

Youngstown police identify victim in 1980 cold case

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The cold case unit at Youngstown Police Department successfully identified an unknown male found under the Market Street Bridge in the Mahoning River in 1980.

His name was Ralph Coffman, 54, and he was recently identified using only photos of his fingerprints taken back in 1980.

This was the only evidence available because Coffman's body had been cremated shortly after he died, leaving no DNA or other photo evidence.

Thanks to help from a retired police officer, Officer George Ross, YPD solved the 43-year-old cold case.

Ross last logged fingerprints in the archives for YPD and came as soon as YPD called to help by sifting through the thousands of prints on file from 1915 to 1940 to see if any matched the photographed prints.

With Ross' help, they were able to narrow the matching prints down from thousands of possibilities to just one person.

They sent the evidence to the Bureau of Criminal Investigations, who confirmed the fingerprints matched Ralph Coffman.

Then Val Bogart, with the Porch Light Project, helped connect the police to Coffman's living relatives in Ohio and other parts of the United States.

The Coffman family thanked YPD for identifying Ralph but requested privacy.

Coffman lived upstream from where his body was found. His cause of death was confirmed to be asphyxiation by drowning and no foul play is suspected.

Police expressed condolences to the Coffman family and commended current and retired personnel for their hard work.