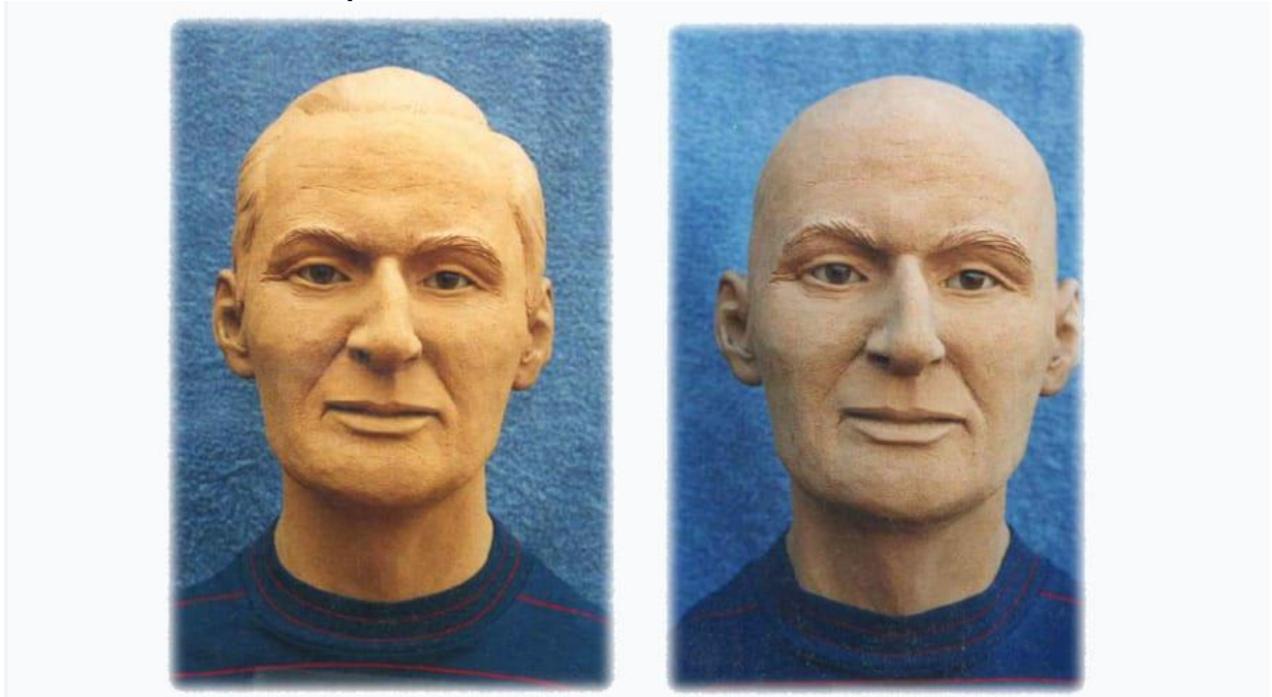


Man found murdered in ICW in Flagler County identified 26 years later

Cold Case Unit, forensic genetic genealogy lab identify man killed in September 1997



There are no known photos of Robert Bruce McPhail, however, a facial approximation of McPhail was created by Betty Pat Gatliff of Skullpture Inc. in 1997. (Provided by Flagler County Sheriff's Office)

FLAGLER COUNTY, Fla. – A cold case murder victim who remained unidentified for 26 years finally has a name, the Flagler County Sheriff's Office announced Thursday.

Robert Bruce McPhail, 58, was found floating in the Intracoastal Waterway on Sept. 10, 1997, northeast of Sea Ray Drive in Flagler Beach, investigators said.

When he was pulled from the water, deputies learned he had been bound, shot and stabbed multiple times before his body was dumped in the water.

Initially, FCSO investigators and the Medical Examiner's Office estimated the man was between 30-50 years old, approximately 5 feet, 8 inches tall and weighed 170 pounds, but they were never able to identify him -- until now.

In 2020 Flagler County Sheriff Rick Staly created the Cold Case Unit with a dedicated full-time detective. In 2021, the Cold Case Unit submitted the man's bones to Othram, a private forensic genetic genealogy corporation, and through work by Othram's genetic genealogy team and Cold Case Detective Sarah Scalia, the victim was identified as McPhail.

"Cold cases, especially with unidentified victims, and forensic genetic genealogy is a time-consuming process to identify and solve," Staly said. "This case required a lot of outside-the-box research and the cooperation of multiple agencies to give the victim a name. Now that we have identified the victim as **Robert Bruce McPhail** our Cold Case Unit can work on finding who murdered him and why to bring justice for him and his family. I commend Detective Scalia for diligently working on this case but there is more work to do. We know someone out there has more information and I ask you to call us or Crime Stoppers. We won't give up until the killer or killer(s) are caught."

The discovery is being announced as Flagler County hosts the 2023 Florida Sheriffs Association Cold Case Advisory Commission training day and commission meeting on Wednesday and Thursday.

"This case serves as a clear demonstration of how collaborative efforts within this network have brought us one step closer to resolving a cold case that was once

dormant,” said Citrus County Sheriff Mike Prendergast, Chairman of the Florida Cold Case Advisory Commission. “The Cold Case Advisory Commission of the Florida Sheriffs Association plays a crucial role in ensuring that justice is never forgotten. By revisiting unresolved cases with fresh perspectives and utilizing advancements in technology, officials like Detective Scalia can strive to provide resolution to the families and communities affected by these unsolved mysteries.”

Nassau County Sheriff Bill Leeper, who is a part of the Cold Case Case Advisory Commission, said the work is rewarding.

“I can tell you as an investigator how satisfying it is to be able to bring closure to families, particularly for these cold cases, and that is why the cold case commission was developed,” Leeper said.

McPhail was 58 years old at the time of his death and originally from the Kenora/Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada area.

McPhail, who went by his middle name “Bruce,” had moved to the South Florida area sometime in the mid-1990s and had a passion for boats.

There are no known photos of McPhail, however, a facial approximation of McPhail (Photos shown above) was created by Betty Pat Gatliff of Skullpture Inc. in 1997.

“We know someone out there has more information,” Staly said. “They knew him as a friend, maybe they were friends with the killer or killers at the time and relationships have changed. We need that information.”

If anyone has any information about Robert Bruce McPhail's life or has information about his murder, you can submit a tip through email at TIPS@flaglersheriff.com or directly to Cold Case Detective Sarah Scalia at SScalia@flaglersheriff.com or call 386-313-4911. If you would like to remain anonymous, tips may be submitted to Crime Stoppers of Northeast Florida by calling 1-888-277-TIPS (8477), where you could be eligible for a reward of up to \$9,500.

Flagler County announced it has 10 unsolved homicides dating back to 1980.