

Repatriation Summary Report on Research

Repatriation of Skulls from University of Leipzig (Germany)

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Brief background on the situation:

The University of Leipzig (UL) has decided to deaccession their skull collection donated by Dr. Emil Ludwig Schmidt (Dr. Emil); the provenience of the items appears to come from Dr. Emil's own inventory conducted in April 1886.¹ Nineteen skulls were identified as having been gifted to Dr. Emil by "Dr. H. Schmidt in New Orleans." The university could tell us little about Dr. Emil and nothing about Dr. H. Schmidt, nor any additional information about the collection, aside from what was written in the inventory.² To that end, we have begun research into several different aspects of the human remains in the hope of providing a strong connection to the New Orleans area and ultimately have their skulls repatriated to the city. Below are items we know. Connections and conclusions are provided with our current knowledge that we expect to grow and evolve in the future. Much of the research is incomplete due to an interest to involve more partners with specialized skills who would be more appropriate to aid in the ultimate goal of identifying ancestors/descendants of these former citizens of Louisiana.

Brief Bio on Dr. Henry D. Schmidt

Dr. H. D. Schmidt was identified in several texts on medical history in New Orleans, as well as publications that confirmed some years of his service at Charity Hospital.³ From those sources, a search of the Web site FindAGrave provided details on Dr. H. D. Schmidt's interment and detailed biographical information.⁴ Dr. Henry D. Schmidt (Dr. Schmidt) was originally born in Prussia (1823), and came to the United States (via Pennsylvania in 1838) serving as an apprentice to an instrument-maker.⁵ Beginning in 1848, he began his study of anatomy at the University of Pennsylvania, working closely with Professors Leidy and Jackson. Professor Leidy would be his advisor and colleague, and Dr. Schmidt graduated in 1858.⁶ A brief tenure at the Medical College of Alabama (Mobile, Alabama) led to Dr. Schmidt coming to New Orleans in 1860 as an anatomy demonstrator at the New Orleans School of Medicine (1856-1870 – an early teaching hospital that

¹ This date is provided for in the inventory document shared by University of Leipzig.

² Please refer to the email from University of Leipzig dated June 5, 2023. Also the Wikipedia page about Dr. Emil Schmidt.

³ See Duffy (1962). *The Rudolph Matas History of Medicine in Louisiana: Volume 2*. Louisiana State University Press. Duffy (1984). *The Tulane University Medical Center: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Medical Education*. Louisiana State University Press. Fossier (1922). *The Charity Hospital of Louisiana*.

⁴ FindAGrave bio for Dr. Henry Schmidt.

⁵ See Kelly, H. A. (1920). *A cyclopedia of American medical biography: comprising the lives of eminent deceased physicians and surgeons from 1610 to 1910* (Vol. 2). WB Saunders Company. See also FindAGrave biography.

⁶ Schmidt, Henry D. (1858). *Microscopical Researches of the External Coat or Sheath of the Primitive Nervefibre*. University of Pennsylvania.

did not last long due to Charity Hospital's presence in the city).⁷ He then served in the Confederate Army as a surgeon throughout the duration of the U.S. Civil War, but came back to open a private practice in New Orleans in 1865. In addition to his private practice, beginning around 1868 Dr. Schmidt is noted as being a pathologist at Charity Hospital.⁸ Some sources list him as a visiting staff surgeon at Charity Hospital in 1871, and pathologist from 1878-1887. Nevertheless, he maintained his connection to Charity Hospital in various capacities until his death in 1888. He buried in New Orleans at Greenwood Cemetery.

Connection to Professor Leidy

As noted above, Dr. Schmidt was connected to Dr. Leidy at the University of Pennsylvania from his youth, and also earned his medical degree under him. Dr. Leidy was a well-known professor in the natural and medical sciences, spending much of his time in dissection and anatomy (of both human and nonhuman species).⁹ Although he did conduct (and hold positions) as anatomical demonstrator, he was less interested in human anatomy, and more so the comparative anatomy of non-human species and natural sciences.¹⁰ Establishing their connection regarding antiquities comes from the notice posted by Dr. H. D. Schmidt in 1869 looking for specimens to procure for Prof. Leidy of Philadelphia. Interested persons could transfer their antiquities for study to Leidy through Schmidt.¹¹ This establishes their connection continuing into the 1870s, and although the advertisement does not indicate human specimens explicitly, it can be seen as more than an implication for the jargon of the time.¹²

Brief bio of Dr. Emil Ludwig Schmidt

Aside from the single Web page on Dr. Emil that was provided to us from UL, there appears to be no further information on his activities that I can find except for a reference in a doctoral dissertation.¹³ This dissertation does not provide insight into Dr. Emil's life; however, it is a resource to contextualize the mindset of the time in which the natural sciences were engaged in the acquisition and research of skulls through racial research/science.¹⁴ Although we have not yet found direct connections between Dr. Emil and Dr. Schmidt, the Wikipedia page on Dr. Emil states that he came to North America for anthropological trips in 1869-1870, and again in 1876.¹⁵ Given their similar backgrounds and nationality,¹⁵ it is feasible that those trips brought him to New

⁷ See again Kelly (1920).

⁸ See again the FindAGrave bio for Dr. Henry Schmidt, they have an incorrect date of death, however most of the other information appears to be corroborated in other documents, although dates may be incorrect.

⁹ See University of Pennsylvania archives on Joseph Mellick Leidy document.

¹⁰ See Osborn, Henry F. (1913). Biographical Memoir of Joseph Leidy 1823-1891. National Academy of Sciences.

¹¹ Schmidt, H.D. American Antiquities. The New Orleans Journal of Medicine, Vol. 22(April):393.

¹² See Clever 2020. The Lives and Afterlives of Skulls. The Development of Biometric Methods of Measuring Race (1880-1950). UCLA dissertation. "The natural history tradition of collecting specimens took the form of shipping thousands of human remains back to Europe's museums and laboratories, where researchers meticulously described foreign bones and skulls and compared them to anthropoid and European bony remains" (page 5).

¹³ See again Clever 2020 (page 47). This is a citation regarding discussion about an instrument; a copy of the original document by Dr. Emil Schmidt in English has not yet been obtained.

¹⁴ Clever 2020 (page 16), "The production of racial knowledge about "primitive" and "savage" races became intertwined with various nationalist, racist, and imperialist campaigns in the 19th and 20th centuries" ¹⁵ See Wikipedia article Emil Ludwig Schmidt.

¹⁵ Despite their same surnames, there is no indication that H. Schmidt and E. Schmidt were related.

Orleans or Philadelphia, and put him in contact with any number of physicians/professors of anatomy of the time.

Potential Identification of Persons in New Orleans, Louisiana

Although possible, it seems less likely that the UL skulls would have originated from Dr. Schmidt's time as anatomy demonstrator at the New Orleans School of Medicine or the Medical College of Alabama (pre-Civil War appointments) due to the amount of travel he would endure during the war. Upon his return to New Orleans in 1865, along with his remaining years as surgeon/pathologist at Charity Hospital (~1868-1888), and Charity Hospital's history as serving the indigent population of New Orleans, with anatomical demonstrations, dissection houses, and surgical training, seems the likely source of the individuals that are now at UL.¹⁶ To exhaust sources, the names of the individuals were checked in the State Archives records for their death certificates.¹⁷ The names and ages were not matched to any death records, which further supports the supposition that the individuals were taken from Charity Hospital and potentially the remainder of their skeletons were buried through the indigent program without proper death certificates. Charity Hospital, as a state-run facility, has death record books on microfiche retained on site at the New Orleans Public Library.¹⁸ Considering several of the known facts at this time, the logical place to start viewing records is in the 1865–1890-time range (the overlap between Dr. Schmidt's life and tenure at the hospital and Dr. Emil's own inventory). There are files, on microfilm from 1869-1886, and, when viewed as a preliminary exercise, many names and demographic information does appear to line up, matching the information from the inventory. More research is needed on these materials. What these records highlight is that there is a potential positive connection to New Orleans through historic records, with the possibility of finding some actual descendants of these individuals whose skulls these are. Of course, additional medical schools at the time and other resources should be checked, but currently the direction of study appears to flow towards Charity Hospital of New Orleans.

Final Thoughts and Future Directions

From this research, there appears to be enough corroborative information to connect the items listed in the inventory from UL to New Orleans. Although direct descendants have not been identified, it is our strong recommendation to obtain the remains of these nineteen individuals as swiftly as possible (under any applicable state and federal laws or regulations); because there is no guidance regarding how to accomplish this goal under this exact scenario (to our current knowledge), this process is at our discretion. Once safely returned, a broad appeal to the community for the direction of future research can be planned and accomplished. Ideally, partners in this project will already be identified such that possible descendants/communities will have the ability to direct resources and specify objectives for the appropriate, respectful final disposition of these individuals.

¹⁶ See Halling and Seidemann (2017). Structural Violence in New Orleans: Skeletal Evidence from Charity Hospital's Cemeteries, 1847-1929. In: K. Nystrom (editor) *The Bioarchaeology of Dissection and Autopsy in the United States*. Springer.

¹⁷ Names were provided on the inventory from UL, ages at death but no dates were provided. Three names were identified in the archival research as potential matches, however upon viewing the death certificates demographic information could not be confirmed.

¹⁸ See the public archive holdings list.