

23 YEAR OLD COLD CASE SOLVED

The case of State vs. Jeffrey K. Bayer began with the brutal beating death of 86-year-old widow Rose Twells during a botched burglary in her Woodbury home a week before Christmas in 1979. It ended with Bayer's July 2005 conviction for the murder of Mrs. Twells and a resulting 30-year prison sentence that Bayer is still serving.

In between, there were suspicions and despair that the investigation of Woodbury's only unsolved murder would never lead to a suspect until finally in June 2003 charges against three men- Bayer, the adopted son of a former Woodbury mayor, Clifford M. Jeffrey and Mark F. English, were accused of the murder of Rose Twells, the widow of John Stokes Twells, mayor of Woodbury in the 1930s. The Bayer and Twells families both lived on the West End of the city, shared a local prominence due to their leadership roles and had been friends.

The Twells investigation had been reopened by Gloucester County Prosecutor Sean Dalton in 2002 as part of a new focus on old homicides. A linchpin in prosecution of the "cold" case was a former girlfriend of Bayer who finally agreed to tell what she knew. At Bayer's trial, Louann Vennell-Waller testified she acted as a lookout during the burglary of the Twells home on Delaware Street and was present when the crime was planned.

Other acquaintances of Bayer were witnesses for First Assistant Gloucester County Prosecutor Steven Sand and Gloucester County Assistant Prosecutor Laurie Cimino who presented the case against Bayer. One of them, Stephen Forbes, testified he was the getaway driver in the burglary.

Collectively, the witnesses were an effective antidote to the lack of any physical evidence in the case. There were no fingerprints, no DNA to connect the crime to the suspects- just the similar recollections of five people from Bayer's teenage world, some of them unacquainted with each other.

Bayer continued to maintain his innocence. The New Jersey Supreme Court found no reason to hear his appeal in 2008.

Clifford M. Jeffrey pleaded guilty to felony murder in 2005 and was sentenced to 12 years in New Jersey state prison. Mark F. English was tried twice for the Twells murder, the first trial ending with a hung jury and the retrial resulting in an acquittal in 2006.