

Local tied to church blazes

Yorktown resident, formerly of Daleville, suspected in 50 arsons throughout country

BY REX HUPPKE
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — A Yorktown man who was born and raised in Daleville admitted to setting as many as 50 church fires across the country, including seven in Indiana, according to a probable cause affidavit released Tuesday.



Ballinger

The U.S. Department of Justice announced Tuesday Jay Scott Ballinger, 36, had been arrested and charged with setting seven Indiana church fires dating back to 1994. He was being held in federal custody in Indianapolis while a multi-agency investigation continues.



Wood

U.S. Attorney Judith A. Stewart would not give information on a motive for the arsons. She said because the charges are part of a federal criminal complaint she could not comment on the investigation until formal charges were brought before a grand jury.

Two other people, including a woman court documents identify as Ballinger's girlfriend, have been charged in one of the Indiana arsons. All three are white and most of the church burnings in Indiana have involved rural churches with predominately white congregations.

Although he attended Daleville High School through 10th grade, most townspeople said they couldn't remember him. Yorkville residents contacted on Tuesday also said they didn't know of him.

Identity of suspected arsonist unfamiliar in local haunts

BY JON REITER
Staff Reporter

DALEVILLE — Residents of this town and of a neighboring town, Yorktown, don't seem to know anything about the life of Jay Scott Ballinger, 36.

The man who is thought to have participated in the burning of seven churches statewide and as many as 50 in 11 states remains an enigma in the two towns where he was born and raised.

At Mr. Mouse, a popular Yorktown tavern, no one recognizes the name. The same goes for the Interstate 69 truck stop in Daleville.

The police department, fire department, not even the local convenience stores know his story.

Ballinger's high school yearbook shows that he attended the school in 1978 as a sophomore, but doesn't show his academic progress any further than that.

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Suspect

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"When someone sets fire to a house of worship, they are not just setting fire to a building, but to an entire community," said Bill Lann Lee, assistant attorney general for the Justice Department's civil rights division.

"These fires may have scorched the structures, but they cannot sear the spirit of the communities in which the churches are located."

The arrests stemmed from the work of the National Church Arson Task Force, established by President Clinton in 1996 after a series of fires at Southern black churches. Members of the Indiana Church Arson Task Force also were involved.

An affidavit from a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agent says that searches of Ballinger's central Indiana residence turned up a gasoline container and satanic books and writings. Also found were credit card

statements showing purchases made in Indiana and other states on or about the dates of church fires in those areas.

The affidavit says Ballinger admitted to setting "a total of approximately thirty to fifty" church fires in Indiana and other states.

Jerry Singer, a special agent with the ATF, said the fires involve 11 states, including Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, Mississippi, Georgia and Alabama, all of which were mentioned in the affidavits. Singer would not identify the other four states involved.

He said that in his 21 years with the ATF, this is the largest serial arson case he's seen.

Charged with one count each of arson are Angela Wood, 24, of Atlanta, Ga., and Donald A. Puckett, 37, of Lebanon, Macon, Ga., and Puckett are being held in Indianapolis.

Cook has admitted to serving as a lookout during some of the other fires Ballinger allegedly set, according to the affidavit.

Identity

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It seems almost, at times, that no one in the area knows anything about the man.

"Boy, I wish that I could think of anything about him, but nothing comes to mind," said Ray Bayer, a seventh-grade teacher at Daleville Junior-Senior High School.

"I recognize the name from somewhere ... but I can't recall where," said Paul Garrison, superintendent of Daleville Community Schools. "I can't say that I can remember him."

"I don't even know the name at

all," said Betty Wingrove, a resident of Yorktown, a town of a little more than 2,000 residents, for 10 years.

The FBI announced Ballinger's arrest Tuesday at a press conference and said he was a resident of Yorktown.

Even his address and phone number are unlisted.

"I faintly remember him, but he didn't have any of my classes," said Gary Kirkham, an advanced science teacher at Daleville. "I don't think I would know him if I saw him."

Jon Reiter covers police stories. His e-mail address is jreiter@indol.com

ANDERSON, INDIANA

Suspect described as being a satanist

Police: Man accused in church
fires tried to recruit teen-agers

BY JR ROSS
Associated Press

DALEVILLE — A man accused of setting more than 50 church fires across the South and Midwest was described Wednesday as a satanist who once tried to recruit local teen-agers into the occult.

Daleville Police Sgt. Mark Brewer said he confronted Jay Scott Ballinger in 1994 after several parents complained that he had coaxed their children into signing contracts with the devil in blood.

"He was preying basically on these kids and brainwashing them, telling them whatever kids want to hear," said Brewer, an 11-year veteran.

He said he knew Ballinger from his arrest earlier in 1994 on charges of contributing to the delinquency of minors for allowing teen-agers to drink alcohol in his car.

Brewer drove to Ballinger's rural Delaware County home to investigate the parents' complaints. There, he confiscated about 50 satanic contracts signed in blood by teen-agers.

Brewer was later ordered by a judge to return them after Ballinger filed suit, but a teen who signed one of the contracts gave him his copy.

In that contract, which bears Ballinger's signature at the bottom, the teen agreed to: "give my body and soul to Lucifer and for all Eternity, ... I promise in blood to do all types of Evil in service to our Lord until the end of time ... In return for my soul I

Charged

The three people charged in 50 church arsons:

- Jay Scott Ballinger, 36, Yorktown
- Donald A. Puckett, 37, Lebanon
- Angela Wood, 24, Atlanta

Maximum penalties for each of the counts committed after 1996

- Up to 20 years in prison (10 years for those committed before 1996.)
- A fine of up to \$250,000
- Three years of parole after release from prison

The seven churches Ballinger is charged with burning:

- Concord Church of Christ in Boone County.
- Liberty Baptist Church in Tipton County
- Hawcreek Missionary Baptist Church in Bartholomew County
- Grace Baptist Church in Hendricks County
- Ebenezer Presbyterian Church in Rush County
- Bethel Mission Baptist Church in Putnam County
- Christian Liberty Church in Boone County.

Suspect

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shall receive Wealth, Power, Success, and Sex for the rest of my NATURAL BORN LIFE."

The document was signed in at least five different spots with what appears to be dried dabs of blood.

Brewer said Ballinger had had no other brushes with the law until he was arrested Sunday on federal charges of setting seven Indiana church fires dating back to 1994. The 37-year-old is a suspect in more than 50 church arsons across the Midwest and South.

His arrest came after an off-

duty Ball State University police officer on his way to buy his wife a birthday present Feb. 9 heard an emergency radio call between paramedics and a local hospital about a man with extensive burns.

Sgt. Steve Hiatt recognized Jay Scott Ballinger's name from a 1997 case he worked on with Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents. He drove to Ball Memorial Hospital in Muncie and interviewed Ballinger and his father.

Suspicious of Ballinger's 2-day-old burns on his face, neck, chest, legs and hands, Hiatt called ATF agents in Indianapolis the next day, and the 5-year-old

church arson investigation quickly fell into place, leading to Ballinger's arrest.

"It was a matter of luck," said Hiatt, an 18-year veteran. "It really came as a shot out of the dark."

In searches earlier this month of Ballinger's father's residence in rural Delaware County about 40 miles northeast of Indianapolis, agents found satanic books and writings, according to a probable cause affidavit. At least one of the churches Ballinger is accused of burning was desecrated with satanic graffiti.

People in Yorktown and nearby Daleville, where Ballinger attended high school in the 1970s, recall

him as a long-haired teen-ager who went by "Scotty" before he left town more than 20 years ago.

Sitting at a bar on the outskirts of Daleville on Wednesday afternoon, Sally Moon remembered Ballinger as a "rather strange kid" who used to come over to her house while he was in high school to play guitar with her son.

"All he cared about was music. All this other stuff about the occult has been since then," Moon said. "It's all rumor to me."

Investigators have linked Ballinger to fires in 11 states, including Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, Mississippi, Georgia and Alabama. Authorities have

declined to identify the other four states involved. ATF special agent Jerry Singer said investigators still were trying to correlate trips taken by Ballinger with church arsons in the other states.

"There's a lot more work to be done, but we feel we're on the right track," he said.

The Rev. John W. McKay lost his Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Fillmore in Putnam County about 40 miles southwest of Indianapolis after a Nov. 20, 1998, arson fire left it heavily damaged.

McKay, who now lives in Madison and preaches at the North Madison Baptist Church,

said he was relieved to hear of Ballinger's arrest for arson fires at his former church and six others in Indiana.

"It was really terrible that someone would intentionally damage God's house," McKay said. "That church was a community church. People around there saw it as an important landmark."

Still, McKay said he won't be satisfied until he understands the motive behind the arson.

"There has to be some reason why he would do that," McKay said. "That's something that would be good to know because it might stop similar situations in the future."

Shock remains in small-town Daleville

BY JON REITER
Staff Reporter

Suspect

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DALEVILLE — Residents in this small town remained shocked by the news that one of its residents, Jay Ballinger, confessed to setting off fires which have destroyed seven churches in the state of Indiana and several others across the country.

"Of all places for someone like that to come from, it's hard to believe that it would be here," 15-year-old resident Justin Symmes said.

"I can't believe that he would burn down churches," 16-year-old Wes Baker said. "To burn down a shack is one thing, but if you burn down a church, you've got some serious problems."

Others agree with Baker. Talk to people in Daleville about Ballinger, and you're likely to hear that the 37-year-old man was an irritable loner who dabbled in Satanism.

"He's always been an outlaw," Oren Johnson, who knows Ballinger, said Saturday afternoon at Elliot's Tavern in Daleville, "and I don't think he's been a consistent resident. But he sure hasn't been a perfect resident."

Johnson said that despite the fact that he characterized Johnson as an outlaw, "he was a meek and mild guy. He never really was the threatening type. I never really saw him as a threat or as being the gangster type."

"He didn't have a whole lot of lady friends, and he kind of stayed secluded, by himself. He wasn't much of a conversationalist."

Ballinger, 36, is considered a "no information" patient at Wishard, and a condition report was not available.

He was admitted there after Delaware County paramedics were called to his parents' home. He told them he had received the burns from a bonfire. Off-duty Ball State University police officer Steve Hiatt overheard the emergency call from the paramedics and said Ballinger's name triggered memories of a 1997 investigation.

Hiatt questioned Ballinger at Ball Memorial Hospital, where he was first treated for severe burns to his face, chest, legs and hands. Hiatt also called ATF agents, who confiscated satanic books and other satanic items, as well as a gasoline container, at Ballinger's home.

Ballinger, who was known by his nickname "Scotty" locally, attended Daleville High School, where he dropped out in 1990 when he was 18, authorities said. He played guitar in a rock band, which may have provided some of the charisma he is alleged to have used to coax

Still, not that many people in town know of Ballinger, and many admit they only know him by what they've read in the newspaper or see on television.

The bartender at Elliot's, Max Tilley, said he worries about the perception the rest of the state has

younger teens to join his devil's cult.

"You remember how it was when you were that age," Brewer said Friday. "They didn't see the negatives with Ballinger. All they saw was somebody who said, 'I can get you beer and all that kind of thing,' and it sounds pretty good."

The so-called blood-oath contracts the teens signed promised their souls in exchange for material wealth, incredible power and even sex.

"We sat down with the kids and their parents right away," Brewer said. "It stopped because he knew we were keeping an eye on him."

Reports of satanic worship or cult activities in the Daleville area have not recurred since that time, Brewer said.

Ballinger's only area arrest as an adult was in 1994, in Daleville, when he was cited for providing alcohol to minors.

"Some of the people who have recently talked to the media are having some regrets," Brewer said of the community that has been besieged by media. "Some of them were really young at the time it was happening and they just don't want to go through all that again."

Brewer said he believed one of

about the town because of the media attention surrounding Ballinger's case.

"You never know. They might say he was in a cult," he said. "I'm just shocked something like this took place."

Still, residents say they like

Ballinger's associates from his recruiting days is incarcerated at the Youth Opportunity Center in Muncie.

That could not be confirmed by late Saturday.

Even those who did not know Ballinger, such as Chesterfield Town Council member Jay Mier, said they couldn't believe someone in this area could be connected to the arsons in Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Ohio and Tennessee.

Ballinger has told authorities he burned churches in those states.

Georgia State Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner John Oxendine said he has evidence linking Ballinger and his stripper girlfriend Angela Wood, 24, of Atlanta — to a New Year's fire in Banks County, Ga., in which a firefighter was killed, and four other church fires set in December and January. Loy Williams, 27, of Bold Springs, Ga., was killed during a fire at the 100-year-old New Salem United Methodist Church when the roof collapsed on him.

A third suspect, Donald A. Puckett, 37, of Lebanon also is in custody, but Oxendine said he doesn't believe Puckett is connected to the Georgia fires.

living in Daleville, and despite the previous week, it's normally quiet and peaceful.

"I like living in a small city," Baker said.

"The schools are easy to get to and everybody gets along pretty well."

Indicators of trouble ahead not apparent

As link between suspected arsonist, Pike's Peak Church probed, Daleville authorities investigating satanic activity

BY ANITA MUNSON
Staff Reporter

DALEVILLE — There was nothing to indicate to authorities five years ago Jay Scott "Scotty" Ballinger's devil worship would lead to him being the prime suspect in the arsons of up to 50 churches across the country.

Daleville police Sgt. Mark Brewer said Ballinger's recruitment of up to 20 area teenagers ages 13 to 16 was stopped dead in its tracks as soon as it was discovered.

"I had nothing to indicate it would come to this," Brewer said.

■ The sight of a worn U.S. flag can dampen patriotism; caring for flags/A3

"We stopped it as quick as it started."

Ballinger, Brewer said, was raised about a mile east of the incorporated town of Daleville. Ironically, the location is near the Pike's Peak Church, which burned at the hands of an arsonist.

"That's one of the first things you think of," Brewer said, contemplating a possible link between Ballinger and the local fire.

Brewer's clash with federal authorities from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms — the agency in whose custody Ballinger remains while being treated for burns at Wishard Hospital in Indianapolis — is completed, he said, and he doesn't know if Pike's Peak will be included in the investigation.

Local

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Deaths 5

Ex-cop accuses councilman of slander

DALEVILLE: Remarks after council meeting being questioned.

By **SETH SLABAUGH**
The Star Press

DALEVILLE — A former police officer has filed a tort claim alleging he was slandered by a town council member.

Mark Brewer, 36, is seeking at least \$100,000 in damages from the town.

Brewer claims council member Michael Murphy on Feb. 1 falsely and maliciously stated Brewer had sexual relations with a married Daleville woman.

Murphy reportedly made the statement to Brewer, Daleville Town Marshal James Orr and other officers before and after a town council meeting.

Brewer was divorced and a policeman at the time but has since quit the department to take a better-paying job in the

private sector.

Relations between Murphy and the police department were strained when officers opposed Murphy in the 1995 town elections. Officers believe they are underpaid and funding for police equipment is insufficient.

Orr said in an interview Tuesday that he broke up a Feb. 1 discussion between Brewer and Murphy after it became "louder and louder." Brewer threatened to ticket Murphy if he was caught speeding, and Murphy

threatened to freeze Brewer's salary, Orr said.

Murphy told The Star Press Tuesday the incident had been blown way out of proportion.

"A citizen had approached me and said Brewer's car had been seen several times in front of a married woman's house," Murphy said. "I didn't think there was anything to it in the first place, but felt it was my obligation to verify" the accusation, which, if true, would have placed Brewer on "morally shaky

ground," Murphy said.

Murphy said he felt it was his obligation to investigate concerns expressed by citizens, such as a recent report of town employees spending time at a tavern. Murphy's investigation of that concern showed employees were eating lunch at the tavern, but not drinking.

The town has 90 days to approve or deny Brewer's claim. If it is denied, Brewer and his attorney, Michael Painter, can initiate a lawsuit.

August 5, 1999

The Herald Bulletin

Daleville dumps Chesterfield water supply

BY ANITA MUNSON

Staff Reporter

CHESTERFIELD - Daleville will stop getting its water from Chesterfield in about 90 days.

Daleville sent Chesterfield its notice through correspondence from Daleville Town Attorney Philip Decker II. While news of the separation from Chesterfield's water lines was not a surprise, the claim that Chesterfield didn't want to negotiate a backup water source contract was.

"This is not true," Chesterfield Town Attorney William Kreegar said.

"We haven't been given the opportunity," Buddy Patterson, Chesterfield town councilman added. "We've never denied them the opportunity to negotiate with us."

Council president Don Carpenter said the letter from Decker was the first time the topic had been broached by Daleville, and that the Chesterfield council would be willing to negotiate.

Daleville residents have used water from Chesterfield's lines for about eight years, Carpenter said. "The outlet mall over there on I-69 (Indiana Factory Shops) wouldn't be in operation without Chesterfield water."

Carpenter said Daleville, at the time it decided to use water from Chesterfield, had begun to place water lines for its residents. The cost of a water tower and other required equipment to complete Daleville's water independence was a consideration at that time, he said.

Jack Sater, Daleville water commissioner, did not return calls for comment. A town spokesman said residents should expect to be on Daleville's system by the end of October.

Chesterfield raised rates to both towns' residents effective in January this year, from 68 cents per 1,000 gallons to 94 cents per 1,000 gallons, Chesterfield Clerk-treasurer Reggie Horner said. One of the factors in the increase was to offset the loss of revenues when Daleville's system was put in place.

In the council meeting Monday night, Horner said Daleville has continued to pay its bills at the old rate. He displayed copies of payments in which the new rate had been crossed out and the old rate written in.

Carpenter asked about the possibility of charging a late fee, possibly 3 percent of the outstanding balance, on the difference between the bills and the amount actually paid by Daleville. Kreegar said he would need to review the contract to see if that was included.

"We want to be a good neighbor with them, but it's not fair to people in Chesterfield to pay a higher rate than they're (Daleville) paying," Carpenter said.

Carpenter said the council plans to negotiate with Daleville officials to provide a back-up water source, a plan the Environmental Protection Agency supports among small towns, as soon as possible. He said Kreegar and Decker already had spoken about the matter.

Anita Munson covers Chesterfield news. Her e-mail address is amunson@indol.com