



Physical Anthropology Section – 2008

H124 Establishing a Central Database for the Missing and Unidentified of Louisiana

Mary H. Manhein, MA*, and Helen B. Mathews, MA, Louisiana State University, Department of Geography and Anthropology, 227 Howe- Russell Building, Baton Rouge, LA 70803

The goal of this presentation is to inform attendees of a state-sponsored database of information on all missing persons and unidentified remains cases in Louisiana.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by presenting information on the construction of a state database, how case information has been gathered, and the current status of case resolution. Such a database is meant to act as a central location for data on all missing persons and unidentified remains cases in a state. By creating a central location for data, the goal is to assist law enforcement in resolving cases that otherwise might remain unsolved.

The issue of unsolved missing persons and unidentified remains cases continues to be a problem in this country. Few states offer a centralized location for detailed information on missing persons and unidentified remains cases. Without a centralized information system in place, comparisons between cases that could potentially result in a positive identification may go unnoticed by the agencies involved. As agencies are forced to confront new cases that arise, the trail grows colder on cases that remain unsolved. When a cold case involves unidentified remains, these remains may end up on the back shelves in coroners' offices or they are buried or cremated before all possible identifying information has been collected. The authors propose that more unresolved cases could be solved if each state developed a central location for all the data available on all missing persons and unidentified remains cases reported in their state.

For almost thirty years the Louisiana State University Forensic Anthropology and Computer Enhancement Services Laboratory (LSU FACES Lab) has worked with both Louisiana agencies and agencies across the United States on unidentified remains cases. The lab has assisted in hundreds of successful identifications. However, there are cases on record at the LSU FACES Lab which still remain unidentified. In April, 2004, the LSU FACES Lab began a collaborative effort to address the issue of unresolved cases. Thanks to funding from the President's DNA Initiative, the LSU FACES Lab and the North Louisiana Criminalistics Laboratory established the Louisiana Identification Data Analysis (IDA) Project. The funding allowed for DNA testing on every unidentified homicide case on record at the LSU FACES Lab. The goal of the IDA Project was to develop DNA profiles to work in conjunction with the anthropological profiles established on each unidentified remains case.

In 2006, a bill was presented to the Louisiana State Legislature that would allow for the establishment of the Louisiana Repository for Unidentified and Missing Persons Information Program to be maintained by the LSU FACES Lab in conjunction with the North Louisiana Criminalistics Laboratory. The bill was signed into law and became Act 227 (<http://www.legis.state.la.us>). The law allowed for the development of a database on all missing persons and unidentified remains cases reported in the state of Louisiana. The database combines data on unidentified remains (i.e., DNA profiles, anthropological assessments, facial reconstructions, and other case specific information) and data on missing persons (i.e., biological information, dental records, family reference samples, and other case specific information). The state of Louisiana provides all funding for the database. Although a statewide database is paramount to assist in resolving unsolved local cases, it is also important that the information be available on a national level. DNA information on Louisiana's unidentified cases and family reference samples will be entered into the FBI's national CODIS database for comparison across state lines.

The Louisiana Repository for Unidentified and Missing Persons Information Program has already generated some success, much of which is due to the ability of the researchers to travel and actively seek case information. By taking an aggressive stance, rather than waiting for cases and samples to be submitted, the LSU FACES Lab has managed to establish additional contacts and collect more case information than otherwise would have been possible. As data continues to be collected across the state of Louisiana, the expectation is that more success stories will be generated from this project.

Missing Persons, Unidentified Remains, Louisiana