

HAMILTON COUNTY COLD CASE UNIT  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE  
117 EAST 7<sup>TH</sup> STREET  
SECOND FLOOR  
CHATTANOOGA, TN 37402



March 22, 2017

## **Alabama Man Enters Guilty Plea in 28-year old Cold Case Homicide**

Wednesday morning, Samuel Edward Reeves (dob: 10/10/1967) of Bryant, Alabama, entered a guilty plea to Voluntary Manslaughter in the February 1989 death of James "Richard" Layne.

### **Background:**

Richard Layne checked into La Plaza Motel on Cummings Highway in Lookout Valley on the afternoon of Monday, February 20, 1989. He paid for a one night stay.

The following morning, Tuesday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, Mr. Layne did not check out as scheduled. Motel housekeeping staff entered his room and found the naked and bloody body of the 47-year old lying in the floor.

An autopsy revealed Mr. Layne had been stabbed thirty-two (32) times, with wounds to the head, neck, chest, back, abdomen, and arms. The ring finger of his left hand had been crudely amputated.

Investigators believe the killer made off with Mr. Layne's wedding ring. Also, the Ringgold, Georgia, man was known to carry large amounts of cash (which he used at car auctions) but Chattanooga police found his wallet empty, leading them to suspect cash had been taken, too.

Original detectives assigned to the Layne homicide had few leads and the case quickly became cold.

### **Recent Developments:**

Last year, the FBI's Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) found a match to a fingerprint on a beer can collected from Layne's motel room. It belonged to Samuel Edward Reeves and was identical to a fingerprint taken when Reeves was more recently booked on a DUI charge.

Once notified of the AFIS hit, the Cold Case Unit reopened the case and began interviewing potential witnesses. When CCU investigators approached the suspect, he refused to talk and hired defense attorney Lee Davis.

Based on Mr. Reeves' contention he acted in self-defense and with limited available evidence (one fingerprint on a beer can), District Attorney General Neal Pinkston negotiated a plea agreement with Mr. Davis.

Reeves entered a plea of Voluntary Manslaughter and received a six (6) year prison sentence, which will be suspended to probation after he serves 11 months, 29 days in the county jail. The state has agreed to allow Reeves to serve his probation in his home state of Alabama.

DA General Pinkston recently met with Mr. Layne's family and they have indicated they are in favor of this resolution.

This is the ninth case resolved by the DA's Cold Case Unit since it began operating on October 1, 2014.

### ***DA's Cold Case Unit***

*District Attorney General Neal Pinkston created the Cold Case Unit upon taking office in September 2014 to review the nearly 200 unsolved homicides and missing persons cases in Hamilton County. The Unit is led by retired CPD Captain Mike Mathis. Chattanooga Police Chief Fred Fletcher and Hamilton County Sheriff Jim Hammond each provide an investigator to the unit. If you have information about any cold case, please contact us using the Cold Case Hotline at 423-209-7470 or by email at coldcases@hcdatn.org.*