

Officials hope to put names to murdered South Mississippi women's faces

Published: November 2, 2013

Facial renderings from their remains found in 1980 may help identification

By MARGARET BAKER — mbbaker@sunherald.com

HARRISON COUNTY -- In October 1980, hunters discovered the skeletal remains of a woman who had been murdered and dumped on a dirt road off Mississippi 26 in Wiggins.

The woman, referred to by authorities as Ms. Wiggins because of where her remains were found, had been stripped, bound and placed in a large green garbage bag.

Her identity remains unknown.

She's one of two women

whose skeletal remains were discovered the same year.

On Nov. 10, 1980, a man on White Plains Road, an old logging road off Lamey Bridge Road in Harrison County, discovered the second woman's remains, later determined to be another homicide victim. Authorities refer to her as Ms. Harrison because of where her body was found. She, too, was found unclothed. She, too, remains unidentified.

Now, two Harrison County cold case investigators, Sgt. Coley Judy and crime scene investigator Kristi Johnson, are hoping that by generating facial-reconstruction renderings of the women, investigators will be able to identify them and aid the investigations into their murders.

"We just really want to know who they are," Johnson said. "We want to be able to tell their families what happened to them and where they are, and bring them back home. People deserve to know."

Ms. Wiggins

Harrison County investigators have worked with Mississippi and out-of-state forensic experts and others to gain leads. So far, they have obtained dental records on the victims and have sought through forensic examiners any type of physical details that could aid identification.

In addition, they are working with experts to have DNA extracted from the remains. After the DNA is extracted, they hope to make greater strides in their investigation.

So far, Judy and Johnson said over the last four months they have been able to determine the woman found in Wiggins was white, 36 to 46 years old and 5 feet 1 to 5 feet 7 inches tall. She had a healed fracture of her right clavicle and had medium to dark brown hair.

Experts estimate she died between April and September 1980.

She also had undergone very expensive dental work, they said. Her dental records did not match any of the thousands of people listed in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, or NamUs, database. Both women's information has been submitted to NamUs.

Judy and Johnson said they have been working with a team of cold cases investigators throughout South Mississippi, among them Pascagoula police Detective Darren Versiga and Stone County sheriff's Lt. Ray Boggs.

Ms. Harrison

A man who was squirrel hunting discovered the remains of the woman found on the logging road in Harrison County. He told investigators then he called the owner of a nearby business to report the find to authorities.

Harrison County investigators said they have learned from experts the woman was white, likely had medium-length light-brown hair, was 19 to 25 years old, 5 feet 2 to 5 feet 5 inches tall and had a curvature in her spine that may have made her appear slightly hunchbacked.

Experts believe she died between May 1979 and August 1980.

She had 12 fillings but no other dental work and it was unlikely she ever gave birth.

Judy and Johnson are working with law enforcement officers from surrounding agencies to try to solve unsolved murders such as these.

Harrison County alone has 21 unsolved murders, Judy said, and cold case investigators are sharing information in an effort to get leads in them.

As for Ms. Wiggins and Ms. Harrison, "We've checked all the missing persons in the area at the time the remains were found, but never found anybody that matched," Judy said. He said information on the two has been entered into the National Crime Information Center database.

"We're hoping to identify the victims of these homicides, and we are hoping to have closure for the families," Johnson said. "They've got families who want to know what happened to them. It's kinda sad to know they are still waiting on answers."

To report information, call the Harrison County Sheriff's Office at 896-0678 or Crime Stoppers at 1-877-787-5898, text CSTIP plus your message to 274637 or go to mscoastcrimestoppers.com.

Read more here: <http://www.sunherald.com>

Skeletal remains were found on November 10, 1980, in a densely wooded area off White Plains Road and Lamey Bridge Road. The remains were submitted to a Forensic Anthropologist for evaluation. It was determined the victim was a Caucasian Female, aging from 19-25 years. She was approximately 5'1"-5'5" tall and had medium length light brown hair. This young woman had dental work and probably suffered from back pain. She may have appeared "pigeon chest" or "humpbacked"; however, it was only slightly. It was determined that her remains were in the woods for 3-18 months putting her time of death between May 1978 and November 1980. A forensic artist performed a facial reconstruction (pictured). Please note her eye color is unknown <http://www.harrisoncountysheriff.com/depar...old-case-files/>

Investigators continue to identify two women 33 years later

Posted: Feb 12, 2014 5:16 PM CST

Updated: Feb 12, 2014 7:00 PM CST

By Michelle Lady - bio | email

HARRISON COUNTY, MS (WLOX) -

In October 1980, a woman was found dead in a wooded area of Wiggins. One month later, another woman was found dead in a wooded area of Harrison County. To this day no one knows who these women are, how they died or who is responsible for their deaths.

Harrison County investigators are not giving up. They have recently taken another look at the cases and with today's technology they are hoping to get answers.

"We get new cases in everyday, and it's important to work every case and make sure you don't forget them because it's old," Harrison County Evidence Technician Kristi Johnson said.

"We have a dedication to these people just like we do our victims of today."

Thirty-three years ago the Internet was not even thought of, but now with a few clicks on the web you can look up missing people from across the country. Johnson added the two women's profiles to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System to expand their search for the families of the ladies she knows only as Ms. Harrison and Ms. Wiggins.

Johnson is also getting a DNA profile of the women compiled.

"DNA takes a long time and once it gets entered into the database we are hoping to have some sort of resolution at least, at the very least, identify them and bring them home to their families."

Through her investigation, Johnson found out that the women's skeletal remains were analyzed in Oklahoma. She contacted the office and was able to get pictures of facial reconstructions made shortly after the women were found dead.

"We have been able to see in other people that have been identified that their reconstructions are pretty close likeness to what they looked like. Usually family members can recognize, or at least think, that person looks like the person or resembles their missing loved one."

Ms. Harrison was found on November 10, 1980 on Logging Road off White Plains Road north of Interstate 10. Investigators believe she was between 19 and 25-years-old and had been dead for anywhere from three to 12 months before her remains were found.

"There was nothing on her remains to indicate how she died, so we are not sure. We are working it as a homicide until we can prove otherwise."

Ms. Harrison was a Caucasian woman between 5'2" and 5'5" tall. Investigators said she had a little bit of a hunchback and believed she had some back pain. She also had some dental work done.

Ms. Wiggins was found October 5, 1980 off Highway 26 in Wiggins. She is also a Caucasian woman and is believed to have been anywhere from 34 to 46-years-old and about 5'1" to 5'7" tall.

"She was actually found in some trash bags with some twine wrapped around her remains and the bag, so we know she was a victim of a homicide."

Ms. Wiggins had medium to dark brown hair and extensive dental work including a root canal and platinum or gold bridges.

With very little information on these women, Johnson hopes the pictures or even the DNA can help them identify them and then maybe she can even track down their killers.

"It's really important to these people. They have been waiting 25 plus years to find out what happened to their family and, we want to bring that closure to them."

If you recognize these women or know anything about their disappearance you are asked to call Harrison County Sheriff's Department at 228-896-0678. If you would like to leave an anonymous tip you can do so by clicking on the link

<http://www.harrisoncountysheriff.com/anonymous-tip-form/>.

To learn more about these women or other cold cases Harrison County investigators are working on click here <Http://www.harrisoncountysheriff.com/depar...old-case-files/>
<http://www.wlox.com/story/24708496>

HARRISON COUNTY -- Cold case investigators were disappointed when DNA extracted from the skeletal remains of a woman found slain in 1980 didn't match any of the profiles of women reported missing nationwide.

"That means either she's not been reported missing or there is no DNA on file for the missing person that's been reported to authorities," said Kristi Johnson Harrison County sheriff's cold case and crime scene investigator. "Now, it's one of those cases where I'm going to have to research missing persons to see if I can find somebody with similar features."

In October 1980, hunters discovered the remains dumped on a dirt road off Mississippi 26 in Wiggins. The woman, referred to as Ms. Wiggins because of where her remains were found, had been stripped, bound and placed in a large green garbage bag.

She was one of two women whose remains were discovered that year.

On Nov. 10, 1980, a man found the scattered skeletal remains of an unclothed woman on an old logging road just off Lamey Bridge Road in rural Harrison County. Authorities believe the woman, referred to by authorities as Ms. Harrison, was dumped there because no clothing or personal effects such as purse, were found. Her death was ruled a homicide.

Johnson and Harrison County cold case investigator Sgt. Coley Judy are still waiting for experts to extract DNA from those remains in hopes of finding a match.

The investigation

So far, the investigators have artist's renderings of the women from experts who reconstructed their faces based on evidence found at the scenes.

They are planning to do isotope testing, which can determine the region of the country where the women resided based on the water they consumed over the years.

In 2013, the Sun Herald first reported on the two killings. Sever

al tips came in as a result, but none panned out. Investigators are hoping for more leads this time that might mean a break in the cases. Authorities believe the two slayings may be related because of the nature of the evidence at each of the crime scenes.

"There is somebody out there who is wondering what happened to their family member or their friend," Johnson said. "I'm a mother. I'm a daughter. I'm a sister. I cannot imagine not knowing where someone in my family is for a day, much less years. That's got to be heartbreaking. No matter how many years have passed, they deserve answers and closure for the victims."

Ms. Wiggins

Harrison County investigators have worked with authorities in Stone County, including sheriff's Lt. Ray Boggs, and in- and out-of-state forensic experts and others to gather leads in the case.

They have determined the woman was white, 36 to 46 years old and 5-feet-1 to 5-feet-7. She had a healed fracture of her right clavicle and had medium to dark hair.

Experts estimate she died between April and September 1980.

She had undergone extensive dental work, with four bridges, several fillings and root canals, though her dental records did not match any of the people listed so far in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, or NamUs, database.

Ms. Harrison

The investigators have learned from experts the woman was white, 5-feet-2 to 5-feet-5 and had a curvature of her spine that may have made her appear slightly hunchbacked.

She likely died between May 1979 and August 1980.

She had 12 fillings but no other dental work and it was unlikely she ever gave birth.

Johnson said investigations today are conducted much differently than they were in the '70s and '80s, when DNA technology, for example, was not yet available. DNA samples or dental records

weren't routinely collected from relatives of missing persons so that information isn't among the evidence.

"The fact of the matter is that we may never get these girls identified, but the more people we get involved with the number of missing and unidentified persons, the more people could share information with us and possibly help identify these people," Johnson said. "We want to be able to reach out to somebody before it is too late. It's getting really hard with each passing year. Relatives of these two women may be passing away. We want to give them some closure before it's too late."

To report information, call the Harrison County Sheriff's Office at 896-0678 or Crime Stoppers at 1-877-787-5898, text CSTIP plus your message to 274637 or go to mscoastcrimestoppers.com.

Read more here: <http://www.sunherald.com>
