



A68 The Recordkeeping of Walter H. Birkby, PhD

Bruce E. Anderson, PhD, PCOME, Forensic Science Center, 2825 E District Street, Tucson, AZ 85714*

After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the advantages of keeping a parallel set of records derived from forensic anthropology examinations and the associated medicolegal death investigations.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating the potential for augmenting current medicolegal case investigation data and for performing research into old and cold cases that can lead to case resolution.

The late Walter H. Birkby performed his first forensic anthropology examination in 1965 and continued from that date to keep a set of medicolegal death investigation records parallel to that of Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA) and Medical Examiners/Coroners (ME/C) for each of the more than 3500 forensic anthropology consultations that he performed over his illustrious career of over forty years. These records, arranged within a separate folder for each individual consultation, were a combination of original forensic anthropological notes, forms, sketches, chain-of-custody documents, photographs, radiographs, reports, and photocopies of law enforcement and ME/C reports. Many copies of court interviews and depositions, as well as a plethora of newspaper clippings from selected cases, are also included in this collection.

The vast majority of these records survive to date and are housed at the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner (PCOME), where many of these are consulted on a regular basis by PCOME forensic anthropologists still attempting to identify unknown individuals or assisting LEA or family requests on resolved cases. The value of these records cannot be overstated for those cases in which governmental retention schedules have served to drastically reduce, or even destroy, the entire original governmental case file. More than 150 such files of currently unidentified individuals, including Dr. Birkby's first case from 1965, are the sole source of surviving archival records. Several identifications have been made over the past decade utilizing these records, with the existence of the original anthropological data and copies of ME/C data proving essential in establishing everything from chain-of-custody to explaining an identification to the family of the decedent. Because Dr. Birkby consulted in every county in Arizona and several counties in California over the course of his career, other forensic anthropologists in other jurisdictions have made inquiries to the PCOME regarding a few old cases with the hope that Dr. Birkby's records might clarify or establish that a suspected old case actually existed.

Examples of the diversity of the information contained within these 3,500 records will be highlighted and their importance to unresolved cases will be emphasized.

Forensic Anthropology, Case Reports, ME/C Case Records