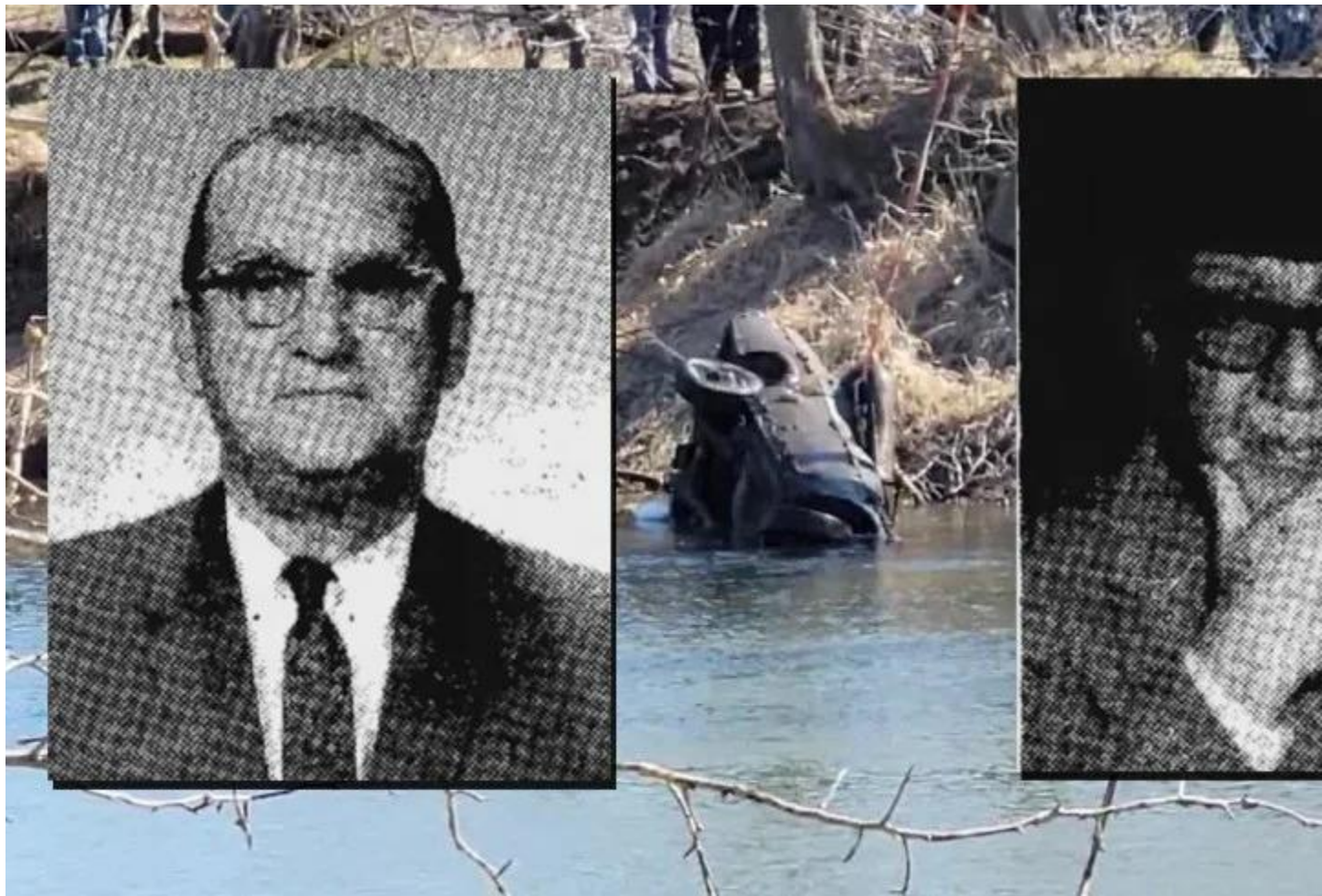


WTVO Rockford

Remains found in Peconica River identified as men who disappeared in 1976

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PECATONICA, Ill. (WTVO) — The Winnebago County Coroner has identified remains found inside a car submerged in the Peconica River as Clarence Owens and Everett Hawley, two businessmen who have been missing since 1976.

“By the end of March, we were able to take those remains to a forensic anthropologist in Saint Louis, where she did some more work, some more

analysis,” said Winnebago County Coroner Jennifer Muraski. We associated them, and then she was able to let us know that it was, in fact, the remains of two adult males.

According to Muraski, over 100 skeletal remains were found in the river and in the vehicle.

The examination also found no evidence of trauma, officials said.

“Well, it was difficult for them in this case specifically because those remains were underwater, submerged for so long. It made her job quite difficult,” Muraski went on to say. “But they’re trained to look at the size of the pelvis. You can tell a male from a female.”

They were later sent to the Illinois State Police forensic lab for DNA testing.

“This brings us one step closer to providing closure to the families of Clarence Owens and Everett Hawley who have waited many years for answers that have been affected by this tragic case. This is a testament to the dedication and perseverance of our detectives and forensic experts. It’s a reminder that no case is ever truly closed no matter how much time has passed,” Winnebago County Sheriff Gary Caruana said in a statement.



Everett Hawley. Photo: Freeport Journal-Standard



Clarence Owens. Photo: Freeport Journal-Standard

Divers were called to the scene in Pecatonica in March after fishermen had found an object on sonar that appeared to be a car beneath the surface.

“From the fishermen that day or a few days before that, you know, and then the sonar and then the sheriff’s department and the trucking company that helped bring the car out of the water,” said Muraski. “I mean, there were just multiple players that that helped make this happen for the families.”

The car was determined to be a gold 1966 Chevrolet Impala, matching a vehicle Owens and Hawley were last seen in.



According to the International Center for Unidentified and Missing Persons, the two men were business partners and were last seen between 2:40 p.m. and 3 p.m. at a farm auction. Earlier that day, they had attended a political rally for gubernatorial candidate James Thompson at the American Legion in Pecatonica, stopped off at Rocky’s Cafe, and visited Owen’s son, who lived nearby.

The pair failed to keep a scheduled appointment in German Valley and were reported missing by their families the next day.

Their disappearance has puzzled investigators for decades.

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