

Guilty verdict in Darby murder

First defendant gets life plus 15 years

After more than five years of investigation, a man has been convicted and sentenced for the January 19, 1991, abduction and murder of Trudy Darby, 42-year-old Macks Creek resident.

Darby, a former Hickory County resident, was abducted from the K&D Market at the Highway 54-73 intersection west of Macks Creek about 10 p.m. Saturday, January 19, 1991. Her body was found floating in the Little Niangua River in eastern Hickory County Monday afternoon January 21.

Jess Rush, who was 15 when the kidnapping and murder occurred, was convicted by a Camden County jury Tuesday afternoon on a charge of kidnapping and first degree murder. He was sentenced to life in prison without parole on the murder charge and received a 15-year prison term on the kidnapping charge.

Instrumental elements of the case against Rush were his earlier confession to an investigator and several letters he had written after he was jailed on the murder charge. In the letters written to another inmate, Rush revealed details of the murder and abduction. He also reportedly implicated himself and another suspect in abductions and

murders at Clinton and at Nevada. Those victims have never been found, but information in Rush's letters led investigators to buried items believed to have belonged to at least one of those victims.

The Camden County jury was seated Thursday, and the trial was held Friday, Saturday and Monday with Camden County Prosecutor Jim Icenogle presenting evidence against him. Rush had been certified to stand trial as an adult, although he was a juvenile at the time he allegedly participated in the murder and kidnapping.

The cases were submitted to the jury just before noon Tuesday, and they returned their guilty verdicts by midafternoon. A spokesperson for the prosecutor's office said an investigation is continuing into connections between Rush's involvement in the Darby murder and the two other missing women at Nevada and Clinton.

Rush and his half-brother, Marvin Chaney, 35, were arraigned in Camden County Associate Court in June 1995. At that time Tim McQueen, a Camden County resident, testified that Rush and Chaney had detailed their crime in a jail-house confession. McQueen has

been convicted of the second degree murder of his wife and has a 15-year prison term. He admitted pushing his wife off a cliff at Ha Ha Tonka State Park in October of 1993.

In the preliminary hearing June 8, 1995, McQueen said Chaney and Rush told him how the men had kidnapped Darby, had taken her to a barn in Dallas County and raped her, and then had shot her once at the barn and a second time at the Erickson's Ford on the Little Niangua River in Hickory County. The barn later burned, according to Sheriff Tipton. McQueen testified that the men admitted burning the barn several days after Darby's death to cover their tracks.

McQueen said the men told him Chaney shot Darby at the barn. After throwing her nude body in the river, the men had to wade into the stream to push her body out of an eddy into a current that would take it downstream where local deputies later discovered it.

Camden County chief juvenile officer Tammy Waldon had testified at the preliminary hearing that Rush had told her a story very similar to McQueen's testimony in October 1994. That interrogation occurred at the Eldon police station

October 9 and 12.

Darby's son Waylon told investigators that his mother was working alone at the store on the evening she disappeared. She called him about 10 p.m. and described a strange man outside the store and asked her son to come to the store. When the son arrived minutes later, he found the store open and no sign of his mother other than her purse and jacket. Two days later her nude body was found in Hickory County with two gunshot wounds to the head.

Chaney's trial is set to begin in November of this year. Icenogle has not ruled out other suspects in the case. Rush and Chaney both have Hickory County connections, according to Sheriff Ray Tipton, as well as connections to Nevada and Clinton where the other two women are still missing.

Tipton said both were suspects from the beginning, but investigators didn't have enough evidence to file charges until they were jailed on other charges and began providing information about the killing through conversations with other prisoners and through Rush's letters.