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Murders unsolved but not forgotten

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Charles Englehart was found murdered in the 700 block of Main Street in Davenport on Sept. 22, 1935.

Not much more than that is known about the man and his murder, except that it is the oldest of 52 unsolved Quad-Cities area murders discovered during a search of Dispatch/Argus files and of old police records by officers.



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Photo: John Greenwood

This stack of files represents a portion of the 30 unsolved murders in Davenport, some dating back to 1935.

Of those 52 unsolved murders, 37 of them happened in Scott County and 11 in Rock Island County. Henry and Whiteside counties each had two.

The newest unsolved murder occurred just over four months ago. Sergio Jimenez, 24, was discovered in a parking lot between in Rock Island between 19th and 20th streets and First and Second avenues at about 3 a.m. Nov. 15, 2009, according to Rock Island police. Officers on patrol in the area heard gunshots and responded and found a man with a gunshot wound, later identified as Mr. Jimenez.

The more time that passes after a murder, the harder that murder becomes to solve, police said.

Davenport police Maj. Don Schaeffer, who ran the department's detective bureau from 1986 until 2000, said one problem is that standards for prosecution and evidence collection are much stricter now.

"Proving a homicide is way more difficult now than 30, 40 years ago," he said. Evidence collected so many years ago was packaged much differently and may not have survived. "Everything (now) is packaged correctly and sealed correctly. Everything is so much more professional."

When multiple agencies are involved in investigating a homicide, it makes coordinating

information a little more difficult, said Detective Chris George of the Milan Police Department. Milan has two unsolved homicides -- Nicholas Atwater and Harriet Crandall.

"In both the homicides, there's more than Milan involved," Detective George said. To keep the different officers from different agencies up to date, periodic meetings are needed, he said. "You kind of do a round-table to see where folks are at."

The science of forensic investigation also is much different now than it was years ago, Maj. Schaeffer said. It wasn't until 1984, that police began collecting and using DNA as evidence, and police now know more than ever about what happens to a body after death -- a major key in determining when someone died.

"Nobody had any idea how long it took for a hair to fall off your head," he said. "They have so many different sciences."

Still, Maj. Schaeffer said, that does not mean old murders cannot be solved, nor does the difficulties keep him from periodically looking back at old murders in the hopes of finding something new.

One murder Maj. Schaeffer has investigated periodically over the years happened before he even joined the Davenport Police Department. Clarence Case was found bludgeoned to death inside Ray and Edith's Tavern at 1600 W. Locust St. on Feb. 16, 1961. Maj. Schaeffer said police believe he was killed overnight, possibly after the bar closed.

One problem, Maj. Schaeffer said, is that even if he looks at the reports and discovers something new, finding witnesses to verify it would be difficult.

"There's almost nobody alive that was around," he said.

Besides witnesses, finding police officers who investigated an old case can be a problem, said Silvis police Chief Bill Brasche. Indeed, Chief Brasche said, that is the case in the unsolved murder of Paul Donder.

"Nobody who works here now was on the department when it happened," he said.

Investigating an old murder like that of Mr. Case starts with going over existing reports.

"I reinvestigate every aspect of it," Major Schaeffer said. "I look for discrepancies. At the end, I'll put a timeline together."

The timeline, Maj. Schaeffer said, is the most important part.

"The easiest way of eliminating a suspect is by timeline," he said. "You get a suspect, their path had to cross (with the victim's) at that time (of death)."

Maj. Schaeffer said reinvestigating old murders often means bringing his work home with him.

"That's a lot of times my bedtime reading," he said.

Once, he said, the solution to a murder came to him when he suddenly woke up at 4 a.m. after reading about a murder the night before. He realized that he could prove a suspect had lied to him about where he had gone and what he had been doing the day of the murder. He noted that because he fell asleep with the information fresh in his head, he was able to pick up on the lie.

But Maj. Schaeffer has had no such luck with the Clarence Case murder -- a case he says still gnaws at him from time to time. A few years back, he said, he ran into Mr. Case's daughter, who still lives in the area. He said she remembered him and that she's still hoping to someday know who killed her father.

"I said I'd look at it again," he said. "I'd like to solve that one."

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