

Spokane County Medical Examiner's Office & Othram Identify 1971 John Doe

After a half-century, an unidentified man found in the Spokane River has been identified as **Bruce Frank Sherman**, a member of the Ojibwe Tribe from Deer River Minnesota.

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Summary



In September 1971, a marina employee discovered a body in the Spokane River near the Division Street Bridge. The decedent appeared to be an adult male wearing jeans with a plain tattoo depicting the letters "BS" on his left forearm. Unfortunately, no personal belongings were found, and decomposition prevented visual identification. An examination by the Spokane County Coroner found no evident injuries and the death was determined to be an accidental drowning. Fingerprints taken by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in Washington DC did not match any on file. No

other resources were available at the time, so the decedent was buried at Fairmount Cemetery as an unidentified person.

In February 2007 the case was added to The Doe Network website (Case 1283UMWA), run by a public organization that works to assist investigating agencies by providing exposure and searching for matches between missing and unidentified persons cases. In June 2007 the case was added to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) (Case UP338), a federal database used by law enforcement, medical examiners, and missing persons' families across the country to track and investigate cases.

In August 2022, the Spokane County Medical Examiner's Office (SCMEO) received an allocation of American Rescue Plan funds to help identify unidentified human remains using forensic genetic genealogy.

In November 2022, the Spokane County Medical Examiner sent skeletal remains to Othram in The Woodlands, Texas. Othram scientists developed a suitable DNA extract and then used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive DNA profile for the unknown man. Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team used the profile in a genetic genealogy search to develop investigative leads that were returned to Spokane County Medical Examiner investigators.

Although the person was originally presumed (through anthropological analysis) to be White or Caucasian, biogeographical analysis of the DNA profile revealed a substantial ancestry component likely indicative of Native American origins. Death investigators for the SCMEO used the resulting investigative leads to confirm and contact the unknown man's genetic relatives, eventually reaching a brother and cousin who provided the name of a missing family member. The details from the family aligned with the details in the case.

A reference DNA sample from the brother was compared to the DNA profile for the unknown man, confirming the suspected genetic relationship. With this information, Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Veena Singh officially identified the man as Bruce Frank Sherman.

Bruce was born in Itasca County, Minnesota on April 17th, 1943, and was a member of the Ojibwe Tribe from Deer River Minnesota. He moved to Washington state with extended family in his 20's. He was known to have gone missing in the early 1970's and was reported missing and searched for by his family, but there was no further information on the disappearance. Bruce was 28 years old at the time of his death.