

SERIAL KILLING TRIALS TO OPEN SUSPECT IN 11 DEATHS TO CLAIM INSANITY

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Benjamin Atkins , accused of being the Highland Park serial killer, has notified Detroit Recorder's Court Judge Bruce Kerwin he will plead insanity at his murder trials, scheduled to begin Monday.

Atkins , 25, is charged with strangling eleven women with his hands in eight months -- the fastest pace ever for a serial killer in the United States. He also is charged with raping and trying to kill another woman.

The trials, which could last eight weeks, will recreate step by step a desperate search for the killer by police, sheriff's deputies and the FBI. From late 1991 through the summer of 1992, women in the tiny city of Highland Park and the area of Detroit just south of it were terrorized by the discovery of body after body.

They had been crammed into shower stalls in the abandoned Monterey Motel, spread-eagled in pitch-black basements and buried under debris in vacant apartment buildings, a former nursing home, and other rotting structures on or near Woodward Avenue.

FBI experts and psychological profilers were stunned by the pace of the strangler, who outstripped the rate of such notorious killers as Ted Bundy and David Berkowitz, the New York killer known as Son of Sam.

Thursday, as the trials approached, Highland Park Mayor Linsey Porter announced plans to demolish the Monterey Motel -- where three of the women were found Feb. 17, 1992 -- and replace it with a new police headquarters, city hall and court building. The \$10-million proposal will be considered by the City Council on Monday night -- just hours after jury selection is to begin in the **Atkins** trials.

Today, Kerwin is to consider motions by Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Michael Reynolds to consolidate the nine Highland Park trials and three Detroit trials, to save time and allow for just two juries, one for the Detroit cases and one for the Highland Park killings. He also will rule on whether the prosecutor should be allowed to introduce all of the statements **Atkins** made to police about the killings at each of the trials. Under Michigan case law, a judge can rule that evidence of similar crimes can be presented as evidence in another crime.

Atkins ' attorney, Jeffrey Edison, said he would object to the use of unrelated evidence in any of the cases.

In the 16 months since his arrest after the one surviving victim, Darlene Sanders, spotted him at a pay phone in Detroit's Cass Corridor, **Atkins** has been in the Wayne County Jail. He's been evaluated by psychologists and psychiatrists for the prosecution and the defense.

Atkins , a former pizza cook, confessed to police that he killed the women -- most or all of them crack-addicted prostitutes -- by luring them into structures on and around a 1.4-mile stretch of Woodward Avenue.

Police said he told them he raped and killed his victims because he hated them for being women. Social service files show that **Atkins** had been forced as a child to sit in the backseat of cars while his mother worked as a prostitute in the front.

Edison said the notice of intent to use an insanity defense was required by law, but would not necessarily be the heart of his defense. He said his client's statements to police also will be a major issue.

The lead detective who took the statements, Ronald Sanders, has suffered a stroke and probably will not testify. The other detective, Lee Caudill, has retired, as has Paul Lindsey, the lead FBI agent on the case. Caudill and Lindsey will return to Recorder's Court to testify.

They are among 150 witnesses that prosecutor Reynolds may use. The others range from family members of the victims to the Highland Park police officer who discovered a woman he had known since high school -- Valerie Brown Chalk -- stuffed in the shower in a room at the Monterey.

One woman's body has never been claimed -- Unidentified Woman No. 15 for 1992 -- also found in the Monterey on Feb. 17, 1992.

Caption: Map

Memo: CORRECTION RAN January 21, 1994

getting it straight

* A Jan. 7 Local News article about the trial of serial killing suspect **Benjamin Atkins** misspelled the name of Detroit Recorder's Court Judge David Kerwin.

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Page: 1B

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