

LOCAL

DNA reveals Geneseo John Doe found in 1966 was teen Ronald Cole

Nida Tazeen

Reporter Assisted by AI

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Ronald Joe Cole has been identified as the Geneseo John Doe, Sixty years after his remains were discovered in Illinois, according to a community announcement.

Cole was 19 when he disappeared from Fillmore, California, in 1965. His body was found thousands of miles away near Geneseo, Illinois, in 1966.

The identification was made possible through the efforts of the DNA Doe Project, which used genetic genealogy to match Cole's DNA with relatives who had uploaded their DNA results to GEDmatch.

Identified!

Geneseo John Doe 1966



Ronald Cole

DNA Doe Project.org

Discovery of remains

On Oct. 27, 1966, a postman found a human skull near a creek southeast of Geneseo, Illinois. The FBI determined that a bullet hole at the base of the skull was the cause of death and that the man had died 1 to 5 years earlier. Further search of the area led investigators to

additional skeletal remains, which were determined to belong to a man between 16 and 30 years old.

In 2024, the Henry County Sheriff's Office brought the case to the DNA Doe Project. A DNA profile was generated from the remains and uploaded to GEDmatch, revealing several DNA matches in the second- to third-cousin range.

Genetic genealogy leads to identification

The DNA Doe Project team began to focus on Cole's family after finding information online that he was a murder victim whose body had never been discovered. Further research confirmed that he had been missing for six decades, and additional DNA testing confirmed that the Geneseo John Doe was indeed Cole.

"We are very grateful for the relatives who chose to upload their DNA results to GEDmatch," said team leader Gwen Knapp. "Unusually, our team had good matches on both the father's side and the mother's side to work with."

Suspect named but never charged

Cole was living with his half-brother, David LaFever, at the time of his disappearance. LaFever and his wife, Margaret, were arrested in 1983 on unrelated charges. During the investigation, it was revealed that LaFever had previously confessed to murdering his brother. Margaret's brother also went missing in 1977, and his body was found in a shallow grave near the LaFever's former home in 1984. Police

named LaFever as the prime suspect in both cases, but he was never charged.

The DNA Doe Project expressed gratitude to the groups and individuals who helped solve the case, including the Henry County Sheriff's Office, Astrea Forensics for DNA extraction, Azenta Life Sciences for sequencing, Kevin Lord for bioinformatics, GEDmatch Pro for providing their database, and the project's teams of volunteer investigative genetic genealogists.

More information about the case can be found at dnadoeproject.org/case/geneseo-john-doe-1966.

<https://www.sj-r.com/story/news/local/2026/01/15/1966-geneseo-john-doe-identified-as-ronald-joe-cole/88179185007/>