Ventura County Sheriff's Office & Medical Examiner's Office Team with Othram to Identify a 1985 Jane Doe

After nearly 40 years, a woman whose partial remains were discovered in a plastic bag near Channel Islands Harbor in Oxnard, California, has been identified as Gertrude Elliott-Littlehale, who was born in 1864 and died in 1915.

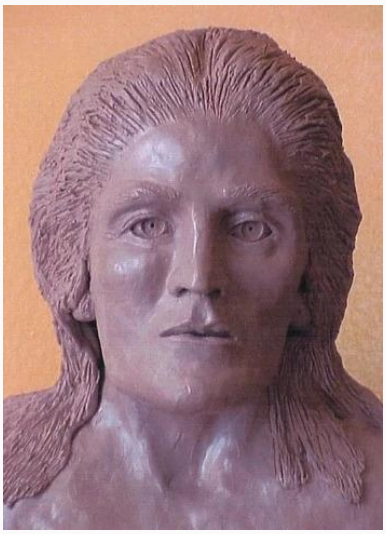
Solved

Summary

In October 1985, the partial skeletal remains of an unidentified individual were discovered in a plastic bag near Channel Islands Harbor in Oxnard, California. Oxnard is just west of downtown Los Angeles. The Ventura County Sheriff's Office responded to the scene and it was determined that the remains were that of a female, between the ages of 35 and 50 years old at her time of death. No other identifying information for the woman was available.

In 2016, details of the case were entered into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) as UP15170. A clay facial reconstruction was developed and released to the public in hopes that it would generate new leads in the case. For many years, investigators followed leads and made comparisons in an attempt to identify the Jane Doe. Despite extensive efforts by law enforcement investigators to

identify the woman, no matches were found, and the case went cold due to a lack of viable leads.



In May 2023, the Ventura County Sheriff's Office-Cold Case Unit in collaboration with the Ventura 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. Othram scientists successfully developed a DNA extract from the provided evidence and used Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® to build a comprehensive DNA profile for the unknown woman. Othram's in-house forensic genetic genealogy team then used this profile to conduct extensive genetic genealogy research, ultimately providing new investigative leads to law enforcement.

Using this new information, a follow-up investigation was conducted leading investigators to potential relatives of the woman. A reference sample was collected from a potential relative and compared to the DNA profile of the woman, which led to the positive identification of the woman, who is now known to be Gertrude Elliott-Littlehale, born in 1864. While Elliott-Littlehale died in 1915 and was buried, law enforcement received a tip several decades ago that a grave had been robbed and a skull was taken. This was Elliot-Littlehale's grave that had been disturbed. Despite Elliott-Littlehale having died nearly 110 years ago, Othram scientists were able to successfully extract DNA from these skeletal remains, build an ultra-sensitive DNA profile, and perform the genealogical research to identify Elliott-Littlehale's displaced remains.

The identification of Gertrude Elliott-Littlehale represents the 38th case in the State of California where officials have publicly identified an individual using technology developed by Othram. Most recently in Humboldt County, California, Freddie Earl Long was identified after 18 years.

Funding for the advanced DNA testing and forensic genetic genealogy used in this case was provided by NamUs, a national clearinghouse that assists the criminal justice community with the investigation and resolution of missing, unidentified, and unclaimed persons cases across the United States and its territories. NamUs is funded and administered by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and is managed through a contract with Research Triangle Institute International. We are grateful for the support of RTI, NamUs, and the NIJ.