

Amish Have to Forgive Again as Abducted Girls Allegedly Sexually Abused

Two young Amish sisters whose abduction touched off a frantic search in northern New York were sexually abused by their captors, *The New York Times* reported.

The girls, aged 12 and 6, were kidnapped on Wednesday from a family farm some 10 miles from New York's border with Canada and released Thursday. Police have charged two suspects, Stephen Howells II, 39, and Nicole Vaisey, 25, with two counts each of first-degree kidnapping.

In remarks to *The New York Times* late on Saturday, St. Lawrence County District Attorney Mary Rain said the girls had suffered sexual abuse during their captivity at Howells' home in Hermon, New York. She did not elaborate.

The victims' names are being withheld due to the sexual-assault allegations.

Earlier on Saturday, St. Lawrence County Sheriff Kevin Wells said at a news conference that the couple had carefully planned the abduction and that the girls were kidnapped not because they were Amish but because they were seen as easy targets. The girls did not know their kidnappers, he said.

He said police had reason to believe that in helping to lead authorities to their captors, the girls had most likely prevented more kidnappings.

A preliminary hearing for Howells and Vaisey is set for Thursday, officials said. Federal charges could be filed at a later date, officials said.

The girls were returned home in good health on Thursday after

their captors dropped them off in front of a stranger's home in the hamlet of Bigelow, then fled, Rain previously said.

The man living at the home recognized the pair as the missing girls and drove them 30 miles back to their family farm in the rural Amish community of Oswegatchie, she said.

Reporting by Karen Brooks; editing by Sonya Hepinstall

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