

November 28, 2017

Re. Deaccession and Transfer of skeletonized cadaver (A50276/17293)

Wisconsin Lutheran College
Department of Anthropology
8800 W. Bluemound Road
Milwaukee, WI 53226

Milwaukee Public Museum
Dawn Scher Thomae
Curator of Collections
800 W. Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53233

Mrs. Scher Thomae,

My colleagues and I are thankful for the opportunity to follow-up with your office regarding the proposed deaccession and transfer of A50276/17293. Our interest in connecting with the community through research has become an important part of our work at the college. These remains provide us with a chance to add to the history of the county and the patients that it served. Their stories—often forgotten—must be told. Our hope is to add to what is known of the health profile of this individual and to better understand the nature of infectious diseases like syphilis.

Throughout its history, genetic research has contributed, in both positive and negative ways, to the lives of our local and national communities. Today, at Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC) students routinely address subjects of ethnicity, ethics in science, and public history as they apply these concerns to their own research in the field. Undergraduates, majoring in anthropology, nursing, and biology, for example, spend time looking at the life of Henrietta Lacks. As you know, Henrietta became famous after her death in 1951; a cellular culture of Mrs. Lacks', gathered by Johns Hopkins Hospital in the 1950s, helped scientists to eradicate polio in the United States. The tragedy of this story is that Henrietta's cells were used without her consent. She died unaware of the lifesaving gift that she provided to millions of Americans. This story speaks to the importance of ethical practices in research, and the need to connect every aspect of science to the lives of those who it affects. With this study, we hope to achieve just that. By applying limited forensic and biochemical analysis we will complete the story behind these remains, adding to what is known of historic illnesses in the history of the county.

The history of a health condition can tell us a great deal about how humans have adapted to changing health risks. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, health sufferers did not receive the medical attention that they needed. This inequality in access to healthcare resulted in unnecessary suffering and the survival of diseases that could have been treated or eradicated. Being able to identify an effector strain (or

starting strain) of a bacterial community is an important practice in modern research, and it may help us to better understand the need for greater and equal access to preventative healthcare. Unfortunately, we cannot undo the suffering of nineteenth and early-twentieth century county patients. Instead, we are proposing research designed to look back at how human pathogens have behaved—it will allow us to provide today's scientific community with a deeper understanding of how evolving strains of human pathogens may be addressed before they become an unfortunate truth in our national history.

Archaeological and biological materials are often an excellent starting point in reconstructing the evolutionary history of a health condition. When this condition is inherited, or when it is relatable to a public health concern, it becomes important to pursue. The techniques that we will apply to these remains are minimally invasive (requiring less 2/10ths of a gram of material to analyze) however, their potential impact on understanding the history of this pathogen will be important in the eventual eradication of the disease. It may also be helpful in our understanding of how populations have reacted to blood-borne pathogenic exposures over time. The limited research that would be conducted will help us to understand how this illness was acquired, its retention, and the passing of the strain from one generation to the next. In considering these characteristics, we will be able to add to what is known of the microbial history of the disease.

It is my belief that Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC) is an ideal site for the continued curation of A50276/17293. Not only do our facilities meet the standards required to protect these remains, but the religious mission and ethical goals that guide our faculty and staff provide this individual with a structured and safe environment to rest. The life and legacy of this historic donor will be honored and protected.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact my office. I may be reached at 414.443.8521 or 414.885.8335 (cell).

Sincerely,



Ned Farley, Ph.D. RPA
Department of Anthropology
Wisconsin Lutheran College

