

►CASES HAVE SIMILARITIES,
BUT CONNECTION UNLIKELY

Resendez-Ramirez link to Dardeen killings explored

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The Southern Illinoisan

Could the man wanted for a string of brutal killings in three states, including two Jackson County murders last month, also be a suspect in a grisly, 12-year-old Southern Illinois murder case?

Investigators say they doubt Rafael Resendez-Ramirez, wanted for eight killings in Texas, Kentucky and Illinois since 1997, killed the Dardeen family in Jefferson County in 1987.



Resendez-Ramirez

But some of the similarities between the unsolved case and the murders attributed to Resendez-Ramirez, and Resendez-Ramirez' presence in the area in 1987, are at least coincidental and warrant a look, they say.

"It has been mentioned and discussed, or suggested," said Charles Parker, the one-time chief Dardeen case investigator for the Illinois State Police.

Keith and Ruby Dardeen of Ina were found dead in November 1987 along with their 3-year-old son and infant daughter.

But Keith's body was not found with his wife, son Peter and baby girl, who likely was born when her mother was beaten to death along with the boy inside their mobile home 10 miles south of Mount Vernon. Keith's body was found about a mile away, shot three times in the head and mutilated.

Last fall, the case captured the attention of "America's Most Wanted," a television program that normally features reports on fugitive searches, but which also investigates some unsolved murders.

A segment on the Dardeen case is scheduled to air on July 17.

Resendez-Ramirez has been accused of beating most of his victims to death, but he is suspected of shooting 79-year-old George Morber in Gorham last month and stabbing a Texas doctor in December. All of the victims lived near railroad tracks, Union Pacific lines in all but one case.

The Dardeens lived near Union Pacific tracks in Ina, a town of roughly 400 people in southernmost Jefferson County.

But the murders that have made Resendez-Ramirez the newest name on the FBI's 10 most wanted list and the subject of an intensive nationwide manhunt all occurred 10 years after the Dardeen case.

But Parker, now an investigator for the Washington County state's attorney's office, said his gut tells him Resendez-Ramirez was not involved.

"Sure, they lived near railroad tracks and it's something that should be kept in mind and looked into once they apprehend him," he said. "But from what I've seen personally, the likelihood is not very high."

Mike Anthis, who led the investigation for the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department at the time, said no theory should be overlooked.

"With some of the similarities in the method and the geographic location of the Dardeen crime scene being adjacent to Union Pacific tracks in Ina, and them being bludgeoned," he said, "someone should look at the physical evidence on file and compare it to the Dardeen file to give it a look."

What raises the question even more is that Resendez-Ramirez, a Mexican native known to have family in the United States, was in St. Louis, just 90 miles from Ina, several times during the 1980s. Resendez-Ramirez was arrested and charged with weapons and other offenses in St. Louis within a few months of the Dardeens' murders.

Agents investigating Resendez-Ramirez after his April 1988 arrest in St. Louis for document fraud found him with a key to a locker containing a machete-style knife and a loaded semiautomatic handgun.

Parker said the bullets that killed Keith Dardeen were from a small-caliber handgun and that it could have been a semiautomatic weapon. His genitals also had been cut off.

State police crime lab officials in Carbondale are aware of the similarities and have noted the similarity in the timeline, Anthis said.

John Kemp, a detective with the Jefferson County sheriff's department still involved with the Dardeen case, did not return telephone messages to comment on the status of the investigation.

Although no official motive has ever been made public, Parker always suspected the Dardeen killings could have been revenge over a drug conspiracy or sexual relationship. Whatever prompted the murders, Parker will always believe it was less random than the Resendez-Ramirez killings appear to be.

Resendez-Ramirez, who uses dozens of aliases and is believed to be either 38 or 39 years old, is known to have been in the United States and deported many times since 1976.

He has a long criminal history including his conviction on federal charges in St. Louis in 1988, as well as earlier convictions for theft, aggravated battery and burglary.

In the Illinois murder case against him, Resendez-Ramirez is suspected of leaving the scene in Morber's pickup truck, which was ditched in Cairo later that day. In three of the Texas cases, Resendez-Ramirez also is believed to have taken the victims' vehicles as part of his getaway, then abandoned them, usually near railroad tracks.

The Dardeens' 1981 Plymouth was found the day after the killings 10 miles away from Ina in Benton, which lies along the same Union Pacific tracks that run through Ina.

For Anthis, the evidence will always suggest that two people killed the Dardeens.

"It's a shot," he said. "I personally don't feel it matches. I don't know everything about him, but I'm glad someone still remembers that case and they are still looking into it. I don't ever want that thing to hit the cold case file."