

THE ROCKLAND MAN

The Identification of an Unknown Deceased

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On June 11, 1968, an assistant professor from the West Chester State Teachers College, Pennsylvania, contacted Delaware State Police to report the discovery of a body. The assistant professor and nine West Chester college students were on a bird watching expedition to the Brandywine Creek area when the body was discovered. The area in which the body was found consisted of heavy underbrush and was located near the Brandywine River approximately 60 feet from a heavily traveled dirt path. (1) The Brandywine Creek Park area is located near Rockland, Delaware.

The body was badly decomposed except for the left hand which was kept off the ground by some shrubbery. (2) The shrubbery had apparently delayed decomposition of the hand and enabled the police to secure fingerprints. (3) An initial terrain search of the area was conducted by police on the scene. The search yielded negative results. The surrounding area in the vicinity of the body was strewn with dead leaves, however, upon removal of the body the earth beneath was found to be bare. A second search was conducted, which consisted of raking the immediate area surrounding the body. Searchers hoped to recover weapons, identification or other evidence. This search also produced negative results.

The body, after being sent to the Medical Examiner's Office for examination, was found to have two holes in the skull. The first was located in the area of the right temple, the second was located in the area of the upper jaw. The skull was cleaned and then forwarded to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for analysis, by either the FBI or Smithsonian experts. (4) (When the body was removed from the scene the skull became detached.) The left hand was removed by the Medical Examiner's Office and was sent to the State Identification Division for fingerprinting.

The experts who studied the skull determined; "The victim was white, tall and thin, between 25 and 35 years of age, and native American or of northwest European ancestry." (5)

It was also determined that the victim had been dead approximately six to eight weeks.

The Identification Division secured fingerprints from the left hand of the deceased, and began to compare them to the known prints of missing persons in Delaware. From these comparisons police were able to determine that the 12 reported missing persons on file were not the unidentified body nicknamed the Rockland Man. (6)

After further investigation, State Detectives verified a report that the body had been discovered prior to June 11th by two juveniles. The boys, ages 9 and 12, were fishing in the area on Good Friday, April 12th or on Friday, April 19th. The boys found the body and ran home frightened. They told their parents who "just shrugged it off" as a childish illusion. (7)

On June 14th, Detectives re-visited the scene and systematically went through the area where the body was discovered. When the earth at the scene was sifted, seven of the deceased's natural teeth, two fingernails and several fingerbones were found. (8) No bullets or bullet fragments were recovered.

On June 18th, Detectives and twenty-two State Police recruits performed an extensive terrain search. The entire wooded area was searched by foot for any type of evidence. This search also yielded no further leads.

Even though fingerprints had been recorded of the deceased's left hand the prints could not be searched in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's file of 200 million fingerprint cards because they are classified on the basis of a 10 fingerprint system. Investigators would have to check each card individually and this would be an undertaking of "enormous proportions." (9)

On March 1, 1989, the Delaware State Police officially put into operation the Homicide Investigation Unit. The number of men initially assigned to the unit were two full-time detectives. The unit would expand a total of four times between March 1 and August 7 of 1989 before it would reach its current staff level of seven full-time detectives.

On April 7, 1989, the Homicide Investigation Unit contacted by telephone the Federal Bureau of Investigation Latent Print Section. The basis of the conversation was the Delaware 1968 unknown deceased case entitled the "Rockland Man." The objective was to have a copy of the unknown deceased fingerprints sent to the Delaware State Police, and to have the FBI initiate an Automated Fingerprint search of the Rockland Man's fingerprints against their data base. On April 24th, the Homicide Unit received a copy of the deceased's prints and submitted them to the Delaware State Bureau of Identification for a search through the Delaware Automated Fingerprint Identification System. The prints were searched against the Delaware automated data base with negative results. The Automated Fingerprint search through

the FBI's data base proved to be fruitful. On April 28, 1989, the FBI Latent Print Division contacted the Delaware State Police Homicide Unit and informed them that the automated search had provided an identification of the Rockland Man.

Through a check of motor vehicle files from the surrounding states, the Homicide Unit discovered the newly identified Rockland Man was on file with the Maryland State Police Fugitive Unit. The Maryland State Police were notified that an Unexplained Death Investigation from 1968 had been reopened in Delaware and that the subject on file with them had been identified as the deceased. Copies of the prints received from the FBI of the Rockland Man's left hand were hand-carried to the Maryland State Police Crime Laboratory. Latent Print Examiners compared the prints brought over by the Delaware detectives to those on file with the Maryland State Police. The examination results were positive. On May 3rd, the Delaware State Bureau of Identification Latent Print experts compared the known prints of the deceased to the photographic copy of the original prints taken from the Rockland Man. Their print comparison proved positive, also.

On May 5, 1989, the Detectives of the Homicide Investigation Unit made the formal death notification and contacted the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for the state of Delaware. After notification to the Medical Examiner's Office that the Rockland Man had been positively identified, a death certificate was issued. On May 12, 1989, the official certificate of death was signed and "Delaware - Unidentified White Male #68-335" was officially named.

On May 23, 1989, copies of the official Death Certificate and the Supplemental report concerning the identification were forwarded to the Maryland State Police. These reports will enable the Maryland State Police Fugitive Unit to close out their files on the identified subject. The identification of the Rockland Man has also proved important to the Detectives of the Delaware State Police Homicide Investigation Unit. The identity of the deceased has given them positive leads that will eventually help to clear the 1968 case from the investigation files.

FOOTNOTES

1. Evening Journal, Vol. 36, No. 139, "Unidentified Body Found" June 12, 1968, (pg37)
2. Lyons, M. (1989, July). (Interview with Detective Sergeant John Alstadt, Investigator. Rockland Homicide case)
3. Lyons, M. (1989, July). (Interview with Detective Sergeant John Alstadt, Investigator. Rockland Homicide Case)
4. Evening Journal, Vol. 36, No. 143, "Shooting Theorized in Grizzly Murder," June 14, 1968
5. Evening Journal, Vol. 36, No. 146, "Body of Man Decayed 3 Months, Police Learn," June 19, 1968, (pg. 3)
6. Lyons, M. (1989, July). (Interview with Detective Sergeant John Alstadt, Investigator. Rockland Homicide Case.)
7. Evening Journal, Vol. 36, No. 143, "Body of Man Decayed 3 Months, Police Learn," June 19, 1968, (pg 3)
8. Morning News, Vol. 173, No. 147, "Rockland Mans Body Found in April," June 19, 1968, (pg. 1 &2)
9. Lyons, M. (1989, July). (Interview with Detective Sergeant John Alstadt, Investigator. Rockland Homicide Case.)