

Homicide Verdict In Rest Home Case

A 74-year-old inmate who died under mysterious circumstances in a rural Jefferson County home last Monday, came to his death by homicide "by party or parties unknown," a Coroner's jury at DeSoto decided late last night.

Immediately after the verdict was reached, just before midnight, Prosecuting Attorney Stewart O'Brien ordered the operator of the "home," Mrs. Ida Etta Finchem, and her husband, Barney, taken into custody.

O'Brien said the Finchems would be held pending investigation. He added that he is investigating the possibility of seeking an injunction to prevent further operation of their "home."

Death of the inmate, Fred Gestemer, was due to a subdural hemorrhage, suffered four to six weeks previously, of a type usually resulting from a blow, Dr. Arthur B. Twersky, Jefferson County Coroner, said the autopsy showed.

DECLINES TO TESTIFY

In addition the body was found to be in a state of dehydration, with gangrene of the left foot, an ulcer and broken blood vessels on the lower back, Dr. Twersky testified.

Mrs. Finchem declined to testify at the inquest and was not represented by counsel. Her husband, however, testified that Gestemer prior to his death appeared in good health and had eaten well. He denied that the elderly inmate had injured his head.

Testimony disclosed that up until a month ago, Gestemer had been living in an unheated, ramshackle chicken house on the grounds of the home with Paul Barber, 30-year-old son of Mrs. **Rose Marie Tilker**, 59, another inmate of the home.

Both Barber and his mother, a blind invalid, were removed from the "home" as wards of the county. They, together with Gestemer and Miss Cecelia Krejci, 52-year-old self described friend of Mrs. Finchem, formerly lived with Mrs. Finchem in the 2500 block of DeKalb street in St. Louis.

WITNESS ON STRETCHER

A DeSoto real estate agent, Fred McMillen, testified that he

received a down payment of \$2000 on the home, located near Fletcher, about 13 miles west of DeSoto, from Mrs. Tilker last August.

The payment was made with a cashier's check for \$3000, marked with an "X" by Mrs. Tilker and co-signed by Mrs. Finchem, testimony showed.

Mrs. Tilker, brought to the inquest on a stretcher, testified that she gave part of the balance of \$1000 to Mrs. Finchem, plus \$1400 from the proceeds of a house in the 2500 block of DeKalb street that she sold for \$1800. She also gave additional unspecified sums to Mrs. Finchem, she stated.

Mrs. Tilker testified that Mrs. Finchem had agreed to take care of her and told her that her son had been given pleasant quarters in another building on the grounds.

Rev. Dana Vaughn, pastor of the Fletcher Baptist Church, said he went to the home Thanksgiving Day at the behest of Mrs. Tilker, who told him she was not receiving proper care. He found her, he said, in a cold unheated room and subsequently had members of his parish gather clothing for her.