



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Minnesota State Archives

ATTORNEY GENERAL
Charities Division

**An Inventory of its Litigation Files Concerning the May V.
Wilson Case**

OVERVIEW OF THE RECORDS

- Agency:** Minnesota. Attorney General. Charities Division.
- Series Title:** Litigation files concerning the May V. Wilson case,
- Dates:** 1973-1988.
- Abstract:** This insurance fraud case concerned the murder of May V. Wilson by Leonard J. Richards as part of a fraudulent scheme to obtain insurance benefits via the charities, controlled by Richards, that were the beneficiaries of her estate.
- Quantity:** 2.5 cu. ft. (2 boxes and 1 partial box)
- Location:** See Detailed Description section for box locations.

HISTORY OF THE CASE

This case is probably as good an example of the intermingling of charities fraud, murder, and manipulation of individuals and of the legal system as can be found. On May 21, 1982, the body of May Wilson, a retired nurse, was found in an empty store on West Broadway in Minneapolis. Wilson was insured against accidental death by at least 27 policies worth over 3 million dollars. The largest beneficiaries were two obscure charities and four trusts that were substantially under the control of her half-brother, Leonard J. Richards, also of Minneapolis. Through the years, Richards had worked as an accountant, minister, taxi-cab operator, real estate agent, management consultant, and corporate secretary to a company publishing a gay magazine. He ran for Congress twice, once as a Libertarian and once as a Republican.

Wilson, who had received a full medical disability discharge from the U.S. Air Force in 1968, suffered from mental and physical ailments. Drug dependence further hampered her control of her own affairs. During the 1970s, Richards helped Wilson acquire 46 overlapping hospitalization income policies that paid a fixed amount for each day a person was hospitalized. Wilson spent more than 300 days in hospitals and collected about \$700,000, according to the

Internal; Revenue Service. During the same time period, she contributed about \$700,000 to churches and charities controlled by Richards.

In March 1982, Wilson was rescued from the garage of the house she shared with Richards. A taxi operated by one of Richard's companies was running, and Wilson was in the back seat. The garage door was closed. When she was revived by firefighters, she asked them, "Do you think he is trying to kill me?" Two months later she was found dead.

In September 1985, after a three week trial (*Cerro Gordo Charity v. Firemen's Fund & North American Life & Casualty Co.*), the jury returned the verdict that Leonard Richards intentionally killed or caused to have May Wilson killed as part of a fraudulent scheme to obtain insurance benefits in which Wilson was a mere pawn. The jury further ruled that Richards' fraudulent intent existed at the time the policies were initially purchased. For the next several years Richards appealed the case to District Court in hopes of having certain evidence and testimony thrown out and the decision reversed.

Although the Attorney General's Office files deal only with the charities fraud cases and the attempts by the insurance companies to avoid payment because of the fraud, the Richards saga was far from over. In February 1987, Richards' lawyer, Robert T. Stratton, was found dead. Stratton was apparently planning to report Richards' financial schemes to the IRS. Richards was soon arrested, and on April 27, 1989, was convicted of killing Stratton. On that same date, he also was indicted for the murder of May Wilson.

Richards appealed his conviction in the Stratton case, since the judge had refused his request to represent himself as his own lawyer. In June 1990, the Minnesota Supreme Court, even though ruling that there was sufficient evidence to sustain a guilty verdict, reversed the decision and ordered a new trial. In August 1991, Richards was again found guilty of the Stratton murder and received a life sentence with eligibility for parole after 17½ years. In April 1992, the Wilson murder trial was stopped after nine weeks when Richards was able to get the judge disqualified for hostility. While these trials were pending, Richards ran for Minnesota state treasurer in 1990, finishing third in the DFL primary, and for U.S. Representative in the 8th District in 1992 while in jail. Suspicions that Richards used public money, granted for his murder defenses, for his political campaigns were never proven.

Finally in May 1994, Richards was found guilty of May Wilson's murder. After more than twelve years, at the expense of a half-million dollars in public money, and following a five-month trial, the jury returned its guilty verdict in less than five hours. In addition to receiving a second life sentence, Richards was ordered to pay \$50,000 to Hennepin County for court costs. Richards claimed that he was too sick to be his own lawyer at this second trial and that since his appeal for a stand-by counsel was refused, the verdict should be thrown out. On July 19, 1996, the Minnesota Supreme Court denied this appeal.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE RECORDS

The following files deal only with the charities fraud cases and the attempts by the insurance companies to avoid payment because of the fraud.

The files include correspondence, petitions, exhibits, affidavits, discovery documents, motions and briefs, financial records, and other material related to and documenting the case.

ORGANIZATION OF THE RECORDS

The files are organized into several sections corresponding to various stages in the insurance fraud investigation.

RELATED MATERIALS

This case received considerable coverage in the Minneapolis and St. Paul newspapers.

INDEX TERMS

This collection is indexed under the following headings in the catalog of the Minnesota Historical Society. Researchers desiring materials about related topics, persons or places should search the catalog using these headings.

Topics:

Charitable uses, trusts, and foundations—Minnesota.
Distribution of decedents' estates—Minnesota.
Insurance crimes—Minnesota.
Litigating.
Murder—Minnesota.
Veterans, Disabled—Minnesota.
Women veterans—Minnesota.

Persons:

Richards, Leonard J.
Wilson, May V.

Organizations:

Cerro Gordo Charity.
Fireman's Fund Insurance Companies.
North American Life and Casualty Company (Minneapolis, Minn.)

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Preferred Citation:

[Indicate the cited item, folder title, and sub-unit here]. Minnesota Attorney General.
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See the Chicago Manual of Style for additional examples.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

Note to Researchers: To request materials, please note both the location and box numbers shown below.

Location	Box	
101.I.11.8F	1	<p>Charitable Trusts and Organizations v. Hennepin County Attorney and P.R. of Estate of May V. Wilson, Court File No. 85-9478, July 1985 - February 1986. 1 folder.</p> <p>Correspondence and documents regarding the action taken by the litigants against Hennepin County to obtain information about the murder investigation.</p> <p>Probate files, 1982-1988. 7 folders.</p> <p>Estate of May V. Wilson, AG Docket #15.336M.0050.</p> <p>Correspondence and documents filed with the probate court or which relate to the probate proceedings in the estate of May V. Wilson. These files contain no insurance litigation documents.</p> <p>Petitions, 1-6, June 1982 - December 1983.</p> <p>Exhibits to Sixth Petition for Interim Order, 1982-1983.</p> <p>Petitions 7-9, and correspondence, December 1983 - November 1984.</p> <p>Correspondence, December 1984 - December 1988. 2 folders.</p> <p>Notices of Settlement Agreements, December 1983 - February 1984.</p> <p>Notes, 1983.</p> <p>General information, 1979-1987. 14 folders.</p> <p>Information on the non-profit organizations and trusts which were involved in the insurance litigation and/or named in May Wilson's will. It also includes various complaints and answers filed in the insurance litigation cases.</p> <p>Ashawa Trust, 1981-1982.</p> <p>Bothnia Trust, 1981-1982.</p> <p>Complaints and Answers, 1983.</p> <p>General correspondence, 1983-1987.</p> <p>Elmwood Fund, 1981-1982.</p> <p>King Fund, 1981-1982.</p> <p>Laine Memorial Fund, 1977-1983.</p> <p>Montana Fund, 1982.</p> <p>Richards, Leonard J. to David Maland, 1986.</p> <p>Rova Family Fund, 1979.</p> <p>Wilson, May V., Estate, notes, 1982.</p> <p>Wilson, May V., Investigation, 1979-1982.</p> <p>Wilson Lectures in American Penology, 1981-1982.</p> <p>Wilson Trusts, 1984.</p> <p>May V. Wilson life insurance litigation files, 1983-1986. 17 folders.</p>

AG Docket #15.790B.0050. These files contain all of the documents filed during the consolidated discovery period. The files contain discovery pleadings, case management orders, affidavits and evidence, and the Attorney General's intervention documents.

Affidavits and other evidence, 1984-1986.
Appeal Re: Certification of Jay Jaffe as Expert Witness, 1985.
Assisted suicide issue, 1984-1985.
Attorney General's Complaint and Answer, 1985.
Best & Flanagan's Motion to Withdraw, 1984.
Case Management documents, 1, 2, and 3, 1984.
Attorney General's Intervention and Case Management Order No. 4, 1984-1985.

Location **Box**

101.I.11.9B

2

Case Management Order No. 5, 1985.
Correspondence, 1984-1985.
Discovery, October 1984 - August 1985. 3 folders.
Family Trusts' Motion to Compel Joiner of Leonard Richards, June 1985.
Intervention Documents (examples), 1984
Legal research, 1984.
Miscellaneous memos and notes, 1983-1985.
U.S. District Court - Consolidated Litigation, 1984.
Cerro Gordo Charity vs. Fireman's Fund (civil 4-83-871) and North American Life & Casualty (civil 4-83-251) litigation files, 1973-1988. 19 folders.
AG Docket No. 15.790B.0050.
Cerro Gordo - Appellant.
General information, 1987.
Financial statements, 1978-1983.
Brief and Appendix, May 1986.
Petition for Rehearing, June 12, 1987.
Reply Brief, October 7, 1985.
Writ of Mandamus, September 1985.
Correspondence, August - September, 1985.
Court Orders, September - November, 1985.
Discovery, August 1985.
Fireman's Fund American Life Insurance Company - Appellee's brief, June 12, 1986.
Hartford Accident & Indemnity Company, 1983-1986.
Knudsen v. Peickert briefs, 1973.
Merger - Cerro Gordo, Laine Memorial and others, 1987-1988.
Motions and memoranda, 1985.
Non-Party Appellant Leonard Richards brief, March 1986.
North American Life and Casualty Company:

Brief and appendix, June 1986.
Pre-trial statement, August 1985.
Patient's Reply Brief and Appendix, July 1986.
Pleadings, 1983-1987.

Location	Box	
101.I.11.10F	[3]	<p>Richards, Leonard J.: Petition for Writ of Prohibition, September 1985. Supplemental Authorities of Patient, August, 11, 1986. Trial notes, 1985. Trial statements, July - August 1985.</p> <p>Laine Memorial Fund vs. Leon Raymond Butler (Lloyd's of London) litigation file, Civil 4-83-534. 3 items in expansion folder. General file, 1985-1986. Correspondence and miscellaneous, 1986. Affidavit of David M. Gische, 1986.</p> <p>Post-Discovery Insurance Litigation Files, 1981-1988. 10 folders. Includes documents filed after completion of discovery.</p> <p>Cerro Gordo vs. American Heritage Insurance Company, 1986-1987. City National Bank of Miami (Rova Family Fund) vs. Continental Casualty Company, 1986. Elmwood Fund vs. St. Paul Fire & Marine Insurance Co., 1985-1986. First National Bank in Sioux Falls vs. Omaha Indemnity Company (Bothnia), 1985-1988. First National Bank in Sioux Falls (Ashawa Trust) vs. Combined Insurance Company, 1981. First National Bank in Sioux Falls (Ashawa Trust) vs. The Omaha Indemnity Company, 1981. First National Bank in Sioux Falls (Ashawa Trust) vs. The Travelers Insurance Company, 1981. Laine Memorial Fund vs. Monumental Life Insurance Company, 1985-1986. Mutual of Omaha Insurance Company v. American National Bank & Trust, Cerro Gordo Charity, Laine Memorial, 1986. Judge Renner's pretrial order and responses, 1985.</p>