

Jackson County Medical Examiner's Office Teams with Othram to Identify a 1979 Homicide Victim

After 47 years, the remains of homicide victim found on the roof of a hotel in Kansas City, Missouri, have been identified as [Orlene Donaldson](#).

Solved



Summary

In April 1979, the remains of an unidentified woman were found on the 12th-floor roof of the Continental Hotel in Kansas City, Missouri. The Kansas City Police Department and Jackson County Medical Examiner's Office responded and began collecting evidence and investigating the case as a homicide. Investigators determined the woman's throat had been cut and her body had been thrown from the fire escape of 19th floor of the hotel, seven floors from where she was found. The woman had only been dead for a few hours when found.

The woman had green eyes, brown hair, stood about 5'4" and was 35 to 50 years old. She was found with a tan wallet with RMK inscribed on it. She was wearing a bra, a "Miss Kay" brand sweater, and a gold/brown Glenbrook blouse. Investigators also found a gold ring with a brown rectangle with topaz initials "KI66" and a Town and Country brand ring #1220.

Californian Admits To Killing Woman

A 29-year-old Sacramento, Calif., man pleaded guilty Monday to second-degree murder in the stabbing death April 5 of a woman whose still-unidentified body was thrown from the Continental Hotel.

The defendant, Larry Hayes, told authorities that he had picked the woman up and did not know her identity. He said he acted in self-defense when the woman tried to attack him with a knife. When he entered his guilty plea in Jackson County Circuit Court, Hayes said that he was under the influence of alcohol and drugs at the time of the incident.

A man named Larry E. Hayes was arrested in for the woman's death and charged with murder, despite authorities not knowing the woman's identity. Hayes, a 29-year-old man from California, said he met the woman and took her to his room while he was under the influence of drugs and alcohol. He later pleaded guilty to second-degree murder, saying he killed her in self-defense when she attacked him with a knife.

Despite the criminal case and a lengthy investigation, the woman could not be identified and became known as Jackson County Jane Doe (1979). Details of the case were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as UP5299.

The case remained open and in 2025, the Jackson County Medical Examiner's Office submitted forensic evidence to Othram in The Woodlands, Texas to determine if advanced DNA testing could help identify the woman. The Othram team coordinated the exhumation of the woman's remains, and skeletal remains were submitted to the Othram's laboratory. At Othram, scientists successfully developed a DNA extract from the evidence and then used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive DNA profile for the woman.

Using this new information, a follow-up investigation was conducted leading investigators to potential relatives of the woman. Reference DNA samples were collected from a relative and compared to the DNA profile of the unidentified woman using Othram's KinSNP® rapid relationship testing. This investigation led to the positive identification of the woman, who is now known to be Orlene Donaldson.

Individuals who have taken a consumer DNA test can aid ongoing forensic investigations by joining the [DNASolves database](#). Expanding the pool of available DNA data increases the likelihood of successful identifications, helping to reunite families with their missing loved ones and resolve cases that have remained unsolved for years.

This is the 26th publicly announced case in the State of Missouri where officials leveraged Othram's identity inference pipeline. Explore other cases on [Othram's website](#).