

Burglary charge filed against couple who 'cleaned up' vacant house

Written by Marty Randall

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A couple who "cleaned up" a vacant house on State Road 256 recently have found themselves in a new home - the Scott County Security Center.

Terri Lynn Franklin, 41, Scottsburg, and Johnny Williams, 36, Austin, have both been charged in Scott Circuit Court with one count of burglary, a Class B felony. They are accused of taking items from the house without the owner's permission and selling them in Seymour.

The probable cause affidavit was prepared by Deputy Justin Cheatham with the Sheriff's Department. He took the original statement from the house owner's granddaughter on May 4. A list of stolen items was submitted by the owner, but the woman also told Deputy Cheatham that a friend of hers had seen an older, gray S10 pickup truck with faded white paint on its top parked at the house the day before. Two men and a woman the friend identified only as "Terri" were seen removing items from the house and putting them in the truck.

One of the men had the last name of Williams, the friend thought.

That same day, Deputy Cheatham began looking for the truck in the Austin vicinity.

As he passed a local gas station, the officer said he saw two men getting into an S10 that matched the description given. He pulled in behind the truck and asked the driver for identification.

The man readily complied. His passenger identified himself as Clarence Williams but could not produce any identification. It was later learned the man was Johnny Williams.

The truck's driver said Williams and Terri Lynn Franklin had asked him for help on Friday, May 3. Franklin, he said, had told him that she had permission to clean out the house and take items "...to scrap." When Deputy Cheatham asked the driver why his passenger identified himself as Clarence Williams, the driver appeared confused and said he was unsure why Williams did that. He was sure the man's first name was Johnny, the driver remarked.

The driver also told the officer that they used his truck because "...he was the only one that had a truck and that he used his ID at the scrap yard because the other two stated they did not have any ID on them."

When Deputy Cheatham asked Williams about taking items from the house, Williams said the owner had given him and Franklin permission to do so because Franklin wanted to rent the house.

Since Williams was wanted on a criminal warrant issued by Jackson County authorities, he was taken into custody on those unrelated charges and transported to the Security Center.

Franklin was located at the Austin Police Department. An Austin officer, Greg Green, relayed the message to Franklin that Deputy Cheatham wanted to talk to her. She came and repeated the story about getting permission to clean it out and taking the items to a place in Seymour, where they were sold.

In talking with the house owner, Deputy Cheatham confirmed that the woman had not given the couple permission to do so. Franklin was then taken into custody as well and taken to the local jail.

Each appeared on Tuesday, May 7, in Circuit Court for their initial hearings, and each entered a preliminary plea of not guilty. Each were provided with the services of a public defender, and each had a preliminary jury trial date of October 7 assigned.

Bail in each case was set at \$50,000 corporate surety/full cash. Franklin's attorney filed a motion for an alteration/revocation of bail to either allow for a lower bond or her release before the trial date. That matter has been scheduled for a court hearing on June 3.