

Four Murders Closed

Questions Remain In Meirhofer Case

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The case is closed on four Gallatin County murders, but some nagging loose ends remain.

County Attorney Thomas Olson said today the investigation into those slayings is now complete, and evidence indicates that all four were committed by David G. Meirhofer, 25, a Manhattan handyman and contractor who confessed Sunday to the bizarre murders.

Olson said the investigation indicates there were no accomplices to the slayings, that Meirhofer acted alone, and as he (Meirhofer) admitted, actually killed two young boys, a young girl and a 19-year-old woman since 1967.

Meirhofer was arrested Friday after a long investigation by federal, state and local authorities. His confession Sunday tied together four unsolved slayings in the county, and raised speculation about his link to several other bizarre murders in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. Authorities said Meirhofer committed suicide by hanging in the county jail Sunday.

Meirhofer confessed to the slaying of Susan Jaeger, a Farmington, Mich., girl who was taken from her tent at the Headwaters Campground in June, 1973. He also admitted killing Sandra Dykman Smallegan, a Manhattan woman, whose remains were found in 1,200 pieces at a ranch in the Horse Shoe Hills. Meirhofer told authorities he shot Bernard Poelman, a 13-year-old who was found near the Nixon Bridge between Logan and Manhattan in March of 1967. A Bozeman Boy Scout, Micahel R. Raney, who died from wounds after an attack in his tent at the Head Waters campgrounds near Three Forks, was also confessed to by Meirhofer.

Olson said today that Friday's inquest should resolve some apparent discrepancies in Meirhofer's confession.

Among those discrepancies are: Did Meirhofer lie about the two bloodied sheets hanging in his warehouse? He denied the sheets were his. He said they were there when he bought the buildings.

Meirhofer admitted stabbing

the Raney youth, but said he did not hit the boy in the head. The autopsy showed the Raney youth died of head injuries, and the stab wound in the lung was not the primary cause of death.

And finally, why did he do it? Olson declined to speculate on the man's motives for murder.

One source who did not want to be named, however, said a clue to the slayings may come from the Bible itself, and possibly will be revealed at the inquest.

This source said Meirhofer had underlined certain passages in the Old Testament that may have given a chilling hint to the motive.

The passage, Hebrews 9:22, reads: "and almost all things are, by the law, purged with blood; and without shedding of blood there is no remission."

A local clergyman was familiar with the passage, and said it "has been used by demented, deranged people to do some heinous things with certain religious overtones, feeling they were doing the Lord's will by sacrificing someone."

He said without specific reference to Meirhofer, those using this passage to justify their acts, "are rationalizing

their own conflicts, saying 'I must do this terrible thing to expiate the sins of the people.'"

He said in the Hebrew sacrificial tradition, an "unblemished lamb" was sacrificed. He said human sacrifices were never performed in the Old Testament period.

Another puzzling question surrounds Meirhofer. How did he pass a truth serum test last summer with flying colors? Olson said Meirhofer's residence was searched then and nothing was turned up. Last week, several pieces of evidence were reportedly found in a subsequent search.

Gallatin County Sheriff L.D.W. Anderson said today the investigation was the culmination of "countless hours" of work by men who received no additional compensation in the case.

He said the case was solved with the joint efforts of the county attorney, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the State Crime Laboratory, the sheriff's department, the Highway Patrol and the city-county investigation team. Also assisting in the case were the sheriff's posse and several interested citizens.

"This was the most thorough and exhaustive investigation I have ever encountered in the 27 years of law enforcement with this office," Anderson said.

MANHATTAN, Mont. (AP) — Confessed mass slayer David G. Meirhofer, who was buried Wednesday after committing suicide, was paid \$100.80 by the U.S. government one day after his death.

The government check, issued by the U.S. marshal's office in Billings, was for being a member of a federal jury panel called to Butte to report for possible service.

Records show Meirhofer did not actually serve but appeared in Butte July 29 and 31 and again Sept. 3. For each appearance, Meirhofer was paid \$20 per diem and \$13.60 for travel expenses. The check was made payable to David G. Meirhofer, Box 135, Manhattan.

Authorities said Meirhofer's relatives have been given the proper forms to be presented in order to claim the government compensation.

Jurors for the federal court are selected from the rolls of registered voters in all of the counties in the Montana District of the U.S. federal court system.