking to the festival.

In 1984, during the gathering near Likely, Calif., a woman "freaked out" and put her baby into a fire. Another Rainbow im-

mediately rescued the infant, and the baby recovered at a burn unit in Sacramento.

The origin of the Rainbow Family is steeped in mythology.

"There are a million different stories about how the Rainbow Family was formed," Jonathan said.

One version holds that a group turned up at a 1971 equinox gathering, calling themselves the "family of the living light." They slept in rainbow-colored tepees, and a year later, their followers rallied under the name of "Rainbow Family of the Living Light."

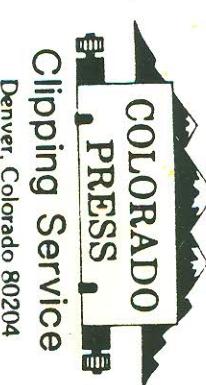
Another account, published in

the Rainbow's "All Ways Free" newspaper, traces the family to a 1969 gathering on Salmon Creek in Big Sur, Calif. That group, called the Salmon Creek Family, later merged with others to form the Rainbow Family.

Regardless of origin, the family has remained intact for more than 18 years "because the spirit is with us, and because we've taken the responsibility upon ourselves to continue to meet," Jonathan said. "Every year, new blood comes into the family, young and old. That is how we grew. That is how we continue. We believe the children are the next generation of the family."

F - 52

NOV 11 1988



Clipping Service

Denver, Colorado 80204

Rumors of satanism closes Montezuma Creek School

BY JEROME JACKSON-MAAG

MONTEZUMA CREEK, UTAH — Parents withheld their children from attending Whitehorse High School here after allegations surfaced that a school counselor was involved in Satanism, though San Juan School District officials deny any connection with the occult in the boycott.

Students were kept from classes Tuesday and Wednesday and returned Thursday only after parents from the community met with the San Juan School District Board of Education Wednesday night.

While school officials denied that rumors of Satanism had anything to do with the closing of the school, Robert Billy Whitehorse, a leader of the parents group and former San Juan School District Board of Education member, said it was the main justification for withholding students.

"We had been aware of a misunderstanding was he has, according to a document he wrote, been forming a church but it was used as a

front," Whitehorse said. "The rationale behind it was Satan believers. So we contacted the parents of Whitehorse school and talked Monday night."

The allegations apparently arose from an unsigned document, said to contain Satanic references, that was attributed to the counselor.

Whitehorse said the parents decided that if they attempted to go through due process in dealing with the situation, the investigation would take a long time.

"Based on that, the parents decided to boycott," Whitehorse

said.

The parents group met Monday night, at which time they decided to withhold the school until action was taken on the allegations. They met Wednesday with the San Juan School District Board of Education and

presented a list of allegations against the counselor. Satanism was not one of them, said San Juan School Superintendent Hal Jensen.

"Satanism is not on the list," Jensen said. "It just absolutely is not."

The concerns on the parents list included the counselor being a part-

ner in a small trading post in Montezuma Creek and has "been using his position to further the purpose and progress of the business," Jensen said. In addition, there were allegations of alcohol use by the counselor.

"(The parents) feel he's been using his position to promote his personal beliefs," Jensen said. "His personal philosophies, which are different from the Navajo culture, or from the Anglo culture to that extent, are highly philosophical in a very academic way. He has a PhD in philosophy."

Jensen said the counselor believed "any subject ought to be investigated and talked about on a philosophical basis. We are concerned about how that philosophy comes across."

"The main concern we have here and one reason why this has happened is a show of support from the community to be involved in the school," said Mitch Kalauli, Whitehorse High School principal. "The effectiveness of a counselor at the school is in question, so the parents called a meeting. The paren-

ts wanted to at least say to people they were serious about the matter—that somebody, whoever is in power, needs to listen."

"This is not a flag-waving, banner-waving, picket kind of thing. The parents kept children at home," Kalauli said. "Whatever the rumor is, it is not Satanism."

Whitehorse said the parents requested that the San Juan School Board immediately dismiss the counselor since this counselor is trying to steer the student's minds to different areas of belief."

"We don't want him around our students anymore," he said.

After meeting with the parents, the school board decided to relieve the counselor of his duties at the school, Jensen said.

"The board met on that and basically accepted the premise, though we didn't accept the allegations—we didn't have any evidence," he said. "The board recognizes that because of what happened, the (counselor) has lost

See COUNSELOR on Page 18A

Counselor removed

Continued from Page 1A

credibility and his ability to function at Whitehorse High School. He has been removed from his duties and will not have any further relationship with the school."

Jensen said an investigation will be held into the allegations. Following the investigation, the counselor will be given a hearing before the board, with legal counsel present.

"We see that as taking several days," he said.

The action was taken because of the obvious seriousness of the parents on the issue, Jensen said.

Whitehorse said the allegations of Satanism extend to the counselor's

partners in the trading post, which is located near the Montezuma Creek Elementary School.

"We're trying to do something about the store as well," he said. In the meantime, the counselor

will probably be reassigned within the district, Jensen said. That assignment has not been made as yet.

"The kids are back in school and (the counselor) is no longer at the school," Jensen said.

"I'm glad they supported us," Whitehorse said.

The counselor declined comment on the case because of the investigation and potential action by the board.

Schools taking devilish view of once-benign peace symbol

By BILL DISESSA
Houston Chronicle 6-18-89

When Debora Johnson was growing up in the turbulent 1960s, peace symbols were worn by anti-war protesters, flower children and campus radicals.

Today, her 11-year-old son attends one of several Pasadena schools where the peace symbol is banned because some people see murky ties to devil worship.

"A lot of my hippie friends wore peace symbols. When my son told me some people are saying it has an evil meaning, I said, 'That's not what that means.' I was shocked," said the 39-year-old mother of four.

"From peace symbol to devil sign — there's a big gap there."

However, she said, she's been convinced that for many people, the peace symbol does indeed have satanic meanings.

Pasadena Independent School District officials said their already cynical view of the peace symbol was reinforced by the recent drug- and cult-related slayings of University of Texas student Mark Kilroy and 14 others in Matamoros, Mexico.

"The dramatic conclusion of that tragedy made us sit up and take notice, but the awareness was already there," district spokesman Kirk Lewis said. "We'd pick up little signs, like students' doodling things on desk tops while not listening in class or rumors of some students involved in cult practices.

"It's harder for those of us who lived in the '60s to be told that the peace symbol means something completely different. But experts are telling us that, and it became inappropriate for children to wear them."

He said a districtwide policy banning the peace symbol and several other signs believed to reflect Satan-

ism may be established when the new school year begins this fall.

The peace symbol already is outlawed under tightened dress codes on at least six Pasadena campuses, he said, and last month several Parkview Intermediate School students wearing T-shirts sporting the symbol were sent home to change clothes.

Although Johnson supports the school's action, her son, Josh, is one of several Parkview students who believe officials have overreacted.

"Back in the hippie days, they wore peace symbols all the time."

See PEACE on Page 4C.

No Hale column

Leon Hale is on vacation. His column will resume upon his return.

dered police to stop their crackdown on vehicles with peace decals. One patrolman arrested a decorated Vietnam War veteran because his car had a peace symbol superimposed on an American flag. Federal law prohibits defacing the flag.

Later that year in San Antonio, parents complained when their children were exposed to middle school flyers exhorting them to "Beware the Communist Peace Symbol."

The flyers said a similar symbol was called the "witches foot" in the Middle Ages and represents the devil.

In Charlotte, N.C., that year, a teen-ager was fined \$15 for wearing a jacket emblazoned with an American flag and the peace symbol.

In 1970, a Culpeper, Va., principal refused to let a student wear a peace symbol on his graduation gown, winning applause from a com-

ment audience.

Nowadays, however, many of the students wearing the peace symbol say it is just another piece of nostalgia — and nostalgia is "in" even for students too young to remember Vietnam protests.

Street Smart clerk Dee Corkill

said the renewed market includes other 1960s items like tie-dye T-

shirts and Batman emblems produced in conjunction with the much-touted movie starring Michael Keaton and Jack Palance.

was used by a Nazi Panzer division for its campaign against France in World War II. Wyle J. Rapecki, a Flagstaff, Ariz.-based occult expert and author of a book on satanic symbols, said that to deviant covenants and gangs today, the peace symbol represents "Nero's Cross," which he described as an upside-down cross with broken arms.

"In biblical times, Peter waited to be crucified upside down because he thought he wasn't worthy of his Lord. Nero granted the request but had the arms of the cross broken to show the defeat of Christianity," Rapecki said.

He said modern satanists regard the circle containing the broken cross as a symbol of the "unity, totality and eternity" of their beliefs.

Rapecki said he has noticed an outbreak of satanism on campuses around the country, but acknowledged many youths simply wear peace signs for the same harmless reasons as their baby-boomer par-

"We do have parents and educators who overreact and we have to guard against that," he said, "but I believe, as unfortunate as it may be, that some school boards must take giant leaps to keep out on-campus crimes."

In 1970, San Antonio officials or-

indicated the issue was up to administrators to decide. Spokesmen for Houston and Deer Park ISDs said peace symbols are tolerated on their campuses, although obscene or sexually oriented slogans or emblems are restricted. Despite their on-campus ban in Pasadena, peace symbol T-shirts are hot items in area stores.

The Street Smart T-shirt shop at Baybrook Mall has sold scores of shirts so far this year, Assistant Manager Jennifer Carmichael said. "Mostly they're just normal and average," she said of her young customers. "The shirts don't mean anything bad to us."

The peace symbol's modern origins date to 1958 when American and British "Ban the Bomb" advocates met in Connecticut. Wanting a universally accepted symbol representing their joint goal of nuclear disarmament, they decided to use the combination of semaphores — a system of visual signals — for "N" and "D."

The result was a circle containing an inverted "Y" with an extended bar.

The peace symbol eventually stood for a broadened concept of world peace, although it was no stranger to controversy even at the height of its popularity in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Coincidentally, the same symbol

Peace

Continued from Page 1C.

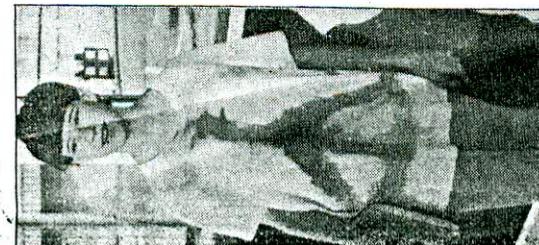
strung the sixth-grader just before he went on summer vacation. Schoolmate Andrew Yahr, 12, said the T-shirts "just meant peace. If they ban peace symbols, they'll have to ban basic geometry because of all its lines and circles."

A Parkview teacher who asked to remain anonymous said she opposes the peace symbol's ban. "Somebody's got their tail caught in a crack. I used to get upset when kids wore long hair to school, but later I found out that it didn't make a bit of difference."

The peace symbol already is prohibited throughout Baytown's Goose Creek ISD, although few problems have surfaced.

"Our principals have some leeway and discretion to eliminate them. Nothing distracting may be worn," said interim Superintendent Ralph Pearce.

At a May 8 school board meeting, a Robert E. Lee High School student complained that one of his friends was sent home to change because he was wearing a peace symbol T-shirt. Trustees accepted a petition signed by 212 students opposing a crack-down on students' appearance, but



Cerlos Antonio Rios / Chronicle
Parkview Intermediate School students were sent home to change when they wore T-shirts bearing peace symbols.

Tuscaloosa News, Aug 9, 1990

Witch rumors, alleged murder plot linked

The Associated Press

BEULAH, N.D. — Two men were charged with conspiring to murder a neighbor they thought was a witch, authorities say.

Karina Singer, 61, said she had no idea some of her neighbors wrongly suspected she was a witch until two armed men were arrested on her farm last week.

"I'm stunned my neighbors could believe these things when we've lived here 21 years," Mrs. Singer said. "And that instead of calling me to find out if they were true, circulating them around until they became like an atomic blast mushrooming out of the prairie."

Jim Reppen, who works for a tire

service company, and farmer Dean Unterseher were charged with conspiracy to commit murder. The charge carries a possible life term. Both were freed on \$5,000 bond after their arrests by police officers acting on a tip.

Mercer County State's Attorney Alan Duppler said rumors about Mrs. Singer have circulated in the county for years. This summer, they also included two visiting friends, he said.

"There have been rumors flying around Mercer County that these three ladies are witches and they're sacrificing animals and doing genital cult-type of things," Duppler said.

The two arrested men, he said,

apparently "decided they were going to go down and eliminate the problem."

A search of the Singer farm uncovered nothing witch-like. Mrs. Singer said she did not know the two men, who authorities said hatched the alleged murder plot at a bar in nearby Hazen.

Since the arrests, neighbors have told Mrs. Singer of hearing stories of firelight rites at the farm.

What really has been going on, Mrs. Singer said, was a plan she developed with her late husband, John, to turn the farm into "a place of beauty and peace" that friends could visit for extended vacations.

Last fall, the couple laid down two

Indian "medicine wheels," or rock configurations "for the healing of the land." During the spring and summer, several old frame buildings were torn down, a pit was burned in the yard and a guest house was erected.

But rumors circulated that the guest house was a church and that visitors were seen dancing around a pit fire.

The "dancers," Mrs. Singer said, actually were workers from a Hazen construction company that tore down the buildings and put out grass fires started by sparks from the pit.

All in all, she said, "it was probably too fast a change" for the neighbors.

Beulah, North Dakota

WICHITA, KANSAS
EAGLE-BEAON
M - 124,625
S - 190,313 88
NOV 16 1989

VICTIM NOV 16 1989

From Page 1D

band and told him to pick up the children.

At the park, "There really were no hostile words exchanged. Very few words at all were exchanged," said Sullivan Police Detective Sam Elia.

The husband "went to the side of the vehicle to open the door to pick up the kids, and Mr. Scheets took a Ruger .44 Magnum with a 10-inch barrel and fired into his stomach, knocking him to the ground.

"All he remembers is getting shot and holding his intestines."

Scheets' ex-wife ran for help. When police arrived, they found that her husband's penis had been cut off.

Meanwhile, authorities said, Scheets was driving southwest with the 7-year-old boy and 6-year-old girl.

The children later told police that Scheets threw the penis on the floorboard of his car and along the route repeatedly stomped on it, cursing his ex-wife's new husband.

The next day, the car was passing through Emporia.

Scheets reportedly tossed the penis out the window into a lot surrounded by Cline Auto Supply, a Hardee's restaurant, a K mart and a trailer park.

The following day, Scheets' car broke down near Trinidad, Colo. He and the children accepted a ride with a trucker.

Highway patrol troopers stopped the truck near Las Vegas, N.M. Scheets was arrested, and troopers confiscated a pocket knife and pistol. Scheets was returned to Franklin County, Mo., where he was charged with two counts of first-degree assault, one count of interfering with custody, and two counts of armed criminal action. He is being held in lieu of \$1 million bond.

On Nov. 3, an Air Force officer from Texas spent the night at an Emporia motel, en route to his base in North Dakota.

About 9:15 the next morning, the officer walked back to the motel after making some purchases at K mart. In an open field, he discovered the penis.

The discovery stunned the community. Two children had been kidnapped a few days earlier. Investigators, the news media and residents wondered whether some maniac was stalking their town.

Trying to determine when the attack occurred, police showed larvae found on the penis to a University of Kansas entomologist. The scientist determined that the attack occurred 2½ to four days earlier.

On Nov. 9, a Franklin County deputy was watching a television satellite program to train law-enforcement officers. It broadcast a list of "unusual items found" in connection with unsolved crimes in other states.

The discovery in Emporia was listed. The deputy ran to tell his boss that he knew where the missing penis was.

The victim, who was hospitalized, is now resting at home.

Doctors have told police that reconstructive and cosmetic surgery could provide the victim with a functioning prosthetic.

Missouri mutilation loses ties to satanism

By Bill Hirschman
The Wichita Eagle

There's no delicate way to report this article.

Suffice it to say that people in Emporia were happier this week when they learned that a bizarre story of violence was not satanic — it was just bizarre.

What happened was this: Last month, an Illinois man shot his ex-wife's new husband in a Missouri park, cut off the victim's penis with a pocket knife, took the dismembered organ with him and drove southwest with his two children.

As he traveled through Emporia, he tossed the penis into a vacant lot. An Air Force officer returning to his base found it almost a week later while he was out for a walk.

Emporia residents — who had heard reports saying only that someone, somewhere had been mutilated — were unnerved by rumors that local children were missing and by a Topeka newspaper story reporting that satanism might have been involved.

This week, they discovered that the incident involved out-of-staters, one arrested in New Mexico and the other recovering in Missouri.

The tale began two days before Halloween.

Samuel Scheets, 30, of Jacksonville, Ill., had not seen his son and daughter since his divorce two years earlier. On hearing that his ex-wife had married a month earlier, he asked to visit the children.

The woman and her new husband, 33, agreed to a visit for Oct. 29, even though Scheets had no visitation rights.

Scheets packed everything he owned into a car and drove to Sullivan, Mo., 90 miles southwest of St. Louis. His ex-wife and her husband drove in from their Ozarks home five miles away and gave the children to Scheets.

They became worried when Scheets failed to return at the agreed time of 5 p.m. About 8:30 p.m., Scheets telephoned the hus-

See VICTIM, Page 4D



Tribune photograph by PAM HIGGINS

Witches Mary Niles, left, and Cassie Cornwell walk along a path where coven members crawled after shots were fired Sunday.

Witches' worship ritual is broken up by gunfire

■ From Page 1A

witch and a registered nurse whose property includes the island.

The small island sits in the middle of a pond at the end of a lush pathway behind Cornwell's house. Only one other house stands within 200 yards of the pond, which backs up to a vast stretch of swamp.

Members said Sunday's ritual was in response to threats they received the day before.

Cornwell said her house was pelted with eggs and a note was thrown in her front yard Saturday, warning the group to stop their "Satan worshiping or be prepared for worse. Next time we won't stop at eggs."

"We are the ultimate enemy. We are out to kill!" read another note.

Cornwell, 43, said between the gunfire she heard people cursing, calling them Satanists and other names.

When the gunfire erupted, one coven member — Curtis Niles of Spring Hill — got a shotgun from the house and fired several rounds in the air, Cornwell said.

One neighbor, Art Gray, 39, told a sheriff's deputy Sunday he heard shots coming from Cornwell's property and he fired back, also in the

air, to warn the people away from his house.

Several of Cornwell's neighbors said they believed the group practices Satanism and sacrifices animals. Cornwell said the group doesn't allow animals near their worshiping area. She said the group's credo is to "do what you will, but harm none."

Parshley said he is an honorary member of the coven and has attended the group's rituals. He said the group has "nothing to do with Satanism."

The coven has worshiped at the Cornwell property since she bought her home a year ago. She said the worship area has been desecrated six or seven times.

Mary Niles, another member, said the coven is named for the tree that the elves inhabited in "The Hobbit," J.R. Tolkien's introductory book about an imaginary dwarflike people called hobbits.

Detective Jerry Puig, a religion specialist for the Pasco Sheriff's Office who has interviewed coven members, said there is a big difference between Satanism and the group's religion.

"Wicca is all nature worship — worship of the sun, the wind, the moon," Puig said. "There is no blood and no devils involved."

Tampa Florida
Tribune
June 19, 1990

Gunshots halt ritual by witches

By NEIL KING JR.
Tribune Staff Writer

NEW PORT RICHEY — A gathering of witches asking their war gods for protection ended abruptly Sunday night when the witches and nearby neighbors exchanged gunshots.

Accounts vary as to who shot first and why, but the witches said the attack is the latest in acts of violence and vandalism against their group and its island shrine near Moon Lake northeast of New Port Richey.

Five witches from the Coven Lothlorien said they had just completed their ritual seeking protection from previous threats when gunfire tore through the trees surrounding their ceremonial grounds at about 11 p.m.

No one was wounded and no arrests were made, the Pasco County Sheriff's Office said.

Witches — or wiccans — are nature worshipers who hold regular rituals in honor of the celestial cycles and the seasons, said Ron Parshley, president of the National Association of Pantheists. Wiccans' ceremonies include torch-lit dancing, chanting and burning of incense, he said.

"We heard the bullets ripping past and we all crouched down on the ground and started crawling back to my house on our hands and knees," said Kassie Cornwell, a

See WITCHES, Page 7A

'Lager' and 'voodoo' spell 'fear' in Texas

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Dixie Blackened Voodoo Lager Beer has been banned from Texas by state alcohol regulators who are spooked by a name and label they say conjure up witchcraft.

"Have you seen the label?" asked Raymond Hoskins, supervisor of marketing practices for the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission. "It appears to be a cult entity. It's a swamp scene with a skeleton in the background and a sort of dark blue color to it."

Hoskins said the ban on the New Orleans-made beer "has to do with your cults and public safety areas. We have to keep an eye on a lot of things like that."

The lager has nothing to do with the occult, said Kendra Bruno of Dixie Brewing Co., maker of the dark beer.

"It's marketing, not magic," Bruno said.

The silver foil label depicts a Louisiana bayou at dusk, Bruno said. There are no skeletons; rather, the label pictures the eyes of small animals seen in the swamp at that time of day.

Dixie Brewing, which also makes Dixie brand beer, introduced Dixie Blackened Voodoo Lager in December. It is sold in a dozen states and several countries, said Bruno.

It has never been connected with witchcraft before, Bruno said.

If fact, beginning in February, it will be sold at Dixie Landing at Disney World in Florida. The new, 2,048-room resort will portray life along the Mississippi, from plantations to bayous, Disney spokeswoman Sarona Saughers said.

"Obviously, if Disney is doing it we feel it's in good taste and fits the intent of the resort," Saughers said.

"But what can you expect from Texas?" said Chris Macerato, bartender at Harry's Place in the French Quarter.

As for the beer itself, "To me it's a lot sweeter than most dark beers," said Macerato. "The label is great, though. It's the best idea Dixie has come up with in a long time."

Bob Scully, a bartender at Cooter Brown's Tavern, said of Dixie Blackened Voodoo Lager: "I see people drinking it, not reading it."

"So far none of them have grown horns or anything from it," he added.

Texas officials don't plan to lift the ban as long as the beer has "voodoo" in its name.

"Anything that would have a reference to any religion would not be approved for sale," said Joe Darnall, the TABC's general counsel. "If they called it Baptist beer, we wouldn't allow that either. We feel voodoo is a religion."

Still, Darnall allowed, "I really think it's a pretty label. If they'd call it Walt Kelly's Pogo Beer, we'd have no problem."

6/27/91 P-B-A
EL PASO HERALD-POST

QUAN
166
119
230
44
9
11
15
7
5
1
1
5
2
29

QUANTITY
3 P
8 K
35 B
12 L
3 Bi
3 Cr
6 St
3 He
3 Ge
11 Pe
9 Fe
4 Be
3 Le

QUANTITY
3 Girl Te
11 Girl Tr
17 Boys F
11 Ninja T
3 Infant
3 Infant
3 Infant
7 Boys
8 Boys
6 Boys L
10 Boys I
2 Boys I

Many
co

sell



Associated Press

No witches, she says

A brew called Dixie Blackened Voodoo Lager Beer has nothing to do with the occult, said Kendra Bruno, owner of Dixie Brewing Co. of New Orleans. That's not enough for Raymond Hoskins, supervisor of marketing practices for the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission. The agency has banned the beer in Texas. Ms. Bruno said that the label depicts only a Louisiana bayou at dusk.

sell

9/28/91
USA Today

VOODOO BREWHAHA: Don't look for Dixie Blackened Voodoo Lager Beer in Texas. The state has banned it. "Have you seen the label?" asked Raymond Hoskins of the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission. "It appears to be a cult entity. It's a swamp scene with a skeleton in the background and a sort of dark blue color to it." The scene actually shows the eyes of small animals in the swamp at dusk, says Kendra Bruno of Dixie Brewing Co. in New Orleans. "It's marketing, not magic," says Bruno, who points out that the beer will be sold at Disney World's Dixie Landing next year.

7/16/91 RTD

BATON ROUGE, La. — Just when a skirmish with Dixie Brewing of New Orleans was threatening to become a full-blown beer battle, the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission has thrown in the towel. Dixie Blackened Voodoo Lager Beer is no longer contraband in the Lone Star State.

Beverage commission officials banned the New Orleans brew in January because, they said, its name and label, which shows a swamp, conjure images of witchcraft and the occult. But, faced with legal questions, a retaliatory ban on a Texas beer and widespread ridicule, the regulators changed their minds.

Kendra Bruno, owner of the New Orleans brewery, was pleased.



Bruno

① RICHMOND TIMES DISPATCH
(VA)

Origins of the Peace Symbol: A Signal from Life

LOUISE BARRY



THE PEACE SYMBOL is a signal from life. It is a portentous sign, on the one hand anticipating disastrous current trends and on the other prophesying hope for this last third of the 20th century. The point is underscored in a cartoon by Bill Mauldin: two old men are parading with signs which read, respectively, "I'd rather be Red" and "I'd rather be Dead," while a child on a tricycle whizzes past with a sign saying, "I'd rather Be!"

I

The peace symbol has a clear and well-documented history. Its design was created by a commercial artist commissioned in London in 1958 by Britishers desiring to communicate peace messages. Chosen as the vehicle of their peace concern was the spring pilgrimage to Canterbury, an annual tradition dating back more than 1,000 years; they decided to make an Easter march to Canterbury Cathedral to protest against the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston. Out of this initial effort of a small group of peace activists came the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, with tens of thousands participating. Quasi-religious in tone, the movement was, according to Peter Brock (in his *Twentieth Century Pacifism*), "a form of witness against the values of the wider society." The campaign's chairman was philosopher Bertrand Russell, who in his autobiography expressed the belief that the arms industry exploited anticomunism as a means of transferring the taxpayer's money into the coffers of the industry. Its church leader was Canon Collins of London's St. Paul's Cathedral.

Feeling the need for a visual symbol to represent the campaign, CND leaders sought out artist Gerald Holtom, who

Mrs. Barry, who lives in Glenview, Illinois, is active in the work of the World Without War Council-Midwest.

completed his design on February 21, 1958. As Holtom describes his work on the project, a banner bearing the entire phrase "Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament" was not practical. He started his sketches with a white circle drawn against a black square. Then the white circle became a sphere, in which he placed various versions of the Christian cross. An extract from his diary tells of the final version: "From the moment the validity of the symbol as a gesture of despair became clear, the central motif [represented] a human being in despair. . . . This was the meaning of the ND sign carried on the Aldermaston march." Research by Eric Austen has confirmed that the "gesture of despair motif has been associated in ancient history with the death of man, and the circle with the unborn child."

Hence, contrary to what American rightists have charged, the peace symbol in no way relates to a broken cross, the sign of the "antichrist." CND secretary Peggy Duff has commented that, although there was opposition to the campaign's aims, the symbol as such was not subjected to criticism at the time of the 1958 march and was never considered an antichrist sign. The peace symbol is a blend of contemporary semaphore signals and early pre-Christian and non-Christian signs.

When juxtaposed, the semaphore signals for the letters N and D (nuclear disarmament), shown below, correspond to an ancient sign for "man dies." In his *The Book of Signs* (Dover Publications, 1955), Rudolph Koch, a German callig-

rapher, presents pre-Christian symbols showing man in two positions: one with arms extending upward, representing a mood of hope and outreach, and the other with arms extending downward in a gesture of despair. These two signs are reproduced here.



On the other hand, *The Book of Signs* gives no support for the symbology of the "broken cross" supposedly constructed by the emperor Nero for the crucifixion of the apostle Peter. Peter was crucified upside down on an inverted — not a broken — cross (see below), referred to as the St. Peter cross. Virtually no reliable reference book so much as mentions a Nero cross. *The Book of Signs* shows none; its broken cross is called the chevron cross and is pictured at right:



II

Whatever the signs that decorated the flags and standards of those who opposed Christianity in the early centuries may have been, they have no relation to today's peace symbol. In fact, it is unlikely that they included a cross at all, for not until the reign of Constantine (313-337) was the cross officially used as a Christian symbol. Furthermore, the cross is one of the earliest known signs and is found everywhere — quite apart from Christianity. In pre-Christian days it was frequently used on coins and medals.

Nonetheless, propaganda efforts by the far right have resulted in the labeling of the peace symbol as the sign of the antichrist. Writing in an American Opinion Library Publication titled *Peace Symbols: The Truth about Those Strange Signs* (June 1970), David E. Gumaer makes this unscholarly statement in support of the notion that the symbol is of evil origin:

According to the voluminous records of Nestorius, the Syrian, Patriarch of Constantinople (438-431 A.D.), the deranged Emperor [Nero] is said to have designed and had constructed a cross, the arms of which were broken, upon which St. Peter was then crucified to death and burned — upside down. From that date, the "Nero cross" was known as the sign of the "Broken Jew" or the "symbol of the Antichrist."

Does that statement constitute evidence that the "broken cross" is to be

Witches' ceremony in park brews trouble with police

CLARK MORPHEW STAFF WRITER

The witches say they were only trying to practice their religion. The St. Paul police say they were breaking the law.

Now a dozen witches are charging that St. Paul police interrupted a recent mid-summer religious ceremony the witches were conducting in a park last Friday. Some of the officers pulled their pistols, ridiculed their religion and ordered the witches to stop the ritual and leave a public area, the witches charge.

The witches, who are members of the Minnesota Church of Wicca, said they intend to file a complaint with the St. Paul Police Department, asking officials

to educate their officers about non-traditional religious groups.

WITCHES CONTINUED ON 6A ▶

"We've been holding outdoor rituals for 20 years in other parks," said the church's high priest, who would identify himself only by his magic or Wiccan name of Bertrand. "People watch us all the time — even some police in Minneapolis watched us one night. We've never had any antagonism."

But police say the witches broke the law and officers were only responding to citizen complaints. Police spokesman Paul Adelmann confirmed that officers pulled their guns on the group's high priest when they spotted his ceremonial dagger, but Adelmann denied the police were trying to prevent the witches from practicing their religion.

RICHARD MARSHALL/PIONEER PRESS

Wiccan priestess Hilary Peil was among those present when St. Paul police interrupted a midsummer ritual at Hidden Falls Park last week.

ST. PAUL (MN) PIONEER PRESS

WED 7 AUG 1991 P. 1A



WITCHES

▼ CONTINUED FROM 1A

"The problem had nothing to do with religion," Adelmann said. "First, there was wine in the park. Two, the ceremonial daggers can easily be misconstrued as weapons in a dark, wooded area. The third problem is that this group had some people who were trying to control access to the fire ring area."

Hilary Pell, 35, a priestess of the Minnesota Church of Wicca, said the group was gathered around a secluded campfire at Hidden Falls Park in the Highland Park area Friday night when the police arrived. The fire was built within a stone circle around which 12 participants, some robed, were conducting a ritual.

Bertrand, the high priest, said the group was celebrating Lammas, or Lughnicht, an ancient pagan ritual that celebrates the harvesting of the first crops of the summer. The ceremony is also a commemoration of the mystic marriage of the God and Goddess, who are considered the foundational deities of Wicca.

Pell said the police officers seemed to imply that the group was conducting a Satanist ritual.

"They asked me, 'Do you worship the devil?'" Pell said. She said she told them she did not, since Satan is a Christian concept. Wicca is an old English name that can be translated as "witch." But followers of Wicca say they do not believe in Satan nor do they cast spells against people. The religion, which is derived from ancient pagan beliefs, focuses on the care of the Earth.

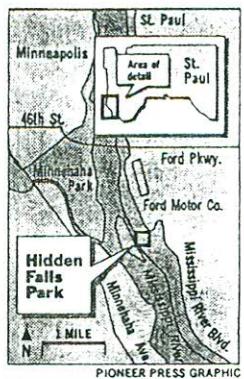
The officers then allegedly asked Pell if she believed in Jesus Christ. She said she believed in the God and Goddess because "there has to be a balance between male and female... so Jesus by himself is insufficient."

Adelmann said a single officer initially responded to a request by a park ranger, who said a religious group was controlling access to the public fire ring area. The ranger told police that people had complained about ritual chanting.

The officer approached the secluded area about 9:30 p.m. and Adelmann said by that time the park was dark except for the light from the witches' fire. After surveying the scene, the officer called three or four more officers before confronting the group, Adelmann said. The witches contend that they were surrounded by 13 officers.

When the officers arrived at the fire ring area, Bertrand was leading the group's liturgy and had his ritual dagger or "athame" — actually a letter opener — in his hand. Allegedly, when Bertrand saw the police, he automatically "cut out of the circle" — literally cutting a door in the air to open the invisible psychic shield that the witches believe they create in their ceremony.

The action apparently alarmed police and Bertrand said two offi-



cers pulled their guns from their holsters. The officers told him they thought he was brandishing a knife, Bertrand said.

Bertrand said when he asked the officers to leave, because the circle around the fire was "sacred space," one of them refused, saying he had a "sacred gun."

Bertrand said he identified himself as the high priest of the Minnesota Church of Wicca, a bona fide church registered in the state of Minnesota.

An officer allegedly replied that he was the "high priest of the police department," Bertrand said.

Bertrand said he admits breaking the law when he brought the wine into the park. And he can understand how the police might mistake a ritual dagger for a weapon, even if it is a letter opener.

But he denies that any Wiccans were threatening people or denying them access to the fire ring area.

Adelmann said no arrests were made and no one was injured.

"Ceremonial daggers at 10 at night in a park can tend to alarm people," Adelmann said. "So when people call we respond. We were not interfering with their religious rights. Our officers are not in the habit of harassing religious groups."

Pell, who has been a witch since 1984 and has conducted rituals at Hidden Falls Park in the past, believes the officers had "singularly poor" information about Wicca and that they believed they had come upon a Satanist ritual.

"What an enormous misuse of taxpayer's money to dispatch 13 officers to disperse a peaceful religious gathering," she said.



Police and top witch are charmed

By Conrad deFiebre
Staff Writer

What began with drawn guns and daggers around a ceremonial fire ring ended over coffee at Embers as the Minnesota Church of Wicca and the St. Paul Police Department called a truce in their dispute over freedom of religion in the city's parks.

Sgt. Vern Lee, occult crimes expert in the police special investigations unit, and Bertram, the high priest of Minnesota's 100 or so practitioners of Wiccan witchcraft, came away from their peace talks bubbling with praise for each other.

"He seemed like a nice guy," Lee said Wednesday. "He even put me on the mailing list for their newsletter."

Replied Bertram, aka Philip Flom, 57, a Minneapolis janitorial-service entrepreneur: "He really should be in public relations. If we had dealt with anyone like him in the first place, this never would have happened."

What happened at St. Paul's Hidden Falls Park shortly after 9 p.m. Friday was unprecedented in Wicca's 20-year Minnesota history, Bertram said: The cops busted a harvest ceremony, and none too tactfully.

One St. Paul officer was especially intolerant of the ritual involving, among other things, patio torches, a sword, a bell, a gallon jug of wine and a dozen robed witches, Bertram said.

St. Paul sergeant, Wiccan leader make amends after park dispute

"I tried to tell him this was sacred space, and he talked about his sacred gun," Bertram said. "He really ridiculed us. They completely disrupted the ritual."

The officers accused them of being satanists. "An all-evil god doesn't fit our concept of religion," Bertram said. "Worse, the police photographed and identified them before dispersing the group without charges. 'We don't seek personal notoriety for our craft,'" he said.

And Wicca hasn't gotten much in the past. In 40 rites in Twin Cities public parks over the past two decades, the worst disruptions came from catcalling drunks, Bertram said.

"Every so often we'll have the police stop by and watch for a while," he said. "They're usually quite respectful, even to the point of turning down their radios."

Not Friday night, the first time the Wiccans had gathered in St. Paul Park rangers approached the group, then called the police. When officers spotted Bertram making ritual gestures with his ceremonial dagger — actually an ornate letter-opener — they drew their service pistols. It made for an awkward moment, Bertram said.

"There was a lot of misunderstanding on both sides," Lee said. "Our people don't generally stumble into that sort of thing. If they were called to the cathedral and high mass was going on, they'd probably be familiar with that. You have to assume the worst. It was kind of scary and it wasn't Halloween. It is somewhat secretive." Later the witches drove

downtown to lodge a complaint with the police watch commander. That led to Monday's meeting with Lee at the Embers.

Lee and Bertram both said that if the group returns to St. Paul it will notify park officials beforehand. "I'm pretty sure there'll be more understanding the next time around," Bertram said.

Lee said he could appreciate the Wiccans' outrage. "I belong to a Masonic lodge and the Shrine," he said. "You don't walk into those meetings."

