

Jury Getting Frank Wetzel Case Today

SANFORD, N.C. (AP) — The murder case against Frank Edward Wetzel, for which the state is seeking the death penalty, was expected to reach the Lee County Superior Court jury today.

Only arguments by Solicitor W. Jack Hooks and Defense Attorney John T. Page Jr. remained before Judge George Fountain charged the panel.

In a week of testimony by 58 witnesses from nine states, Hooks attempted to brand Wetzel as the man who gunned down Highway Patrolman J. T. Brown near here the night of last Nov. 5. Brown's death came an hour after Patrolman W. L. Reece was slain similarly near Ellerbe, about 50 miles south of here.

Wetzel, 36 and of Seneca Falls, N.Y., is already serving a life sentence for the Reece slaying. A Richmond County jury convicted him in January, but its mercy recommendation saved him from the gas chamber.

Page and the other court-appointed defense attorney, Harold W. Gavin of Sanford, chose to present no evidence when the state completed its case yesterday.

Gavin led off arguments to the jury by reminding them of their duty to decide "whether a man shall keep his life or lose it."

He argued the state had failed to place Wetzel in North Carolina at the time of Brown's slaying and questioned testimony of Negro hitchhiker Robert Terry Jr., who identified Wetzel as the slayer of Reece. Gavin termed Terry "not worthy of confidence."

Solicitor K. R. Hoyle pleaded with the jury for a guilty verdict and the "punishment under the law" — the death penalty.

Widows of the slain officers were present often during the trial, which began last March 3.

Wetzel remained impassive during much of the trial, whispering often with his lawyers and occasionally showing signs of tension.

Much of the states evidence revolved around a 1957 black Oldsmobile, found abandoned in Chattanooga, Tenn., the night after Reece and Brown were killed.

A .44 caliber magnum revolver, with two shots fired from its chamber, was presented as the death weapon. It was recovered from under the driver's seat of the car.

A number of other guns, a quantity of ammunition, men's clothing and jewelry were placed in evidence and identified as stolen goods found in the car.

To cover Wetzel's alleged route into North Carolina and his getaway to Chattanooga, the state brought witnesses from New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky. Others were summoned from New Hampshire, California, and various parts of North Carolina.

Clipped By:



ga_anderson79

Mon, May 16, 2016