

Change of venue sought in Parks murder case

Defense also wants murder count dropped because of stage of pregnancy at time of death

By Mark Williams, Daily News staff writer

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Parks

Silas Parks' defense team will seek a change of venue in the Kendrick native's first-degree murder trial and also will seek to have one of the two murder charges dropped.

Parks is accused of murder in the death of his pregnant wife and unborn daughter, then setting fire to the couple's home.

He faces two charges of first-degree murder and one charge of first-degree arson in connection with the deaths. His wife, Sarah Parks, 28, was found dead in the couple's burned-out Moscow duplex on June 24. An autopsy determined she and the fetus died of strangulation or suffocation prior to the fire.

Parks' attorney Ray Barker filed several motions in Latah County District Court on Monday including a motion for a change of venue and to have the second count of first-

degree murder against the unborn child dropped based on the stage of pregnancy at the time of death. Sarah Parks was estimated to be 19 to 20 weeks pregnant at the time of her death.

Other motions were procedural, such as the exclusion of evidence in Parks' April 2006 conviction for disturbing the peace that was pleaded down from a domestic violence charge against his wife.

Barker said local media attention has made the case too high profile to proceed locally and included press clippings of the case from local media publications in his motion to help make the point. He said he would ideally like the trial to take place somewhere outside the range of where jurors would have been privy to the details of the case thus far.

"Obviously it's not up to me," he said. "But I'd like to have it take place outside of the circulation area" of the local newspapers.

The motions will be considered at a pretrial conference March 3 held by Second District Administrative Judge Jeff Brudie. The original conference scheduled for Friday was pushed back when the trial itself was postponed from March 22 to May 10 to accommodate an out-of-state witness who will be used by both sides.

The deadline for all pre-trial motions is Feb. 22 with a short response period for both sides taking place in the days immediately after.

Prosecutor Bill Thompson declined to speculate on what the motions, particularly the change of venue, could mean for how the case is prosecuted.

"I don't think it's appropriate to comment on that at this time," he said. "We'll have a better idea once we meet for the pre-trial conference."

Each first-degree murder charge carries the possibility of life in prison and a fine of up to \$50,000. The arson charge carries a maximum sentence of 25 years in prison and a fine of up to \$100,000. Thompson decided not to pursue the death penalty in October.

Parks was entitled to bail because of the decision and was released from the Latah County Jail in early January after his family posted bail of \$200,000. He is required to reside at his parents' farm outside Kendrick and is reporting to the Latah County Sheriff's office at 10 a.m. every Monday and Friday until his trial's completion. He also cannot travel out of the Second Judicial District, which includes Latah, Clearwater, Idaho, Lewis and Nez Perce counties, and he cannot possess or consume alcohol.

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