

Sunrise Edition

Omaha World-Herald

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Time, Precipitation, Wind, Today, Tomorrow

GOOD MORNING

Omaha-Council Bluffs: Breezy, 50 percent chance of light snow today, Northerly winds at 10 to 20 mph. High 33; low 13.

Ms. Reno's Reasoning



JANET RENO: She said the Justice Department will continue to investigate possible campaign-finance violations.

Attorney General Janet Reno declined to seek an independent counsel probe of fund raising by President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore. She also rejected a prosecutor to investigate former Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary. Her reasoning:

- There was no evidence that any fund-raising calls by Clinton were made from the Oval Office or any other official work space. Two calls were made thanking a contributor or fund-raiser. Several fund-raising calls were made from the White House residence. Gore was unaware that some of the contributions he raised were diverted by party officials to accounts that directly supported the Clinton-Gore reelection campaign. Ms. O'Leary was unaware that a contribution to one of her favorite charities may have been solicited in return for her meeting Chinese businessmen.

No Independent Inquiry On Calls, Ms. Reno Says

Washington — U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno decided Tuesday against asking that an outside prosecutor investigate campaign fund-raising calls made by President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore. She said she acted on "the facts and the law — not pressure, politics or any other factor."

Ms. Reno's decision came after she met with FBI Director Louis Freeh, who had disagreed with her — recommending that an independent counsel examine all the fund-raising allega-

tions, not simply the phone calls, and avoid any possibility of conflict of interest.

The decision is especially important for Gore, freeing him from a potentially lengthy and exhaustive investigation that could stretch into his expected presidential bid in 2000.

But Ms. Reno said that her decision does not exonerate anyone and that the department will vigorously pursue its ongoing investigation of possible campaign-finance violations. Those being investigated include several fund-raisers and donors with ties to Clinton and Gore.

Although it was widely anticipated, Ms. Reno's decision touched off a range of reactions — even within the White House. While the president released only a one-sentence statement, Gore spoke with reporters and predicted future partisan attacks.

The attorney general made her decision based on a careful review of the law and the facts, and that's as it should be, Clinton's statement said.

Republicans in Congress assailed the decision, with some complaining that Ms. Reno viewed her mandate much too narrowly.

Sen. Fred Thompson, R-Tenn., who

led a Senate committee investigation into fund-raising activities, said information uncovered by his probe made clear the need for an independent counsel. Given the broad array of allegations and misdeeds, Ms. Reno's focus on the phone-call issue was like paying too much attention to the tail of the horse while ignoring the horse, Thompson said.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, put his response in stronger, more direct terms. Calling absurd the notion that Ms. Reno had handled the matter as re-

See FUND RAISING Page 13

UNL Faculty Now Backs King Holiday

A proposal to honor the civil-rights leader is headed to a committee for further review

BY NANCY HICKS WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

Lincoln — After a month of campus debate and controversy, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Faculty Senate reversed an earlier decision and agreed Tuesday that canceling classes on Mar-

A commission recommends that tax dollars not be used to make up the \$1.4 million shortfall for the University of Nebraska system. Midlands, Page 15.

tin Luther King Jr. Day is a good way to honor the slain civil-rights leader. The senate recommended that classes be canceled on the third Monday in January, the official national holiday.

The proposal, approved on a 40-3 vote at the December faculty meeting, will go to a committee that reviews the calendar for all campuses in the University of Nebraska system and makes recommendations to Provost Lee Jones. The committee is exploring changes that would go into effect in the 1998-99 school year.

A month ago, the UNL Faculty Senate rejected a similar proposal that classes be canceled after debating the academic and scheduling problems connected with cutting a day out of the academic calendar.

Chancellor James Moeser said he worried at the time that the vote would be misinterpreted as opposition to celebrating Martin Luther King Day.

"There was no opposition to celebrating Martin Luther King Day; there was only veneration and admiration," he said. "The tenor of the debate hinged on the loss of an academic day."

His concerns proved accurate. Black students criticized the vote, and 48 UNL faculty signed a proposal that Dr. King's birthday be declared an official holiday, meaning the university would close its offices and its classes.



WITH TIME RUNNING OUT: Robert Williams' attorney, Paula Hutchinson, right, hugs an unidentified supporter Tuesday morning outside the penitentiary before going inside to see her client for the last time.

Williams' Calm Before Execution Put Others at Ease

The killer's last words were an apology to the husband of one of his victims

BY HENRY J. CORDES WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

Lincoln — Robert E. Williams landed on death row after a 70-hour rage of rapes and murders and left it Tuesday with the quiet grace of a man at peace with his own death.

Nebraska's execution of Williams took place both inside and outside the Nebraska State Penitentiary with a calm that in many ways was reflected by the man who was its subject.

From the time his death warrant was read to him until he spoke his last audible words while seated in the electric chair — an apology to the husband of the third of three women he killed 20 years ago — the condemned killer accepted his fate with remarkable serenity. He even thanked the state's legal team that pushed for his execution date, turning his death into a statement of the Christian faith he found during 19 years on death row.

Wayne Rowe accepts Robert Williams' apology for killing Rowe's wife. Page 11.

The move to a daytime execution proved successful, avoiding a partylike atmosphere, officials say. Page 11.

"I'm on my way home," he told reporters in his final statement an hour before his execution.

The first of four jolts of electricity was administered at 10:16 a.m., and Williams was pronounced dead at 10:23 a.m., ending the state's first-ever daytime execution.

Afterward, everyone from the state's official witnesses and prison officials to Wayne Rowe, whose wife Williams raped and murdered, said Williams' demeanor helped ease an emotionally charged and grim situation.

Strapped tightly in the chair just minutes before the execution, the condemned man smiled broadly and blew kisses to friends among the witnesses.

Said Warden Frank Hopkins: "It's still a difficult situation to deal with. But his interaction with staff was appropriate at all times. I think in that regard it may have helped put them at ease."

See WILLIAMS Page 12

Death May Come Faster for Nebraska's Condemned

BY LESLIE BOELLSTORFF REED WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

Lincoln — Nebraska is on the brink of reducing the amount of time it takes to bring a condemned murderer to the electric chair, Assistant Attorney General J. Kirk Brown said Tuesday, but the difference won't be noticeable for some time yet.

After a handful of lingering cases on death row are resolved, future cases in Nebraska ought to be concluded within a six- to 10-year time frame, Brown said.

Federal law now limits death-row inmates to one federal court appeal of

their conviction and sentence, except in exceptional cases. In addition, many of the procedural questions about the state's death-penalty law have been answered by a series of court rulings.

Brown's boss, Attorney General Don Stenberg, is urging the Nebraska Legislature to enact a similar law limiting appeals on the state level.

However, even as the attorney general advocates for speedier executions, death-penalty foe Ernie Cham-

bers warned that he would work even harder to make sure no execution ever occurs again in Nebraska.

The state senator from north Omaha said Tuesday that he doubted that the Judiciary Committee would advance the bill limiting death-penalty appeals because Stenberg and Brown could not assure the committee that an innocent person would never be executed.

Chambers said he hoped that momentum would grow to repeal the

death penalty in the 1998 session. He said public hearings conducted as part of a Judiciary Committee interim study on the death penalty showed significant support for repeal.

"I'll wage my usual battle, undaunted and undiscouraged," Chambers said. The racism of the death penalty is evident, he said, in that two out of the three men executed in Nebraska in recent years were black, far disproportionate to the numbers of

See EXECUTIONS Page 11

Inside Today



Facing Indictment, Head of 49ers Resigns

Edward DeBartolo Jr. resigns as the head of the San Francisco 49ers amid reports that he and former Louisiana Gov. Edwin Edwards are to be indicted by a federal grand jury for gambling fraud. Sports, Page 34.

BREAST-FEEDING: The American Academy of Pediatrics urges mothers to breast-feed for at least a year — six months longer than previously advised. Nation, Page 2.

BACTERIA KILLER: The Food and Drug Administration gives meat processors permission to use nuclear radiation on beef. Page 3.

SLOW GOING: U.S. negotiators report little progress in winning Third World nations over to a plan for limiting their fuel emissions to help guard against global warming. World, Page 6.

IT'S A RECORD: Kenny G holds an E flat on his saxophone for 45 minutes and 47 seconds. People, Page 52.

INDEX table with categories: Advice, Business, Classifieds, Comics, Deaths, Editorials, Rainbow, Living, Midlands, Movies, People, Sports, TV Listings, World.

Money Woes May Whittle Children's Wish Lists

BY SUSAN SZALEWSKI WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Danielle's doctor has ordered her to stay off her feet.

That's a tall order for the single mother of four young children.

The 23-year-old mother is five months' pregnant and feeling the effects of anemia and high blood pressure. She said she can no longer work outside the home on a steady basis.

In early November, Danielle said, she took an unpaid leave of absence from her job after her allotment of sick days ran out. Meanwhile, bills have been stacking up.

"We were doing pretty good until all this happened," Danielle said of her family, which includes Lakeitha, 7; D.J., 5; Alishia, 4; and Kenielle, 11 months. "I barely made it through Thanksgiving."

Danielle's mother has helped her with family expenses by buying the children winter coats. But food supplies sometimes run low, Danielle said. Friends and family members have helped her care for the children.

The wedding Danielle was expecting has been called off.

GOOD FELLOWS

DONATIONS may be sent to: World-Herald Good Fellows World-Herald Square Omaha, Neb. 68102 Donor list, Page 13.

Balance Forward: \$166,655.58 Today's Total: \$14,840.92 Total to Date: \$181,596.50

The kids will have to get by with less this Christmas, she said.

D.J., the only boy, needs clothes and cannot get by on hand-me-downs as his younger sisters do. The three older children each have Christmas wish lists. D.J. said he wants a toy car to ride in. Alishia wants a Barbie doll and a Barbie car. Lakeitha has her eyes on a doll that does cartwheels.

Donations to Good-Fellows can help their family and others by providing grocery certificates for holiday meals.



WISH LISTS: Alishia, 4, left, wants a Barbie doll for Christmas. Her older sister, Lakeitha, 7, and brother, D.J., 5, also have wish lists. Kenielle is the baby.



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TAKING A STAND: Death-penalty opponent Fran Kaye of Lincoln talks with a reporter Tuesday prior to the execution of Robert Williams. About 35 death-penalty opponents were separated from about 20 supporters by a fence and a vacant lot.

Day Executions May Be Rule

Prison Official Says Experiment Worked Well in Williams Case

Lincoln — The move by Nebraska Corrections Director Harold Clarke to schedule Robert Williams' execution during the day when people are at work and at school in an attempt to prevent a party atmosphere proved successful.

"Based on the experience we had today, we most likely will stick to the time frame we observed today in the future," Clarke said.

Nebraska's first daytime electrocution since the state resumed executions in 1994 was a quiet affair that had little in common with the raucous atmosphere during Harold LaMont Otey's execution just after midnight on Sept. 2, 1994, which attracted a crowd of more than 1,000. A national television audience saw college-age pro-death penalty demonstrators, crowd-surf and sing "Na-na-na-na, goodbye" during Otey's execution. At John Joubert's execution July 16, 1996, about 600 demonstrators showed up, with death-penalty proponents outnumbering opponents about 2-to-1.

Tuesday morning, a small gathering of about 20 death-penalty supporters waited outside the Nebraska State Penitentiary. When Corrections Capt. Scott Busboom announced Williams' death, they erupted into cheers and then dispersed within minutes.

Separated by a fence and a vacant lot about 50 yards apart from those cheering the news of Williams' death, a group of about 35 death-penalty opponents solemnly sang "Amazing Grace" and held silent prayers for Williams.

A corrections officer and a state patrol sergeant who experienced previous executions agreed that Tuesday's atmosphere was better from a security standpoint.

"It was very quiet, much quieter than



PLEA FOR MERCY: Virginia Walsh of Omaha, a member of Nebraska's Against the Death Penalty, stands in silent protest to Williams' execution outside the State Penitentiary walls. At left is Peg Gallagher of Omaha.

the midnight executions — everybody was well-behaved," Busboom said.

Said Nebraska State Patrol Sgt. Dave Sankey: "Today the crowd was light, everybody was mellow. It was not the party atmosphere. ... As far as crowd control is concerned, this is quite a success."

Some of the pro-death penalty demonstrators who turned out for Williams' execution were actually disappointed at the light crowds and the

subdued atmosphere on the cold, damp December morning.

"Joubert was much better than this. There are not many people out here because, I guess, everybody is at work," said 17-year-old Sabrina Meinecke of Lincoln, a senior at Lincoln High School, who came with two friends. "It was more fun to be in the crowd at Joubert's execution, but it got a little chaotic then when the opposing groups were shouting at each other over the fence."

Tom Roti of Lincoln carried a sign quoting a Bible verse that he said supported the execution: "He that killed a man, he shall be put to death." Roti's sign also carried the message: "Williams should have found God before he killed."

Death-penalty opponents quietly gathered, held candles, sang and prayed for Williams, who many said became a different man after he found God while in prison.

"He is, from all accounts, somebody who is genuinely repentant and turned his life around," said Fran Kaye of Lincoln, a member of Nebraska's Against the Death Penalty. "He made an enormous contribution to the idea that moral change is possible."

Karen Sweatman of Grand Island, Neb., who said she's been opposed to capital punishment since her childhood, cried and sat down as word spread that Williams' execution had been carried out. "I feel morally it's wrong — you can't meet violence with violence," said Ms. Sweatman, who brought along her 10-year-old twins, Nitov and Tommy.

"I don't even know this man, but I do feel for his victims," Ms. Sweatman said. "With the death penalty, we're teaching our children that life is not important."

Iowan Accepts Murderer's Apology

BY LESLIE BOELLSTORFF REED
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Lincoln — Wayne Rowe looked into the eyes of the man who killed his wife and accepted his apology.

One of the last things Robert Williams did before his executioner threw the switch Tuesday was to catch Rowe's eye, wave at him with his fingers, and say he was sorry.

Rowe acknowledged the apology with a gesture of his own.

"Mr. Williams was smiling, he was looking around. He said 'I'm sorry, Mr. Rowe. I love you, brother Rowe,'" said Robynn Tysver, the Associated Press reporter who served as an official witness to the execution. "It was an incredible moment."

Rowe said afterward that the execution brought relief after 20 years of waiting. Though never tried for it, Williams told authorities he killed Virginia Rowe. Rowe discovered his wife's body when he came in from working his Sioux Rapids, Iowa, farm fields.

"I know it's completed. It's over with," Rowe said Tuesday. "Now I can go back to my own community with their blessing and live a very decent life again."

Rowe, who now lives in Mesa, Ariz., said he was carried through the experience by his own religious faith and the support of his son and daughter-in-law, Tom and Jan Rowe of Freeport, Ill., who accompanied him to Nebraska for the execution.

"If I didn't have faith, I wouldn't be as relaxed as I was," said Wayne Rowe, who asked to view the execution and was named an official witness so he



FINAL CHAPTER: Wayne Rowe, left, and son Tom Rowe answer reporters' questions after the father witnessed the execution of the man who killed his wife.

could do so.

The son and daughter-in-law were not permitted to be in the viewing room with Rowe. They waited in the warden's office while the execution was carried out. Tom Rowe, who was 30 years old when his mother was slain, said the execution also brought him relief.

"It's a day we've looked forward to for 20 years, ever since that day he took my mom's life for no reason at all," the younger Rowe said. "There were things my father and I shared that day — if you've never lived through it, you'll never understand it." He has said that he helped his father clean the blood-stained bedroom where his mother's

body was found.

Tom Rowe said he and his wife did not discuss Williams while they waited for the execution to be completed.

"We spent the entire time talking about my mother — that's who I'm thinking about now," he said.

He contrasted witnesses' descriptions of Williams' death as serene and calm with Virginia Rowe's final hours.

"I can assure you that day 20 years ago, it was not serene. It was not clinical, it was not peaceful," he said. "Mr. Williams professed his Christianity and said he was ready to go to heaven. I'm sure my mother's in heaven. ... He's at peace. I know my mom's at peace. It's some peace in our hearts."

EXECUTIONS

Newer Cases Expected to Move More Quickly

Continued from Page 1

black people in Nebraska's population.

Nearly 17 years passed before Harold LaMont Otey was finally executed for the 1977 murder of Jane McManus in Omaha. More than 12 years passed before John Joubert was executed for the 1983 slayings of Danny Joe Eberle and Christopher Walden.

When Robert Williams was executed Tuesday, more than 20 years had passed since the August 1977 slayings of Catherine Brooks, Patricia McGarry and Virginia Rowe. Over and over again, the families of his victims said they had to wait too long for justice to be completed.

Even Williams said that after nearly 20 years, he was tired of waiting.

Five of the 11 men remaining on death row in Nebraska have been there for more than 10 years. Four have been there for 15 years.

The cases of newer inmates should move much faster, Brown said. He said Jeremy Sheets, sentenced to death in September for the 1992 abduction and murder of Kenya Bush, could make it to the electric chair in six or seven years if all goes well for the state.

"Frankly, I'd like to think, if we're successful at all levels of review, six or seven years should be enough," Brown said. "Eighteen to 24 months at each level of review for a case like this is probably not out of line. That's still roughly six years."

Death-row inmate Randolph Reeves is the closest to having what Brown describes as a "realistic" execution date. The attorney general has appealed the Reeves case to the U.S. Supreme Court, after the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in Reeves' favor on an argument that his jury should have been instructed to consider less-serious offenses than first-degree murder when it deliberated.

The U.S. Supreme Court could hear arguments in the case as early as January, Brown said. If the state wins, the most significant legal questions surrounding Reeves' conviction and sen-

On Death Row in Nebraska

C. Michael Anderson*
For hired killing of Omaha real estate man Ron Abboud in October 1975.
Sentenced: Aug. 24, 1978

Roger Bjorklund
For kidnapping, rape and shooting death of Candice Harms, 18, of Lincoln in September 1992.
Sentenced: Sept. 20, 1994

Peter Lynn Hochstein*
For killing of Omaha real estate man Ron Abboud in October 1975.
Sentenced: August 24, 1978

John Lotter
For killing Teena Brandon, 21, Lisa Lambert, 24, and Philip Devine, 22, in a farmhouse near Humboldt, Neb., on New Year's Eve 1993.
Sentenced: Feb. 21, 1996

Carey Dean Moore
For killing two Omaha cabdrivers four days apart in August 1979.
Sentenced: June 20, 1980

Charles Jess Palmer
For killing Grand Island coin dealer Eugene Zimmerman in 1979.
Sentenced: Sept. 6, 1984

Randolph Reeves
For stabbing to death two Lincoln women in March 1980, one of whom was raped.
Sentenced: Sept. 11, 1981

Michael Ryan
For torture killing of James Thimm at a farm near Rulo in 1985.
Sentenced: Oct. 16, 1986

Jeremy Sheets
For abduction and murder of 17-year-old Kenya Bush of Omaha on Sept. 23, 1992.
Sentenced: Sept. 26, 1997

Jerry Simpson
For drug-related stabbing death of prisoner Kevin Goodenow of North Platte in 1993 at the Lincoln Correctional Center.
Sentenced: April 30, 1996

Clarence Victor
For beating death of Alyce Singleton, 82, in her Omaha home in December 1987.
Sentenced: Nov. 21, 1988

*Federal judges have ruled that Anderson and Hochstein get new sentencing hearings. The state has appealed those rulings, and the two continue to live on death row.

tence will have been answered and his execution will probably be carried out.

If Reeves wins, his case will return to "square one" — resentencing. The Nebraska Supreme Court has placed the cases of three other death-row inmates — Charles Jess Palmer, Carey Dean Moore and Roger Bjorklund — on hold until the U.S. Supreme Court decides the Reeves case, Brown said.

Three of the oldest cases on death row — those of Moore, C. Michael Anderson and Peter Hochstein — actually had been sent back to square one after the federal courts ruled in their favor and ordered resentencing. Anderson and Hochstein await resentencing in Douglas County District Court. Moore already has been resentenced to death,

with that sentencing being reaffirmed once on appeal.

Brown said newer cases should not present the procedural complications of those old cases. After 20 years of litigation, nearly all the procedural questions about Nebraska's death-penalty law have been answered, he said.

"Frankly, between 1973, when our statute was enacted, and Otey's execution, we basically were trying to discover the rules for an entirely new process of sentencing to death," he said. "That's a time-consuming process. Most of those questions have been answered now and the chance of making a mistake in our choice of procedure today is significantly less than it was in 1973."

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DECEMBER 1997

WILLIAMS Contrite Man Who Killed 3 Dies Calmly

Continued from Page 1
ease a little bit."

Williams then sought out Rowe, a retired Sioux Rapids, Iowa, farmer who had come from his winter home in Arizona to watch Williams die. Williams told Rowe in words audible through the thick pane of glass separating the death chamber from the witnesses: "I'm sorry, Mr. Rowe. I love you, brother Rowe."

"The man put us at ease when he came in there," said Rowe, the first relative of a victim to witness any of the three Nebraska executions that have occurred since 1994.



Robert Williams

Rowe waited almost two decades for Williams, 61, to die for his crimes. Williams was convicted and sentenced to death in 1978 for the rape and murder of Patricia Brooks of Lincoln in August 1977. Over a three-day period, Williams admitted, he also killed Patricia McGarry of Lincoln, committed two other Lincoln rapes, raped and murdered Virginia Rowe in Iowa, and raped, shot and left for dead a Minnesota woman.

Williams had been kept alive on death row by a long series of state and federal court appeals, including a successful, last-ditch bid two years ago that had allowed him to escape the electric chair just hours before his scheduled execution.

But this time Williams' final appeal was turned away an hour before the execution when the U.S. Supreme Court, without comment, rejected hearing arguments that Nebraska's electric chair constitutes cruel and unusual punishment.

Gov. Nelson, Attorney General Don Stenberg and Secretary of State Scott Moore also declined to reconsider their rejection of Williams for a pardon hearing. They dismissed arguments by Williams' supporters that he had found God during his incarceration and was nothing like the man who had committed the bloody crimes more than two decades ago.

Indeed, Williams did live out his final years on death row quietly and humbly, talking to his friends about his love of the Lord. But his life would always be defined by the violent 1977 crime spree that was the most brutal and shocking seen in Nebraska's Capital City since the days of Charles Starkweather.

In the end, Williams became only the third man executed in Nebraska since Starkweather in 1959, all three in a little more than three years. Convicted murderer Harold LaMont Otey — sent to death row 10 days before Williams — was put to death Sept. 2, 1994. John Joubert, convicted in the torture slayings of two Sarpy County boys, was executed July 17 last year after 12 years on death row.

Officials said Williams' execution went according to plan.

The execution was also conducted without serious incident outside the penitentiary walls, where the executions of Otey and Joubert had attracted big crowds — death-penalty supporters cheering and reveling in the demise of the killers, and capital-punishment opponents burning candles and praying.

State officials hoped that switching the start of executions from midnight to daylight hours would reduce the crowds, ugly confrontations and circus atmosphere outside the penitentiary.

As it turned out, the difference between Williams' execution and those of the men who recently preceded him to the chair was like night and day. Minutes before the execution, there were only 20 death-penalty supporters outside the prison and 35 opponents. Both sides dispersed without incident afterward.

Inside the walls, Williams' end began at 8:49 a.m. when he was read his death warrant and he made his final statement to reporters.

He said he appreciated living as long as he did and felt blessed "by so many people God has let into my life." He said he hoped his execution would "inspire other people to find another way."

Williams was composed from the time state officials opened the curtain to show him strapped in the electric chair to when the first jolt was administered. It lasted six seconds; witnesses said, and caused smoke to issue from his left knee. They said he appeared to stop breathing.

The second jolt lasted 25 seconds, the third 19 seconds, and the fourth 20 seconds. After the third jolt, witnesses said, they saw smoke again rise from his left knee and from the right side of his masked head.

Williams filled his four witness slots with Marilyn Felton of Omaha, his spiritual adviser; Paula Hutchinson of Lincoln, one of his attorneys; Dick Hargshiemer of Lincoln, a friend and member of Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty; and Joy Stevens of Fort Calhoun, a friend.

The state's official witnesses included Rowe, Bill Hord of The World-Herald, Robynn Tysver of the Associated Press, Tracy Overstreet of KRRTV in Grand Island, Brad Stephens of KETV in Omaha and Butch Mabini of the Lincoln Journal Star.

After the execution sequence was complete, Ms. Hutchinson hugged Rowe. He told reporters afterward that he accepted Williams' apology.

"I've been waiting 20 years for this," he said of the execution. "A book is closed. A chapter has been finally

ended." Robert E. Williams was born in East Chicago, Ind., in 1936. He had five brothers and one sister. He and his family have said his father was an alcoholic who abused his wife and children. When his mother left the family, Williams and his siblings were separated by welfare officials.

Williams enlisted in the Army and was honorably discharged as a corporal in 1958. Over the next 20 years, he worked a series of factory and railroad jobs in Omaha, St. Paul, Minn., and, finally, Lincoln.

Williams' notorious 70-hour crime spree, which he always maintained was in part fueled by his addiction to alcohol and psychedelic drugs, began in Lincoln on Aug. 10, 1977.

On that day, Williams had been released from jail on a \$2,000 bond for allegedly kidnapping and sexually assaulting his estranged wife earlier in the day. He then went to see Ms. McGarry, with whom he was acquainted.

Ms. Brooks and Ms. McGarry, both 25, were single mothers who shared a northeast Lincoln duplex.

Neighbors began searching for Ms. Brooks in the late afternoon of Aug. 11, 1977, when her 5-year-old daughter began wandering in the neighborhood looking for her mother.

Police found the bodies of both women in Ms. McGarry's apartment, both having been shot in the head with a .22-caliber gun.

Ms. Brooks was nude and had been sexually assaulted. Ms. McGarry was

dressed in her house coat. Police also found Ms. McGarry's 3-year-old son hiding under a bed. He had been in the house with the bodies for at least eight hours.

Police believed Williams had killed Ms. McGarry and then shot and raped Ms. Brooks when she came to help her friend.

Another woman told authorities that he came to her house Aug. 11, threatened her with a gun and repeatedly raped her. Williams told authorities that he then traveled to Sioux Rapids, Iowa, where he allegedly raped and killed Mrs. Rowe, a 51-year-old farm wife, on Aug. 12.

A day later, Williams kidnapped a man near St. Paul, Minn., and forced him to drive to the city. A 20-year-old

woman told authorities that Williams kidnapped her later that day in a St. Paul parking lot. She was shot twice, raped, and left bound and bleeding in a remote field. She was able to free herself and get help.

In June 1978, he was sentenced to death for Ms. Brooks' murder. For the rest of his life, he would be inmate No. 31861 in the Nebraska State Penitentiary.

On death row, Williams was a peaceful man who spent most of his days listening to Christian radio stations, taping programs for friends, reading books and writing letters. In interviews, he often expressed remorse for what he had done and said he prayed for his victims, their families and himself.

A last-minute appeal two years ago not only spared Williams' life that time, but also reunited him with his long-lost family. His brother and sister, who had lost touch with their brother and given him up for dead, learned from news accounts that he was on death row in Nebraska.

Williams paid scant attention to his attorneys' efforts to appeal his death sentence and always said he accepted his fate. He said he didn't believe in the death penalty but understood it is the law. And he said with his conversion to Christianity in prison, he didn't fear death. "I'm in good hands," he said.

Leslie Boellstorff Reed and Bill Hord of The World-Herald's Lincoln bureau contributed to this report.



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