

# 'Chooley' Grange guilty of drug-ring murders

## *Portland man convicted of silencing two informers*

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COLVILLE, Wash.—Portland resident John D. "Chooley" Grange was convicted Saturday of silencing two Rainbow Family drug-ring snitches by shooting them to death and burning their bodies last June when they were spotted at the Northport Barter Faire.

Grange, 26, faces about 40 to 53 years in prison for the first-degree murders of Josh Schaefer and Nick Kaiser, both 21, at a primitive cabin in the mountains 15 miles north of Colville. His use of a firearm may add five to 10 years to the total when Stevens County Superior Court Judge Rebecca Baker passes sentence March 29.

Prosecutor Jerry Wetle said the case gave county residents and unusual glimpse of the big-money, high stakes drug deals that occur in big cities with marijuana grown in rural northeastern Washington.

Within the counterculture Rainbow Family are drug rings that deal in huge sums of money and sometimes resort to violence to protect their interests, Wetle said.

Grange objected to Wetle's characterization of the Rainbow Family as a criminal organization. "There were 23,000 people at the last Rainbow Gathering, and that would be a pretty big drug syndicate if that were true," he told the court Friday.

He described himself as a working man who likes to smoke marijuana. Grange said he hoped to buy his "little, small amount" at a discount from some of the people who were later involved in the murders.

"I found out that these people had been dealing in high volumes of drugs—mostly marijuana, I believe, but also some LSD," Grange testified.

In fact, Wetle said in his closing argument Friday night, Kaiser appeared to be "the LSD man on the West Coast. He was the boss in Seattle." But testimony also indicated Grange as an "enforcer" for Portland drug boss Rob Schultz.

Grange said he'd heard "rumors" that Kaiser might have become an informer after he was arrested in a Seattle drug sting last year—which was true, Wetle said. Grange said he warned others to stay away from Kaiser when Kaiser showed up with Schaefer at the Northport Barter Faire, but he also warned Kaiser that he might be in danger from others because of the rumor. But Grange and others said Kaiser discounted the danger. Testimony indicated Kaiser hoped his friend Schaefer, who was a Rainbow Family drug dealer in California, could smooth things over for him.

Wetle said Kaiser apparently never realized that Schaefer also had been arrested and turned into an informer.

There was no physical evidence that Grange killed Kaiser and Schaefer, but two men testified that they were nearby when Grange shot them with a .22-caliber rifle. Jeffrey S. Cunningham, 25, who had been living at the murder scene with Grange, and Northport-area marijuana grower Dane M. Williams, 27, said, they helped Grange burn the victims' bodies in Kaiser's truck.

In 5 ½ hours of deliberation Saturday, the jury of eight women and four men didn't buy Grange's alibi that he was stranded at the Barter Faire when the murders occurred.

Grange said he was stuck at the fair because he lent his 1987 Ford Bronco to Williams. He suggested Williams committed the murders.

Cunningham and Williams were allowed to plead guilty to first-degree rendering criminal

assistance in exchange for their testimony. Wetle will recommend one-year jail terms for them when they are sentenced.

Wetle said their testimony was necessary to convict Grange, but admitted to the jury that “they didn’t make the best witnesses.”

“They are shameful,” Wetle said in his closing arguments. “They minimize their involvement.”

What they did admit—rifling the dead men’s pockets for money and drugs before setting them afire—was “a real sorry sight,” the prosecutor said.

Cunningham eventually admitted in court that he anticipated Grange would kill Kaiser and Schafer when he took them to the cabin.

Court-appointed defense attorney Robert Simeone argued that only an inability to remember a complicated lie could explain the numerous revisions and discrepancies in Cunningham’s and William’s testimony and statements to detectives.

But Wetle emphasized their agreement on “the big picture” and on certain obscure details. He noted that Cunningham’s girlfriend, Maija Soucie, testified that he told her the same story when he spent the night with her immediately after the murders.