

Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office Teams with Othram to Identify a 1978 Homicide Victim

After 48 years, a murdered woman, whose buried remains were discovered in 1978, has been identified as **Patricia Falls Ritchie**.

Solved



Summary

In January 1978, the skeletal remains of an unidentified individual were found buried in Boca Raton, Florida. Construction workers made the discovery and alerted authorities. The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, along with the Palm Beach County Medical Examiner, responded and began collecting evidence and investigating the case as a homicide. It was determined that the remains belonged to an adult woman who was likely 17 to 29 years old at her time of death. The woman was estimated to be about 5' 4" tall.

Despite an extensive investigation, the woman could not be identified and became known as Palm Beach Jane Doe (1978). Details of the case were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as UP772.

In 2024, the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office and the Palm Beach County Medical Examiner submitted forensic evidence to Othram in The Woodlands, Texas where

scientists determined that advanced DNA testing could help identify the woman. Othram scientists successfully developed a DNA extract from the provided evidence and using Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® built a comprehensive DNA profile for the woman. Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team used the profile in a genetic genealogy search to develop new investigative leads that were returned to law enforcement.

These leads powered a follow-up investigation, leading investigators to potential relatives of the woman. Reference DNA samples were collected from a relative and compared to the DNA profile of the unidentified woman using Othram's KinSNP® testing. This investigation led to the positive identification of the woman, who is now known to be Patricia "Patsy" Ann Falls Ritchie, of Harrisonburg, Virginia. Patsy, born on December 3, 1953, was married to Donnie Wayne Ritchie.

Investigators believe Patsy Ritchie left the Harrisonburg, Virginia area in 1976 or 1977 when she was 23 or 24 years old. She was last seen at a truck stop in Harrisonburg getting into a truck with an unknown person. Investigators continue to work to determine exactly when Patsy came to Florida and are seeking information from individuals who may have known or encountered her in the years preceding her death.

To provide information, individuals may contact Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office Cold Case Unit Investigator William Springer by calling (561) 688-4013 or by emailing springerw@pbso.org. Individuals may also call Crime Stoppers at 1 (800) 458-TIPS with any information.

This is the 52nd publicly announced case in the State of Florida where officials leveraged Othram's identity inference pipeline. Explore other cases on [Othram's website](#).