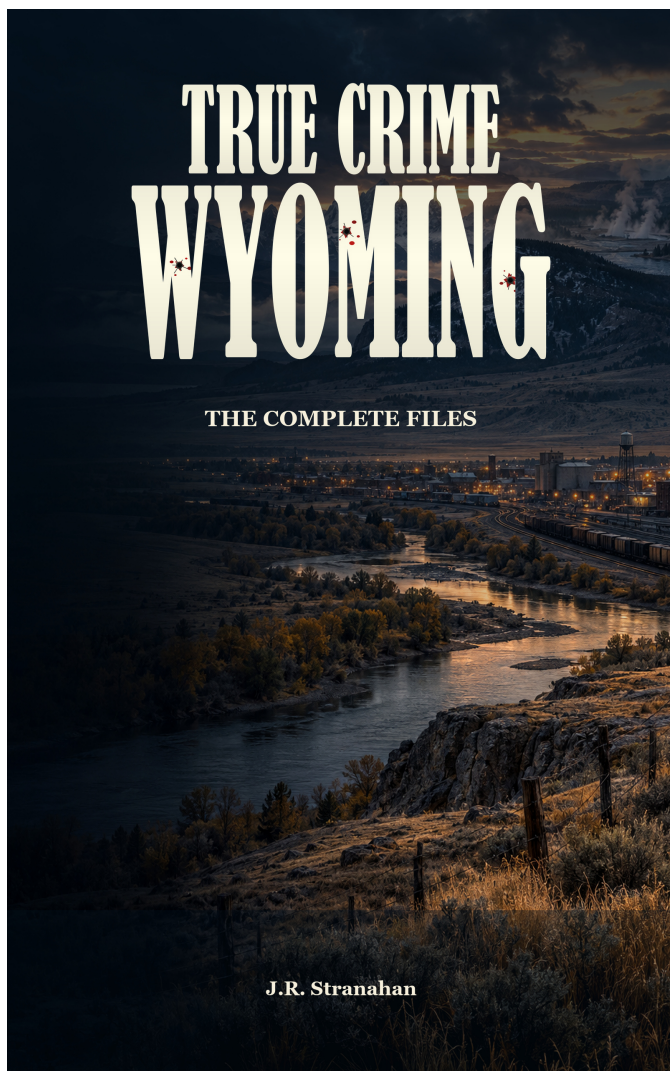




True Crime Wyoming: The Complete Files

J.R. Stranahan

Read a complete chapter.

The Murder of Matthew Shepard

This free sample contains a complete chapter from the edition sold on True Crime America. Its source notes are included. The chapter text is reproduced from that edition; this is not the complete book.

Explore the full edition

One purchase includes the complete PDF and EPUB. Visit the book page for its contents, current price and availability.

<https://truecrimeamerica.us/wyoming/books/complete-files/>

All rights reserved. This sample is supplied for personal reading.

File 1: The Murder of Matthew Shepard

Place and period: Laramie and Albany County, 1998-1999

Present legal status: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

This file belongs first to Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence. The public record is necessarily organized around investigation and adjudication, but a criminal case is not the measure of a life. The account uses the available record to describe what happened and how institutions responded, while avoiding invented biography where sources are silent.

The human scale

Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. That fact is the fixed point for this portion of The Murder of Matthew Shepard. The account keeps the people harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community consequences in view. In Laramie and Albany County, later retellings sometimes collapse the investigation and the judgment into one continuous story. The public record does not. It preserves the order in which information appeared and the forum in which it was tested. The present legal posture is stated separately: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

For Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence, the procedural vocabulary cannot be allowed to eclipse consequence. He was driven outside town, beaten, bound to a fence, and left in the cold. The detail belongs here because it changes the chronology, not because it supplies atmosphere. The account keeps the people harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community consequences in view. Keeping that boundary visible lets the reader understand both the institutional response and the loss that made the response necessary.

The 1998-1999 record from Laramie and Albany County contains a point that resists shorthand: A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. The present legal posture is equally specific: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence. The account keeps the people harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community consequences in view. One proposition may be established while a neighboring proposition remains disputed. Treating them separately is not hesitation; it is accurate reporting.

A headline can make this episode appear settled in a sentence. The underlying record is narrower. Investigators recovered physical evidence and traced the defendants through witness accounts and their later movements. From there, the inquiry moves through source, timing, corroboration, and legal consequence. The account keeps the people harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community consequences in view. None of those steps authorizes invented dialogue or a claim about what Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence privately thought.

Location matters in this file. Laramie and Albany County determined which agencies, courts, and communities carried the case, while 1998-1999 marks the span over which the public learned it. Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial.

The account keeps the people harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community consequences in view. The result is a chronology with identifiable custodians rather than a collection of free-floating claims.

This part of the account begins with a modest question: what did the cited source actually establish? Its answer is plain: Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. The answer does not automatically prove motive, identity, or every charge in the case. The account keeps the people harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community consequences in view. The remaining status is stated without embellishment: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

The case file gives different kinds of information different weight. He was driven outside town, beaten, bound to a fence, and left in the cold. A contemporaneous observation, a laboratory result, a charging allegation, and an appellate finding do not perform the same job. The account keeps the people harmed, the routines interrupted, and the community consequences in view. Describing those jobs plainly is especially important when the story concerns Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence.

The first account

By the time *The Murder of Matthew Shepard* reached public memory, sequence had become easy to lose. Investigators recovered physical evidence and traced the defendants through witness accounts and their later movements. Restoring sequence shows what investigators knew, what prosecutors alleged, what the defense contested, and what a court or jury ultimately resolved. What witnesses reported at the time remains separate from what investigators later inferred. An older headline cannot replace the current status: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

There is no need to enlarge the evidence to make this file serious. Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial. That proposition is consequential on its own. What witnesses reported at the time remains separate from what investigators later inferred. The account therefore avoids borrowing certainty from unrelated defendants, other jurisdictions, or later cases that happen to resemble events in Laramie and Albany County.

The public record speaks most reliably when attribution travels with the claim. Here is the supported proposition: Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. The source may recount an allegation, summarize trial proof, or state a judgment, and the language must match that function. What witnesses reported at the time remains separate from what investigators later inferred. That practice protects the accuracy of the case and the dignity of Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence at the same time.

At this stage of the file, absence is also information. The available materials establish this much: He was driven outside town, beaten, bound to a fence, and left in the cold. They do not establish every rumor

that accumulated during 1998-1999. What witnesses reported at the time remains separate from what investigators later inferred. Refusing to bridge those gaps with speculation keeps the unresolved portions visible instead of disguising them as narrative momentum.

Consider the detail in its proper scale: A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. It is neither disposable nor self-executing. Its force depends on where it sits among the other records from Laramie and Albany County. What witnesses reported at the time remains separate from what investigators later inferred. A measured account can explain that relationship without turning legal caution into a repetitive disclaimer.

The language of this chapter changes when the legal posture changes. Investigators recovered physical evidence and traced the defendants through witness accounts and their later movements. If the proposition came from an accusation, it remains attributed; if it survived adjudication, the judgment is named; if review altered the result, the alteration is carried forward. What witnesses reported at the time remains separate from what investigators later inferred. The controlling endpoint is recorded separately: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

What happened to Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence generated records made for different audiences: investigators, lawyers, judges, jurors, officials, and the public. Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial. Those records overlap, but they are not interchangeable. What witnesses reported at the time remains separate from what investigators later inferred. Reading across them carefully prevents a later summary from erasing an earlier uncertainty or a later reversal.

Building a chronology

The most useful context is the context that changes interpretation. He was driven outside town, beaten, bound to a fence, and left in the cold. In the Laramie and Albany County record, that detail helps explain why a particular investigative or legal step followed. Dates and sequence preserve the difference between early uncertainty and later knowledge. General crime lore would add volume but not understanding, so it is left outside the account.

The end of a proceeding is not always the end of a case's public life. A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. Families, institutions, and communities continued to live with the result after 1998-1999. Dates and sequence preserve the difference between early uncertainty and later knowledge. The legal status is reported in its own terms: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence. It does not imply that every question or consequence disappeared.

Investigators recovered physical evidence and traced the defendants through witness accounts and their later movements. That fact is the fixed point for this portion of The Murder of Matthew Shepard. Dates and sequence preserve the difference between early uncertainty and later knowledge. In Laramie and Albany County, later retellings sometimes collapse the investigation and the judgment into one continuous story. The public record does not. It preserves the order in which information appeared and the forum in which it was tested. The present legal posture is stated separately: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

For Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence, the procedural vocabulary

cannot be allowed to eclipse consequence. Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial. The detail belongs here because it changes the chronology, not because it supplies atmosphere. Dates and sequence preserve the difference between early uncertainty and later knowledge. Keeping that boundary visible lets the reader understand both the institutional response and the loss that made the response necessary.

The 1998-1999 record from Laramie and Albany County contains a point that resists shorthand: Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. The present legal posture is equally specific: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence. Dates and sequence preserve the difference between early uncertainty and later knowledge. One proposition may be established while a neighboring proposition remains disputed. Treating them separately is not hesitation; it is accurate reporting.

A headline can make this episode appear settled in a sentence. The underlying record is narrower. He was driven outside town, beaten, bound to a fence, and left in the cold. From there, the inquiry moves through source, timing, corroboration, and legal consequence. Dates and sequence preserve the difference between early uncertainty and later knowledge. None of those steps authorizes invented dialogue or a claim about what Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence privately thought.

Location matters in this file. Laramie and Albany County determined which agencies, courts, and communities carried the case, while 1998-1999 marks the span over which the public learned it. A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. Dates and sequence preserve the difference between early uncertainty and later knowledge. The result is a

chronology with identifiable custodians rather than a collection of free-floating claims.

Physical evidence

This part of the account begins with a modest question: what did the cited source actually establish? Its answer is plain: Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial. The answer does not automatically prove motive, identity, or every charge in the case. An item's evidentiary value depends on collection, testing, context, and the limits of what it can prove. The remaining status is stated without embellishment: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

The case file gives different kinds of information different weight. Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. A contemporaneous observation, a laboratory result, a charging allegation, and an appellate finding do not perform the same job. An item's evidentiary value depends on collection, testing, context, and the limits of what it can prove. Describing those jobs plainly is especially important when the story concerns Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence.

By the time *The Murder of Matthew Shepard* reached public memory, sequence had become easy to lose. He was driven outside town, beaten, bound to a fence, and left in the cold. Restoring sequence shows what investigators knew, what prosecutors alleged, what the defense contested, and what a court or jury ultimately resolved. An item's evidentiary value depends on collection, testing, context, and the limits of what it can prove. An older headline cannot replace the current status: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither

prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

There is no need to enlarge the evidence to make this file serious. A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. That proposition is consequential on its own. An item's evidentiary value depends on collection, testing, context, and the limits of what it can prove. The account therefore avoids borrowing certainty from unrelated defendants, other jurisdictions, or later cases that happen to resemble events in Laramie and Albany County.

The public record speaks most reliably when attribution travels with the claim. Here is the supported proposition: Investigators recovered physical evidence and traced the defendants through witness accounts and their later movements. The source may recount an allegation, summarize trial proof, or state a judgment, and the language must match that function. An item's evidentiary value depends on collection, testing, context, and the limits of what it can prove. That practice protects the accuracy of the case and the dignity of Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence at the same time.

At this stage of the file, absence is also information. The available materials establish this much: Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial. They do not establish every rumor that accumulated during 1998-1999. An item's evidentiary value depends on collection, testing, context, and the limits of what it can prove. Refusing to bridge those gaps with speculation keeps the unresolved portions visible instead of disguising them as narrative momentum.

Witness evidence

Consider the detail in its proper scale: A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. It is neither disposable nor self-executing. Its force depends on where it sits among the other records from Laramie and Albany County. Credibility depends on opportunity to observe, consistency, corroboration, motive, and courtroom testing. A measured account can explain that relationship without turning legal caution into a repetitive disclaimer.

The language of this chapter changes when the legal posture changes. Investigators recovered physical evidence and traced the defendants through witness accounts and their later movements. If the proposition came from an accusation, it remains attributed; if it survived adjudication, the judgment is named; if review altered the result, the alteration is carried forward. Credibility depends on opportunity to observe, consistency, corroboration, motive, and courtroom testing. The controlling endpoint is recorded separately: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

What happened to Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence generated records made for different audiences: investigators, lawyers, judges, jurors, officials, and the public. Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial. Those records overlap, but they are not interchangeable. Credibility depends on opportunity to observe, consistency, corroboration, motive, and courtroom testing. Reading across them carefully prevents a later summary from erasing an earlier uncertainty or a later reversal.

The most useful context is the context that changes interpretation. Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. In the Laramie and Albany County record, that detail helps explain why a particular investigative or

legal step followed. Credibility depends on opportunity to observe, consistency, corroboration, motive, and courtroom testing. General crime lore would add volume but not understanding, so it is left outside the account.

The end of a proceeding is not always the end of a case's public life. He was driven outside town, beaten, bound to a fence, and left in the cold. Families, institutions, and communities continued to live with the result after 1998-1999. Credibility depends on opportunity to observe, consistency, corroboration, motive, and courtroom testing. The legal status is reported in its own terms: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence. It does not imply that every question or consequence disappeared.

A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. That fact is the fixed point for this portion of *The Murder of Matthew Shepard*. Credibility depends on opportunity to observe, consistency, corroboration, motive, and courtroom testing. In Laramie and Albany County, later retellings sometimes collapse the investigation and the judgment into one continuous story. The public record does not. It preserves the order in which information appeared and the forum in which it was tested. The present legal posture is stated separately: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

Digital and documentary trails

For Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence, the procedural vocabulary cannot be allowed to eclipse consequence. Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. The detail belongs here because it changes the chronology, not because it supplies atmosphere. Records preserve timing and contact, but their meaning still depends on authentication and context. Keeping that boundary visible lets the reader understand both the institutional response and the loss that made the response necessary.

The 1998-1999 record from Laramie and Albany County contains a point that resists shorthand: He was driven outside town, beaten, bound to a fence, and left in the cold. The present legal posture is equally specific: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence. Records preserve timing and contact, but their meaning still depends on authentication and context. One proposition may be established while a neighboring proposition remains disputed. Treating them separately is not hesitation; it is accurate reporting.

A headline can make this episode appear settled in a sentence. The underlying record is narrower. A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. From there, the inquiry moves through source, timing, corroboration, and legal consequence. Records preserve timing and contact, but their meaning still depends on authentication and context. None of those steps authorizes invented dialogue or a claim about what Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence privately thought.

Location matters in this file. Laramie and Albany County determined which agencies, courts, and communities carried the case, while

1998-1999 marks the span over which the public learned it. Investigators recovered physical evidence and traced the defendants through witness accounts and their later movements. Records preserve timing and contact, but their meaning still depends on authentication and context. The result is a chronology with identifiable custodians rather than a collection of free-floating claims.

This part of the account begins with a modest question: what did the cited source actually establish? Its answer is plain: Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial. The answer does not automatically prove motive, identity, or every charge in the case. Records preserve timing and contact, but their meaning still depends on authentication and context. The remaining status is stated without embellishment: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

The case file gives different kinds of information different weight. Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. A contemporaneous observation, a laboratory result, a charging allegation, and an appellate finding do not perform the same job. Records preserve timing and contact, but their meaning still depends on authentication and context. Describing those jobs plainly is especially important when the story concerns Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence.

Charging choices

By the time *The Murder of Matthew Shepard* reached public memory, sequence had become easy to lose. Investigators recovered physical evidence and traced the defendants through witness accounts and their later movements. Restoring sequence shows what investigators knew, what prosecutors alleged, what the defense contested, and what a court or jury ultimately resolved. An indictment states allegations, while a plea or verdict resolves only the counts and defendants actually adjudicated. An older headline cannot replace the current status: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

There is no need to enlarge the evidence to make this file serious. Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial. That proposition is consequential on its own. An indictment states allegations, while a plea or verdict resolves only the counts and defendants actually adjudicated. The account therefore avoids borrowing certainty from unrelated defendants, other jurisdictions, or later cases that happen to resemble events in Laramie and Albany County.

The public record speaks most reliably when attribution travels with the claim. Here is the supported proposition: Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. The source may recount an allegation, summarize trial proof, or state a judgment, and the language must match that function. An indictment states allegations, while a plea or verdict resolves only the counts and defendants actually adjudicated. That practice protects the accuracy of the case and the dignity of Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence at the same time.

At this stage of the file, absence is also information. The available materials establish this much: He was driven outside town, beaten,

bound to a fence, and left in the cold. They do not establish every rumor that accumulated during 1998-1999. An indictment states allegations, while a plea or verdict resolves only the counts and defendants actually adjudicated. Refusing to bridge those gaps with speculation keeps the unresolved portions visible instead of disguising them as narrative momentum.

Consider the detail in its proper scale: A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. It is neither disposable nor self-executing. Its force depends on where it sits among the other records from Laramie and Albany County. An indictment states allegations, while a plea or verdict resolves only the counts and defendants actually adjudicated. A measured account can explain that relationship without turning legal caution into a repetitive disclaimer.

The language of this chapter changes when the legal posture changes. Investigators recovered physical evidence and traced the defendants through witness accounts and their later movements. If the proposition came from an accusation, it remains attributed; if it survived adjudication, the judgment is named; if review altered the result, the alteration is carried forward. An indictment states allegations, while a plea or verdict resolves only the counts and defendants actually adjudicated. The controlling endpoint is recorded separately: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

The courtroom

What happened to Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence generated records made for different audiences: investigators, lawyers, judges, jurors, officials, and the public. He was driven outside town, beaten, bound to a fence, and left in the cold. Those records overlap, but they are not interchangeable. A trial tests admissible proof under defined rules and does not recreate every event or rumor surrounding a case. Reading across them carefully prevents a later summary from erasing an earlier uncertainty or a later reversal.

The most useful context is the context that changes interpretation. A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. In the Laramie and Albany County record, that detail helps explain why a particular investigative or legal step followed. A trial tests admissible proof under defined rules and does not recreate every event or rumor surrounding a case. General crime lore would add volume but not understanding, so it is left outside the account.

The end of a proceeding is not always the end of a case's public life. Investigators recovered physical evidence and traced the defendants through witness accounts and their later movements. Families, institutions, and communities continued to live with the result after 1998-1999. A trial tests admissible proof under defined rules and does not recreate every event or rumor surrounding a case. The legal status is reported in its own terms: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence. It does not imply that every question or consequence disappeared.

Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial. That fact is the fixed point for this portion of *The Murder of Matthew Shepard*. A trial tests admissible proof under defined rules and does not recreate every event or rumor surrounding a case. In Laramie

and Albany County, later retellings sometimes collapse the investigation and the judgment into one continuous story. The public record does not. It preserves the order in which information appeared and the forum in which it was tested. The present legal posture is stated separately: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

For Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence, the procedural vocabulary cannot be allowed to eclipse consequence. Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. The detail belongs here because it changes the chronology, not because it supplies atmosphere. A trial tests admissible proof under defined rules and does not recreate every event or rumor surrounding a case. Keeping that boundary visible lets the reader understand both the institutional response and the loss that made the response necessary.

The 1998-1999 record from Laramie and Albany County contains a point that resists shorthand: He was driven outside town, beaten, bound to a fence, and left in the cold. The present legal posture is equally specific: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence. A trial tests admissible proof under defined rules and does not recreate every event or rumor surrounding a case. One proposition may be established while a neighboring proposition remains disputed. Treating them separately is not hesitation; it is accurate reporting.

Appeal and review

A headline can make this episode appear settled in a sentence. The underlying record is narrower. Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial. From there, the inquiry moves through source, timing, corroboration, and legal consequence. Appellate review addresses claimed legal error on a fixed record rather than conducting a second trial. None of those steps authorizes invented dialogue or a claim about what Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence privately thought.

Location matters in this file. Laramie and Albany County determined which agencies, courts, and communities carried the case, while 1998-1999 marks the span over which the public learned it. Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. Appellate review addresses claimed legal error on a fixed record rather than conducting a second trial. The result is a chronology with identifiable custodians rather than a collection of free-floating claims.

This part of the account begins with a modest question: what did the cited source actually establish? Its answer is plain: He was driven outside town, beaten, bound to a fence, and left in the cold. The answer does not automatically prove motive, identity, or every charge in the case. Appellate review addresses claimed legal error on a fixed record rather than conducting a second trial. The remaining status is stated without embellishment: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

The case file gives different kinds of information different weight. A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. A contemporaneous observation, a laboratory result, a charging allegation, and an appellate finding do not perform the

same job. Appellate review addresses claimed legal error on a fixed record rather than conducting a second trial. Describing those jobs plainly is especially important when the story concerns Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence.

By the time *The Murder of Matthew Shepard* reached public memory, sequence had become easy to lose. Investigators recovered physical evidence and traced the defendants through witness accounts and their later movements. Restoring sequence shows what investigators knew, what prosecutors alleged, what the defense contested, and what a court or jury ultimately resolved. Appellate review addresses claimed legal error on a fixed record rather than conducting a second trial. An older headline cannot replace the current status: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

There is no need to enlarge the evidence to make this file serious. Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial. That proposition is consequential on its own. Appellate review addresses claimed legal error on a fixed record rather than conducting a second trial. The account therefore avoids borrowing certainty from unrelated defendants, other jurisdictions, or later cases that happen to resemble events in Laramie and Albany County.

Uncertainty

The public record speaks most reliably when attribution travels with the claim. Here is the supported proposition: A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. The source may recount an allegation, summarize trial proof, or state a judgment, and the language must match that function. The account marks gaps in the record instead of filling them with motive, dialogue, or private thought. That practice protects the accuracy of the case and the dignity of Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence at the same time.

At this stage of the file, absence is also information. The available materials establish this much: Investigators recovered physical evidence and traced the defendants through witness accounts and their later movements. They do not establish every rumor that accumulated during 1998-1999. The account marks gaps in the record instead of filling them with motive, dialogue, or private thought. Refusing to bridge those gaps with speculation keeps the unresolved portions visible instead of disguising them as narrative momentum.

Consider the detail in its proper scale: Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial. It is neither disposable nor self-executing. Its force depends on where it sits among the other records from Laramie and Albany County. The account marks gaps in the record instead of filling them with motive, dialogue, or private thought. A measured account can explain that relationship without turning legal caution into a repetitive disclaimer.

The language of this chapter changes when the legal posture changes. Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. If the proposition came from an accusation, it remains attributed; if it survived adjudication, the judgment is named; if review altered the result, the alteration is carried forward. The account marks gaps in the record instead of filling them

with motive, dialogue, or private thought. The controlling endpoint is recorded separately: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

What happened to Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence generated records made for different audiences: investigators, lawyers, judges, jurors, officials, and the public. He was driven outside town, beaten, bound to a fence, and left in the cold. Those records overlap, but they are not interchangeable. The account marks gaps in the record instead of filling them with motive, dialogue, or private thought. Reading across them carefully prevents a later summary from erasing an earlier uncertainty or a later reversal.

The most useful context is the context that changes interpretation. A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. In the Laramie and Albany County record, that detail helps explain why a particular investigative or legal step followed. The account marks gaps in the record instead of filling them with motive, dialogue, or private thought. General crime lore would add volume but not understanding, so it is left outside the account.

Institutions

The end of a proceeding is not always the end of a case's public life. Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. Families, institutions, and communities continued to live with the result after 1998-1999. Police, prosecutors, defense counsel, courts, laboratories, journalists, and families occupy different roles in the record. The legal status is reported in its own terms: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence. It does not imply that every question or consequence disappeared.

He was driven outside town, beaten, bound to a fence, and left in the cold. That fact is the fixed point for this portion of *The Murder of Matthew Shepard*. Police, prosecutors, defense counsel, courts, laboratories, journalists, and families occupy different roles in the record. In Laramie and Albany County, later retellings sometimes collapse the investigation and the judgment into one continuous story. The public record does not. It preserves the order in which information appeared and the forum in which it was tested. The present legal posture is stated separately: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence.

For Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence, the procedural vocabulary cannot be allowed to eclipse consequence. A cyclist found him the following morning, and Shepard died in a Colorado hospital on October 12. The detail belongs here because it changes the chronology, not because it supplies atmosphere. Police, prosecutors, defense counsel, courts, laboratories, journalists, and families occupy different roles in the record. Keeping that boundary visible lets the reader understand both the institutional response and the loss that made the response

necessary.

The 1998-1999 record from Laramie and Albany County contains a point that resists shorthand: Investigators recovered physical evidence and traced the defendants through witness accounts and their later movements. The present legal posture is equally specific: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence. Police, prosecutors, defense counsel, courts, laboratories, journalists, and families occupy different roles in the record. One proposition may be established while a neighboring proposition remains disputed. Treating them separately is not hesitation; it is accurate reporting.

A headline can make this episode appear settled in a sentence. The underlying record is narrower. Henderson resolved his case by plea, while a jury convicted McKinney after trial. From there, the inquiry moves through source, timing, corroboration, and legal consequence. Police, prosecutors, defense counsel, courts, laboratories, journalists, and families occupy different roles in the record. None of those steps authorizes invented dialogue or a claim about what Matthew Shepard, his family and friends, the Laramie community, and people affected by anti-LGBTQ violence privately thought.

Location matters in this file. Laramie and Albany County determined which agencies, courts, and communities carried the case, while 1998-1999 marks the span over which the public learned it. Matthew Shepard left a Laramie bar with Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on the night of October 6, 1998. Police, prosecutors, defense counsel, courts, laboratories, journalists, and families occupy different roles in the record. The result is a chronology with identifiable custodians rather than a collection of free-floating claims.

Status at manuscript lock

The controlling status for this account is: Russell Henderson pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping. Aaron McKinney was convicted of felony murder and kidnapping. Each received consecutive life sentences, and neither prosecution resulted in a death sentence. That sentence is deliberately narrower than a television summary. It does not merge co-defendants, convert accusations into findings, or imply that an appeal erased a human death. Later proceedings may change the legal posture, but they should not be projected backward onto the record described here.

Sources from the edition

The Murder of Matthew Shepard

- Congressional Record, Matthew Shepard case chronology: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2009-04-29/pdf/CREC-2009-04-29.pdf>
f - Wyoming District Court filings in State v. McKinney: https://famous-trials.com/images/ftrials/mattshepard/McKinney_Defendant_Motions.pdf

Continue reading.

True Crime Wyoming: The Complete Files

Explore the remaining cases and choose your complete edition in PDF and EPUB.

See the book and current price →

<https://truecrimeamerica.us/wyoming/books/complete-files/>