

CCU Annual Report 2013

Intro

The New Hampshire Cold Case Unit (CCU) saw a mix of transition, challenge, and success in 2013. While an infamous 1991 homicide in Plymouth was presented to a grand jury for indictment, a mistrial due to a hung jury concluded the prosecution in the CCU's pilot case. Both events demonstrate and reinforce the complexity of charging and bringing a successful prosecution to a historic homicide case. The CCU also insured its long-term existence. As the original grant funding for the unit lapsed, both the Department of Safety and the Department of Justice recognized the success of the CCU, and agreed to maintain their respective commitments by including it within their operating budgets. As the CCU welcomes new members, and continues to learn more about its plethora of cases, the hope of bringing justice and resolution to grieving New Hampshire families remains strong.

Staffing

Staffing of the Cold Case Unit saw two notable changes during 2013. First, Sergeant Scott Gilbert left the unit after nearly four years of being the CCU supervisor. Sergeant Gilbert took another position within the Major Crime Unit. New Hampshire State Police Sergeant Jeffrey Ladieu was selected to take Sgt. Gilbert's former position, and now leads the investigative arm of the CCU. Sgt. Ladieu has been an investigator within the Major Crime Unit since 2008. He was promoted to Sergeant in 2011 and has been leading homicide investigations since that time. Sgt. Ladieu also serves as a polygraph examiner. He brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the CCU, and has begun the process of familiarizing himself with ongoing CCU initiatives.

The prosecutor's position also saw change this year. Senior Assistant Attorney General Jeffery Strelzin continues to lead the Attorney General's Homicide Unit, but has passed the reins of the cold case work to Senior Assistant Attorney General Ben Agati. Attorney Agati has prosecuted New Hampshire homicide cases since 2007, and was previously employed as an assistant district attorney in Massachusetts. Attorney Agati brings a great deal of enthusiasm to his new role, and has already begun actively taking part in the strategy and execution of several cold case investigations.

Trooper Michael Kokoski continues to serve as the unit's second full time investigator and Detective Robert Freitas maintains his part-time position as an investigator with the Attorney General's office. Joelle Donnelly still serves as the unit's victim/witness advocate, and volunteers Milli Knudsen and Verne Greene remain as clerical/paralegal support. The CCU is also occasionally assisted by college interns from the New Hampshire State Police internship program.

Funding

The Cold Case Unit was initially funded in 2009 via federal grant money, specifically the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant. In 2013, the sun set on the grant funding, and the existence of the CCU in its current form became uncertain. Thankfully, support for continuing the unit was not hard to find. Over the last four years, it has become evident that given devoted resources and time, some of these troubling cases

can be solved. Leadership from both the Department of Safety and the Department of Justice clearly agreed with this conclusion. As the budgetary process commenced for FY 14-15, both organizations funded their respective cold case unit positions within their annual budgets without reliance on a grant. This action has served as testament to the commitment New Hampshire law enforcement has to making sure the perpetrators of these heinous crimes do not escape justice. With such support, the CCU is in an excellent position to carry out its day-to-day work of investigating the state's unsolved cases.

Solving the Theresa Reed Homicide

On July 19, 2013, the Cold Case Unit solved one of the state's most disturbing murder cases by indicting Craig Conkey for the homicide of Theresa Reed. Theresa Reed was stabbed to death in her Plymouth apartment on September 6, 1991. Ms. Reed was employed in the registrar's office at Plymouth State College. The sadness of this case reverberated not only through Reed's family, but through the Plymouth community and the PSC campus. A tremendous effort was put forth to identify her killer, but sadly the case eventually went cold.

In 2012, CCU investigators proactively began working the Reed case, with particular focus on a suspect, Craig Conkey. Following a year's worth of follow-up work, investigators presented evidence to the Grafton County Grand jury which returned indictments charging Conkey with second degree murder. The CCU is proud to have persisted with this investigation and looks forward to seeing the case make its way through the judicial process.

Investigative Efforts

Below is a general summary of some of the Cold Case Unit's investigative activity:

- Investigators have put in significant time and effort in attempting to find the perpetrator of the 1989 Craig Lane homicide in Peterborough. Lane was brutally stabbed to death while working his after school job at the Texaco gas station. CCU detectives have carefully reviewed the Lane file, and re-focused on specific physical evidence and persons in hopes of advancing the investigation. These efforts are ongoing.
- In October 2013, Cold Case Unit detectives were assigned to assist and supplement investigators working on the 2011 homicide of 11 year old Celina Cass. Detectives from the New Hampshire State Police-Troop F, and the Major Crime Unit, have been working diligently to find Celina's killer. Celina disappeared from her home during the overnight hours leading into July 26, 2011. Her body was found submerged in the nearby Connecticut River on August 1, 2011. While Celina's case has not been officially added to the list of cold cases, CCU members are proud to augment the effort towards unraveling this complex investigation.
- Beginning in 2012, CCU investigators began working closely with Plainfield Police Chief Paul Roberts to revisit the 1982 homicide of Sylvia Gray. Ms. Gray, age 76, was found dead near her home in May of 1982. As part of this new effort, multiple witnesses were re-interviewed, and a thorough review of forensic evidence was conducted. Early in the year, CCU detectives traveled to Florida to follow-up on specific information in this case.

- The CCU released new composite images of the four unidentified female homicide victims found in Allenstown near Bear Brook State Park. These composite images were made possible with collaboration with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, which has been a valuable partner in this investigation.
- Some tasks undertaken by CCU detectives are not linked directly to one specific open case. For instance, in the summer of 2013, the CCU investigated a series of letters written by a prisoner claiming that he had information on numerous historic deaths. Such assignments often present a large amount of research to determine the veracity of such claims. During 2013, CCU detectives also researched and explored possible links between convicted serial killer Rodney Alcala, who had spent time in New Hampshire during the 1970s and some of our unsolved homicides.

State vs. McLeod Update

Since the 2010 arrest of David McLeod, the case of the Hina family has continued to make its way through the judicial process. Carl, Lori, Sara, and Lillian Hina all died in a fire at their Keene apartment in January of 1988. A Superior Court ruling had determined that several of the state's arson experts would not be allowed to testify at trial. In May of 2013, the Supreme Court heard appeals on these issues and reversed the lower court's ruling. Over three years after McLeod's arrest, he faced trial in Cheshire County Superior Court in December of 2013. Following a lengthy trial, the jury could not come to a verdict and a mistrial was declared. The State must now decide the appropriate next steps for this case. Despite this outcome, members of the CCU remain proud of all the efforts put forth over the last four years in an effort to obtain justice for the Hina family.

New Cases Added to Case List

As time goes on, the CCU occasionally learns of historic homicides with which the investigative team was previously unfamiliar. One such case that came to light this year was the unusual disappearance of Patricia ("Patty") Ann Wood. It is believed that Patty Wood went missing from Swanzey, NH sometime around 1976 when she was approximately 4 years old. Patty had been living with her father John Wood and her step-mother Judith Wood at that time. Local residents who knew Patty were told by John and Judith that Patty had left the state to live with her biological mother. Patty's mother did not have any contact with Patty, and thus, she thought Patty continued to live in New Hampshire.

For 11 years, no one was looking for Patty. In 1987, new information surfaced revealing Patty's disappearance. Detectives from the New Hampshire State Police- Troop C commenced an investigation into Patty's whereabouts. Shortly after the investigation began, John and Judith Wood committed suicide. After some additional follow-up work, the investigation stalled. The CCU was contacted by a party wondering what had ever happened to Patty's case. Upon researching the matter, the CCU discovered that Patty had never been located, and that her disappearance is highly suspicious. While the case is unorthodox and challenging, CCU detectives are reviewing the file and efforts are underway to assist in the identification of Patty should unknown remains be found.

In July of 2013, victim/witness advocate Joelle Donnelly was contacted by the family of Everett “Red” Delano inquiring about his 1966 murder. On September 1, 1966, Mr. Delano was shot to death while working at Sanborn’s Garage in Andover, NH. The CCU was unfamiliar with the case, but upon researching the matter, detectives were able to locate a complete file, as well as the original forensic evidence. Despite the age of the crime, investigators are following up on some promising aspects of this fascinating investigation.

Conclusion

As the Cold Case Unit transitions from a grant-funded experiment to a permanent, general funded unit, its members are excited for the opportunity to continue exploring and advancing the unsolved cases of the Granite State. 2013 has shown new success and has also shown the complexity of bringing historical cases through all phases of the justice system. With the continued support of the public, the Department of Safety, and the Department of Justice, the CCU will continue to move these cases forward, and speak for the victims of these devastating crimes.