

# Byers Was Implicated In Thefts Of Statues

By BECKY MCREYNOLDS  
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Russell G. Byers has been in the news frequently in recent months in connection with the theft of seven statues in two separate incidents at the St. Louis Art Museum.

Byers was described by police — for a while — as the "mastermind" behind the first theft of four statues, including Frederic Remington's "Bronco Buster," Jan. 29. Three other statues, all by the French sculptor Francois Auguste Rodin, were taken in a second burglary Feb. 29.

However, all charges against Byers were dropped after the statues were recovered. Police had received anonymous phone calls leading them to the locations of the missing statues.

Byers had been implicated by another suspect in the thefts, John A. Crenshaw, 25. On Feb. 28, police raided the Byers home in the 9300 block of Fredric Court, Rock Hill. None of the stolen statues was recovered, but 138 other items, believed to be stolen, were confiscated.

Since the first burglary, two men believed to be associates of Byers and Crenshaw, and also believed to have been involved in the first museum theft, have met violent deaths.

On Feb. 17, the body of Charles H. Gunn, 28, was found behind the 5900 block of Hamilton Terrace. Gunn, who had been identified by Crenshaw as an accomplice, had been shot in the head.

On June 11, the body of Samuel Ernest White, 42, was found in a field in Madison County. He had been shot three times and his body was severely burned.

When Byers was arrested March 2, he gave his occupation as a vending-machine dealer. Police records show many arrests for him in St. Louis and St. Louis County since 1960.

He was convicted in U.S. District Court here in 1965 of conspiracy to commit auto theft. He was fined and placed on probation.

In March, Byers' wife and daughter filed suit in St. Louis County Court seeking recovery of the items taken from their home and, in addition, \$75,000 in damages from St. Louis Police Chief Eugene J. Camp and County Police Superintendent G. H. Kleinknecht to compensate for the loss of the goods. The suit is pending.

Byers was charged in the art museum burglary after police said Crenshaw led them to the first statue to be recovered and implicated Byers as a middleman. That charge was dropped April 27 after Crenshaw told St. Louis Circuit Attorney George S. Peach that he would not testify against Byers.

Byers was charged with receiving stolen goods in connection with the lithographs found in the raid. That charge was dismissed on May 25 after county prosecutors said their case was not strong enough to proceed.

Byers' wife was seeking the return of three Oriental rugs, eight lithographs and 22 antique objects police confiscated as stolen. Police said the all of the other items taken in the raid were already returned. An attorney for the Byers family said the police had no right to release the goods without a court determination of proper ownership.