

Grange now faces first degree murder charges

Transferred to Spokane after an alleged escape plan discovered

Statesman Examiner, By Jodi Miller

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Accused double-murderer John Douglas Grange, 26, pled not guilty to two charges of first degree murder Tuesday morning in the Stevens County Courthouse. The charges were upgraded at that time from second degree.

Grange was charged with second degree murder in November after being arrested in connection with the June deaths of Nicholas Kaiser, 21, and Joshua Schaefer, also 21.

According to court records, Kaiser was wanted dead by criminals he had allegedly "narced" on. According to Schaefer's widow, her husband was visiting Kaiser, an old friend.

Kaiser and Schaefer went to Grange's cabin in a remote area near Crown Creek, believing that they were going to buy hallucinogenic mushrooms. Instead, they were shot and their bodies burned in Kaiser's truck.

Dane Williams and Jeffrey Cunningham were accused of criminal assistance for helping Grange burn the bodies. Both pled guilty two weeks ago and are expected to testify against Grange, who is scheduled to go to trial Feb. 5.

Stevens County Prosecuting Attorney Jerry Wetle asked Superior Court Judge Rebecca Baker to allow him to upgrade the murder charges against Grange in the face of new information. Wetle argued that the killings were premeditated because the victims had bullet holes in the backs of their heads: because Grange waited for the victims at the cabin where the killings occurred; and because there was a known "hit" out for Kaiser at the Northport Barter Fair, the last the victims were heard from.

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Robert Simeone, defense attorney for Grange, opted to preserve his arguments until a later time. Simeone did argue, though, that moving Grange to the Spokane County Jail was unnecessary and that it denies Grange adequate counsel.

"I need to have him housed here," Simeone told Baker. "There is no way that I can talk to him over the (unsecured) phone. If he's not going to be housed here permanently, I'm going to take every opportunity to have him up here that I can."

A frustrated Simeone asked for the reasoning behind his move, saying that he's only heard unsubstantial allegations.

Wetle told Baker that it had been discovered that Grange and Roy B. Marchand, jailed for his stepfather's death, were planning an escape that was to occur on Jan. 17.

According to Wetle, a five-and-a-half-inch shank carved from a toothbrush was confiscated

from one of the inmates.

“The item has been found and actually was in the courtroom,” Wetle said.

Marchand had also figured out a way to undo a restraining knee brace, Wetle said.

Wetle added that the two had apparently arranged for armed cohorts to be waiting outside the courthouse in escape vehicles.

Wetle painted a harsh picture of the escape, saying that Grange had planned to brutalize and beat the jailer “worse than death,” so that, if apprehended, Grange would have to face the death penalty.

Wetle characterized the escape as a “nothing to lose” attempt. Grange is facing two sentences of life in prison and Wetle claimed that Marchand mistakenly believed he was on his “third strike,” which carries a mandatory life sentence.

“Where the conspiracy arises I don’t know,” Simeone retorted. “So far, I’ve got no details fleshed out...I’ve got bold assertions.”

Simeone also questioned the need to house Grange elsewhere, wondering why “there’s any difference in Spokane’s facility to deal with that.”

Judge Baker opted to leave Grange in Spokane and reimburse Simeone for travel costs.

“Obviously, there’s some security issues in our antiquated Stevens County Jail,” Baker said, adding that she would trust the judgment of Sheriff Craig Thayer. “We won’t waste public resources in transferring Grange up here.”

Grange is scheduled to appear in court again on Friday.