

Michael Elijah Adams – Arrestee DNA Solves a Cold Case

On January 21, 2000 the body of John Semler Owens, a 46-year-old transient, was found on a service road near the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. (See e.g., Owens, *Press Release: Cold Case Funding Leads to Arrest in 2000 Placer County Homicide*, Placer County District Attorney (June 22, 2011) at <<http://www.placer.ca.gov/Departments/DA/News/2011/June/Newsitem,-d-adams.aspx>> [as of May 11, 2012].) The case remained unsolved for 11 years until DNA evidence linked Michael Elijah Adams, a fellow transient, to the case. (See e.g., Thomson, *2000 Roseville cold case suspect in Placer County jail*, Roseville Press Tribune (June 22, 2011) at <<http://rosevillept.com/detail/181662.html>> [as of May 11, 2012].)

Pursuant to California's Proposition 69, on September 11, 2010, San Bernardino Sheriff's Office had collected Adams' DNA sample after arresting Adams on robbery charges. The San Bernardino District Attorney dismissed the robbery case on September 21, 2010 in the "furtherance of justice." On January 10, 2011, the CAL-DOJ DNA Databank notified the Sacramento Bureau of Forensic Services that Adams' profile matched the profile submitted from the Owens murder case. Sacramento BFS submitted their analysis of the crime scene evidence to the Placer County District Attorney, eventually leading to murder charges against Adams. (CAL-DOJ, 2011).

But for the DNA sample taken at the robbery arrest, Adams would not have been linked to the Owens murder case in 2010, or directly to other serious crimes Adams is now wanted for nationwide. Adams' itinerant lifestyle led him to many states, including Texas. On March 15, 2011, the body of Venus Sloan Driscoll, a 51-year-old homeless woman, was found in a shallow grave in El Paso, Texas. She had died of blunt force trauma to the head and witnesses indicated that Driscoll had been seen with a man matching Adams' description. (See e.g., El Paso County Sheriff's Office, *Manhunt Monday 04/25/11: Michael Elijah Adams*, KVIA (April 25, 2011) at <<http://www.kvia.com/news/27662281/detail.html>> [as of May 11, 2012].) It was determined that the perpetrator acted alone in the murder and an arrest warrant was issued for Adams. (See e.g., Baranyay, *News Release: Police Obtain Murder Warrant for Man Accused of Killing Homeless Woman*, City of El Paso (April 15, 2011) at <http://www.elpasotexas.gov/police/_documents/press/Microsoft%20Word%20-%2011-074192%209500%20North%20Loop%20WARRANT.pdf> [as of May 11, 2012].)

Adams was featured on the "Manhunt Monday" portion of the El Paso County Sheriff's website, and became a wanted man in 2 states, under a \$5,000,000 bond. Adams, aka Leon Louie Thiel, "Crazy Mike," and "Nasty Mike," was described as having tattoos of railroad tracks on his face and "Freight Train Riders of America" on his collarbone. (See e.g., El Paso County Sheriff's Office, *Manhunt Monday 04/25/11: Michael Elijah Adams*, El Paso County (April 24, 2011) at <http://www.epcounty.com/CS/blogs/sheriff_news/archive/2011/04/24/manhunt-monday-04-25-11-michael-elijah-adams.aspx> [as of May 11, 2012].) The FTRA is a gang of at least 1000 transient train riders police believe may be linked to hundreds of assaults, deaths and other crimes. (See e.g., Murphy, *A Trail of Blood on the Rails*, Los Angeles Times (September 17, 1997) at <<http://articles.latimes.com/1997/sep/17/news/mn-33166>> [as of May 11, 2012].)

On May 17, 2011, Adams was arrested in Clark County, Washington for assaulting another man. He admitted to a Sheriff's Deputy that he had been in Texas before, and boasted that he had

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(continued)**

been arrested for murder twice before and “beaten the rap.” He also reportedly called himself an enforcer for the FTRA, and said he learned his skills from a fellow gang member, “Dogman Tony,” who has been featured on the FBI’s Most Wanted List several times. Another famous member of the FTRA was Robert Silveria Jr., aka the “Boxcar Killer,” who admitted to killing 28 people. Adams was soon extradited to Lane County, Oregon to face heroin charges. (See e.g., Albrecht, *Clark County end of line for Train gang ‘enforcer,’* The Columbian (May 24, 2011) at <http://www.columbian.com/news/2011/may/24/clark-county-end-of-line-for-train-gang-enforcer/> [as of May 11, 2012].)

On May 24, the Placer County District Attorney’s office filed a Felony Complaint, charging Adams with the murder of John Owens. Adams waived extradition to California, and was arrested by detectives from the Placer County Cold Case Unit and the Roseville Police Department. On June 20, 2011 Adams was arraigned in Placer County Superior Court. (See e.g., Owens, *Press Release: Cold Case Funding Leads to Arrest in 2000 Placer County Homicide*, Placer County District Attorney (June 22, 2011) at <http://www.placer.ca.gov/Departments/DA/News/2011/June/Newsitem,-d-,adams.aspx> [as of May 11, 2012].) Adams plead guilty on November 3, 2011 and was sentenced the following month. (See e.g., Minugh, *Man pleads guilty to 2000 murder of fellow transient man in Roseville*, Sacramento Bee (November 3, 2011) at <http://blogs.sacbee.com/crime/archives/2011/11/man-pleads-guilty-to-2000-murder-of-fellow-transient-man-in-roseville.html> [as of May 11, 2012].) He is currently serving a life sentence in a California Department of Corrections facility. But for the DNA sample taken at the robbery arrest, Adams would not have been linked to the Owens murder case in 2010, or to the other serious crimes nationwide.