

Victim testifies at Garner trial

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By Patrick Lakamp

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A prostitute testified Friday that she agreed to have sex with Antoine J. Garner for \$20 and willingly – but nervously – accompanied him into an abandoned house on Jewett Avenue on June 26, 2011.

The two had sex in the early morning hours, but when Garner wanted to move upstairs and continue without a condom, their encounter turned violent, the 44-year-old woman told an Erie County Court jury.

“I said, ‘No, you must be crazy,’ ” she recalled telling him. “I ... tried to make a run.”

Garner grabbed her from behind and prevented her from escaping, she said. “He pulled me out of my jacket and threw me in a corner,” she testified.

Garner – 6-foot, 4-inches and 387 pounds – lifted the 5-foot, 4-inch, 135-pound woman off the ground by placing his arm around her neck, she said.

She said she blacked out, with her last memory of what happened being Garner “just choking me.”

Her testimony came on the second day of Garner’s assault and strangulation trial before Erie County Judge Kenneth F. Case.

Garner, 26, is accused of choking and assaulting the prostitute. The trial has taken on a higher profile because Garner also is considered a “person of interest” by police in the unrelated but mysterious death of Amanda L. Wienckowski.

Four years ago, Wienckowski’s frozen body was found upside down in a garbage tote outside a church at Clinton and Spring streets on the city’s East Side, across the street from the home of Garner.



Antoine J. Garner is charged with assault and strangulation. He is a person of interest in the Amanda Wienckowski death.

The Wienckowski family believes that the 20-year-old Kenmore woman was murdered and has tried to get the County Medical Examiner's Office to revise the death certificate from an accidental drug overdose to a homicide.

Defense attorney Joseph A. Agro cross-examined the prostitute during Garner's assault trial Friday.

She told Agro that she smoked crack cocaine at about 8 p.m., some seven hours before Garner picked her up in the early morning at Broadway and Mills Street, and drove her to the abandoned house on Jewett.

Later she told Agro, "I wasn't high at all."

In a snippet of videotaped police interrogation shown to jurors, Garner told detectives he had previously lived in the house a decade earlier, when his mother rented it.

Agro questioned her about how sure she was in selecting Garner's photo from a photo array.

"I never forget a face," she replied.

The defense lawyer peppered her with questions about her police statement in which she said Garner "was trying to bring me upstairs by my neck."

How could she know that if she was unconscious, Agro asked.

"He must have heard me wrong or something," she said of the detective who took her statement.

She said she woke up on her stomach with the defendant on top of her on the second floor.

"He said, 'Turn around, [expletive], you're going to learn the hard way,' " she testified.

She said he slid her pants off and then she tried to flee from the house, heading for a broken glass door to a second-floor porch.

"I tried to make a run through the glass [door]," she said. "I'm running for my life. He grabs me before I go through the [door]. He started choking me and beating me at the same time."

The two fought as they moved from the upstairs bedroom to a hallway, she said.

"My life was at stake," she said.

She said she got hit “with all kinds of stuff” and then she passed out again.

Garner then left the house, saying “I’m leaving, stay here,” she testified.

She staggered out of the house half-naked and collapsed on the steps of a nearby home, according to prosecutors. A neighbor called 911.

Detectives from the Buffalo Police Department’s Sex Offense Unit questioned Garner more than two months later after police learned a 2008 Ford Explorer registered to his fiancée was detected at Broadway and Sobieski Street, about three blocks from where the woman said Garner first picked her up, about the time she said they met.

A license plate reader on a police car scanned the SUV’s license plate among those of other cars during an officer’s patrol. The time, date and location of the image had been stored digitally and police later accessed it.

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