

MYSTERY SOLVED AFTER 50 YEARS: FCPD IDENTIFIES VICTIM IN 1970S COLD CASE

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Fairfax County, VA—Detectives from our Major Crimes Bureau Cold Case Squad have solved the mystery of a child found deceased in 1972 in Massey Creek, under the Old Colchester Bridge in Lorton. The child has been identified as **Carl Matthew Bryant**. The identification was made possible through advanced DNA testing and forensic-grade genome sequencing provided by Astrea Forensics.

Astrea Forensics developed a DNA profile suitable for genetic genealogy, which Innovative Forensic Investigations used to identify a possible relative of John Doe. After extensive research and calls, detectives traced John Doe's family to Philadelphia, PA. With help from the Philadelphia Police Department, they contacted a relative who led them to John Doe's mother, Vera Bryant. Bryant died in 1980, and a family member said she had two sons, Carl and James, and planned to travel from Philadelphia to Virginia in 1972. Vera's body was exhumed, and DNA submitted to Astrea Forensics confirmed a match.



Discovery and Initial Investigation

On June 13, 1972, the body of a young boy was found in Massey Creek under the Old Colchester Road Bridge in Lorton. An autopsy revealed that the cause of death was

blunt force trauma, ruling the death a homicide. With no immediate leads, a local church group gave the unidentified child the name "Charles Lee Charlet" and arranged for his burial at Coleman Cemetery in Alexandria, VA. The case remained unsolved for over 50 years.

Breakthroughs and DNA Technology

2003: The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) created a computer-generated sketch. Several tips came in but yielded no viable leads.



- **2004:** Hair evidence was discovered in the case file and sent to the FBI. Mitochondrial DNA was extracted and entered into the national database, but no matches were found.
- **2016:** Two potential leads of missing children, Solomon Rose and George Barksdale, were ruled out via DNA.
- **Genealogy Efforts Begin:** Due to the limitations of mitochondrial DNA, detectives needed nuclear DNA. Detectives sought legal authorization to exhume the body, but poor cemetery records and a storm had erased burial markers of John Doe.
- **DNA Extraction from Hair:** After locating hair samples, Astrea was able to extract a DNA profile from just a few millimeters of hair—far less than typically required.

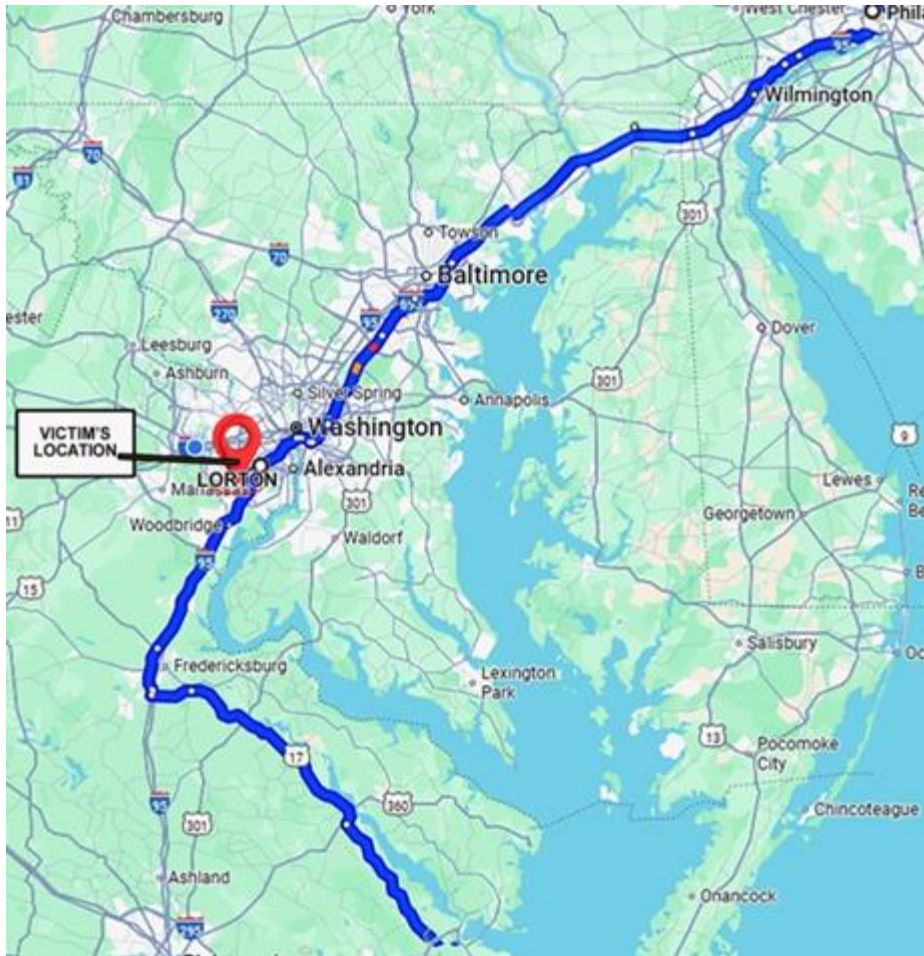
Genetic Genealogy Leads to a Family

- **Genetic Genealogy Match:** Detectives traveled to Philadelphia to speak with family, and it was confirmed that Vera Bryant had a 4-year-old son, Carl Matthew Bryant, who disappeared after leaving for Virginia in 1972.
- **Philadelphia Investigation:** DNA from relatives and Carl's suspected father was collected, along with birth certificates and historical records. Detectives then exhumed Vera Bryant's body to confirm the maternal link. George Mason University provided support in preparing the evidence for submission to Astrea Forensics.
- **Final DNA Match:** After multiple failed attempts (due to preservation issues), DNA was successfully extracted from a portion of Vera's remains by Astrea. On July 1, John Doe was confirmed to be Carl Matthew Bryant, born May 26, 1968.

Homicide Investigation Continues

Detectives believe that Vera Bryant and her boyfriend James Hedgepeth, both now deceased, were involved in the murder of Carl. Detectives also suspect that Carl's infant brother, James Bryant, was killed around the same time. The events are believed to have occurred somewhere between Philadelphia, PA and Middlesex County, VA.

James Hedgepeth was previously convicted of murder and had a violent criminal history.



Above is a map of the route James Hedgepeth and Vera Bryant possibly drove when traveling to Virginia. The whereabouts of James Bryant (6 months old), and he is presumed dead. Detectives believe James' body could have been discarded somewhere along this route.

A Collaborative Effort

This case could not have been solved without the tireless dedication and partnership of multiple organizations across jurisdictions. The Fairfax County Police Department would like to extend our deepest appreciation to the following agencies and individuals for their crucial roles in bringing closure to this decades-old case:

- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
- Astrea Forensics

- Innovative Forensic Investigations (IFI)
- Philadelphia Police Department
- Philadelphia Medical Examiner's Office

- Office of the District Attorney, City of Philadelphia
- George Mason University
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
- Greenmount Cemetery, Philadelphia
- Jones Funeral Home, Philadelphia
- Coleman Cemetery, Alexandria, VA
- The Bryant Family

Detectives are asking for the public's help. If you remember this family, or if any law enforcement agency has recovered or documented unidentified infant remains from the 1970s, especially in Virginia or the Philadelphia area, please call our Major Crimes Bureau at 703-246-7800, option 2. Tips can also be submitted anonymously through Crime Solvers by phone – 1-866-411-TIPS (866-411-8477), and by web [Click HERE](#). Download the 'P3 Tips' App "Fairfax Co Crime Solvers." Anonymous tipsters are eligible for cash rewards. Please leave contact information if you wish for a detective to follow up with you.

Victim specialists from our Major Crimes Bureau's Victim Services Division have been assigned to ensure the victim's family is receiving appropriate resources and assistance.

Join us on [Neighbors by Ring](#). A place where you can connect with your neighbors, see what's happening in your neighborhood and share any available surveillance footage with our department.

For a link to our Cold Case page, visit [here](#).

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