

Mississippi Office of the State Medical Examiner & Desoto County Sheriff Team with Othram to Identify 1985 Homicide Victim

After nearly four decades, the remains of a murdered woman discovered in Olive Branch, Mississippi are now identified as **Lorie Ann Mealer Pennell**, born September 6, 1962.

Solved

Summary



In January 1985, the remains of an unidentified woman were discovered by a southbound truck driver off of Highway 78, just east of the Coldwater River Bridge in Olive Branch, Mississippi. Desoto County Sheriff's Department responded to the scene and located the woman. Investigators determined that the remains were that of a female weighing approximately 110 pounds and standing 5'3" tall. The woman was estimated to be between 20 to 35 years of age. Her hair was light red to blonde in color and wavy with a medium length. She had three piercings in each ear. Authorities also discovered tattoos on the inside of both ankles as well as a small surgical scar on her left forearm. No other identifying characteristics could be determined for the woman, and she was classified as Jane Doe.

The woman's manner of death was determined to be homicide. Details of the case were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs)

as UP8675. Although the woman's face was recognizable, her identity was unknown, and the case went cold for nearly 40 years.

In 2022, working with the Desoto County Sheriff's Office, the Mississippi Office of the State Medical Examiner submitted forensic evidence to Othram in The Woodlands, Texas to determine if advanced DNA testing could help identify the murdered woman. Previous attempts at DNA testing for forensic genetic genealogy had failed. Funding to support this case was provided by Mississippi native and philanthropist Carla Davis, who is committed to resolving the backlog of cold cases in Mississippi. Othram scientists successfully developed a DNA profile using Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing®. Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team then used this profile to conduct forensic genetic genealogy research, ultimately providing new investigative leads to law enforcement.

A follow-up investigation led investigators to relatives of the murdered woman. Additional comparisons of the DNA profile for the murdered woman and a close relative confirmed the identity of the woman as Lorie Ann Mealer Pennell, who was born on September 6th, 1962, in Missouri. Lorie was last seen at a West Memphis Truck Stop in 1982. Her family filed a missing persons report in West Memphis, Arkansas, but she was never found. Pennell's death remains under investigation and further information will be released as it becomes available.