

## A Tribute to Dr. Ellis R. Kerley: The Kansas Years

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**ABSTRACT:** Dr. Ellis R. Kerley, one of the founders of the Physical Anthropology section of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, was born in Kentucky and received his undergraduate degree at the University of Kentucky. Following the completion of his doctoral degree (University of Michigan) he was a visiting professor at the University of Kentucky before joining the faculty at the University of Kansas in 1966. At Kansas he was a major advisor for many graduate students who were to become leaders in the new area of Forensic Anthropology.

**KEYWORDS:** forensic science, Ellis R. Kerley, forensic anthropology, Kansas, history

I first became aware of Ellis Kerley when I began my masters degree work in the Anthropology Department at the University of Kentucky in 1954. My major professor and the Chairman of the department, Dr. Charles E. Snow (1910–67), often spoke of Ellis, who had completed his undergraduate degree in Anthropology at the University of Kentucky in 1950. Ellis was a staff anthropologist at the Bowman Gray School of Medicine in Winston Salem, NC before completing both his masters and doctoral degree at the University of Michigan. While working on his doctoral, and after receiving his Ph.D., Ellis held a position with the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.

I had met Ellis at professional meetings as Charlie Snow suggested and by the mid 60s Ellis had expressed to me a desire to have an academic position.

I joined the Sociology-Anthropology Department at the University of Kansas in the fall of 1960 as the fourth anthropologist and the only physical anthropologist. By 1962 there were five anthropologists on the staff at Kansas and enrollment in Anthropology was booming. We in Anthropology began to express a desire to break away from Sociology and form our own department, primarily because only associate and full professors could vote on departmental matters. Of the five Anthropologists only one was an associate professor (Carlyle Smith) (1915–93) and could vote. Since the enrollment in Anthropology taught by the five of us was approaching the enrollment in Sociology courses, with a staff about three times that in Anthropology, we felt it was time to make some changes. The Sociology faculty bitterly opposed this separation but the Graduate School and the University administration approved a separate Department of Anthropology.

Enrollment in Anthropology continued to rapidly expand and by 1965 I needed help in the physical anthropology area. In the

1965–66 academic year Ellis Kerley was a Visiting Associate Professor at the University of Kentucky. We were given approval to add an additional physical anthropologist and I contacted Ellis to offer him a full time tenure tract position. Those were the days when you did not have to have search committees. Ellis accepted and joined the Anthropology faculty in September 1966.

We divided the courses in biological anthropology with me continuing to teach the large introductory courses, race, and human osteology. Ellis was already well known for the publication of his doctoral dissertation “The Microscopic Determination of Age in Human Bone” (1) so he taught the Forensic Anthropology and early hominid courses. We offered a masters degree when we were still a part of the Sociology Department and after Ellis joined us we began a Ph.D. program in 1964. I had already been the major advisor for graduate students (my first masters student was Walter Birkby in 1963). My first doctoral student was Terrell Phenice (1940–75) in 1968 and Ellis’s first doctoral student was Stephen Rosen in 1969.

We were both interested in Forensic Anthropology, a term just being coined at the time. Ellis and I had long discussions about Forensic Anthropology and it is out of these discussions that we decided to set up an Anthropology section of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. Ellis and I both did forensic cases for the Kansas Bureau of Investigation as well as local and national law enforcement agencies. It was fun and exciting to have another colleague to talk to and Ellis and I formed a life-long friendship.

Ellis and I not only worked on forensic cases and taught together but we had a joint publication in 1967 on Paleopathology (2).

The Anthropology Department at the University of Kansas was growing by leaps and bounds. We had a number of excellent graduate students in the late 60s and since Ellis participated in the training of many of these students at Kansas who went on to become successful, his Kansas influence was considerable. The University of Kansas was the only doctoral program where Ellis held a permanent position.

Ellis had a big influence on Doug Ubelaker (Smithsonian) via histological aging (3). Their relationship in research on histological aging continued until Ellis’ death.

Don Ortner (Smithsonian) was also a graduate student while Ellis was at Kansas, thus Ellis had a big influence on physical anthropology at the Smithsonian. Ellis served on the doctoral committees of other students such as Dick Jantz (Tennessee), Bill Lyon (Missouri, Kansas City), Linda Klippenger (Illinois), Gentry Steel (Texas A & M), George Gill (Wyoming), and Ted Rathbun (South Carolina). There could have been other students at Kansas who were influenced by Ellis that are unknown to the author and I am sorry for their omission from this list. Ellis had an influence on at least one student at Maryland who became a professional anthropologist, Steve Ousley (Smithsonian). Steve Ous-

<sup>1</sup> Department of Anthropology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.  
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ley completed his Ph.D. at the University of Tennessee under Dick Jantz.

The Anthropology Department at Kansas had moved into a new building in 1966 and Ellis and Tom McKern (1920–74) had offices side by side that were entered through a joint laboratory. Tom McKern joined the Anthropology Department as the third Physical Anthropologist in the fall of 1967, having moved from the University of Texas. The Anthropology Department grew rapidly and by the late 1960s it had become factionalized. The political environment in the department had deteriorated to the point where, in order to avoid it, Ellis began to stay home more often and come in mainly for classes. However, from 1968 to 1971 we had the beginning of what was and could have been a major Forensic Anthropology center in the United States. Universities and departments do not always know what potential they have and needless to say this potential was not encouraged and was never met at Kansas.

I was the first of the three physical anthropologist to leave Kansas when I joined the Anthropology Department at the University of Tennessee on June 1, 1971 as Department Head. Ellis left Kansas in December 1971 to become the Anthropology Department Head at the University of Maryland. Tom McKern left Kansas in the summer of 1972 to go to Simon Frazer University in

Canada. In the period of one year, three of the better known forensic anthropologists left for greener pastures.

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Additional information and reprint requests:

William M. Bass, Ph.D.  
Department of Anthropology  
252 South Stadium Hall  
University of Tennessee  
Knoxville, TN 37996-0720