

Custody dispute ends, girls go with father

By DICK FARRELL

Michelle and Dawn Sweitzer determined their own fate Monday and, in effect, settled what their parents apparently could not in the past three years.

A custody battle involving the two girls, ages 11 and 9, ended after Judge John W. Hazard of Noble County conferred with family members for more than two hours. The girls, after court-ordered periods of visitation with their divorced parents, apparently told the judge they preferred to live most of the year with their father, a Dover resident. The judge made a ruling to that effect.

Hazard, called on by the Ohio Supreme Court to negotiate a settlement in Tuscarawas County after Judge Raymond Rice disqualified himself from the case, met privately with the girls, then their mother, Michaela of Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., and finally their father, Robert.

At the conclusion, Hazard announced his decision. "Basically, it's the same as the temporary order we made in April," Hazard said. "Let's hope it's over."

THE CASE FIRST received public attention on Feb. 20, 1976, when the girls, after leaving Dover East Elementary, were whisked away by two women waiting nearby.

The next morning, Michaela called Dover police from her Florida home and reported the girls were safe with her.

In all, the girls have been the subjects of three alleged abductions. Twice they were taken in similar fashion from their Florida home.

Terms of Monday's settlement are that the girls will live with their father and his wife at 309 Glenview av. during the school year. Michelle and Dawn will live with their mother, who remarried in April, during the summer months. The mother also was granted liberal visitation privileges on holidays.