

Bexar officials switch:

Lucas not their man

Now say that one-eyed drifter lied about murdering nightclub owner Barker

By PATRICK CANTY
Staff writer

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Bexar County Sheriff's Department officials, who earlier this year stood staunchly by confessions of accused serial killer Henry Lee Lucas, now say he lied when he claimed he killed country and western nightclub owner Bobbie Lee Barker, her maid and four other local women.

Sheriff's Executive Administrator Joe Davis said Wednesday that the

Sept. 23, 1982, slayings of Barker and her maid, Frances Machado, and the unrelated murders of four other women remain "open cases" because the department's criminal investigations division has determined the one-eyed drifter did not commit them.

"When he (Lucas) first came down here and made all those statements, it sure sounded good," Davis said of Lucas' trip to Bexar County in March. "I think he presented himself really well. But the truth of the matter is that we

don't believe he was telling the truth."

But in April, when published news reports first cast doubt on Lucas' claims that he killed hundreds of people throughout the nation, Davis maintained the Bexar County confessions were solid.

"There is no one except God to say if he did or did not kill those women," Davis said then. "But, based on what he told us about what was in the (Barker) house, he was damn well there when she was murdered."

And Sheriff Harlon Copeland said Lucas, who reportedly led authorities to the Barker home in South Bexar County and provided them with numerous details of the slayings there, "was telling us facts that no one else could know, except us. I believe him."

Lucas, Copeland said at the time, also confessed to killing 23-year-old Nancy Frese in 1976, 29-year-old Linda Hopwood in 1977, 18-year-old Elsa Gonzales also in 1977 and 24-year-old Kathryn O'Connor in 1979.

About a month after Lucas' visit, an article in a Dallas newspaper presented documents showing it was physically impossible for Lucas to have committed many of the murders to which he had confessed because he was hundreds of miles from the scenes when the killings occurred.

The report ultimately cast doubt over all but two of Lucas' confessions, which he did not recant: the murder of his mother and the murder of his girlfriend. A Waco grand jury even considered accusations that the killer may have been coached by law enforcement officials armed with details of unsolved murders.

Despite the controversy last spring, Copeland, Davis and John Wood, head of criminal investigations for the sheriff at the time of

Lucas' local confessions, stood by their contention that Lucas was responsible for Barker's murder.

At one point, Wood offered to "bet every bit of money I have that he (Lucas) pulled the Barker case."

Lucas now is on death row at the Texas Department of Corrections awaiting death by injection for the 1979 murder in Williamson County of a female hitchhiker, a murder to which he initially confessed, then later denied committing.

"We've always had doubts (of Lucas' confessions)," Davis said Wednesday. "That's why we kept the cases open."

Lucas proclaims his innocence in letter

By BILL HENDRICKS

Express-News Staff Writer OCT 23 1985

Henry Lee Lucas has written a letter to the Express-News declaring himself innocent of any Bexar County killings and disclaiming the description "mass murderer."

Seven months ago, Lucas was flown to San Antonio and led lawmen to the sites of six unsolved Bexar County murders.

He claimed then to have murdered county music dance hall owner Bobbie Lee Barker; her housekeeper, Frances Machado; and at least four other women, Sheriff Harlan Copeland announced.

Says he lied

Since then, Lucas has said he lied in hundreds of murder confessions in Texas and several other states.

An unedited part of the letter Lucas sent the Express-News reads:

"And this is the only the start of what I intend on proving to them. And that I'm going to prove that what they thought of me isn't true and I am not a mass killer and I don't like the title one bit and I will show the people that what I'm telling them now is the honest truth."

Lucas sent the letter from his Death Row cell at the Ellis I Prison Unit north of Huntsville.

The man who once claimed a cross-country murder toll of more than 300, was sentenced to die by lethal injection after his capital murder conviction in April of 1984 at Georgetown.

A jury found him guilty in the 1979 Halloween death of an unidentified woman hitchhiker, a killing to which he once confessed and, in the letter to the Express-News, now denies.

Lucas' murder claims continued to mount early into this year. He was flown to Bexar County last March and confessed to the slayings of Barker, Machado, Nancy Frese, Linda Hopwood, Elsa Gonzales and Kathryn O'Connor.

The bodies of Barker and Machado, both 65, were found Sept. 23,

1982, at Barker's ranch-style home near Von Ormy.

Barker, owner of the Farmer's Daughter county-western nightclub and friend of some of the most widely known county performers, had been stabbed 19 times, mostly in the chest, an autopsy showed.

Machado was shot twice in the head with a .22-caliber weapon, authorities said at the time.

Frese, 23, disappeared in San Antonio on Dec. 17, 1976, and her skeleton was found on Feb. 24, 1977.

Hopwood, 29, was believed abducted April 27, 1977. She was found strangled three days later.

Gonzales, 18, was stabbed to death at her home on July 31, 1977.

O'Connor, 24, was discovered stabbed to death in Pletz Park on July 27, 1979.

In April, Lucas dropped a bombshell that still echoes in law enforcement offices across Texas and several other states.

Hoaxes concocted

The drifter announced that all but a few of his murder confessions were elaborate hoaxes concocted at the urging of eager lawmen.

A week ago, the Express-News wrote to Lucas, asking him whether he had killed anybody in Bexar County.

His response, dated Oct. 18, arrived Tuesday.

The four-page letter, typed on yellow, lined paper, contained Lucas' latest claims.

Lucas said he had played a role in only one death — his mother's.

He said his mother died of a heart attack in 1960 and he was held responsible. The letter does not make clear what part Lucas says he played in his mother's death.

"You see, Mr. Hendricks, any of the murders that took place in the San Antonio area I had nothing what so ever to do with (and) I do not have any murder cases in or around that area," Lucas wrote.

Lucas said he regretted that, "I ever got involved in this."