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[Manhunts, murders and armed robberies: Maine's crime trends flip with spring, summer mayhem](#)

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The date of Friday, July 17 marked one of the busier and stranger periods in Maine law enforcement history.

For a matter of hours, police were engaged in two, unrelated manhunts for murder suspects – one spurred by a series of killings in the Millinocket area, the other stemming from a woman's slaying in June in the North Guilford area about 80 miles to the west.

The manhunt in the North Guilford area has persisted for more than a month and a half. Robert Burton is accused of murdering his former girlfriend, Stephanie Gebo. On July 6, the Maine State Police reported that the search ramped up when Burton was spotted in a canoe or kayak in the area of the First and Second Davis Ponds. The July 6 search did not yield any sign of Burton or the canoe or kayak that he was last seen in, police reported.

Although police suspect Burton has been breaking into camps and houses in the area, this was only the second time that a confirmed sighting of the fugitive had taken place, the Maine State Police reported. Police continue to seek the public's help in locating Burton and warned he is considered armed and dangerous. Any signs of suspicious activity should be called in at once, either via 911, or to the State Police in Bangor at 207.973.3700.

Friday's other active manhunt ended in more dramatic fashion. The suspect, Anthony Lord, 35, from the Crystal and Sherman area, was taken into police custody after he embarked on a rampage that began late Thursday evening and ended with the shooting of five people and the beating of another man. Two men were shot and killed and two other men and a woman were shot and were being treated for their injuries. The shootings took place in several towns that included Benedicta and Lee, police reported.

Friday also marked the date of the Portland arrest of Johnny Ouch, 20, of Westbrook, who is charged with murder and elevated aggravated assault in connection with a shooting at a local recording studio. Ouch has entered a plea of not guilty, according to news reports.

Treyjon "Trey" Arsenault, 19, of Scarborough, died in the hospital following the shooting at Da Block Studios, which also injured an as-yet unidentified second victim.

This week's police log from the Portland Police Department contained the rare citation of murder due to Ouch's arrest.

Meanwhile, armed robberies seemed to erupt across the city. Portland police – still searching for clues in a Wednesday evening armed robbery of a Windham couple on Forest Avenue – were confronted Friday afternoon by two more armed robberies. Both occurred on Baxter Boulevard and both apparently involved the same suspect. In one case, the robber escaped after demanding a phone, in the second the robber took off in the victim's car, police said.

How to explain this rash of crime?

Maine had the lowest violent crime rate in the country in 2012 – 122.7 incidents per 100,000 people, the Muskie Center at University of Southern Maine reported. State data revealed that crime decreased 9.1 percent overall in 2013 – the largest decrease in 20 years.

“The statistics continue to show that Maine is one of the safest places in the nation to live,” Colonel Robert Williams, chief of the Maine State Police, wrote in the 2013 “Crime in Maine” report (http://www.maine.gov/dps/cim/crime_in_maine/2013pdf/Crime%202013.pdf).

Although 2014 statistics haven’t been released, this spring, during investigation of the Da Block Studios homicide, then-Acting Portland Police Chief Vernon Malloch described “consistent reductions in violent crimes and property crime rates over the last three to five years.”

Yet this year’s rash of crimes has skewed those trends.

Portland Police Lt. James Sweatt said, “Property crimes are down, generally speaking. ... We’ve had a spike in robberies. ... It’s quite rare to see this.”

Drugs are often a common denominator, he said.

“People who are desperate do desperate things,” Sweatt said.

Malloch agreed property crimes are down for year to date in Portland, but the department is concerned about crimes of violence.

“We’re always concerned when we see any crime of violence, but this is unusual for Portland,” he said in an interview Friday.

“It’s unusual that we see this many armed robberies in Portland,” Malloch said.

Assistant Professor of Sociology Michael Rocque at Bates College, who is the former director of research for the Maine Department of Corrections, remained circumspect.

“The only statistics I’ve seen, officially, are for 2013, in which a new low for crime was recorded,” Rocque wrote to the Phoenix. “I have noticed instances of pretty brutal crimes this summer but I don’t have enough information to say whether they are related to an increase in crime or just getting more attention because of their nature. ... One thing I would say is that it appears more expressive crimes like homicide have less to do with macro factors like the economy and more to do with interpersonal issues or drug related factors.”

These observations were echoed by Professor Steve Barkan at the University of Maine, whose areas of expertise include criminology; deviant behavior and law and society.

“I haven’t seen this year’s crime statistics yet, but even if there are more serious crimes so far than last year, the year is barely more than half over, and it’s far too early to know whether this represents a trend or just a blip,” he wrote to the Phoenix. “So many things can affect crime statistics, including whether people are more or less likely to report victimizations to police and whether the police have consistent crime recording processes from year to year. One bottom line is that Maine remains one of the lowest crime (and therefore safest) states in the nation, even when controlling for population size.”

Property crimes in Portland

Tuesday, June 9. Police investigated approximately 30 reports of cars that were broken into the previous night and early that morning. The cars were parked in the area of Somerset Street, Preble Street and State Street. In all instances windows were smashed to gain entry, police said. Thieves targeted cash and in several cases left other valuables behind. Blood was left on some of the cars, suggesting the perpetrator or perpetrators sustained injury, police said.

No arrests have been made in this rash of car burglaries, Portland Police Lt. James Sweatt said Monday.

“There’s been blood evidence collected at some of the crime scenes and it’s been submitted to the crime lab,” Sweatt said.

A “person of interest” photograph of a possible suspect, circulated by police, did not yield an arrest.

Saturday, June 27. Portland Police arrested Richard Bing Coleman, 29, of Portland on two counts of residential burglary (class B), two counts of theft (Class C), possession of scheduled W drugs (class D), possession of burglar tools (Class E), as well as an outstanding felony warrant for theft.

The Parkside and the West End areas of Portland were the location of at least eight residential burglaries over the previous 10 days, and at least some of those were linked to Coleman, police said. All burglaries involved the suspect entering unlocked or open windows. Coleman was charged with two burglaries: One occurred on Brackett Street on June 20 and another on Deering Street that occurred on June 27. Coleman was arrested on Cumberland Avenue and found to be in possession of numerous stolen items as well as a small amount of suspected cocaine, police said.

Monday, July 6. Joshua Allen Lamb, 26, of Portland, was arrested for burglary of a motor vehicle, theft by unauthorized taking or transfer, carrying a concealed weapon and unlawful possession of schedule drugs, according to the Portland police log.

Lamb was wanted for breaking into motor vehicles, typically locked vehicles, and he is considered a repeat offender, Sweatt said.

“The detectives know him well,” he said.

Violent crimes in Portland

Wednesday, July 15. A 26-year-old man and a 32-year-old woman from Windham were robbed at gunpoint last Wednesday night at 1871 Forest Ave., police reported. The couple were talking outside their cars in the parking lot of Tortilla Flats around 10:20 p.m. when they were approached by two men armed with handguns. The perpetrators demanded money and searched the victims before taking a purse and mobile phone. They fled on foot into the Wellesley Estates apartment complex on Forest Avenue. The victims were not injured.

The perpetrators are both described as black males and wearing dark hooded sweatshirts. Police said one man was between 5 feet, 5 inches and 5 feet, 7 inches tall with a thin build; and the other man was about 6 feet, 1 inch tall and of a medium build.

Friday, July 17. Johnny Ouch, 20, of Westbrook was arrested last Friday morning and charged with murder and elevated aggravated assault in connection with a shooting at a local recording studio. He was located on East Valentine Street in Westbrook around 11 a.m. Friday and taken into custody, police said.

WMTW reported that Ouch made his first court appearance Friday afternoon in Cumberland County Court and pleaded not guilty to the charges of murder and aggravated assault.

Friday, July 17. TruChoice and cPort federal credit unions, victims of robberies this spring, upped the reward amount for a third time Friday. The federal credit unions, working in cooperation with the Portland Police Department, increased the reward last week to \$15,000. Previously, the reward was set at \$5,000, then it was increased to \$10,000 in late June. The reward is for information leading to the arrest and successful prosecution of individuals responsible for the robberies that occurred on May 26 at TruChoice and June 19 at cPort.

Friday, July 17. Police launched an investigation into two armed robberies that occurred in the Baxter Boulevard area. The first took place around 1:45 p.m. in the parking lot of Hannaford's supermarket, 295 Forest Ave. A man reported that while sitting in his car he was approached by a subject with a handgun who demanded his phone. The suspect eventually fled on foot without the phone.

About an hour later a subject approached a woman in her car in the parking lot of 850 Baxter Blvd., Seaside Nursing Home, and pointed a handgun at the driver and ordered her out of the car, police said. She fled on foot, and the perpetrator stole her car, a silver 2004 Honda Pilot with Maine registration 6690 SZ.

In both cases the suspect was described as a black male, about 20 years old, 5 feet, 10 inches tall and wearing dark color clothing and having afro style hair, police said. Neither victim was injured. Police asked anyone with information to call 207.874.8575. Anyone who sees the stolen car is cautioned against approaching it but should call police immediately.