

The trial of Robert William Pickton

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Since 1985, sex-trade workers had been disappearing from the downtown Eastside of the city of Vancouver, British Columbia. Were they simply missing or dead? On the accused's 15-acre property, personal effects and blood stains matched to three of the missing women. After vague admissions to investigators, Pickton told his cell-mate that he had killed 49 women. The investigation set out to prove if what Pickton had said was true. The search scene was a forensic nightmare. A meticulous search, lasting 17 months, involved sifting the soil and dismantling every building. Many forensic disciplines were engaged. DNA analysis played a major role. Human remains, ranging from bones and teeth, ground flesh and bifurcated heads containing hands and feet, were found. Pickton was charged with 26 counts of first-degree murder. The trial judge made several preliminary rulings that severely restricted prosecution. A trial on only six counts lasted from January, 2006 to December, 2007. Pickton was convicted of six counts of second-degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. A new trial on twenty-six counts of first-degree murder was ordered on appeal, but the accused's appeal against conviction was rejected on July 31, 2010. The remaining 20 counts were stayed. This case teaches important lessons with respect to investigative organization and forensic methodology. Given the intense public scrutiny that mega-cases attract, it stands as an excellent example of effective team work between the prosecution, the investigators and forensic scientists.

Biography

Derrill Prevett, B.A., J.D., Q.C., joined the B.C. Ministry of the Attorney General in 1977 where he acted as prosecuting counsel for over thirty years. He has prosecuted several high-profile homicide cases involving forensic DNA analysis. In 2003, he was appointed Queen's Counsel. In 2008, he was the initial recipient of the "Commitment to Justice Award", recognizing his contribution to the practice of law. He is a co-author of the "DNA Handbook", (LexisNexis, Canada). As a member of the prosecution team having conduct of R.V. Pickton, his responsibilities included the conduct of DNA evidence and related matters.

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