

West Haven PD & Connecticut Office of the Chief Medical Examiner Team with Othram to Identify New Haven County Jane Doe

After four decades, investigators have identified the unknown woman as Sarah Tatham Abbott, born August 3, 1940, in Manhattan, New York.

Solved

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Highlights

Connecticut Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

West Haven, Connecticut

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Summary



In April 1979, skeletal remains were found on the property of the New Haven Water Company adjacent to Route 34 and Derby Avenue in New Haven County, Connecticut. Investigators determined that the skeletal remains were that of a Caucasian woman estimated to be in her late teens to early twenties. The unidentified woman stood between 5'1" and 5'3" in height during her life. Investigators were unable to make definitive determinations about the woman's weight, hair color, or eye color during her life. It is believed that the decedent had been deceased for one to eight years upon discovery of her remains.



Since the discovery of the woman's remains more than 44 years ago, law enforcement investigators have diligently pursued various leads about her identity, but none have returned a match for her identity. Two years following the discovery of the remains, a mandible was located which investigators associated with the woman's remains found in 1979. Later, a facial reconstruction was created to depict what the woman might have looked like. Along with the discovery of the unknown woman's remains, investigators also recovered a black lace bra, and a "Westclox" brand folding travel alarm clock in a hard red case. Investigators located a replica of the alarm clock, which has been provided for reference, although they noted that the actual clock may have differed somewhat from the replica. Finally, in May 2008, the case was entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as case number UP9236. Many leads were followed in the case, but in spite of exhaustive efforts, the woman could not be identified.

In 2022, Medicolegal Death Investigator Michelle Clark partnered with Othram to use Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to develop a comprehensive DNA profile for the unknown woman, in order to generate leads to her identity. The case is part of a broader collaboration between the Connecticut Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and Othram, aimed at solving the backlog of cold cases in Connecticut. Othram scientists built the comprehensive DNA profile and Othram's in-house genetic

genealogy team used the profile to develop investigative leads that were returned to law enforcement.



In a follow up investigation by law enforcement, the West Haven Police Department confirmed that remains found in 1979 belonged to Sarah Tatham Abbott, also affectionately known as “Sally” by her family. She was born August 3, 1940, in Manhattan, New York. Ms. Abbott was only 29-years-old at the time of her disappearance from New Haven in July 1970. The investigation into the death of Ms. Abbott did not yield any definitive conclusions with regard to her manner and cause of death, which after consulting with the State of Connecticut Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, will remain undetermined. Anyone who may have information pertaining to Ms. Abbott is asked to contact the West Haven Police Department Investigative Services Division at [203-937-3905](tel:203-937-3905).

This case was funded through a DNASolves crowdfund and we are grateful to everyone that contributed towards the costs of Othram's testing in the case. The West Haven Police Department would like to thank the various agencies and entities that have assisted in this investigation throughout the years, including the State of Connecticut Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, the Regional Water Authority, and multiple generations of West Haven Police officers, for their commitment and unwavering efforts to identify this young woman over the past 44 years. If nothing else, the identification of Ms. Abbott brings closure to a family that has been “searching for sally” for over half a century.