

Burlington John Doe 2011

Funded, Success Stories

DNA Doe Project identifies remains found in Vermont in 2011 Skull fragment belonged to New Yorker who died the previous year

Burlington, VT – Fifteen years after the skull fragment of a man was found on the shores of Lake Champlain, the DNA Doe Project has identified him as 87-year-old **Arthur Weiss**. In a surprising twist, Weiss was not a missing person – he had died in New York City eight months prior, before his ashes were scattered on Lake Champlain. This identification proves that the skull fragment found was the result of a memorial scattering rather than a disappearance, resolving the mystery of the man formerly known only as Burlington John Doe.



Arthur Weiss

In January 2011, a quarter-sized skull fragment was discovered in the snow in Oakledge Park, a waterfront park along the shores of Lake Champlain in Burlington, Vermont. The fragment belonged to an adult white male who died between 1975 and 2011, but nothing more could be determined about the unidentified man.

The Burlington Police Department later brought this case to the DNA Doe Project, whose expert investigative genetic genealogists work pro bono to

identify John and Jane Does. A DNA profile was developed for the unidentified man and shortly afterwards, in January 2023, a team of DNA Doe Project volunteers began working on this case.

The DNA results of the unidentified man provided the team with an important clue – he was of Ashkenazi Jewish descent. But their research efforts were complicated by the lack of close DNA matches to Burlington John Doe, as well as impediments like endogamy and recent immigration to the US.

“As a specialist in Jewish genetic genealogy, I was brought on to assist when this case was already underway,” said team leader Adina Newman. “It was clear that this case would be an uphill battle as we faced all the challenges that can arise with Jewish genealogy, such as record accessibility, name changes, linguistic barriers, and more.”

In spite of these challenges, the team continued to plug away at this case, and eventually their hard work paid off. They identified a woman from modern-day Belarus, who had immigrated to the US, as a likely ancestor of the unidentified man. They then noticed that one of her sons – Arthur Weiss – had died just a few months before the skull fragment was found in Burlington.

Investigators from the Burlington Police Department looked into this lead and discovered that, after Arthur passed, his cremains were sent to a friend of his in Burlington. While this friend had since passed away, investigators were able to speak to his daughter, who remembered her father scattering Arthur's remains across Lake Champlain. Following this revelation, it was soon confirmed that Burlington John Doe was, in fact, Arthur Weiss.

The DNA Doe Project is grateful to the groups who we worked with to solve this case: the Burlington Police Department, who entrusted this case to us; the University of North Texas Center for Human Identification for DNA extraction; Genologue for sequencing; Kevin Lord for bioinformatics; GEDmatch Pro and FamilyTreeDNA for providing their databases; our generous donors who joined our mission and contributed to this case; and the DNA Doe Project's dedicated teams of volunteer investigative genetic genealogists who work tirelessly to bring all our John and Jane Does home.

Description:

On January 3, 2011, a quarter-sized skull fragment was discovered in the snow in Oakledge, a waterfront park along the shores of Lake Champlain in Burlington, Vermont. The fragment is thought to belong to an adult white male who died between 1975 and 2011.

NamUs ID: UP12366

Date Body Found: January 3, 2011

Race: White/Caucasian

Gender: Male

Estimated Age: Adult, 18+

Estimated PMI: 1975-2011

Agency of Jurisdiction:

Oakledge Park – 3 Flynn Ave., Lake Champlain Waterline, Burlington, VT (Chittenden Co.)

Burlington Police Department

Amy Czuhanich, Criminal Identification Technician

802-540-2148

aczuhanich@bpdvt.org

Links to More Information:

<https://www.websleuths.com/forums/threads/vt-burlington-oakledge-park-whmale-18-99-up12366-jan11.313669/>

<https://www.namus.gov/UnidentifiedPersons/Case#/12366/>

<https://www.doenetwork.org/cases/2518umvt.html>

Status: Identified

Image Credit: photograph Sharlene McKinnon; composite image Pam Lauritzen

Doe-Nate Fund Goal: \$3,296

This case has been fully funded by three generous donors, including a major gift from Melissa and Brian Rice. Funds donated pay for expensive lab work and operational support of our volunteer team of investigative genetic genealogists. DNA Doe Project is a 501(c)3 non-profit. Donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Last Updated: April 7, 2026

Posted on

August 19, 2022