

Friday, June 2, 2023 at 1:20 p.m.

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## Genetic Genealogy again assists in identifying another body found more than 40 years ago

For the second time in the past several months, Spokane Police and investigators with the Spokane County Medical Examiner's Office have solved a human remains/cold case.

In January of 1980, three transients were walking in a railroad tunnel located at 700 E. Trent in Spokane. They discovered a deceased male curled up with burn marks to his torso and significant head trauma. The victim's death was ruled a homicide due to traumatic injuries and smoke inhalation. The victim did not have any identification and confirming an identity proved difficult. No missing persons report was ever filed for someone fitting the victim's profile.

He was described as a young male between the ages of 35-45, 5'6, weighing 125 lbs. An autopsy was conducted but no DNA samples were retained, which was not uncommon in that era. Fingerprints were collected but they failed to produce an identification. So, the man was buried as a John Doe in February of 1980 in Fairmount Memorial Park.

In 1980, technology and forensic testing ability were virtually unrecognizable from the capabilities of today. DNA was recognized as a scientific concept, but wasn't used to solve forensic cases for decades to come. SPD detectives gathered evidence, conducted interviews, and followed up on leads but ultimately, the case went cold. In July of 2022, the Medical Examiner's Office received a grant to help identify human remains using genetic genealogy. Since no DNA samples were retained from the victim, his body was exhumed in October of 2022 to collect samples. They were sent to a forensic lab, Othram Inc., which specializes in working with degraded specimens to obtain a DNA profile.

Othram was successful in providing viable leads of potential relatives of the victim. SPD detectives and an investigator from the Medical Examiner's Office located a son in Missouri. He provided DNA and is assisting in the investigation. Then in April of 2023 Othram confirmed the parent/child relationship and revealed the identity of this John Doe as **Donald Leroy Pearson**. Pearson was born in 1924, which means he would have been 56 years old at the time of his death. Pearson was born in Nebraska and many of his known addresses are in the Midwest. His siblings are deceased and his children relay that their father was not present in their lives.

Spokane Police and Investigators with the Medical Examiner's Office are hopeful that anyone who knew Pearson, will contact police through Crime Check at 509-456-2233

and help bring closure and answers to his death. This cold case remains open with SPD but few leads to the suspect exist.

In February of this year, the same genetic genealogy process, under the same grant, was used to identify a woman whose body was pulled from the Spokane River in 1984. Dubbed "Millie" for decades, the woman was identified as Ruth Belle Waymire. SPD cold case detectives continue to seek leads in her death as well. They have not ruled out Ruth's husband at the time of her death as a suspect. See the attached media release for more information.

\*SPD and the Spokane County Medical Examiner's Office would like to thank Othram, Fairmount Memorial Association, Hickory County Sheriff's Office, and Pearson's relatives for sharing their DNA and family history to help solve this 43-year-old case. \*

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