



The Skeleton in the Closet: An Historic Forensic Case from Scio, Oregon

by: Dawn Marie Alapisco

Faculty Mentors: Melissa Cheyney, PhD, CPM, LDM ; David Brauner , PhD

Professional Mentor: Jennifer Schindell, RN, BSN F-ABMDI

Linn County Chief Deputy Medical Examiner/ Forensic Nurse



The coffin from the Scio Odd Fellows Lodge in the evidence locker at the Linn County Sheriff's Department.



The skeleton laid out in the Bio-Cultural Anthropology Lab in preparation for cleaning.



The coffin, sized for a child, was dated from 1855 to 1870 using hardware morphologies.



Odd Fellows Regalia Catalog.

Background:

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) fraternal organization was formed in the early 18th century in England. They came together as a group of men with no unifying trait other than to "do good by man". Their main goals were to support each other and take care of the needy. In 1819, the first American Lodge opened in Baltimore, Maryland during a time of high unemployment and a yellow fever epidemic. The newly ordained lodge took on as their mission to "visit the sick, relieve distress, bury the dead, and educate the orphans" (Independent Order of Odd Fellows, 2012). The Odd Fellows became known for being the keepers of the dead and local historians in areas where lodges had formed (Minten, 2012).

As new Lodges opened, the "Mother Lodge" would gift each new lodge with what was known as "Regalia and Paraphernalia", including a coffin or casket and a skeleton. The skeleton and coffin are used in the "Bury the Dead" pledge during initiation rites. These items were commonly available through Odd Fellow Goods catalogs (Minten, 2012). Newer lodges receive plastic bones (Minten, 2012), or, less commonly, papier-mâché skeletons.

On August 23, 2011, while helping her injured mother clean the local lodge, Jenny Minten came upon a dark mahogany wood coffin filled with human bones. The local sheriff's department was called and during the investigation, the case was determined to be not of modern origin. The skeleton and coffin were sent to the Oregon State University Anthropology Department to be cleaned, analyzed, and curated.

Upon arriving at OSU, the coffin and remains were very muddy and moldy, the coffin showing significant water damage from the 1962 Columbus Day Storm. The main questions I set out to answer were: What can we learn about who is in the coffin? And, what is the story behind how this individual came to be discovered in the Scio lodge?

Methods:

Utilizing a multi-disciplinary approach, this project touches on most of the sub-fields in anthropology.

Following guidelines set out in *Human Osteology* 3rd Edition, by White and Folkens, and *Human Osteology: A Laboratory and Field Manual*, by Bass, the skeletonized remains were organized and sided on trays then cleaned with plain water and soft toothbrushes. The skull, mandible, scapula, and innominates were cleaned with a soft cotton washcloth due to their fragile cortical bone integrity. Results were then recorded into a copy of the Arizona Museum Skeletal inventory Form Guidelines, an abbreviated version of the industry go-to *Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains* by Buikstra and Ubelaker.

After the initial cleaning, skeletal remains were then analyzed for sex, age, biogeographic origin/ancestry, height, pathologies, and idiosyncratic non-metric traits. Some of the bones required a more detailed cleaning using dental tools and bamboo probes. During the more detailed cleaning a waxy substance was identified on the left humerus and both femurs. The substance was analyzed with a Field Portable X-Ray Florescence gun and found to have high concentrations of arsenic and lead (Kalnicky and Singhvi, 2001). The coffin was analyzed utilizing hardware morphology which dated the coffin to between 1855 and 1870. The coffin has a base length of 54 inches, the widest point is 16 inches, and the external height (without lid) is 9 inches. Interestingly, the coffin was built for a child.

Oral histories of the organization and Scio lodge were taken from Lindy Minten, a member of the Rebekah's, the IOOF women's auxiliary group.

Results:

The remains were determined to be from a male, over 40 years of age (although aging estimates on this skeleton have been difficult, as the only technique that can be utilized, cranial suture closure, is the least accurate), of European ancestry, and his height is estimated at 65.36 inches to 71.56 inches (~5'5" to 6'). The overall bones are robust and show signs of muscular hypertrophy.

His cranium has an autopsy style cut resulting in a calotte. There are significant pathological lesions on his cranium and splanchnocranium. There are open and healed lesions on both parietals, his maxillary sinuses have significant bulging on both the facial surface and on the hard palate. He has significant dental wear and a dental abscess, combined with a pronounced underbite. He also has hypertrophic muscle development sites infraorbitally.

The cervical vertebrae have an exaggerated curvature, and show signs of fusion. The thoracic vertebrae have significant wear much of it postmortem from being in the coffin and unprotected. They also show signs of scoliosis, with the lower 5 thoracics having alternating angled spinous processes. His lumbar vertebrae also have significant bone loss and damage. L-5, the last vertebrae, has a deep pathological cavitation on the inferior aspect of the body, suggesting proliferative osteological tuberculosis.

His right humerus has significant cortical bone loss and cancellous bone growth at the distal end with almost complete obliteration of the articular surfaces for the radius and ulna. The semilunar notch of the ulna and the head of the radius have the same type of lesions. These are also indicative of proliferative osseous tuberculosis. The metaphysis of the humerus shows some hypertrophic muscle development superior to the tuberculosis lesions. The 5th metacarpal on his right hand also shows mild tuberculosis lesions. There are osteoarthritic lesions at articular sites throughout the body, with the knees both showing signs of wear.

Conclusions:

The skeleton in the closet and accompanying coffin were purchased from a catalog by the Portland IOOF Lodge as a gift for the Scio Lodge sometime in the late 19th century. The skeleton itself was most likely a medical model, as evidenced by the cut on the cranium and the presence of an arsenic heavy preservative. The coffin, sized for a youth, was not large enough to fit his frame. After the 1962 Columbus Day Storm destroyed the original IOOF Lodge in Scio, the coffin was recovered. When the new lodge was built, it was put in a closet and forgotten. The Scio Lodge has largely been stagnant, and rites that the coffin and bones were used for would likely not have been performed at this lodge in the time since this coffin had been "lost" (Minten, 2012).

Due to the secrecy surrounding much of the IOOF organization the identity and age of the skeleton cannot be determined more specifically at this time, but the known IOOF history tells us that the skeleton was used for initiation rites and he has most likely been in the lodge since the opening of the first lodge in Scio in the late 19th century.



Skeleton laid out for photos.



Tuberculosis lesions on the right humerus, ulna, and radius obliterating the elbow joint and L-5.



Resources:
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Independent Order of Odd Fellows. *Independent Order of Odd Fellows*. 2012. <http://www.ioof.org/aboutus.html> (accessed April 27, 2012).
Kalnicky, Dennis J., and Raj Singh. "Field Portable XRF analysis of environmental samples." *Journal of Hazardous Materials*, 2001: 93-122.
Minten, Lindy. Interview by Dawn Marie Alapisco. IOOF Skeleton March, 2012.
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