

DA says Ala. shooter had revenge list of employers

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SAMSON, Ala. — A gunman who killed 10 people in the worst mass shooting in Alabama history had a list of employers "who had done him wrong," including the nearby sausage plant he quit days before the spree and the metal factory where he shot himself, authorities said Wednesday.

Investigators trying to figure out why Michael McLendon, 28, killed relatives and others Tuesday afternoon found the list in his home, Coffee County District Attorney Gary McAliley said.

"We found a list of people he worked with, people who had done him wrong," said McAliley in a brief interview outside the charred house where the rampage began.

The killings devastated rural communities in two counties near the Florida border. While the list was one of several perplexing clues that emerged Wednesday about McLendon's life, authorities couldn't say what set him off.

And the people who might be able to explain — his mother, his grandmother, his uncle and two cousins — were among the victims. A witness said the four had no time to react when McLendon wordlessly and expressionlessly pulled his car up to a house where they were sitting and opened fire.

The rampage started around 3:30 p.m. Tuesday, and took only about an hour from start to finish. In that time, McLendon sprayed more than 200 rounds, authorities said.

First, McLendon set his mother's house on fire and killed her, then drove 12 miles and opened fire on his uncle's front porch, killing five more people and his grandmother, who lived next door, authorities said. Then, he drove through town and fired seemingly at random, killing three more people. With police in pursuit, he ended up at the metals plant where he once worked, and shot himself after engaging in a shootout with law enforcement officers.

"He cleaned his family out," Coffee County Coroner Robert Preachers said.

McLendon was briefly employed by the police department in Samson in 2003 and spent about a week and a half at the police academy, dropping out before he received firearms training, said Col. Chris Murphy, director of the Alabama Department of Public Safety. More recently, he worked nearly two years at food manufacturer and distributor Kelley Foods in Elba, about 25 miles north of where he shot most of his victims.

The company didn't specify what his position was, but said in a statement that he was a "reliable team leader" who was well liked, but quit last Wednesday.

Though Kelley Foods said he left voluntarily, the company was on the list of those the gunman felt slighted by, said McAliley. So were another of his employers, Reliable Metals in Samson, and a Pilgrim's Pride plant near Enterprise where his mother had worked. The district attorney said the mother had recently been laid off from the plant.

McAliley wouldn't elaborate further on what the list said.

McLendon worked at Reliable Metal Products until 2003, when Geneva County District Attorney Kirke Adams said he was forced to resign. A co-worker there, Jerry Hysmith, echoed Kelley Foods' description, saying McLendon was shy, quiet and laid-back.

"Something had to snap," said Hysmith, 35, who lives in Samson, and worked with McLendon in 2001.

The victims were identified as McLendon's mother, Lisa McLendon, 52; his uncle, James Alford White, 55; his cousin, Tracy Michelle Wise, 34; a second cousin, Dean James Wise, 15; and his grandmother, Virginia E. White, 74. Also killed were James Irvin Starling, 24; Sonja Smith, 43; and Bruce Wilson Malloy, 51.

The wife and daughter of Geneva County Deputy Josh Myers, who was one of the law enforcement officers involved in the chase for McLendon, also died in the shooting spree. Andrea D. Myers, 31, was visiting the home with 18-month old Corrine Gracy Myers and 4-month-old Ella Myers when the shooting began.

Ella was flown to a hospital in Pensacola and was awaiting surgery for a wound to the leg caused by either a bullet or shrapnel. She was in fair condition, authorities said.

"I cried so much yesterday, I don't have a tear left in me," said the girl's father, who did not know McLendon. "I feel like I should be able to walk in the house and my wife would be there, my baby girl climbing on me."

The first killed Tuesday was McLendon's mother. Authorities said he put her on an L-shaped couch, piled stuff on top of her and set her afire. He said McLendon also shot four dogs at the house.

A dozen miles away, he gunned down the other relatives and sent panicked bystanders fleeing and ducking behind cars. His uncle's wife, Phyllis White, sought refuge in the house of neighbor Archie Mock.

"She was just saying, 'I think my family is dead, I think my family is dead,'" said Mock, 55.

Tom Knowles saw McLendon pull up and begin firing without saying a word, leaving his victims no time to react.

"He had no expression — just dead," said Knowles, who was in the yard of his son's house next door.

McLendon went inside the house and chased Phyllis White out before driving off, Knowles said. He returned moments later in his car as if he were still looking for her. The witness then made eye contact with him.

"He had cold eyes. There was nothing. I hollered at him. I said, 'Look, boy, I ain't done nothing to you,'" Knowles said. McLendon then left for good.

Afterwards, Knowles said he and his daughter found the baby Ella bleeding: "The only thing that was alive was the 3-month-old baby."

McLendon shot more victims at random as he drove toward the metals plant where he once worked. Smith was struck down as she walked out of a gas station. Malloy was hit while driving. Starling was shot as he walked.

At the Reliable plant, McLendon got out of his car and fired at police with his assault rifle, wounding Geneva Police Chief Frankie Lindsey, authorities said. He then walked inside and killed himself.

Once investigators got a look at the ammunition he was carrying, they feared the bloodshed could have been worse. "I'm convinced he went over there to kill more people. He was heavily armed," said Coffee County Sheriff Dave Sutton.

The community was still in shock Wednesday.

"This was 20-something miles of terror in my district," said State Sen. Harri Anne Smith, R-Slocumb.

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Associated Press Writers Garry Mitchell in Mobile and Bob Johnson in Montgomery contributed to this report.