



Physical Anthropology Section – 2009

H50 Full Time Employment of Forensic Anthropologists in Medical Examiner's/Coroner's Offices in the United States—A History

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding of the development and expansion of forensic anthropology in the United States and its relationship with Medical Examiner's/Coroner's Offices.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by demonstrating a slow but steady increase in the demand for forensic anthropologists within the United States.

The second Luetgert murder trial in 1894 and the expert testimony of George A. Dorsey of the Columbia Field Museum in Chicago launched physical anthropology as a valuable judicial tool. Throughout the early and middle 20th Century, physical anthropologists employed in academic settings were increasingly called upon by law enforcement agencies to examine skeletal remains to ascertain identity. Wilton Krogman's 1939 publication in the FBI Bulletin entitled *A Guide to the Identification of Human Skeletal Material* stimulated interest in the medico-legal potential held by physical anthropology, and served as the earliest material evidence of a new specialty taking root. Krogman's expanded version of this bulletin appeared in 1962 under the title of *The Human Skeleton in Forensic Medicine*, and provided a formal literary toolkit for early practitioners. In 1972, the American Academy of Forensic Science introduced Physical Anthropology as a new section and during the 1970's forensic anthropology courses began to appear on many campuses and graduates began to look beyond academia for employment. By 1980, physical anthropologists were being considered for employment in medical examiner and coroner offices, although their employers often struggled for justification considering the infrequent and sporadic nature of anthropology casework.

In September 1980, Hugh Berryman was employed as Director of the Shelby County Medical Examiner's Morgue in Memphis, Tennessee marking the first full-time employment of a forensic anthropologist in a medical examiner's office in the United States. The position of Morgue Director, with its administrative duties, provided justification for the position and insured the presence of a forensic anthropologist for the intermittent skeletal casework. In 1981, the New Jersey Medical Examiners Office hired Donna Fontana as full-time Forensic Anthropologist and Forensic Microscopist. She assisted with radiographs, identifications, and facial reconstruction. Currently, she has two interns and is the only anthropologist in the United States with direct access to a National Crime Information Center terminal.

In 1977, the Beverly Hills Supper Club disaster in Southgate, Kentucky claimed 165 lives and was the deadliest nightclub fire in United States history. This disaster provided the Kentucky Medical Examiner's Office the impetus to seek physical anthropological assistance from David Wolf between 1979 and 1980. From July 1980 to 1982, he worked under a personal service contract. In 1982, Wolf was employed full-time as Kentucky's and the nation's first State Forensic Anthropologist. In 1983, Berryman reorganized the Shelby County Morgue, eliminating two autopsy technician positions, and hired physical anthropologist Craig Lahren as Assistant Director to interface with the physicians and technicians, to bring an anthropology influence to the autopsy, and to facilitate research.

In 1984, William Rodriguez completed his pioneering work at the Anthropology Research Facility at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville and was employed as Deputy Chief Coroner at the Caddo and Bossier Parish Coroner's Office in Louisiana. In addition to forensic anthropology casework, he oversaw investigations including death scenes, and, as Deputy Chief Coroner, was responsible for psychiatric commitments. In 1986, Rodriguez left Louisiana for Syracuse, New York to become Forensic Anthropologist for the Onondaga County Medical Examiner's Office.

Also in 1986, Craig Lahren left Memphis opening the position of Assistant Morgue Director. The vacancy was immediately filled by Robert Mann who, after eight months, left for a position at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. Earlier that year, Steve Symes had been hired as Morgue Director for the Metropolitan Nashville/Davidson County Medical Examiner's Office only to leave that position late in 1986 to fill the Assistant Director's vacancy left by Robert Mann in Memphis. By 1987, Craig Lahren, who started this domino effect, became Coordinator of Forensic Services and forensic anthropologist for the Hamilton County Medical Examiner's Office in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

In 1979, when William Haglund began his career as one of thirteen Medical Investigators at the King County Medical Examiner's Office, Seattle, Washington, he was not an anthropologist. His duties required him to respond to all deaths occurring in his jurisdiction, collect evidence, interview families, perform death notifications and write reports. In 1983 he advanced to Chief Medical Investigator. However, it was the Green River Killings that began in 1982, and continued with 42 associated murders, that attracted him to forensic anthropology. With the completion of his Master's degree in physical anthropology in 1988, he added forensic anthropology to his duties as Chief Medical Investigator. After completing his PhD in physical anthropology in 1991, he worked four more years for the medical examiner's office before being employed in 1995 by the



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United Nations as Senior Forensic Advisor.

In 1989, William Rodriguez left Syracuse to accept a position as Chief Forensic Anthropologist and Deputy Chief Medical Examiner for Special Investigations for the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, Washington, DC. The position of Kentucky State Forensic Anthropologist, left open by the untimely death of David Wolf in 1992, was filled in 1994 by Emily Craig.

For physical anthropologists, the 1980's marked the beginning of a shift in employment from academic to applied opportunities. That shift has continued and the numbers of forensic anthropologists employed full time in medical examiner's offices continues to increase, and their duties are more focused on their training. Austin and Fulginiti (2008) note that there are currently 19 forensic anthropologists hired in full-time positions with medical examiner's offices within the United States and an additional nine who are hired with shared duties. Encouragingly, Bradley Adams was hired as Forensic Anthropologist for New York City in 2004. He now has seven anthropologists that he directs—two with BA degrees, three with MA degrees, and two PhDs.

Forensic Anthropology, Medical Examiner, History