

William R. Maples, Forensic Historian: Four Men, Four Centuries, Four Countries

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ABSTRACT: Prior to 1984, William R. Maples, Ph.D. worked primarily with Medical Examiners in the State of Florida in investigation of and testimony in criminal cases. In 1984 the Republic of Peru requested him to identify skeletal remains thought to be those of Francisco Pizarro, conqueror of Peru and the Incas in the early 16th Century. Dr. Maples made a positive identification of those remains as Pizarro, resulting in their substitution in a glass-sided coffin in the Cathedral of Lima, where other remains had been displayed as those of Pizarro for a hundred years. In addition, it was proved that the remains removed could not have been those of Pizarro.

In 1988, Dr. Maples examined the skeletal remains of Joseph Merrick (“The Elephant Man”) at Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel, and made photographic studies of them for comparison with death casts of limbs and skull to ascertain depth of tissue by video-superimposition. In 1991, Dr. Maples, headed a team which removed President Zachary Taylor (1779–1842) from his tomb in Louisville, Kentucky. The purpose was to determine if he had been poisoned, as had been proposed by some at the time. Test results showed that he had not been. In 1992, Dr. Maples and a team of forensic specialists went by invitation to Ekaterinburg, Russia to study skeletal remains which the Russians had tentatively identified as the Russian Royal Family, and entourage, murdered in 1918. The American team identified them as Tsar Nicholas II, his wife, three of his children, his physician, and three of his servants.

William Ross Maples died in Gainesville, Florida, 27 February 1997.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, forensic anthropology, physical anthropology, identification historical figures, video-superimposition, forensic anthropology, William R. Maples

William Ross Maples, Ph.D., long-time Member and Fellow in the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, known and respected by many in this organization, died 27 Feb. 1997. It is fitting that we remember him on this occasion. As a close friend and associate of his for many years, I am honored to be permitted to participate in paying tribute to his memory and to his many accomplishments.

Dr. Maples came to the University of Florida to the Florida State Museum, now known as the Florida Museum of Natural History, in 1973, as Associate Curator of Physical Anthropology. He established a noteworthy reputation over the years in working with Medical Examiners all over the State of Florida, and in the

investigation and prosecution of criminal cases. But his world-wide fame came from his investigation of remains of historical figures of the world, involving four men, four centuries and four countries. These are detailed, among others, in his book, *Dead Men Do Tell Tales*; published by Doubleday in six printings, translated into German and Japanese, and published separately in England.

Francisco Pizarro

In 1984, my office as Adjunct Curator of Archaeology was located across the hall from Dr. Maples in the Florida State Museum. One day in that year, Dr. Maples came to my office and asked if I would like to accompany him to Peru, where he had been invited to identify skeletal remains proposed to be those of Francisco Pizarro, who died in 1541, and to establish that the currently accepted remains exhibited in the Cathedral of Lima were not those of Pizarro. My response was an immediate affirmative.

Although to accompany Dr. Maples on this project was a departure from my ordinary work at the Museum, it was perhaps even more of a change for Dr. Maples in his professional endeavors. I had retired from an active practice of law before coming to the Museum, but for Dr. Maples—then Curator of Physical Anthropology—the new assignment presented a very challenging opportunity to focus his talents upon a significant victim slain over 400 years ago, rather than a contemporary crime-related subject.

Dr. Maples had often assisted the archaeology department of The Florida State Museum in identification and classification of skeletal remains found in excavation of Native American sites, so the transition to identification of a known historical figure was of interest to him. Also, since his childhood, Maples was an avid reader of history, his favorite authors including the scholarly William Hickling Prescott and the romantic adventurer, Richard Halliburton. Such interest foreshadowed Maples later involvement with the remains of some of the characters whose deeds were detailed in the writings of those authors.

Dr. Hugo Ludeña, of the Institute of Culture, Lima, Republic of Perú, headed the Peruvian team for the project, with Dr. Maples; Dr. Robert Benfer, Professor of Anthropology, University of Missouri, at Columbia; and this author comprising the North American team.

Initially, Dr. Benfer had been brought into the Pizarro project by Dr. Ludeña because his skills and experience in Perú in the field of physical anthropology would be of great assistance to the Peruvian experts already involved. He is also fluent in the Spanish language. Dr. Benfer had been acquainted with Dr. Maples in his professional endeavors, and also through their membership in The American Academy of Forensic Sciences, so the involvement of Maples was

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accomplished. Through these connective experiences, William R. Maples would commence his career as a forensic historian, which would bring him world-wide recognition.

In several trips to Peru in 1984 and the following year it was established that the recently discovered remains were indeed those of Pizarro. A mold of the skull was made by Robert Leavy, of the Florida State Museum, and a facial reconstruction was made on a copy of the mold by Betty Pat Gatliff, who has conducted many instructive classes and seminars for this Academy. Space constraints prohibit my giving details of the study, but a comprehensive article outlining the procedure was published in the *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, July 1989;34(4):1021–36. And what of the “false” Pizarro, who had reposed for almost a hundred years in a glass-sided sepulchre in the Cathedral of Lima? As the last sentence in our Pizarro article reads. . . “It was on a sheet of plywood supported by two sawhorses. . . (raising) the sobering thought that fame is fleeting, not only for the living but also for the dead.”

Francisco Pizarro was the “passport” for Dr. Maples and this author to give many papers on the subject, including the Last Word Society of this organization; the Museo de Extrémadura - Trujillo, Spain (birthplace of Pizarro); Colóquios Históricos de Extrémadura; and in the State of Florida.

Joseph Merrick

My next association with Dr. Maples and his wife, Margaret, took us to London in 1988 to the London Hospital, in Whitechapel, now known as the Royal London Hospital, for a study of the remains of Joseph Merrick (“The Elephant Man”). This study was based upon extensive photography of the full-skeletal remains and of the death casts of skull and limbs. Thus, video superimposition could be attained to give an appreciation of the relationship between the skeletal lesions and the outward appearances. Video superimposition showed which distortions resulted from osseous growths and which from soft-tissue masses. The thickness of overlaying soft tissue could be measured (skin surface to bone) by use of a scale. A presentation of the study was made by Dr. Maples and this author to The Last Word Society in 1990.

President Zachary Taylor

After the studies made in Peru and England, Dr. Maples turned his forensic attentions in history to the United States. A request was made to him in 1991 by descendants of President Zachary Taylor to remove their distinguished forebear from the mausoleum in Louisville, Kentucky. The purpose was to determine whether his death had been caused by arsenic poisoning, as suspected by many at his death, instead of by acute enteritis, as noted on his death certificate. Dr. Maples was joined in this study by this author and William Hamilton, M.D., the Medical Examiner for 8 Florida counties in the vicinity of Gainesville. Among other specialties of Dr. Hamilton’s expertise is toxicology. Several graduate students of Dr. Maples, as well as Mrs. Margaret Maples and this author assisted. The Medical Examiner for the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Dr. George Nichols, IV also participated, as did Coroner Richard Greathouse of Jefferson County, Kentucky.

The lead coffin containing the remains of President Taylor was removed to the Coroner’s office in Louisville from the mausoleum draped in a flag of the United States. Appropriate samples were removed for testing for arsenic, after which the remains were returned to the Zachary Taylor National Cemetery in Louisville, with

a rifle unit of the Kentucky National Guard firing a 21 volley salute, and with the bugler sounding taps. Testing by one governmental and one private laboratory revealed traces of arsenic not sufficient to cause the death of President Taylor. A presentation of the study was made at the 1992 meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences by Dr. Maples and this author and others under the title “Arsenic and Old Rough and Ready” at the session of “Bring Your Own Slides.”

Tsar Nicholas II

Finally, in 1992 we went to the far slopes of the Ural Mountains to the industrial city of Ekaterinburg, Russia. There Tsar Nicholas II, the Tsarina Alexandra, their four daughters - Olga, Tatiana, Marie, and Anastasia - their son, the Tsarevich Alexei; Eugene Botkin, the Tsar’s physician; Demidova, the maid; Aleksei Trupp, the valet; and Ivan Kharitonov, the butler, were brutally murdered and disfigured in July 1918. The remains of all but one daughter and the Tsarevich were discovered, and assistance in identifying the remains was sought from the United States by the Russian authorities. Dr. Maples was chosen to assemble the team for the purpose of identification.

In addition to Dr. Maples, the team selected for the examination included: Michael Baden, M.D., Lowell Levine, D.D.S., Katherine Oakes, M.A., Margaret Maples, M.A., and this author. Dr. Maples reported the findings at a conference held in Ekaterinburg following the examination. The remains of the royal family were all identified, but Anastasia and Alexei were, and remain missing. DNA testing at Aldermaston, England; University of California (Berkeley); and the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (Rockville, Maryland) confirmed the relationship of the parties, and physical evidence provided identity of the parents and siblings.

Plans are going forward to attempt to locate the remains of the two missing children. Whatever attempts are made, it is safe to say that the successors to Bill Maples will be in the forefront, pursuing the search. The C. A. Pound Human Identification Laboratory, of the University of Florida, founded by William R. Maples, will be there. Such a project could bring closure to the question of the death and disposal of the remains of all the slain royal Romanovs, a question that has perplexed historians for 80 years. For those of us conducting the search and hoped-for recovery of the remains, our efforts will be dedicated to the memory of William Ross Maples, forensic historian. We hope to maintain his high standards of excellence.

Endnote

On 17 July 1998, the 80th anniversary of their murder, Tsar Nicholas II, his wife, three daughters and four of their closest loyal servants were buried at the Fortress of Peter and Paul in St. Petersburg. Reports from around the world describe the lengthy process of identification and analysis of the skeletal remains of the Royal Family. Furthermore, each refers to the positive identification of the Tsar’s three daughters; Olga, Tatiana, and *Anastasia*. It should be noted that various analyses submitted to the Russians by the American forensic team, headed by Dr. William R. Maples, report that the biological profile of the skeletons described as the Tsar’s three daughters best matches the known records of Olga, Tatiana, and *Marie*, not the youngest daughter Anastasia. Maples and his team believed that the skeletal morphology of the youngest female skeleton recovered could not have been

Anastasia, as she would have been 17 years and one month of age at death, and the remains presented for analysis presented age-related morphology of an older female. Moreover, photographs taken several months prior to their death, show that Anastasia was significantly shorter than her three sisters, who were of similar stature. The three female skeletons recovered were of similar stature.

In February of 1998, Drs. Diane L. France and Anthony B. Falsetti had the opportunity to examine briefly the remains of the Royal Family at the Forensic-Medical Examination Bureau Labo-

ratory in Ekaterinburg. They [also] believe that the remains identified as Anastasia by the Russians, while not outside the extreme range of skeletal morphology for a girl who had just turned 17, are more consistent with the older Marie.

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