

Kern County Sheriff-Coroner's Office Teams with Othram to Identify a 1978 Kern County Homicide Victim

DNA evidence and genetic genealogy reveal the identity of 15-year-old **Michelle Collier**, 48 years after her remains were discovered in an Arvin, California vineyard.

Solved



Summary

On June 21, 1978, skeletal remains of an unidentified individual were found in a shallow grave uncovered during cultivation of a vineyard near Arvin in Kern County, California. The Kern County Sheriff's Office Coroner Division responded and began collecting evidence and investigating. It was determined that the remains likely belonged to a young female between the ages of 13 and 24 years old. The remains were in a partial skeletal state, and because of their condition, the young woman could not be identified.

Despite a lengthy investigation, the Jane Doe could not be identified and became known as Arvin Jane Doe (1978). Details of the case were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as UP13916. Forensic constructions were developed and released to the public in hopes that someone would come forward with information about the young woman's identity.

In 2025, the Kern County Sheriff-Coroner's Office submitted forensic evidence to Othram in The Woodlands, Texas where scientists determined that advanced DNA testing could help identify the Jane Doe. At Othram, scientists successfully developed a DNA extract from the provided evidence and then used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive DNA profile for the young 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.

Using this new information, a follow-up investigation was conducted leading investigators to potential relatives of the Arvin Jane Doe. This investigation led to the positive identification of the Jane Doe, who is now known to be Michelle Collier. Collier was 15 years old at the time of her death. Following Collier's identification, her remains were disinterred and provided to her family for final disposition.

This case is part of Othram's [Project 525 initiative](#). Project 525, launched on May 23, 2024 in collaboration with RTI, the organization that manages the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), aims to bring resolution to five hundred twenty-five juvenile cases published in NamUs. Funding for this case was provided by Roads to Justice.

This is the 86th publicly announced case in the State of California where officials leveraged Othram's identity inference pipeline. Learn more by visiting Othram's [website](#).