

# Man forges document to be buried next to wife

By JOE MANDAK  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

A man accused of murdering his wife has been charged with forging documents to steal a cemetery plot so he could be buried beside her.

Bedford County District Attorney William Higgins contends the alleged scam is 39-year-old John Gerholt's latest effort to harass his late wife, Karen, and her relatives.

"I've never seen somebody so persistent with somebody they killed, trying to torment them after they've killed them. Isn't that enough?" Higgins said.

Gerholt's defense attorney, Thomas Dickey, denied that his client is harassing his late wife's family.

"This is just another sign of his true love and devotion to his wife, albeit deceased," Dickey said.

Gerholt is accused of shooting his 24-year-old wife twice with a sawed-off shotgun as she left for a break at the McDonald's where she worked near Everett, about 90 miles east of Pittsburgh.

Dickey claims the Nov. 9, 2008, shooting was

accidental. Higgins calls that "inconsistent," because he contends the gun would have to be cocked between the first and second shots.

Gerholt is charged with murder and awaiting trial. Higgins is pursuing the death penalty because Karen Gerholt had a protection-from-abuse order against her husband, and because John Gerholt allegedly endangered others outside the restaurant.

Karen Gerholt's aunt owned two empty burial lots at a cemetery, Higgins said. The aunt gave up one for Karen and planned to give the other to another relative, only to discover it had already been deeded to Gerholt, he said. The aunt contacted authorities and the deed in Gerholt's name has since been voided, Higgins said.

Gerholt somehow got paperwork into the county jail, had it forged and had a jail employee notarize it, Higgins said.

Nobody else has been charged with helping Gerholt, though the prosecutor said he hasn't ruled out charging Karen's mother, Carolyn McConaughy, who inquired about ownership of the cemetery plot shortly before Gerholt got the documents.

McConaughy, of Huntingdon County, regularly

visits Gerholt at the jail and has urged Higgins not to prosecute her former son-in-law, the prosecutor said. "We don't know why," Higgins said.

McConaughy told The Associated Press she "didn't have any involvement" in the burial plot transfer. She said she inquired about its ownership because she wanted to bury her mother next to her daughter, but dropped the matter when she never heard back from the owner.

Asked about her sympathies for Gerholt, she said, "All I want to say is, he loved my daughter and I don't believe he intentionally shot her for any reason." Then she hung up.

Higgins said Gerholt has placed newspaper ads mourning his wife's passing on her birthday, on Valentine's Day, and on the anniversary of her death. He called the ads an effort to win public sympathy and further harass his wife's relatives.

The anniversary ad says, "I won't stop looking for you until I meet up with you again in Heaven." It appeared next to one from McConaughy, her husband and other relatives.

"He's letting her know that he's going to track her down in heaven, and be buried next to her," Higgins said. "That's the way we see this and it's extremely disturbing."

# AP Fact Check: NY terror trials

By DEANNA BELLANDI  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

As the Obama administration considers a plan to move Guantanamo Bay detainees to prisons on U.S. soil, including possible sites in Illinois and Michigan, proponents and critics are spinning the facts.

The nearly vacant Thomson Correctional Center in the western Illinois farming town of Thomson is the latest potential candidate being evaluated to hold detainees after President Barack Obama promised to close the military-run detention center in Cuba.

Federal officials inspected Thomson on Monday after visiting another proposed site, a shuttered prison in the northeast Michigan town of Standish, in August.

Here is a look at some of claims about security, economic impact and prison visitors if Guantanamo Bay detainees are locked up in the U.S.

**CLAIMS:** Critics, including Republican U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk and several other Congress members from Illinois, contend moving Guantanamo prisoners there would make the state — with its signature Chicago skyscrapers — a terrorist target. Opponents in Michigan, including U.S. Rep. Peter Hoekstra, the ranking Republican on the House intelligence committee, raised similar concerns.

**FACTS:** Convicted terrorists already are held in U.S. prisons. Federal Bureau of Prisons director Harley Lappin said more than 340 international and domestic terrorists currently are incarcerated.

Lappin said the bureau already works with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to assess threats.

Northwestern University law professor Joseph Margulies, who has represented detainees, agreed that moving them

to a U.S. prison would not affect any risk of a terrorist attack. Chicago has been on guard against terrorism since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

In Michigan, Standish residents scoffed at the notion of their town, population 1,500, as a terrorist target. Residents of Thomson, a village of about 450 people, did too.

If Chicago is a terrorist target, they say, it's because it's a big city and not because detainees would be locked up in Illinois.

**CLAIMS:** Detainees moved from Guantanamo Bay would be able to recruit other inmates to terrorism if held in a U.S. prison.

**FACTS:** Detainees would be overseen by the military and would not mingle with other federal inmates, said Bureau of Prisons spokeswoman Felicia Ponce.

If Thomson is chosen, the bureau would buy the prison and lease a "small" portion of it to the Department of Defense to house the detainees. The remainder would be operated as a high-security prison with between 1,500 and 1,600 inmates, Lappin said.

Democratic U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin has said there would be fewer than 100 detainees at Thomson. Lappin said Monday there would be a "limited" number of detainees and they would be in Department of Defense custody.

The Michigan prison, which closed Oct. 31 because of budget cuts, has a capacity of about 600.

**CLAIMS:** Federal prisoners are allowed visitors so al-Qaida followers and family members would visit detainees.

**FACTS:** The Department of Defense does not allow detainees to have visitors. Phil Carter, deputy assistant secretary of defense for detainee policy, said detainees' only visitors at Guantanamo Bay are attorneys, the Red Cross and diplomatic and law enforcement personnel.

"They would not have friends and family coming to visit them here so that's not a concern," Carter said.

**CLAIMS:** Bringing Guantanamo detainees to Illinois or Michigan would bring jobs to small prison towns.

Durbin and Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn say selling the Thomson prison to the federal government would generate about 3,000 jobs both directly at the facility and indirectly in the community.

Supporters in Michigan said the prison complex there could employ 500 to 1,200, including guards and military officials, and create spinoff jobs for construction workers, contractors and others.

Opponents say the numbers are inflated.

**FACTS:** An economist says the reality is probably somewhere between predictions floated by supporters and critics.

University of Chicago economist Allen Sanderson said job creation numbers "tend to be gross overestimates."

"You should take them with more than one grain of salt although it's not recommended by a doctor," Sanderson joked.

If Thomson is chosen, Lappin said the bureau of prisons would employ about 800 to 900 people, including 250 to 300 people moved in from other facilities to quickly get the prison up and running. Carter said the defense department would have as many as 1,500 military, civilian and contractor personnel there. The majority would be military.

In Michigan, critics argue that economic impact and job creation forecasts are debatable because, they say, detainees' presence would scare tourists away from the rural community near Lake Huron.