

Chesterfield County Police Department & Virginia State Office of the Chief Medical Examiner Team with Othram to Identify a 1990 John Doe

After 34 years, a man found near Appomattox River in Chesterfield County, Virginia, has been identified as **Robert Lee Harris**, born February 22nd, 1935.

Solved

Summary



In May 1990, the partial skeletal remains of an unidentified individual were discovered by a fisherman in a wooded area off Point of Rocks Road in Chesterfield County, Virginia, just south of Richmond on the Appomattox River bank. Investigators were called to the scene and determined the remains were that of an adult male between 40 and 60 years old. The man had a beard, was clothed, missing almost all of his teeth, and was laying face down at the time of discovery. The man's remains were transported to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) for examination where it was determined that there were no signs of foul play and his manner of death was ruled as undetermined.



Several items were found in the vicinity of the man's remains, including a Budweiser wrist watch, a men's small "Bristol Bay" blue knit t-shirt, a white t-shirt, size 33 Dungarees pants, size 32 striped boxer shorts, blue socks, and hiking shoes. Details of the case were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as case number UP6530. Despite continuous efforts by law enforcement to identify the man, no leads yielded a match and the case went cold.

In June 2022, the Chesterfield County Police Department collaborated with the Virginia State Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to submit forensic evidence to Othram in The Woodlands, Texas. Othram scientists successfully developed a DNA extract from the forensic evidence, and then used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive genealogical profile for the unknown man. Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team then used this profile to conduct extensive genetic genealogy research, ultimately providing new investigative leads to law enforcement.

Using this new information, a follow-up investigation was conducted leading investigators to potential relatives of the man. Reference DNA samples were collected from the potential relatives and compared to the DNA profile of the unknown man. This investigation led to the positive identification of the man, who is now known to be Robert Lee Harris. Harris was last seen by his mother on April 17, 1990, and he was never seen or heard from again. Harris was 55 years old and lived in the 1400 block of Burning Tree Road in Henrico at the time of his disappearance. Henrico is a community just northwest of Richmond. Detectives have notified Harris' surviving family of the positive identification, and the OCME will work with the family to return Harris' remains.

The identification of Robert Lee Harris represents the seventh case in the State of Virginia where officials have publicly identified an individual using technology

developed by Othram. Most recently in Galax, [5-year-old Logan Nathaniel Bowman](#) was identified two decades after being murdered.