

City razes Kan. motel where OKC bomber stayed

By The Associated Press

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GRANDVIEW PLAZA — A small-town Kansas motel with an unlikely place in U.S. history is now becoming history itself.

Sixteen years to the day a rental truck laden with explosives blew up outside Oklahoma City's Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, crews began demolishing the Dreamland Motel, where Timothy McVeigh stayed in April 1995 while planning the bombing that killed 168 people and injured 800 others.

The city council in Grandview Plaza, a small community just outside Junction City and Fort Riley, voted March 15 to have the abandoned motel torn down. The work began April 19.

"It's been empty for several years," Grandview Plaza city superintendent Jerome Thomas said. "It was becoming a safety and health risk for the city, so the council decided to smash it."

McVeigh, a former Fort Riley soldier, and co-conspirator Terry Nichols were frequently on the move in Kansas and elsewhere in the months before the bombing. Both rented rooms earlier in 1995 at a Junction City motel, and Nichols later moved with his family into a house in the Kansas town of Herington.

Within hours of the April 19 blast, the Federal Bureau of Investigation launched the largest manhunt in U.S. history. McVeigh had been stopped for speeding, with a gun in his car, north of Oklahoma City shortly after the bombing, and investigators ended up tracking his journey back to Junction City and Grandview Plaza.

They traced the yellow Ryder rental truck that had pulled up to the federal building with more than 5,000 pounds of ammonium nitrate and nitromethane back to Elliott's Body Shop in Junction City.

FBI Special Agent Mark Bouton noted that someone signed for the truck under the name "Robert Kling."

"He had a backward slant to his handwriting, which is unusual," Bouton recalled. "About 5 percent of people do."

Bouton began searching area hotels for someone registered with the last name Kling. His first stop was the Dreamland Motel, where a clerk told him a man with a Ryder truck had stayed for a few days.

“I asked her to describe him and he fit the description,” Bouton said. “We showed her the sketch we had and she said, ‘Yeah, that’s the guy.’”

Using his own name, McVeigh had registered at the Dreamland on April 14 and checked into Room 25.

“He actually ordered food to Room 25, but he ordered it in the name Kling, which matched the Ryder truck rental,” Bouton said.

McVeigh was later convicted of the bombing and was executed June 11, 2001. Nichols is serving 161 consecutive life sentences at a maximum security prison in Colorado.

As for the Dreamland, Thomas said the city council has no plans to rebuild a hotel or apartments on the site, but said there was speculation of a prospective buyer for the land.