

Manning sentenced to maximum of 30 years

HIGHLIGHTS

After deliberating almost 10 hours over two days, a Richland County jury has found confessed Internet romance killer Theodore Manning guilty of voluntary manslaughter in the 2009 death of Nikki McPhatter, a Charlotte airlines employee.

BY JOHN MONK, JMONK@THESTATE.COM

Confessed Internet romance killer Theodore Manning was sentenced Thursday to a maximum of 30 years for the slaying of former Charlotte airlines employee Nikki McPhatter.

"I have no sympathy for you whatsoever," trial judge Thomas Cooper told Manning as he sentenced him on a voluntary manslaughter conviction handed down about an hour earlier by a Richland County jury.

Cooper told Manning that his three-week coverup of McPhatter's death in May 2009 as well as what the judge called the "desecration" of her body by burning it left no room for a merciful sentence.

Cooper imposed the sentence about 3:30 p.m. at the Richland County courthouse after hearing from six of McPhatter's relatives.

Early in the trial, Manning admitted shooting and killing his former girlfriend.

The jury of seven men and five women returned its verdict at 2:35 p.m. in a third-floor courtroom after deliberating almost 10 hours over two days.

Prosecutors had sought to convince the jury that Manning was guilty of murder, which carries a much harsher sentence — 30 years to life without parole in prison.

The verdict climaxed a hard-fought, nine-day trial over in one of the most sensational, widely publicized murder cases in Richland County in recent years.

Manning, 30, admitted on the witness stand that he had killed McPhatter, 30, in an argument. He also admitted to then stuffing her in the trunk of her car, driving the car to a rural Fairfield County site and setting it afire after dousing it with gasoline.

By its decision, the jury signaled it went along with the defendant's version of the case, which depicted Manning as acting in anger during a sudden argument with McPhatter.

What happened after that was despicable, admitted attorneys from the Richland County public defender's office, but had nothing to do with the killing itself.

The 5th Circuit Solicitor's Office sought to convince the jury that Manning's treatment of the body was so horrific, and his attempted cover-up so extensive, that he should be convicted of murder.



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