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Front Page August 23, 2007

Police probe link to local fires BY MELISSA MCKEON MMCKEON@HOLDENLANDMARK.COM



The Mary Sawyer homestead was destroyed by a fire last week. The State Fire Marshal posted a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the suspected arsonists. Brittany Durgin photo

REGION - Two suspects arrested in Lancaster on August 19 for an Erving fire are also "strong persons of interest" in recent fires that claimed historic properties in Holden and Sterling, including the homestead of Mary Sawyer of "Mary Had a Little Lamb" fame, Holden Police Chief George Sherrill confirmed Monday.

John Rousseau, 28, and Michael Dreslinski, 28, both of Clinton were arrested and charged Monday in Orange District Court with setting a fire that burned a portion of the Usher Paper

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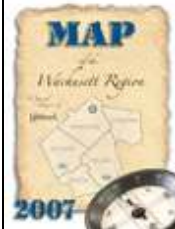
Mill in Erving on July 30. They are also being charged with conspiracy.

Rousseau and Dreslinski pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The two are being held without bail pending the result of a dangerousness hearing on Thursday, August 23, in Greenfield District Court.



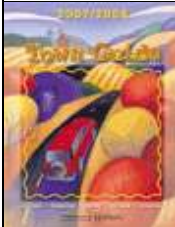
The arrest was the result of an investigation by a task force of state Attorney General Martha Coakley's office and included the efforts of state police assigned to the AG's office, state police assigned to the State Fire Marshal's Office, the Massachusetts State Police Fire and Explosion Investigation Section, state police assigned to the offices of Northwestern District Attorney Betsy Scheibel and Worcester County District Attorney Joseph D. Early Jr., the Commonwealth Fusion Center, State Police Air Wing, police departments in the towns of Clinton, Rutland and Holden, and B&M Railways.



Sherrill said the attorney general's office has been handling the investigation because the crimes it is investigating cross several jurisdictional boundaries all over the state.



Though the investigation has been going on for months, Holden only became directly involved after the fire that destroyed the barn on the Sandstrom property on Bond Road on Monday, August 13. A fire just one day earlier that destroyed the historic home of Mary Sawyer in Sterling, the inspiration for the famous nursery rhyme "Mary Had a Little Lamb," is also thought to be related, along with other fires in the area.




The names of the two suspects are not unknown to Holden police.

Rousseau and Dreslinski have appeared regularly in the Holden police log after several



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visits and phone calls to the station to request copies of log entries regarding traffic stops and their visits to the station, complaints about staff and threats to sue. They have also had other interactions with Holden police over the last few months, Sherrill said.

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The attorney generals task force will be taking a closer look at the suspects in relation to other arson crimes in the area, Sherrill said.

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