

**9.2: A Web of Trace Evidence
Ensnarers Two Dangerous
Brothers in a Summer of Terror**

On the night of June 18, 1999, arsonists destroyed the library and damaged the sanctuary at the B'Nai Israel Synagogue in Sacramento, California. Within the next 45 minutes, fires were set at two other synagogues. Items of physical evidence included three black 1-gallon Mobil oil jugs. A torn piece of fabric was tied around the handle of each of the jugs. Tufts of trace debris could be seen adhering to the oily mouth of these jugs. A wooden crate with a newspaper at the bottom was recovered from the exterior of the synagogue. The newspaper was the *Record Searchlight* from Redding, California, 150 miles north of Sacramento. Anti-Jewish propaganda flyers were strewn about the other two synagogues.

The following items of trace evidence were removed from the oil jugs:

- Paint chips with a light blue top coat over a red layer
- Red plastic chip
- White cotton strips of fabric
- White and brown dog hairs
- Numerous feathers, primarily white and brown in color
- Numerous miscellaneous fibers of various types and colors

On the evening of July 1, 1999, Gary Matson and Winfred Mauder were murdered in bed while they were asleep. They died in the town of Happy Valley, a small community located in the Redding area of California. Gary and Winfred were an openly gay couple. Their vehicle and some credit cards were also stolen. On the evening of July 2, 1999, an office building in Sacramento housing a medical clinic that performed abortions was burned by arsonists. This arson was not linked to the synagogue arsons until later in the investigation. On July 3, the vehicle belonging to Matson and Mauder was found abandoned in the Oroville area. Oroville is located between Redding and Sacramento. When the investigators opened the door to search inside, they noticed a strong odor of gasoline.

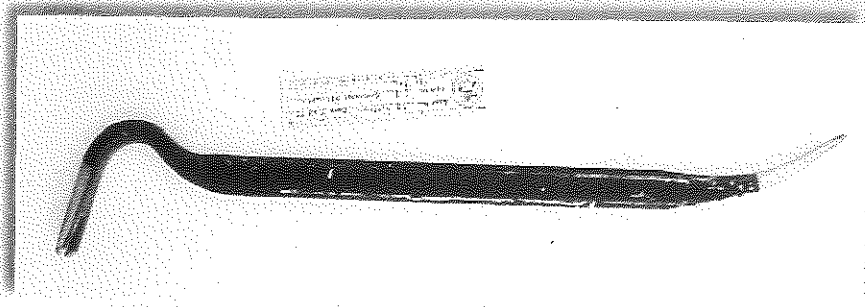
The break in these cases came when the credit card of Gary Matson was used to order ammunition from Arizona. The ammunition had been shipped

CASE STUDY



to a United Parcel Service depot in Yuba City, California. Yuba City is just south of Orville. On July 7, as the police arrived at the depot in Yuba City to investigate this lead, they observed brothers Benjamin Matthew Williams and James Tyler Williams picking up the ammunition. Both were arrested for possession of a stolen credit card. Numerous weapons and thousands of rounds of ammunition were recovered in subsequent searches of their vehicle and residence. One of the recovered weapons was identified as the murder weapon that killed Gary Matson and Winfred Mauder. The Williams brothers were arrested for murder.

A black pry bar and a black wrecking bar were collected from the Williamses' vehicle. Receipts showed that the bars had been purchased just prior to the synagogue arsons. Both bars had powdered glass fragments embedded in indentations on the surface. In addition, a large green paint spot on an aluminum metal shaving was present on the blade of the pry bar. None of the paint samples collected from any of the synagogues had green paint. After a discussion among investigators as to possible sources of this paint, the arson scene at the medical building in Sacramento was revisited on July 28. This was a white stucco building with green trim. The glass in the upper portion of the door had been struck by a linear-shaped object. The frame of the door was aluminum that had been painted green. A black paint transfer was present on the broken edges of the glass. A comparison of the green paint chip on the pry bar and the black paint on the glass established that this pry bar most likely broke this window. Some of the glass on the pry bar was similar in refractive index to the broken window of the clinic.



In a prior search of the brothers' parents' residence, Mobil oil bottles similar to those found at B'Nai Israel Synagogue had been recovered. This suggested that the parents' residence was the place at which the arson devices were constructed. New search warrants authorized collection of reference materials such as paint, animal hairs, feathers, and fabrics for comparison to the trace evidence already isolated from the arson devices used in setting the fires. A blue jumpsuit from a bedroom in the house and additional Mobil oil bottles from a shed outside the house were collected. Reference materials and additional trace evidence were collected from the Williamses' vehicle and the Matson vehicle in order to link the Williamses' vehicle to the synagogue fires and Matson's vehicle to the medical clinic fire in Sacramento.

CASE STUDY
CONTINUED

Examination of the physical evidence established many associations, including:

**CASE STUDY
CONTINUED**

Medical Clinic Evidence

- Green paint on the blade of the black pry bar in the Williamses' vehicle was similar to that from the door of the medical clinic.
- Black paint on the broken glass of the door of the medical clinic was similar to the pry bar paint.

- Glass on the pry bar was similar in refractive index and semiquantitative elemental analysis to the glass from the window in the door of the medical clinic.

- Glass on the floor of the Matson vehicle was similar in refractive index and

semiquantitative elemental analysis to the glass from the door of the medical clinic.

- Glass on the jumpsuit recovered from the parents' residence was similar in refractive index and semiquantitative elemental analysis to glass from the door of the medical clinic.

- Fibers on the jumpsuit recovered from the parents' residence were similar to fibers from the upholstery of the Matson vehicle.

- Fibers on the front seats of the Matson vehicle were similar to fibers from the fabric of the jumpsuit.

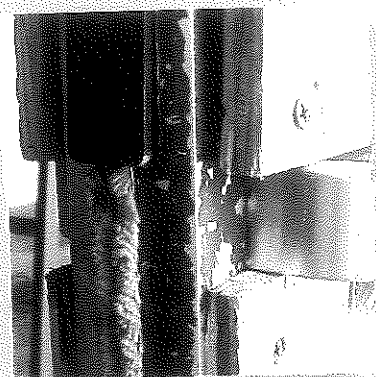
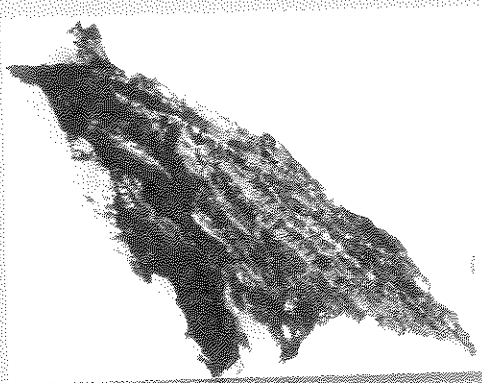
- DNA on the jumpsuit matched that of James Williams, indicating that the younger Williams brother wore this jumpsuit.

B'Nai Israel Synagogue Evidence

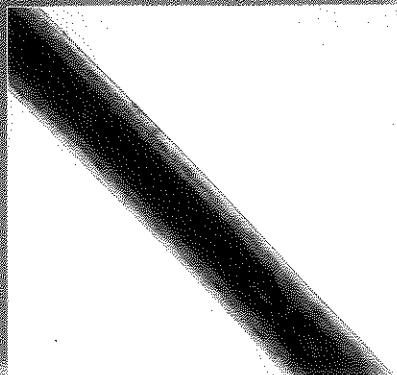
- Glass on the black wrecking bar recovered from the Williamses' vehicle was similar in refractive index to the glass from a broken window at B'Nai Israel Synagogue.

- Paint on the broken glass of the window at B'Nai Israel Synagogue was similar to the wrecking bar paint.

- Oil jugs found at B'Nai Israel Synagogue were similar to the Mobil oil jug from the Williamses' parents' residence.



This is a classic case of using many kinds of trace evidence that we have studied, or are about to study, to associate knowns to unknowns, victims to perpetrators, and perpetrators to the crimes committed. It also reminds us of the impact the *Daubert* ruling has in the legal system.



Both brothers were charged with several counts of arson, hate crimes, and murder. The attorneys for the defendants made a motion for a *Daubert* hearing in forensic hair analysis, forensic paint analysis, forensic glass analysis, and forensic fiber analysis. They claimed that present technology had changed significantly over the years and was not universally accepted by the scientific community. The federal court judge denied this request for a hearing upon receiving declarations attesting to the validity and admissibility of the trace evidence analyses.

—condensed from *Summer of Terror: Trace Evidence in a Series of Hate Crimes*, with permission of Faye A. Springer and the Sacramento County District Attorney's Office

- Dog hairs and feathers on the mouths of the oil jugs and the rags tied to the oil jugs were similar to those from animals at the parents' residence.
- Blue-over-red paint chips on the mouths of the oil jugs were similar to the paint from the shed at the parents' residence.
- Newspaper in the bottom of a crate left at the synagogue arson site was from the Redding area.
- A palm print on one anti-Jewish flyer left at the synagogues was identified as being from Benjamin Williams.

CASE STUDY
CONTINUED