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**Charlotte Observer, The (NC)**

January 12, 1994

Edition: THREE

Section: YORK OBSERVER

Page: 1Y

**BAR OWNER, EMPLOYEES ACQUITTED**

Author: LOLO PENDERGRAST and SHELLEY CANUPP, Staff Writer

Dateline: YORK

Article Text:

It took a jury less than five hours Tuesday to find three men not guilty in the beating death of Jeffery Lanier.

Bar owner Jackie Clarence Hartley, 40, and employees Clyde Amos Wright, 50, and Johnny Wayne Estes, 51, had been tried on charges of murder, armed robbery and conspiracy in the 1980 murder

"I don't see how they could have listened to testimony and come up with that," said Lanier's sister, Toinette Lanier. "I said you couldn't get a fair trial in this county, and I was right."

The Lanier family had asked for a change of venue but was turned down. Toinette Lanier said the family was told it would have cost too much money.

"But here we have a brand-new justice center," she said.

Lanier's mother, Marion Lanier, could barely speak after the verdict was announced.

"A higher power they will have to deal with," Lanier's mother said softly. "If they can live with themselves."

Speaking for the attorneys and their clients, Estes' lawyer, Chris Wellborn, said he hopes now that the York County Sheriff's Department will investigate and determine who really killed Lanier.

The defendants are happy, the lawyers are happy and I'm personally happy, because someone who was innocent of charges was proved innocent.

"... I'm terribly sorry about what happened to Jeffery Lanier, but sending innocent people to jail doesn't come anywhere near constituting justice."

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Lanier, 18, suffered more than 22 head wounds and was robbed and dumped off an I-77 on-ramp that Oct. 12.

A fourth man, Bobby Joe Lawson, 50, faces a separate trial in Lanier's death

The jury, which announced its verdict at 8 40 p.m., didn't accept the state witnesses' testimony that Hartley, who owned Country Jack's then, retrieved a stick, slapjack and brass knuckles from behind the bar counter, then went outside and smacked Lanier on the head with the slapjack

State witnesses also testified that Wright and Estes beat Lanier when they went outside, and that Hartley threatened patrons, telling them they saw or heard nothing if they knew what was good for them.

"Why not tell you the truth?" Estes' attorney, Bill Hancock said in closing remarks. "Why not give it to you all? They gave you spots and pieces. . . . I know what they're saying did not happen."

Defense witnesses had testified that the men couldn't have been involved.

Hartley and his wife, Shirley, testified they didn't remember seeing Lanier, a fight or any other trouble at the bar that night. Shirley Hartley said they never kept weapons there - stick, slapjack or brass knuckles.

Wright carried a slapjack for self-defense, but neither he nor any other employees ever beat anybody up, Hartley testified. Wright didn't testify in his own defense.

Estes said he never went outside the bar and didn't remember anyone being beaten there that night.

Other defense witnesses said they saw Lanier, drank with him at a bar or ate with him at Sambo's restaurant at the time he was supposed to have been beaten. Some York County sheriff's file notes indicated that two waitresses saw Lanier alive at 5:30 a.m., almost two hours after Hartley's bar closed.

The pathologist testified Lanier had a full stomach of ham and eggs. He said it would have been more likely that he died at 5:30 a.m. or later - rather than from midnight to 3:30 a.m. as state witnesses said.

Defense attorneys questioned why crucial evidence was missing. Wright's attorney, Chris Wellborn, said the police work was half-cocked.

"What has happened in this case is sickening and it's disgusting," he said. "It's wrong."

Hartley's attorney, Jack Swerling, said the state should have looked elsewhere for its suspects.

"They did not put the puzzle together and if a puzzle is not put together, it fails," he told the jury. ". . . The puzzle comes together from the defense. It says somebody else did it."

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**Charlotte Observer, The (NC)**

January 8, 1994

Edition: THREE

Section: YORK OBSERVER

Page: 1Y

**MYSTERY WITNESS SAYS SHE WAS WITH SLAIN TEEN**

Author: LOLO PENDERGRAST, Staff Writer

Dateline: YORK

Article Text

A former homeless woman testified Friday she was drinking with an N.C. teenager the night three men allegedly beat him and left him for dead.

Joyce Davis Blankenship was a defense team's "mystery witness" whose testimony implied that someone other than Jackie Hartley, Clyde Amos Wright and Johnny Wayne Estes severely beat Jeffery Lanier before he died Oct. 12, 1980.

Hartley, then the owner of Country Jack's bar, and employees Wright and Estes are on trial on charges of murder, armed robbery and conspiracy in Lanier's death.

Lanier, 19, died shortly after he was found on the I-77 on-ramp near Dave Lyle Boulevard. State witnesses said he suffered more than 22 head wounds in a beating outside the bar.

A fourth defendant, Bobby Joe Lawson, faces a separate trial.

Blankenship, 46, an Alabama prisoner now awaiting federal sentencing, said she was with Lanier and two other strangers at a Rock Hill bar when Lanier was supposed to have been beaten.

She said by dawn Oct. 12, the four were eating pancakes, ham, sausage and eggs at Sambo's restaurant. That would have been hours after state witnesses said Lanier was beaten.

She explained why she remembers the events.

"These people were nice people," she said, describing the strangers. "That's something you don't forget."

Hartley and Estes testified they never saw a hint of trouble that night. In fact, both defendants denied that they'd seen Lanier at the bar.

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Do you know anything about the incident the state alleges happened?" Hartley's defense attorney, Jack Swerling asked him

"No, I do not," Hartley testified

"Did you participate in it?" Swerling asked.

"No, I did not," Hartley answered.

Did you have any knowledge of it?" Swerling asked a last time.

"No, I did not," Hartley said. "It did not happen "

But in three days of testimony, state witnesses testified they watched Estes and Wright shove or hit Lanier inside the bar and escort him outside, followed by Hartley carrying sticks and brass knuckles

Three witnesses said they saw Wright hit Lanier with a shiny object outside the bar. Other witnesses said Hartley smacked Lanier once in the head, and all three men stomped or kicked Lanier. Hartley ordered Estes and Wright to take him away, a witness said.

Friday, the state tried to introduce evidence that Wright had beaten a customer with brass knuckles at the Carolina Jubilee, the previous name of Country Jack's, a month before Lanier's beating. A police incident report also showed Wright and Estes pulled guns on the victim.

Circuit Judge Frank McGowan didn't allow the testimony

For the defense, four witnesses - including Hartley's wife, Shirley - also testified they never saw a fight among hundreds of patrons at Country Jack's that night

"There was never any trouble that night or the previous night," she told the jury.

Bar regular Warren Aycock said he remembered a stranger at his table that night. He and patron Rick Hinson testified they never saw anyone beaten. And Aycock testified he drove home the same route as a state witness but never saw a body on the I-77 on-ramp - as that witness testified.

Country Jack's waitress/bartender Donna Deas testified she never saw Hartley keep or hold a weapon at the bar.

The trial resumes Monday.

Caption:  
Staff photos by DAVID T. FOSTER III

1. Jackie Hartley (left), a defendant in the Jeffery Lanier murder trial, stands with a diagram of Country Jack's bar where Lanier was killed. Hartley, who was then the owner of the bar, used the marker to show where he was that night.

2, 3 & 4. Scenes from the trial. Above, defendant Johnny Estes testifies; at left, Circuit Court Judge Frank McGowan clarifies a point made by defense attorney Jack Swerling. Below, Defense attorneys Swerling (left) and Jim Morton confer during a break in testimony.  
Photo-4

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