

Man charged in kin's death

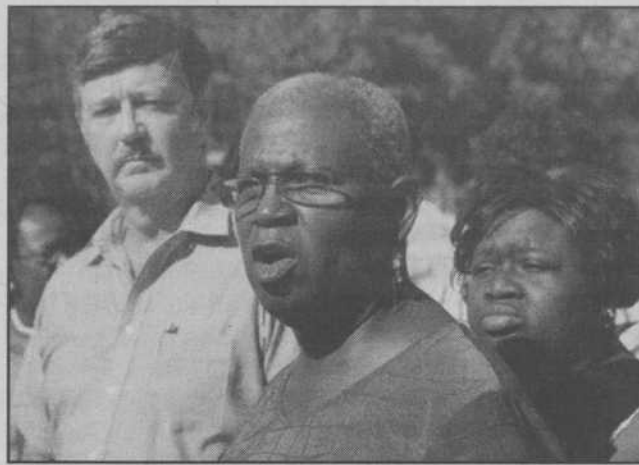
NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP)—A man was charged Sunday with murdering his wife and her four children in a domestic dispute at their home, authorities said.

Michael Simmons, 41, appeared at a bond hearing via video link from the Charleston County jail on Sunday and was ordered held without bond on five counts of murder.

Officers discovered the bodies, including that of a 6-year-old, on Saturday after a witness saw the bodies in the home and called police, according to a police affidavit. Simmons was captured as he tried to drive from the scene.

The victims had been shot with a handgun sometime between 3 a.m. and 5:45 a.m., the affidavit said. Simmons was not the children's father, Charleston County Coroner Rae Wooten said.

Simmons and Detra



Melba Rainey Thompson, center, the sister of slaying victim Detra Rainey Simmons, is surrounded by family and friends as she addresses the media on Sunday in West Ashley, S.C. Shown with Thompson, from left, are Detra Simmons' brother-in-law, Gene Fanning, and niece, Jamie Seaward.

Rainey Simmons had been married for more than a year, authorities and her relatives said. "This appears to have been a domestic situation that turned deadly," said Spencer Pryor, a North Charleston police spokesman.

Melba Rainey Thompson said her sister worked at a

hospital, was attending nursing school and was undergoing the second phase of chemotherapy for colon cancer.

"Her children were always there for her to comfort her when she went through the pain," Thompson said.

The coroner had earlier identified the victims as

Detra Rainey, 39, and her children William Rainey, 16, Hakiem Rainey, 13, Malachia Robinson, 8, and Samenia Robinson, 6. Rainey Simmons had a fifth child, 21-year-old Christan, who attends Southern University in Louisiana, relatives said.

The family belonged to St. Andrews Episcopal Mission, where the children attended vacation Bible school and sang in the choir, relatives said.

"Words can't express the impact this has had on our family," relative Gene Fanning said at the bond hearing. "It's a devastating loss. We want him held fully accountable for his actions."

Fanning said later that Simmons was disabled and unemployed. The jail did not have any attorney information for Simmons.

Monique Singleton, who lives across the street in the subdivision of about two dozen mobile homes, said that four children lived in the home and that her children occasionally played with them.

"They were nice people; they seemed fine," she said.

Fraud allegations trip up voting rights group

By Andrew Welsh Huggins
Special to Sentinel-Voice

An advocacy group that registered more than a million voters two years ago is facing new allegations of voter fraud and sloppy work just weeks before crucial midterm elections.

Philadelphia's municipal voter registration office has rejected about 3,000 cards submitted by ACORN — the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now — since April because of missing information or invalid addresses.

Denver County election officials forwarded about 200 cards to the secretary of state's office after finding similar handwriting on signatures.

In Ohio, election officials in three of the state's largest counties have cited problems with hundreds of voter registration cards. ACORN is accused of submitting cards with nonexistent addresses, forged signatures and, in one case, for someone who died seven years ago.

"In my opinion, there's a lot of words but little action in terms of fixing the problem," said Matt Damschroder, elections board director in Franklin County, Ohio.

ACORN, which has about 220,000 members nationally, registered 1.2 million people

to vote in 2004 and is running voter registration drives in 17 states this year.

The nonprofit group dispatches workers and volunteers to poor neighborhoods, gas stations, courthouses and other places to sign up new voters.

Although it is nonpartisan, ACORN recruits new voters in heavily Democratic poor and minority neighborhoods. The group says those areas are the most underrepresented in the political process.

Republicans are among ACORN's loudest critics. Ohio GOP chairman Bob Bennett says the group is "notorious for abusing Ohio election laws."

Democrats largely support its work. In July, Hillary Rodham Clinton, a potential 2008 Democratic presidential candidate, addressed the group's national convention in Columbus.

Democrats hope to regain control of the U.S. House and narrow or erase the GOP majority in the Senate on Nov. 7.

ACORN was accused of submitting questionable voter registration cards in 2004 in Ohio, Florida, Minnesota, North Carolina and Virginia, and in 2003 in Missouri. Prosecution is rare, and federal lawsuits accusing the group of fraud were dis-

missed in Florida.

ACORN says it's working to reduce problems, and officials of the New Orleans-based group promise to fire any worker found committing fraud.

"ACORN does not commit voter fraud," national president Maude Hurd said in a statement Monday. "We work hard to bring new people into the democratic process and work to maintain good quality control."

Such statements do little to appease critics. Even groups supporting the organization's efforts question why fraud allegations keep cropping up.

"They're sort of their own worst enemy," said Bill Faith, who directs Ohio's largest homeless advocacy group and shares many of ACORN's goals.

"They want low-income people to register to vote but because of the kind of problems that come from their program, it provokes a reaction from the Legislature that actually makes it harder to run such programs," Faith said.

The Denver Election Commission says it's been unsuccessful in working with ACORN to reduce problems with voter registration cards. Colorado officials had investigated similar concerns

(See ACORN, Page 4)

Governor: White Masons inclusive

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) - Gov. Bob Riley is defending his membership in a Masonic organization that critics say excludes Blacks.

Riley, a Republican running for re-election against Democratic Lt. Gov. Lucy Baxley, is a member of a Masonic lodge in his east Alabama hometown of Ashland. It is affiliated with the Grand Lodge of Alabama, a statewide group.

Speaking in an interview with The Associated Press, Riley said he did not know whether his lodge had any Black members. But Riley denied that the Masonic group is racist.

Riley's membership in the Masons has been mentioned on Internet blogs and was a hot topic on a Birmingham-based radio talk show hosted by Russ and Dee Fine, Baxley supporters who claim they were fired earlier this week in part because they pointed it out.

Dee Fine said a governor shouldn't be a member of an all-White group, adding, "If nothing else it's surely not politically astute."

The head of the Grand Lodge of Alabama, Grand Master Frank W. Little, said he knows of no Blacks among its 32,000 members. The group has 318 lodges and accepts new members by applications and referrals from other members. The organization has an affiliated women's group called the Order of the Eastern Star.

Little denied that there is anything in the organization's current constitution or edicts to prevent a Black from joining.

"To my knowledge I don't know of any Black who's ever applied for membership in the Grand Lodge," he said. "Is there anything that would prevent them? No. As the grand master, if I heard of any lodge that denied a man membership because of his race, they wouldn't

(See Unit, Page 14)

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