

Killing suspects tied to arson, hate groups - Conspiracy feared: Brothers held in deaths of two gay men are believed linked to synagogue fires.

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Author: John Howard; Associated Press

Two brothers suspected of killing a gay couple near this rural Northern California town have been linked to arson attacks at three Sacramento synagogues that caused more than \$1 million damage, and investigators have seized white supremacist literature from their home.

Benjamin Matthew Williams, 31, and James Tyler Williams, 29, were arraigned Friday on charges of receiving stolen property. Prosecutors said that property was linked to the slaying victims, Gary Matson and Winfield Scott Mowder of Happy Valley.

On Saturday, Shasta County Sheriff's Capt. Ron Richardson confirmed a link between the brothers and evidence pointing to the June 18 synagogue fires.

Literature espousing white supremacy was found at the brothers' home outside Redding, Richardson said.

Authorities searched the brothers' modest house and brought out several bags of evidence, and a van from the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms was parked nearby.

Neighbor Beatrice Stansbury said the brothers were "very quiet, very clean-cut."

"We'd see the lights on late at night, but we didn't think anything of it. We never had any problem with them," Stansbury said.

Ed Smith, who owns the Palo Cedro nursery, where the older Williams brother worked two years ago, said the brothers were deeply religious.

Smith said he warned Benjamin Williams, known by his middle name, Matthew, not to impose his religious beliefs on customers. Smith also drew the line when he talked about taxation and the government.

"He'd rant and rave about things just like anybody else," Smith told the San Francisco Chronicle. "I told him, he has opinions, but this is a business. I want it separated."

The two, arrested Wednesday in Yuba City, were being held in lieu of \$150,000 bail each. Richardson said a credit card belonging to one of the slaying victims was used to make a purchase for delivery to a Yuba City business.

Federal and local authorities staked out the business, arresting the brothers. One was wearing a bulletproof vest. Authorities confiscated two assault rifles, a shotgun, 9 mm pistols and other items that Richardson declined to discuss.

Richardson said his department hopes to charge the two with murder next week.

Investigators are examining whether the case is part of a wide hate crime conspiracy and whether the Williams brothers were linked to the anti-Semitic World Church of the Creator, based in East Peoria, Ill., The Sacramento Bee reported. There was no answer Saturday at the home of the group's leader, Matthew Hale .

A former World Church member killed himself last weekend after targeting minorities in a shooting rampage in Indiana and Illinois. Two were killed and nine wounded.

Richardson said investigators also planned to search an area in Oroville, 85 miles south of Redding, but would give no details.

The Bee also reported Saturday that after the brothers' arrest authorities found a list of 32 names linking the two suspects to the synagogue fires in Sacramento, 150 miles south of Redding.

It said the names on the list were of people connected with the torched synagogues.

The fires, set within minutes of each other June 18, caused more than \$1 million in damage at Congregation B'nai Israel, Congregation Beth Shalom and the Knesset Israel Torah Center.

A leaflet blaming the "International Jew World Order" for the war in Kosovo was left behind at one of the synagogues.

Matson, 50, and Mowder, 40, were found shot in their bed on July 1 in Happy Valley, just outside Redding.

Caption: Photo: Benjamin Matthew Williams (left) and his brother James Tyler Williams are suspected of killing a gay couple and playing a role in the torching of three synagogues. / BOB GALBRAITH / Associated Press

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