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Insane inmate death probed

By RUSSELL GOODMAN

A New Orleans man found mentally unfit in 1978 to stand trial for murder died Sunday after he was discovered ill in his cell on the psychiatric tier in the old Orleans Parish Prison.

Physicians at Charity Hospital, where Clinton Lazard, 29, died in the emergency room, attributed the cause of death to cardiac arrest.

An autopsy supports that finding, according to Orleans Coroner Dr. Frank Minyard. However, the coroner did not rule out heat stroke as a contributing cause of death.

Foti said the old prison, which is not air conditioned, has fans for ventilation. "It's not much hotter in there than in any house in the city which is not air conditioned," Foti said.

Tests for the presence of narcotics or the absence of any needed medication are continuing, Dr. Minyard said, but may take as much as a month to complete.

Lazard was last seen by a psychiatrist Friday, according to Foti. The sheriff said the physician ordered medication for Lazard at that time, "but it wouldn't have come in until Monday."

Foti said Charity Hospital operates and staffs medical facilities inside the Parish Prison complex.

Attorney Ronald J. Rakosky, counsel for the defendant, said he is investigating the death on behalf of Lazard's mother.

Lazard was arrested March 24, 1978, and booked with the second-degree murder of 19-year-old David Henderson, who was killed by four shots earlier that day in his home at 8521 Panola St.

On May 2, 1978, Criminal District Court Judge Israel Augustine found that the defendant was legally insane when the offense occurred and mentally incompetent to stand trial.

On Judge Augustine's orders Lazard was sent to the East Louisiana State Hospital at Jackson for treatment.

Records show Lazard was returned to Parish Prison May 27, 1981, where he was awaiting a hearing on a civil commitment to a mental institution.

"When he was found Sunday," Foti said, "one of our deptuies gave him CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation). A police emergency squad was called and they worked on him, as well as the deputy, all the way to the hospital.

"I understand the doctors worked on him there for about 30 minutes before he died," the sheriff said.

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