

## William R. Maples and the Development of the American Board of Forensic Anthropology

**REFERENCE:** Willey P. William R. Maples and the development of the American Board of Forensic Anthropology. *J Forensic Sci* 1999;44(4):687–688.

**ABSTRACT:** If a person's death is marked by the good he has done, then William R. Maples's passing will be remembered long and well. One of Bill's professional bestowals was serving on many forensic sciences committees and boards. This paper examines his contribution to forensic anthropology through his activities in the American Board of Forensic Anthropology as a diplomate, director, treasurer, and president.

**KEYWORDS:** forensic science, forensic anthropology, William R. Maples, American Board of Forensic Anthropology

William R. Maples's role in the development of forensic anthropology was broad and encompassing. He is remembered for his popular writing (1), his development of the forensic anthropology program at the University of Florida, his extensive casework, his research on contemporary and historic identities, as well as his consultation and advice to the Department of Defense's Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii. Another facet of his legacy, one which is often overlooked, is his service to forensic sciences organizations.

One example is his service to the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS). In the AAFS he served as the Physical Anthropology Section's member on the Academy's Executive Committee (1981–84, 1989–93). In the Forensic Sciences Foundation he served as a trustee (1987–89, 1994–95), treasurer (1988–91), and vice president (1991–94). And in the Physical Anthropology Section, he served as secretary (1977–78) and president (1978–79) (2). It should be noted that this list excludes his service on many minor, secondary committees. His service on formal AAFS committees and offices, though, amounts to no fewer than 18 appointments and elected positions, and it reflects his active involvement in the field's formal development.

In addition to his service to the AAFS, Bill was much involved with the American Board of Forensic Anthropology (ABFA). The ABFA is the organization which credentials forensic anthropologists as diplomates, maintains a list of qualified diplomates, promotes high ethical and professional standards in the discipline, and supports the improvement in the discipline's practice (3). Bill's involvement in the ABFA is the focus of this paper.

Bill was an early member of the ABFA. He was awarded diplomate status in 1978 with 12 other people, a group that was the sec-

ond and the largest of three groups of forensic anthropologists "grandparented" into diplomate status. His early membership is further indicated by his low certificate number (no. 17). Since his certificate was issued, there have been 40 certificates subsequently awarded.

Five years after becoming a diplomate, he was selected as a member of the ABFA's Board of Directors. The Board of Directors is charged with the affairs and operation of the ABFA, including maintaining standards for membership and holding annual meetings (3). His service began in 1983 and ended in 1989, the standard six-year term for a director. Following his first year as one of the Board's 10 directors, he was elected its treasurer for three years (1984–87), succeeding Judy M. Suchey in that office. And during his final two years on the Board (1987–89), he was elected president, succeeding Walter H. Birkby. His five years of service as an officer is a near-record for a six-year term.

Bill's years as a director, treasurer and president were seminal ones for the organization, which had been organized just six years before he became a director. Although the basic procedures for the ABFA's functioning had been established during these first six years, many critical details and decisions were yet to be made. So, during Bill's six-year term, the Board had many critical issues on its agenda.

Many of the issues were handled effectively and form the basis of the procedures and rules still employed by the ABFA today. Among the decisions made during those years which have had long-term success, the manner of re-certifying current diplomates was addressed and determined to be done with completion of an annual update form. The numbering of diplomates' certificates became permanent and the numbers are now retired with the diplomate, comparable to retiring an athlete's jersey and number at the end of a stellar career. And another decision concerned clarification of the credentialing steps required for new applicants, steps which remain largely unchanged today. Bill's involvement in deciding these issues is evident from the Board's minutes. These decisions and rules have continued in force and largely unchanged through today.

One of the pivotal issues that the Board considered in those early years is no longer a concern. This concern was the small number of diplomates. When Maples joined the Board of Directors in 1983, there were 29 diplomates. Decisions were made and practical steps taken to recruit new members and retain old ones. Fifteen years later, at the time of the 1998 Board meeting, there were 48 diplomates. The issue concerning the small number of diplomates is no longer a problem.

Finally some of the issues that the Board contemplated in those early years continue to be problems today. The Board continues to discuss retirement status requirements and what that status means.

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Received 27 March 1998; accepted 14 May 1998.

There are still problems collecting some diplomates' fees and receiving their annual activity update forms. And reputed ethics violations also remain a concern. These issues still require resolution—if resolutions are possible.

Although Bill "retired" from the ABFA Board of Directors in 1989, he remained involved in Board matters and committed to the ABFA well after his tenure was done.

In early 1997, when he was dying, he did something that was particularly impressive. At that time I was vice president of the Board and as vice president my duties included requesting the annual summary from each diplomate, listing their forensic anthropology activities for the past year. Completing such a summary, while a time-consuming and thankless nuisance, is a requirement for continued Board certification—one of the decisions made during Bill's membership on the Board. It is a task most diplomates comply with, some more reluctantly than others.

It must have been clear to Bill in his final weeks that his involvement with forensic anthropology was limited and would be short-lived. Nevertheless he, with the aid of an assistant, completed and sent his update. And he was so concerned about it being a few days late, that he (through the same assistant) faxed a copy and left two phone messages that the update was on its way. His 1996 cases

totaled 207, more than 50% greater than the next highest diplomate's caseload.

The importance Bill attributed to the ABFA and its certification was impressive, and his efforts to maintain certification went beyond all reasonable expectations. Based on his example during his final weeks of life, I will never again think of such mundane and onerous tasks, such as service to profession and colleagues, in the same way. Commitment to the profession and colleagues is important, as Bill's many accomplishments and friends demonstrate.

### References

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