

Drayton: He, Darryl Hunt and Sammy Mitchell beat Arthur Wilson to death

By L.A.A. WILLIAMS
Chronicle Staff Writer

Merritt William Drayton culminated a day-long preliminary hearing Monday by saying that he, Darryl E. Hunt and Sammy L. Mitchell beat a man to death with an ax handle in September 1983.

District Court Judge R. Kason Keiger found probable cause to bind over the three to Superior Court to be tried for the Sept. 17, 1983, murder of 57-year-old Arthur Wilson.

Wilson was found dead on that date in the 1700 block of Claremont Avenue at 2:30 a.m. He died of injuries to the head.

The three men were charged three weeks ago with the murder.

After listening to the testimony of six state witnesses at the hearing, Drayton decided, against the advice of his attorneys, to take the stand and tell his story.

"Everyone else is saying what happened, but I'm the one who's going to have to deal with it," he said.

Drayton said he told Detective R. A. Spillman at the Forsyth County Jail on April 9 that he had witnessed a killing on Claremont Avenue. He gave two statements on April 11 to Detective Teresa H. Hicks.

Earlier in the hearing, Ms. Hicks had read the two statements from Drayton saying that he, Mitchell and Hunt had robbed and beaten Wilson.

Drayton wanted to clear his conscience, lay everything on the table and get it over with, Ms. Hicks said under cross-examination.

Drayton said in the statements that, on the night of the crime, Mitchell had gotten into an argument with Wilson at a Claremont Avenue drink house owned by Ezell Clowers. Mitchell was angry, Drayton said, because Wilson, who was flashing money and buying drinks for everyone, would not buy Mitchell and Hunt drinks. Mitchell and Hunt called him into a bathroom and proposed robbing Wilson, Drayton said.

Drayton left the house with his common-law wife Anna "Mattie" Marie Davis to escort Wilson to another drink house on Claremont owned by "Red" Moseley, he said. Mitchell and Hunt followed them.

Less than a block away from the house, Mitchell clotheslined Wilson and started to beat him with an ax handle, Drayton said. Hunt, he said, kicked Wilson to the head and body. Drayton said he hit Wilson three times at Mitchell's instruction, "to get him to move his arm."

Drayton said later under cross-examination that Mitchell beat Wilson for "about 10 minutes," until the blows sounded "mushy-like."

The three men ran when a car approached, Drayton said. He



Darryl Eugene Hunt

said he and Mitchell then returned to the drink house while Hunt went to Mitchell's house. The incident occurred between 1:30 and 1:45 a.m., he said.

Drayton said he was paid \$25 by Mitchell when they returned to the drink house. He said a total of \$105 was taken from Wilson.

Drayton testified under cross-examination from Hunt defense lawyer James E. Ferguson II that he had been "kind of persuaded" to come forward about the crime. He said he started to come forward several times but changed his mind. He said he had also changed his mind several times since giving the statement to the police.

He said he thought about not



Sammy Lee Mitchell

going through with it because he feared for the life of Ms. Davis, who is one of the prosecution's witnesses. After police assured him that Ms. Davis would not be harmed, he decided to go through with it, he said.

In the most bizarre part of his testimony, Drayton, under cross-examination from one of Mitchell's attorneys, George A. Bedsworth, said he had written a letter to Ms. Davis from the jail saying that he wanted to die. "I told her I might die because of it (his testimony), but I wanted to do it anyway," he said.

Drayton later gave Ferguson a letter out of his pocket that said that he had decided Monday that he would die. When Ferguson entered the letter as evidence, Drayton asked, "May I please have it back?" Drayton's defense lawyers objected but Keiger admitted it as evidence.

Ferguson asked Drayton if one of the reasons he wanted to die was because Ms. Davis had told him she was leaving him. "Regardless," Drayton said, "I've made up my mind to live or die."

Drayton insisted later that he was not looking to make any deals with the district attorney

and was prepared to accept the death penalty.

"I'm not scared," he told Ferguson.

Detective Hicks also testified that Drayton led police to the stick that Mitchell allegedly used in the beating, during a consent search of Drayton's Claremont Avenue apartment. The stick has been sent to the State Bureau of Investigation lab in Raleigh for tests.

Ms. Hicks also revealed under cross-examination that Hunt and Mitchell's name had come up in the original investigation as a result of an anonymous Crimestoppers tip. Police had interviewed three witnesses in the original investigation who saw three black men beating Wilson while they were passing in an automobile. None of the witnesses could identify the assailants.

Police Sgt. Michael V. McCoy, the state's first witness, testified, however, that three of the original witnesses have given different testimony in the last month.

Hunt and Drayton were both in prison at the time of their arrests.

Hunt was serving a life sentence after being convicted in June of the August 1984 rape and murder of newspaper copy editor Deborah B. Sykes. A city manager's review of Hunt's arrest and prosecution for Mrs. Sykes' murder criticized the department's murder case management, and led to the reinvestigation of eight unsolved murders. Wilson's murder was one of the eight.

Drayton was in the Forsyth County Jail after being arrested March 19 and being charged with manslaughter in the death of Mary Annette Smith two days earlier.

Many Hunt supporters were among the more than 50 people on hand at the hearing. His sup-

porters maintain that Hunt, who is black, was railroaded for the death of Mrs. Sykes, who was white. They maintain that the new charges were part of District Attorney Donald K. Tisdale's attempts to improve his public image on the eve of Tuesday's primary elections.

After hearing the opening testimony of police Sgt. McCoy, Ferguson asked for and had Tisdale's four prosecution witnesses taken out of the courtroom. Ferguson said the witnesses should be sequestered and heard one-by-one so that none could repeat the statements of others. In the interest of fairness, Keiger replied, the witnesses should be taken out.

Barbara Jean Bason, Ms. Davis, and Patricia Ann Williams all testified that they were eyewitnesses to the crime, though none said they saw the other at the scene.

All testified they were present in the drink house, and saw the three defendants there.

Ms. Bason said she heard the three talking in the house about getting Wilson's money. She also said Mitchell had a stick with black tape around one end. She said she was walking away from the house when she saw Mitchell hit Wilson with a stick, knocking him to the ground. Hunt and Drayton kicked Wilson repeatedly, she said.

She said she ran screaming back to the house.

Ms. Davis said she left the scene after she saw Mitchell push Wilson in the chest and knock him down. She said she did not see Mitchell hit Wilson with a stick, nor did she see Bason.

Ms. Williams said she saw Mitchell hit Wilson with a stick, and Hunt kicking Wilson while she was standing just in front of the house. She said she did not see Drayton.

All three women admitted that they had been drinking heavily.

Black voters oust Tisdale

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David Drummond and former 21-year Kernersville Mayor Roger Swisher eased to victory. Drummond won 6,011 votes to Swisher's 5,535. Betty W. Crouse finished far back in third place with 3,098 votes.

In the predominantly black 67th House District, black candidate Logan Burke maintained a comfortable lead throughout the night in downing Sears manager John D. Clark, a white man, 2,769 to 1,871. Burke will face Republican Diana Williams-Henry in November.

The Republican races for the U.S. Senate and Congress appeared to contribute to the high 27.5-percent Republican turnout for the primary, which, uncharacteristically, nearly matched the 28.2-percent figure of Democratic voters.

Long-time Rep. James T. Brody won the right to face Sanford in November as he humbled Congressional Club candidate David Funderburk, 6,342-4,140. Stuart Epperson topped Lyons Gray in the 5th District Republican primary, edging his opponent by only 352 votes. Epperson will face incumbent Democrat Stephen L. Neal in November.

The race for five seats in the crowded field of 14 Democrats for city/county school board produced both suspense and certainty.

Incumbents Beaufort O. Bailey and Nancy L. Wooten ran strongly throughout the county, assuring themselves of the top two spots, and leaving six others to vie for the other three.

Incumbent Mary Margaret Lohr, Mary P. "Candy" Wood and Evelyn A. Terry grabbed the final three berths, distancing themselves by about 1,000 votes from the rest of the pack.

Officially, Bailey totalled 11,320 votes, Mrs. Wooten 10,352, Mrs. Lohr 7,438, Mrs. Wood 7,321, and Mrs. Terry 7,194. Naomi W. Jones was next with 6,231, followed by William H. "Bill" Tatum with 6,169.

The biggest surprises were the high Republican turnout, which usually runs eight to 10 percentage points behind the Democrats, and the defeats of Tisdale and Mrs. Woodruff.

Supervisor of Elections Kathie C. Cooper said signs of the Republican turnout were evident early in the day.

"When we found that the absentee ballots between Republicans and Democrats were

almost even, we knew the Republican turnout would be higher than expected," she said. Democratic absentee ballots exceeded Republican ballots 169 to 167.

Tisdale's defeat came primarily at the hands of the black community. He led most predominantly white precincts but was trounced in East Winston. Tisdale's campaign manager, William "Bill" Cofey, acknowledged that fact.

"The size of the turnout in the black community was really surprising," he said. "It was very heavy as compared to past voting records. It's one thing to get beat by 100 or 150 votes, but when you lose by 300 to 400, it's hard to make that up."

"Given the obvious problems we had all along, I thought we ran a great race."

Alderman Virginia K. Newell was part of Sparrow's campaign committee. She said Tisdale got what he deserved.

"Tisdale said he didn't need the black vote," she said. "And that's what got him defeated."

"People are saying they want justice and fairness, and Sparrow will bring a terrific amount of credibility to the office."

Mrs. Newell said she was not happy with the school board and commissioners races.

"I'm really disappointed that the black community did not get out like they should have," she said. "We should not have lost Mazie. She is a wonderful candidate and very responsive to her constituency."

Mrs. Woodruff, whom many thought would lead the Democratic voting for commissioner, said some votes in the black community were given away.

"The low turnout in the black community was the key," she said. "We gave my counterpart

some votes. We gave away plenty. You can't win in the primary like that." Mrs. Woodruff linked her campaign with Holleman's and Preston Oldham's for sheriff.

Mrs. Woodruff said after the totals were in that if the numbers were there, she would call for a runoff. She was informed shortly thereafter that both Holleman and Willard had tallied more than 50 percent of the vote, and therefore could not be involved in a runoff.

Willard, who served as a local radio newsman for 30 years, said his popularity was key to his victory.

"I believe I was successful because I'm so well-known," he said. "I've been here for 30 years in radio and TV and people have learned to trust me." Willard said he felt all along that he would either run first or second in the race. He said, however, that he expected Mrs. Woodruff to lead the voting.

"I'm really disappointed for Mazie, but she just didn't get the turnout in the city precincts," he said.

One of the problems facing Sheriff Oldham is what to do with Barker now that the election is over. Barker took a leave of absence as Oldham's chief of detectives to run for the office. He will report back to work on Monday, Oldham said.

"It's going to be one of the hardest decisions I'm going to have to make," Oldham said at the Board of Elections after the results were in.

"The issue now is, will his coming back create dissension in the operation of the department? I'll have to weigh that very carefully, seek some advice, clear my head and get away from everything for a couple of days. Then I'll make a decision."

EAST WINSTON OGBURN STATION

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Model Pharmacy 2. Pic'N'Pay (Claremont) 3. Laundry Center (Claremont) 4. Brown's Beauty 5. Etna Gas 6. Great American Foods 7. Smith Cleaners 8. Reynolds Health Center 9. Sunrise Towers 10. Special Occasions (Jetway Shop, Ctr.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 36. Laundry Center (Old Rural Hall Rd.) 37. Paragon Food Center | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 68. Amoco (Fourth & Broad) 69. Hop-In (First St.) 70. Food Fair (First St.) 71. Baptist Hospital 72. Amoco (Cloverdale) 73. Kroger 74. Hop-In (Stratford Rd.) 75. Papers & Paperbacks (Hanes Mall) 76. Crown Drugs (Hanes Mall) 77. Forsyth Hospital |
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NORTHWEST

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Merita Breadbox 12. Record Boutique 13. Minit Market (13th & Liberty) 14. Salem Seafood 15. Fairview Cleaners 16. Silver Front Cleaners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 37. Etna Gas 38. N.W. Blvd. Pantry 39. Hazel's Beauty 40. Real Food Bakery 41. Ray's Fish 42. Joe's Shop Rite (Patterson) 43. Great American Foods 44. A Cleaner World 45. Brown's Produce 46. Ervin's Beauty 47. Bojangles 48. Northside Fish Market | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 78. Rainbow News 79. Crown Drugs (Peters Creek) |
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NORTHEAST

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Gulf Gas 18. Mama Chris 19. Jamal's Grocery 20. Chandler's 21. Westbrook's 22. Minit Market (27th & Liberty) 23. Chick's Drive Inn 24. Mack's Grocery 25. 3 Girls (Northampton) 26. Shop Rite (Northampton) 27. Clean World (Carter Rd.) 28. Carver Food 29. Joe's Shop Rite (Bowen) 30. Garrett's (311) 31. Wilco Gas (311) 32. Garden Harvest 33. Bernard's 34. Jones' Grocery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 49. Eckerd Drugs 50. 1 Stop Food (Akron Dr.) 51. Food Fair (Patterson Ave. Exit) 52. Motel 6 53. Winn-Dixie 54. Ticked Pink Cleaners (Cherry St.) 55. Food Lion (University Plaza) 56. Fast Fare (Cherry St.) 57. Maytag Laundry (Cherry St.) 58. Forest Hills Curb Market 59. RJR World Headquarters (under the arch) 60. Fast Fare (30th St.) 61. Super X Drugs 62. K&W (Coliseum) 63. Golden Comb 64. Best Bookstore (Reynolds Shop. Ctr.) 65. Mr. T 66. Paw's Grocery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80. Marketplace 81. Gulf Gas (S. Broad St.) 82. Garden Harvest 83. Post Office (Waughtown Station) 84. Hop-In (Stadium Dr.) 85. Revco Drugs 86. Belview House 87. Gold Fish Bowl 88. Joe's Shop Rite (S. Main) |
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DOWNTOWN

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 89. Chronicle Office 90. Lincoln Barber 91. Post Office 92. Benton Convention Center 93. Cecelia's (Hyatt House) 94. Rite-Aid 95. Revco 96. NCNB Building 97. Wachovia (Main St.) 98. RJR Plaza 99. Brown's Restaurant 100. Forsyth Seafood 101. Sanitary Barber Shop |
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