

Arkansas investigators identify 3 cold case victims through DNA evidence

The Benton County Sheriff's Office gave an update on three cold case homicides after "major advancements" were discovered through DNA evidence.

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BENTONVILLE, Ark — Benton County Sheriff Shawn Holloway, prosecuting attorney Nathan Smith, and Benton County Lt. Hunter Petray held a press conference Tuesday, Oct. 25, to give an update on three cold cases.

Sheriff Holloway said genetic genealogy and the county's partnership with Othram, Inc. helped identify the victims in cold case murders from 1981, 1990 and 1996.

Investigators say these are the only unidentified bodies that the sheriff's office had in Benton County.

What made the identification of two victims particularly difficult, Lt. Petray said, was that only one of the victims was reported missing. The other two were not reported missing, and none were in any national missing person's database.

Fred James "Jamie" Grow, 1981 cold case

In the summer of 1981 in the Garfield, Arkansas area, a victim was shot and dumped in a wooded area near the railroad tracks. In 1981, the victim was buried in an unmarked grave in a Bentonville cemetery.

The victim was estimated to be 20-40 years old at the time. In 2016, investigators resubmitted evidence to the crime lab but were unsuccessful in identifying the victim.

In March 2022, a DNA profile of the victim was made and investigators were able to identify a potential close family member. In August of 2022, the relative's DNA showed to be a match. After 41 years, the victim was identified as Fred James "Jamie" Grow, who was 33 years old at the time.

Investigators say he left on a planned trip to Colorado on June 3, 1981. Prior to leaving, witnesses told police Grow was approached by two females needing a ride to Oregon. Those two women allegedly were last seen loading their belongings into Jamie's van in Fayetteville. This case is still active and the sheriff's department is following up on leads.

Donna Sue Nelton, 1990 cold case

A Jane Doe was found in a heavily wooded area in Maysville in 1990. Investigators say she was shot, gasoline was poured on her and she was set on fire. At the time, she was estimated to be 25-35 years old.

In 1995, a facial reconstruction was attempted but wasn't possible due to the damage to her body. That same year, evidence was resubmitted to the crime lab, but was unsuccessful in identifying the victim.

In August of 2022, investigators were able to locate a distant relative who was unaware anyone in their family was missing. In September of 2022, DNA showed a genetic match and after 32 years, Jane Doe was identified as Donna Sue Nelton, who was 28 years old at the time of her death. She was originally from Arkansas but was living in the Kansas City area at the time of her death.

Donna and her boyfriend, George Brewton, were known to "pass through" Benton County and frequent an RV park. Petray confirmed that flyers for the RV park were found near her body at the crime scene.

Brewton had a long criminal record and, at one point, was on the FBI's Most Wanted list after shooting two officers and was paroled in 1988. At some point, he reportedly admitted to killing "a Donna."

Brewton was sentenced to two life sentences in 1990 for drug offenses and died in prison in 2008. Benton County investigators said at the press conference they feel confident in closing the case but mentioned they were open to hearing from someone if they think they may know more about Nelton's death.

John Douglas Rollins Jr., 1996 cold case

The victim in the 1996 cold case was located in Beaver Lake, around the area of Railroad Cut, south of Monte Ne. The male victim was found floating in a sleeping bag, possibly weighted down at some point, according to Petray.

He had been in the lake for three months to a year.

In 1996, his remains were sent to the University of Arkansas Department of Anthropology where it was determined he was 30-60 years old at the time. In 1998, a composite sketch was done but did not lead to any more information on his identity.

In June of 2022, investigators were able to locate through DNA evidence a possible relative who was unaware of anyone missing in their family.

In September of 2022, another family member said they'd been missing a relative since the mid-90s. DNA showed a genetic match and, after 26 years, the victim was identified as John Douglas Rollins Jr., who was 31 years old at the time of his death. Rollins Jr. had been living in Springdale but was originally from Missouri.

He was last seen by his family in 1995. Petray says there are not a lot of leads on a suspect in this case and it remains active at this time.