

Witness Sought in Fatal Shooting

Written by Steve Frank

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Wilkes County Authorities are looking for a witness to a shooting that killed a man shortly after noon Friday at a store on Champion-Mount Pleasant Road in Ferguson. Wilkes Sheriff Chris Shew said Melissa Hartley, 37, Wilkesboro, fatally shot James Phillip Church Jr., also 37, of Beaver Creek Road, Boomer, that as Church reportedly tried to grab money from the register of Yadkin River Grocery and Hardware store where Hartley was working. Shew said Ms. Hartley told investigators that Church entered the store and was attempting to get money from the cash register when Ms. Hartley shot Church after he grabbed her as she tried to stop him. The matter is more complicated according to Sheriff Shew as Ms. Hartley and Church had a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship until they broke up a few days earlier. Ms. Hartley has not been charged in the case. The sheriff said investigators are trying to find a white male who apparently was in the store when the shooting occurred, a man witnesses described as being in his 60s and about 5'4" to 5'7" tall. Ms. Hartley said she left the store after the shooting and that this man was gone when she returned. Shew said, "We need this man to come forward." Shew said authorities were told Church was in a vehicle driven by someone else when he was dropped off at the store. The initial call was an armed robbery involving a shooting at 12:07 p.m. Friday.