

# Antoine Garner pleads guilty to sex, robbery charges

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By Patrick Lakamp

April 4, 2013



Antoine J. Garner, “person of interest” in Amanda Wienckowski’s death, pleaded guilty as charged to several crimes Wednesday.

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A Buffalo man recently convicted of choking and assaulting a prostitute admitted to more crimes Wednesday stemming from two other violent incidents.

Antoine J. Garner, 26, pleaded guilty as charged to three counts of third-degree rape and three counts of third-degree criminal sexual act for raping and sodomizing a 16-year-old girl and impregnating her, according to the Erie County District Attorney’s Office.

The sex crimes occurred between December 2008 and January 2009, according to the office.

Though he did not force himself on the 16-year-old, legally consensual sex was not permitted because he was an adult and she was a minor. Authorities did not learn about what happened until 2011, when a paternity suit against Garner was filed in Erie County Family Court on behalf of the mother.

Garner also pleaded guilty, as charged, to two counts of first-degree robbery and two counts of second-degree robbery before Erie County Judge Kenneth F. Case.

Garner admitted participating in a home invasion in the Town of Clarence, taking money and jewelry from the victim and also terrorizing her at gunpoint.

Garner “orchestrated and led” the home invasion, according to District Attorney Frank A. Sedita III.

Garner and another man were accused of invading the Clarence home in the middle of the night on July 2, 2011, and forcing the woman homeowner, who was home alone at the time, to open a safe at gunpoint.

Two men, both of them wearing ski masks, stole at least \$75,000 in cash and jewelry, then fled in a car, according to the Erie County Sheriff’s Office.

Investigators got a break from workers at Airport Plaza Jewelers who identified a high-end watch that someone tried to pawn there the day after the break-in. The jewelers said the item was too expensive to sell at their store, and the man left. Authorities were able to identify the man as Garner.

The sex crimes to which Garner admitted carry up to four years in state prison, while the robbery convictions carry up to 25 years.

There was no plea agreement for any of the crimes to which Garner pleaded guilty, Sedita said.

“I cannot speak for Mr. Garner, but when the judge committed to 18 years, I would think that provided a more desirable alternative than, say, 37 years,” Sedita said. “There is absolutely nothing a DA can do when the defendant pleads guilty as charged and the judge gives him a commitment.”

Sedita cited the work of the assistant district attorneys who handled the Garner cases: Rosanne E. Johnson, chief of the Special Victims Bureau, and Brian McNamara, chief of the Felony Trial Bureau.

Sedita also cited the investigative work of detectives Daniel Brinkerhoff of the Erie County Sheriff’s Office and James Kaska and Kim Tomassi of the Buffalo Police Department.

In February, a jury found Garner guilty of choking and assaulting a 43-year-old woman in an abandoned house on Jewett Avenue in June 2011. The convictions in that trial, in which Case presided, carry up to seven years in state prison.

While the victim in that case survived with cuts and bruises, Garner's choking conviction carries overtones to the unrelated but mysterious death of Amanda L. Wienckowski.

Garner is considered a "person of interest" but was never charged in Wienckowski's death. Authorities believe he was the last person known to have seen Wienckowski alive.

Four years ago, Wienckowski's frozen body was found upside down in a garbage tote at Clinton and Spring streets, across the street from Garner's home.

Garner has publicly stated that Wienckowski briefly stopped at his home to buy drugs and then she left.

Leslie Brill, Wienckowski's mother, offered her sympathies to Garner's victims.

"Thank God he is off the streets so that he can no longer victimize any other people like he did these two individuals and Amanda. God knows how many others," said Brill, who was in the courtroom Wednesday.

email: [plakamp@buffnews.com](mailto:plakamp@buffnews.com)