

Man known for 23 years as Conception Bay John Doe identified as a Cuban in Canada on a tourist visa

Remains were discovered at a dump site near St. John's in 2001



[Ronna Syed, Bob McKeown](#) · CBC News · Posted: May 28, 2024 4:35 PM EDT | Last Updated: May 28



Conception Bay John Doe, a victim of a homicide whose severed head was discovered in Conception Bay, N.L., in 2001, has been identified as **Temistocle Casas from Cuba**. He arrived in Montreal in 1992 on a tourist visa. (Submitted by Royal Newfoundland Constabulary)

WARNING: This story contains graphic details some readers may find disturbing.

The man who became known as Conception Bay John Doe after his severed head was found buried in a dump site 23 years ago has been identified by the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary as a Cuban who came to Canada on a tourist visa, *The Fifth Estate* has learned.

Temistocle Casas was identified through genetic genealogy that led investigators to his first cousin, police said.

RNC Const. Greg Davis said he will never forget the moment he learned Casas's name and saw his photo for the first time.

"Surreal! I guess would be the word to use. I couldn't believe it had happened," Davis said. "I always knew it was possible but I didn't know if we were going to get there.... My head was spinning, it was a crazy moment."

Two men looking for tree saplings discovered Casas's remains in a Billy Boot shopping bag in a dump site in Conception Bay, near St. John's, in 2001.

He had been known as Conception Bay John Doe since then.

After the remains were discovered, police said the victim probably lived in Quebec or Ontario or possibly the northeastern United States. Through isotope analysis and carbon dates, it was established that he was probably born in the late 1950s or early 1960s.



A facial reconstruction shows Conception Bay John Doe. He has now been identified as Casas. (Submitted by Royal Newfoundland Constabulary).

However, the RNC has now told *The Fifth Estate* they don't believe Casas ever lived in the U.S. They said he came to Montreal on a tourist visa in 1992.

It is not known how Casas ended up in Newfoundland.

"Through our investigation, we believe Mr. Casas was killed in 1997 or 1998," said Davis. "We're not going to disclose any more details at this time since it is an active homicide investigation."

The Fifth Estate was not able to find any records indicating Casas became a Canadian citizen.

Three years ago, the RNC began using genetic genealogy — when DNA is used to do family tree research — to try to identify the man. But any matches made with relatives had been too distant to make an identification, according to the RNC.

Then, in February, a man from the U.S. uploaded his DNA. He turned out to be Casas's first cousin.

Investigative dead ends

In 2001, when the RNC held a news conference about the case, they said they believed the man was killed sometime between 1994 and 1997, but they would not disclose the cause of death, saying it would compromise their investigation. They did confirm that he was a victim of homicide.

Over the past two decades, the RNC pursued several avenues to try to crack open the case. They held media conferences, used isotope analysis, submitted the unknown man's DNA to the national DNA data bank for the missing and unidentified and sent his dental records to authorities in the U.S.

It was all to no avail.



The RNC's lead investigator on the case, Const. Greg Davis, left, shows The Fifth Estate's Bob McKeown a replica of the then-unknown victim's skull in 2021. The victim has now been identified as Casas. (John Badcock/CBC)

In 2001, the RNC concluded that the skull, which had shoulder-length black, curly hair, belonged to a male between the ages of 20 and 40.

It was not possible to determine other physical features like height because the rest of the man's remains have never been found.

In 2021, the RNC decided to pursue genetic genealogy. It has become a popular tool for policing agencies to try to identify John and Jane Does, but it only works if a close relative of the dead person enters their DNA into a public family tree database.

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Identification becomes more difficult if the unknown person comes from an ethnic community that doesn't typically pursue family tree research. That was the challenge in this case, according to police.

Casas's DNA profile was uploaded into GEDmatch, a public database of profiles from different family tree databases, in February 2022. His identity was confirmed in April after a DNA match with a family member.

"Personally, I am relieved that we are at this point. I never knew that we'd get to the point where we'd have an identity. I knew the technology was there to identify him but I didn't know if it would work because of the Cuban ancestry," said Davis.

Davis, has made a plea for anyone with any knowledge of the case to step forward. (John Badcock/CBC)

Casas arrived in Canada from Cuba on April 1, 1992. The RNC have not been able to find any records of Casas travelling to Newfoundland and Labrador.

"I beg anyone out there who is reading this story that if you know any information to contact us," said Davis.

"We are back to Square 1. In a normal [homicide], you know who the victim is from the start. We only learned his name 23 years later, so now I feel that in a lot of ways we're only now starting a homicide investigation, even though we put great effort into this file for over two decades."

If you have any information about this case, please call 416-205-6679 or write to us at ronna.syed@cbc.ca.