

Slovers pin hopes for new trial on fingerprint evidence

- Story

By HUEY FREEMAN - H&R Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, February 2, 2010 3:00 am

Font Size:

Default font size

Larger font size

DECATUR - Pinning hopes for a new trial for the Slovers on a fingerprint found on a bridge railing, the Downstate Illinois Innocence Project presented its case at a hearing Monday afternoon.

The project, based at the University of Illinois at Springfield, has taken the case of Michael Slover, Jeannette Slover and Michael Slover Jr., who are all serving 60-year sentences for the murder of Karyn Hearn Slover.

Associate Judge Timothy Steadman heard three hours of testimony on whether a fingerprint should be processed by a crime lab. The print, discovered by Illinois State Police investigators in 1996, was never sent to the state's Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS), to be compared with the prints of others.

It was not clear whether the judge had the authority to order a fingerprint tested by a law enforcement agency because law enforcement officials ordinarily make those decisions.

The fingerprint in question was found on the north side of the Bruce-Findlay Bridge over Lake Shelbyville, about six inches from a blood spot which was positively identified as blood from murder victim Karyn Slover.

Karyn Slover, 23, former wife of Michael Slover Jr., was killed in September 1996. Parts of her dismembered body were found in trash bags floating in Lake Shelbyville two days after she disappeared. Michael Slover Jr. and his parents were convicted of the crime in 2002.

William R. Clutter, a private investigator who directs investigations for the Innocence Project, said while Karyn Slover's remains were disposed of from that bridge, that print did not match any of the defendants in this case. He was questioned by Peter Wise, a Springfield attorney who is volunteering his services for this case.

Wise presented Kenneth Moses, a leading fingerprint expert from San Francisco, who testified that the print found on the bridge contains enough discernible points to be successfully tested and matched in a fingerprint database.

"I marked 13 points on this print," Moses said, adding that a print needs at least eight points to make a match. "Thirteen points are more than sufficient to run this print."

But Jay Scott, Assistant Macon County State's Attorney, presented an expert witness who disputed the usefulness of that print.

Mary McCarthy, Illinois State Police latent print training coordinator, said she was asked to evaluate that print as part of the Slover case, and concluded it was not suitable for AFIS processing. She said the core, or center, of the print is not visible, and there are no landmarks to ascertain exactly where on the finger it comes from.

"The likely location is the top of the finger," she said, explaining recorded prints often omit the finger tips. "It may or may not be recorded on a fingerprint card."

Steadman told the attorneys to submit closing arguments in writing. Wise agreed to complete the project's argument within 14 days, while Scott said he would complete the state's argument in seven days. Wise will also have seven days to complete a written rebuttal to the state's argument.

hfreeman@herald-review.com|421-6985