



G34 The Case of the Missing Mandible

Roger D. Metcalf, DDS, JD, Tarrant County Medical Examiner's District, 200 Feliks Gwozdz Place, Fort Worth, TX 76104; and Janice W. Klim-Lemann, DDS*, 1802 Canyon Road, Redlands, CA 92373*

After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of how a missing mandible contributed to the resolution of three separate cases.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting the importance of retaining records for as long as possible.

In 1986, a farmer in rural Dallas County, TX, was ploughing his field and came upon a decomposing human body. The farmer contacted the Dallas County Sheriff's Office to report the death and the Dallas County Medical Examiner's Office (MEO) was duly notified in turn. The medical examiner's investigators recovered the remains, but the decedent's mandible was not found. The decedent was examined at the morgue and the cause and manner of death were determined. The decedent was identified by comparison of antemortem and postmortem dental radiographs as Mr. A. The treating dentist was from Ohio and was subpoenaed to appear at the perpetrator's trial in Dallas County in order to "prove up" the dental records of the decedent. The perpetrator was tried and convicted. The treating dentist believes the original dental radiographs were retained by the MEO; however, the MEO states the radiographs were returned.

In 2010, in neighboring Denton County, TX, a death was reported to the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's District (the jurisdiction of the Tarrant County office also includes Denton, Parker, and Johnson Counties). The deceased was found seated on a farm combine in a remote area of his farm with an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. The decedent was identified at the scene as Mr. B. by his ex-wife and also by his brother. The deceased had been despondent over the break-up of his family and financial woes as well. He was examined at the Tarrant County morgue and the cause and manner of his death were determined.

In 2011, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner's District was notified of a body found in a partially burned house in rural unincorporated Tarrant County. Upon investigation, the "body" was determined to be incomplete. In fact, the unidentified remains consisted of only a single human mandible found sitting incongruously in plain view on a kitchen counter. It was learned the house had belonged to Mr. B.; Tarrant County medical examiner's investigators found the cause of the fire had been ruled as arson — later investigation revealed Mr. B. had apparently set fire to his home in Tarrant County, then traveled to his farm in Denton County, where he committed suicide. The charred house was being cleaned and the fire damage was being repaired by the bank that had taken possession of the house prior to putting the house up for sale. The house had sat empty and unattended for approximately a year after the fire.

Attendees of this presentation will learn how these cases were intertwined and their eventual resolution. The case report underscores the utility of practitioners retaining dental records for as long as possible and raises the issue that, although the Identification (ID) was eventually made by DNA comparison, were the available dental records sufficient to have made an ID?

Dental ID, Odontology, Mandible