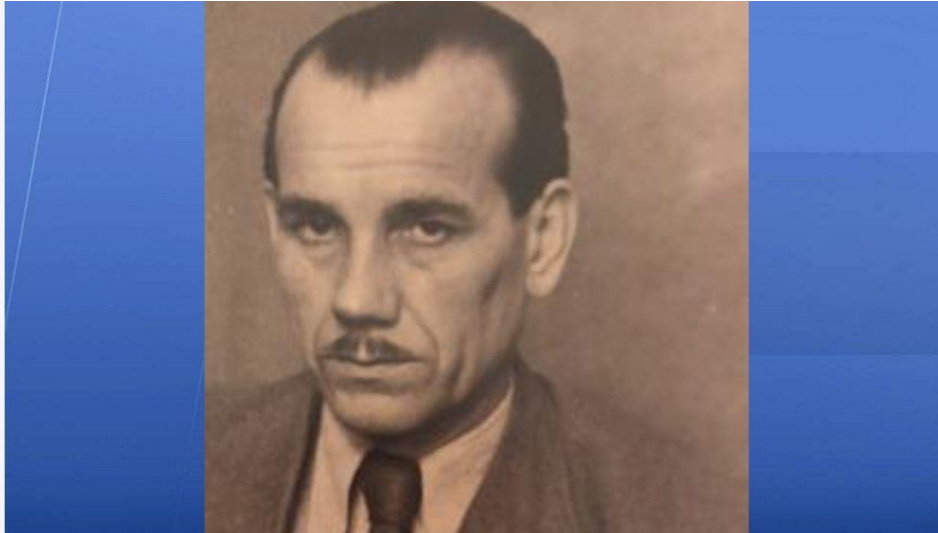




Police say the remains of Mikolai Celesz, who was reported missing by a family member more than 48 years ago, were positively identified after years of interviews and DNA testing. (Courtesy of New York State Police)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Remains discovered in Orange County in 1991 identified as man missing since 1976

BY ADAM PENALE ORANGE COUNTY
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New York State Police announced Wednesday that human remains found in a swamp in Greenville, Orange County, in 1991 have been identified as a man missing since 1976.

Police say the remains of Mikolai Celesz, who was reported missing by a family member more than 48 years ago, were positively identified after years of interviews and DNA testing. Celesz was 76 at the time of his disappearance.

Officials say a DNA profile obtained in 2024 indicated the victim had genetic roots in Eastern Europe, but no definitive identification could be made. Property recovered from the body was also analyzed last year, and police say a state-of-the-art analysis generated a lead that suggested the victim may have resided in Port Jervis, New York. During an investigation, police in Port Jervis located a missing person report for Celesz, dated Oct. 1, 1976.

Subsequent DNA testing from surviving relatives of Celesz resulted in a positive identification of the remains.

According to police, the remains were originally discovered after a swamp was drained off Woods Road in the town of Greenville. A skull and additional skeletal remains concentrated within a seven-foot radius were found, with portions of the remains buried under about one foot of earth. Several personal effects were originally found on the

body, but police say the passage of time and exposure to the elements of being underwater for years did not yield any useful information regarding his identity at the time.

“The New York State Police is grateful to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security Investigations, and the City of Port Jervis Police Department for their invaluable assistance. Their partnership and dedication helped bring long-awaited answers to Mikolai’s family—more than forty-eight years after he disappeared,” State Police said in a statement.

Officials are asking anyone with information on Celesz’s disappearance to contact Troop F Communications at 845-344-5300 and reference case number 3021756.

Adam Penale is a Niagara University graduate who has written for the Buffalo Bisons and the Niagara Gazette. He joined Spectrum News in 2020.