

Dan Gunn remembered as friendly, hard working farmer

By RENEE PENN
Sun Staff Writer

Former Warner Robins police chief W.H. "Pip" Rape first met peach farmer Dan Gunn Jr. 50 years ago when the then 18-year-old Gunn moved to Houston County from Monticello.

"He was one of the hardest working young men I had ever known," Rape recalled. "He worked seven days and nights to get his farm in shape and keep it that way."

Rape, like many others in the community, was "shocked" by the death Monday night of the well-known peach farmer.

According to an autopsy report, the 68-year-old Gunn died of a single gunshot wound to the abdomen. His body was discovered in the bedroom of his home on U.S. 41 by lawmen, who had received a telephone call from someone who reported hearing gunshots fired near the Gunn residence about 11 p.m.

Gunn, who was dead when officers arrived, was lying in a bedroom of his brick home, clothed only in his underwear, officers said.

Lt. Harry Enckler, an investigator with the Houston County Sheriff's Department, said officers believe Gunn, who lived alone, was shot once with a small caliber pistol. The weapon has not been recovered, he added. There was no sign of a struggle in the house, and Gunn's body was not bruised or cut, Enckler said.

When officers arrived at the home, they discovered a screen torn from one window, and a side door was unlocked, Enckler said. Burglary is a possible motive for the slaying, and authorities now are searching the home to see if anything is missing, according to the investigator.

"We have no suspects at this time," Enckler said today.



Sun Photo By Jill Guttman

Sgt. George Oldham of the Houston County Sheriff's Department talks to

Gunn, who lived approximately one mile west of Centerville but had a Byron postal address, first came to Houston County half a century ago with his family, which eventually owned more than 3,500 acres of farm land near Byron, according to friends, but nearly nine years ago the property was divided among Gunn and his brother and sisters.

neighbors of Dan Gunn's at the late peach farmer's house.

Gunn's share was believed to be nearly 2,000 acres of farm land where he grew peaches, wheat, oats, peanuts and corn. He was the owner and operator of Dan Gunn Farms and Packing House, located one-half mile from his home.

"He knew as much about peach farming as any man growing peaches," the 71-year-old Rape said of his

long-time friend.

"Dan was a good farmer and well-known figure in the peach-growing industry," added Houston County extension agent Emmet Wheelchel, who met Gunn 18 years ago. "At one time the Gunns owned one of the largest peach orchards in the state."

Gunn's peach farm was considered one of the largest in Middle Georgia.

Byron farmer Arthur White Sr., father of Houston County Commissioner Arthur White Jr., called Gunn "one of the best friends I've ever had. I've known him nearly 50 years."

"There never lived a better neighbor," said White, who lives approximately one mile from the Gunn home. "He was a good fellow. I was shocked to hear of his death."

Another neighbor, Berry Segraves, said Gunn "had one of the largest and most successful peach groves in Middle Georgia. He always was quite helpful to others. He was very likeable, and he seemed well respected by others."

Gunn's funeral was to be at 4 p.m. today in Snow's Memorial Chapel in Macon. Burial was to be in Riverside Cemetery in Macon. The Rev. Mobley Cross and the Rev. Sydney Odom were to officiate.

A native of Jasper County, Gunn was a member of the Georgia Farm Bureau and the Georgia Peach Council. He was a Methodist.

Survivors include a son, Dan Gunn III of Byron; a daughter, Edwina Williams of Byron; his mother, Mrs. Dan Gunn of Monticello; a brother, Otis B. Gunn of Hilton Head, S.C.; three sisters, Frances G. Roberts and Martha Jordan, both of Monticello, and Mary Brown Coffee of Eastman; a granddaughter, Dana Odom of Byron; a stepgranddaughter, Dwana Williams of Byron.

The family will be at 351 U.S. 41.

The authorities drove and trampled over any evidence, as the photo shows. Tire tracks, footprints and other evidence that could now be used with newer sophisticated crime solving methods.

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What happened to the crime scene evidence that was gathered? The photographs taken at the crime scene would contradict the statements the sheriff's officials gave to the media at the time. Protocol standards and guidelines were never adhered to. The immediate and outlying areas of the rural property were never secured to prevent any evidence from being disturbed or contaminated. Why did sheriff's officials refuse G.B.I. assistance, stating at the time "they did not want an outside agency involved" and would not cooperate with them on the case? Someone should be held accountable for these decisions and be required to answer questions of what happened to any scene evidence that was gathered. These gaffs are likely why the case has not been solved and what authorities wish to prevent from becoming public knowledge. Was the crime preserved in the first place and if so where is the evidence? Have sheriff officials since lost the scene evidence?

Is it possible that a "citizen's review panel" could look into how this case was conducted? Oh, that's right. officials in Houston County are a self contained judiciary system and are so ethical, that they are above oversight by a lowly civil review of their activities by a group of common everyday citizens.

Any critical look at this investigation will show that Houston County officials have demonstrated an egregious and willful indifference to standard investigative protocol, acting with outright intentional disregard of accountability. Justice delayed is most certainly justice denied, going on thirty years is another day justice is denied. The years this case has gone cold are more years than most prison sentences except for the most despicable crimes.

This severely flawed cold case is a "travesty of justice." The only way true justice will prevail in this bungled case is if midstate and Houston County citizens take note and pressure government officials to uncover what went wrong in this case. This should be undertaken with no regard with what the truth would expose about how this case has been conducted.