

METRO

## **SUSPECT PLEADS GUILTY TO RAPING, KILLING TEEN**

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559 words

11 April 1998

The Evansville Courier

EVVL

Final

A1

English

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A pretrial hearing on Friday for Robert Keith Woodall -- charged with the Jan. 25, 1997, kidnapping, rape and murder of 16-year-old Sarah Hansen of Greenville, Ky. -- took an unexpected turn when he pleaded guilty to all charges.

The hearing had been scheduled to iron out last-minute issues before the opening Monday of what had been expected to be a lengthy trial.

But standing before Circuit Judge Bill Cunningham, Woodall, 24, also of Greenville, responded with a quiet, "yes, sir," three times as the judge asked him if he had kidnapped, raped and then killed Miss Hansen.

The plea was made without benefit of a plea bargain agreement. Muhlenberg Commonwealth's Attorney Ralph Vick said he will ask Cunningham to impose the death penalty.

The hearing was attended by a handful of spectators, including Miss Hansen's parents, Alan and Julie Hansen, who were led by state police officers from the courtroom to a waiting car after the hearing.

In entering the guilty plea, Woodall also agreed to have Cunningham, rather than a jury, set his sentence. Options available to the judge include 20 years to life in prison, life in prison, life without parole for 25 years and death.

Cunningham has scheduled a sentencing hearing, expected to take at least three days, to begin at 9 a.m. Tuesday. At it, prosecutors and Woodall's attorney, Michael Williams of the Department of

Public Advocacy's Frankfort, Ky., staff who specializes in death penalty defenses, will present testimony .

Among the issues likely to be raised is Woodall's conviction in 1993 for sexual abuse of two girls, ages 8 and 9. Indicted on five counts of first-degree sexual abuse, he pleaded guilty to two of the counts and was sentenced to five years in prison on each, with the sentences running concurrently. He was released in February 1996.

Williams had argued that Woodall suffers from a mental disorder and had sought unsuccessfully to delay the trial to obtain additional mental testing of Woodall.

The defense attorney said he will appeal Cunningham's refusal to grant the continuance. Without the additional testing Woodall had no defense, he said.

"The guy doesn't remember what happened," Williams said.

Kentucky State Police have said Miss Hansen, a student at Muhlenberg South High School where she was a cheerleader and band member, had left her home about 7:30 that Saturday evening to go to a nearby convenience store and rent a video.

When she did not return, her family alerted police after making a quick search of the community.

The family's van, which she had been driving, was seen about 11 p.m. at nearby Luzerne Lake and her body was found in the water.

An autopsy showed she had been raped and her throat slashed.

In a search of Woodall's apartment, not far from the convenience store, police have said they found a bag of bloody clothing and that Woodall wore shoes which left an imprint like those found at the murder scene.

Photo;

Caption: Robert Woodall's guilty plea gives Judge Bill Cunningham sentencing options of 20 years to life in prison, life in prison, life without parole for 25 years, or death.

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