



LW1 The Murder of Matt Warren: Father of Former Alameda County Prosecutor, Three-Time California Governor, and Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) Chief Justice Earl Warren

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will learn about the investigation of an unsolved murder from 1938. Attendees will learn about the investigative techniques of a high-profile murder case of the time and will also learn how modern investigative methods can be applied to a crime scene from more than 80 years ago.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing knowledge when reviewing historical evidence in the form of documents and crime scene photographs. Attendees may catch a glimpse into the thinking of a famous political figure and how the death of his father may have influenced his decisions as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

On May 14, 1938, Methias Warren, father of former United States Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren (*Brown v. Board of Education*), presidential candidate, three-time Governor of California, and chair of the infamous commission investigating the assassination of John F. Kennedy (JFK) that bears his name, was found bludgeoned to death in his home at 707 Niles Street in Bakersfield, CA. Many theories regarding the identity of the killer and the motive were asserted. Many argued that the assailant was most likely a transient. However, the evidence points to other plausible motives. There were many other “whodunit” theories, and, to this day, the case remains an unsolved mystery.

Eighty years later, the Historical Research Center on the campus of California State University, Bakersfield accessioned the records of the Kern County Superior Court. Buried within this body of records is information that sheds light on this cold case. Records include police reports, crime scene photographs, interviews, autopsy photographs, coroner’s inquest, and newspaper articles of the day. A “dream team” of investigators was assembled representing multiple law enforcement agencies across the state of California. These were the “crack” investigators of the day. Newspapers of the day published detailed descriptions of the crime scene. Readers even had glimpses into the published photographs of the crime scene. Yet, the case remains unsolved, even when the “third degree” was employed while questioning suspects. Tensions developed between the local law enforcement officials charged with investigating the crime and the handpicked investigators brought in by Warren.

While limited forensic science applications were applied in this case, the evidence recorded at the time was such that those techniques could have been employed. Techniques such as latent fingerprint development, footwear examination and comparison, and bloodstain pattern analysis are but a few that might have been employed at that time. This begs the question: What effect did not knowing who committed the murder of his father have on the chief justice? Could a case decision that resulted in the issuance of the Miranda warning or his desire to determine what happened in the assassination of JFK been a result of his anxiety? What could have turned a staunch Republican into the overseer of what was considered a liberal Supreme Court? This presentation will discuss this evidence, reflecting upon the investigative techniques of the time, the political implications, and brief bloodstain pattern analysis of the crime scene based upon evidence photographs.

Warren, SCOTUS, Murder