

Mississippi Office of the State Medical Examiner, Mississippi Bureau of Investigation, and Lincoln County Sheriff's Office Team with Othram to Identify 1989 Jane Doe

More than thirty-two years later, Mississippi's 1989 Lincoln County Jane Doe, a homicide victim, has been identified as Melinda Lou Barnhouse of Maryland.

Solved

Summary



A long-standing mystery surrounding the unidentified body of a female homicide victim discovered in September 1989 has finally been solved, thanks to a collaboration between the Mississippi Office of the State Medical Examiner, Mississippi Bureau of Investigation, Lincoln County Sheriff's Office, and Othram. The unknown woman has been identified as Melinda Lou Barnhouse, bringing closure to a case that had remained unsolved for decades.

The unidentified woman's body was found in the bushes at a rest stop along the southbound side of Interstate 55 in Lincoln County, Mississippi. Investigators were

unable to definitively determine the woman's ancestry. They estimated her age to be between 16 and 35 years old at the time of her death. Descriptions indicated that she had brown, shoulder-length hair, possibly naturally curly or wavy, and blue eyes. She stood approximately 5 feet 2 inches tall and weighed around 140 pounds. Notable identifying features included a one centimeter scar on her forehead and another scar on her right thigh. Based on the condition of the remains, investigators believed she had died just days before her discovery.

In 2009, the case was entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as case UP4769. Law enforcement investigators worked diligently to uncover leads about the unknown woman's identity. Unfortunately, despite exhaustive efforts, no matches were found, and the case eventually went cold due to a lack of viable leads.

In 2022, the Mississippi Office of the State Medical Examiner in partnership with the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office and Mississippi Bureau of Investigation explored the potential of forensic genetic genealogy as a tool to generate new leads. Forensic evidence collected in the case was sent to Othram's laboratory in The Woodlands, Texas. Othram scientists used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive genealogical profile for the unknown woman. Othram's in-house genealogy team then leveraged this profile to conduct extensive genetic genealogy research, ultimately providing investigative leads to law enforcement.



The Mississippi Bureau of Investigation Cold Case Unit facilitated the interstate investigation required to bring this case to a resolution. On May 10, 2023, through additional DNA testing of a close family member, the unidentified woman was positively identified as **Melinda Lou Barnhouse**. Originally from Maryland, the

circumstances surrounding how she ended up in Mississippi remain unclear. Significantly, the suspect in the case had been apprehended prior to the Barnhouse's identification and is currently serving time in prison.

The Mississippi Office of the State Medical Examiner, Mississippi Bureau of Investigation, Lincoln County Sheriff's Office and Othram extend their deepest gratitude to the investigators, forensic experts, scientists, and genealogists who worked hard to resolve this case and to Carla Davis, a Mississippi philanthropist, committed to resolving the backlog of cold cases in Mississippi, for funding the advanced DNA testing and forensic genetic genealogy in this case.