

Symposium: Essays Honoring T. Dale Stewart, M.D. (1901–1997)*

This collection of essays and the symposium they represent was organized and edited by Douglas H. Ubelaker, Ph.D., Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560. The symposium was presented at the 51st Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences in Orlando, Florida, February 19, 1999.

With the October 27, 1997 death of T. Dale Stewart, forensic science and physical anthropology lost one of its most accomplished and influential scientists. As the long-time assistant, apprentice, and successor to Aleš Hrdlička (1869–1943) at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., Stewart helped pioneer the modern science of forensic anthropology. Through his casework for the FBI and others, his publications, court testimony, and other professional activity, Stewart profoundly influenced the development of forensic anthropology and the broader field of physical anthropology. In recognition of this influence, the physical anthropology section of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences offers the “T. Dale Stewart Award” as its highest honor to recognize the career accomplishments of its members.

In organizing this symposium, I invited past recipients of the T. Dale Stewart Award to present papers in honor of Dr. Stewart, perhaps indicating what receiving this award has meant to them. In response, Drs. William M. Bass, Michael Finnegan, and Kenneth A. R. Kennedy volunteered abstracts for inclusion in the symposium. In addition, Frank Spencer (physical anthropologist with Queens College of the City University of New York) and I offered to summarize Stewart’s accomplishments in historical perspective. Unfortunately, health problems ultimately prevented the further participation of Frank Spencer. In his place, Dr. Miroslav Prokopec of the Czech Republic generously agreed to present European perspective on Stewart’s work and to summarize Stewart’s foreign travels. The photograph of Stewart reproduced here is courtesy of

Dr. Prokopec. It shows Stewart in 1959 at the Sedlec Ossuary near Kutna Hora, Czech Republic.

In the process of preparing my own introductory paper on Stewart, I became impressed with the quality of a series of taped interviews he had conducted in 1975 and 1986 with staff of the Office of the Smithsonian Institution Archives as part of the Oral History Project. Working with the staffs of the Office of the Smithsonian Institution Archives and the Department of Anthropology’s Human Studies Film Archives, I edited excerpts from these interviews that were most relevant to forensic anthropology. Following the formal papers in our symposium, I played the resulting cassette tape recording and those in attendance were able to hear Dr. Stewart himself discussing key aspects of his career and contributions.

Following the tape presentation, three colleagues volunteered their perspective on Dr. Stewart. Dr. Robert M. George (Florida International University, Miami) related a story about Dr. Stewart’s examination of the Piltdown remains. Drs. Robert I. Sundick (Western Michigan University) and Frank P. Saul (Lucas County Coroner’s Office, Toledo, Ohio) both spoke to Stewart’s amiable nature and how generous he always was with his time to colleagues and other visitors.

The symposium concluded with a champagne toast to Stewart. All present raised their glasses to salute the accomplishments of their most distinguished colleague.

Organizing this symposium and subsequent journal submission has been a special pleasure for me. As a student, I always regarded Dr. Stewart as the ultimate authority in forensic anthropology and physical anthropology. He served as Chairman of my dissertation committee and guided much of my early work. I was hired by the Smithsonian in the early 1970’s when Stewart formally retired but we continued to work closely together for many years. This work included field work in South Dakota and Maryland, numerous research activities and forensic casework. I have always felt that we enjoyed the same “apprentice” relationship that he so frequently described in his own relationship with Hrdlička. Although our relationship was always friendly and collegial, I consider myself to be his student and have always strived to conduct my work to meet his high standards. I hope that our published effort here is regarded as a suitable tribute to this great man and reveals the breadth and depth of his accomplishments and aspects of his personal characteristics that helped make him so successful.

¹ National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

* *Editor’s Note:* The sincere appreciation and gratitude of the journal and its readership is extended to Dr. Douglas H. Ubelaker for his effort and assistance in bringing this published record of the T. Dale Stewart Symposium to successful completion. He acted as organizer of the symposium, and editor of this published record. In addition, he singlehandedly contributed several of the papers and elements to the finished product.

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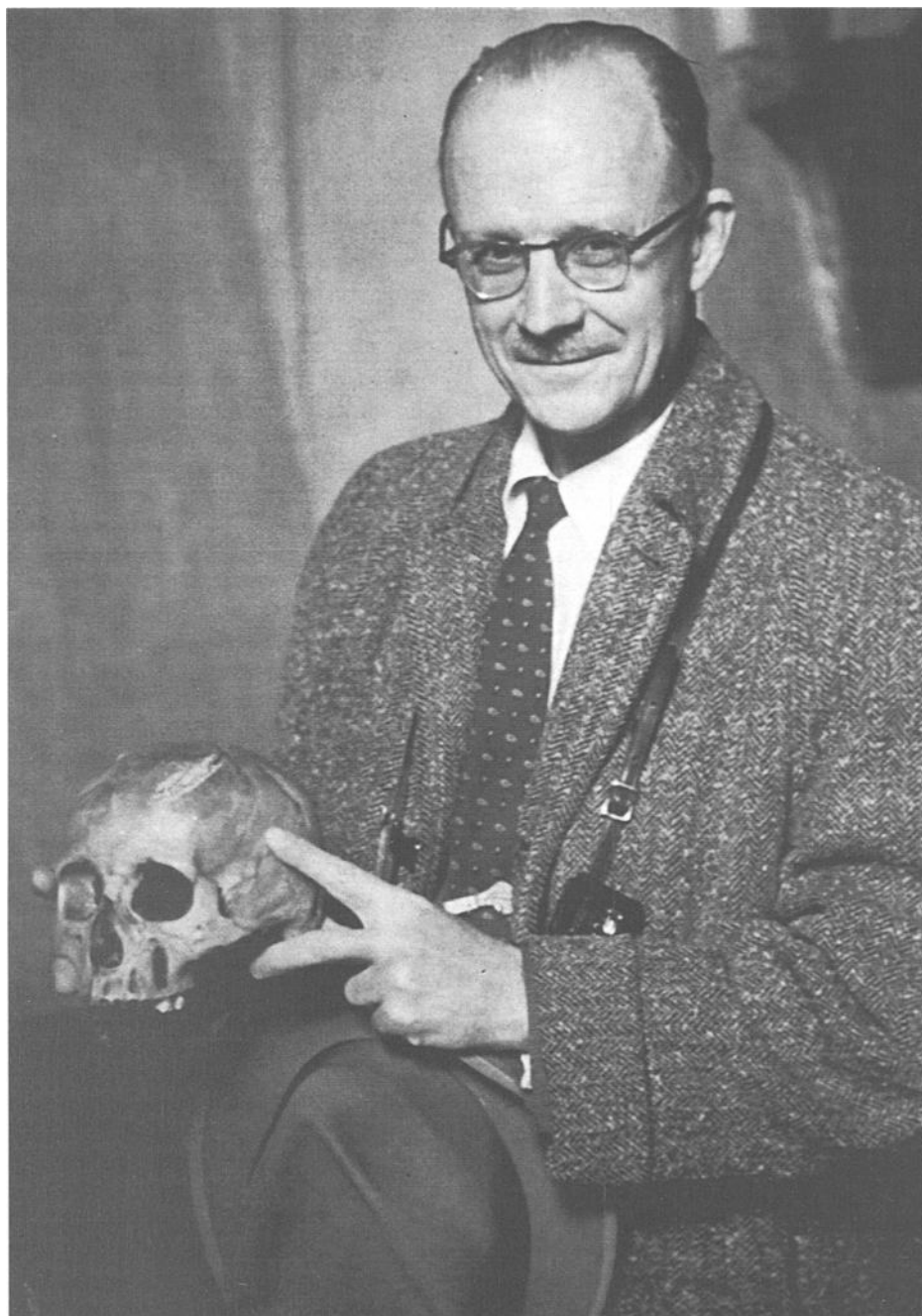


FIG. 1—*T. Dale Stewart (1901–1997).*