



# Smithsonian

*National Museum of Natural History*

Guide to the United States Army Medical Museum  
records concerning skeletal material transferred  
to the Smithsonian Institution, 1868-1897

National Anthropological Archives  
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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	National Anthropological Archives
<b>Title:</b>	United States Army Medical Museum records concerning skeletal material transferred to the Smithsonian Institution
<b>Date:</b>	1868-1897
<b>Identifier:</b>	NAA.XXXX.0330
<b>Creator:</b>	Army Medical Museum (U.S.)
<b>Extent:</b>	4.75 Linear feet
<b>Language:</b>	English .

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The records were originally transferred from the United States Army Museum to the Smithsonian along with the specimens. They were transferred from the Smithsonian Archives to the National Anthropological Archives on March 17, 1986.

### Related Materials

Related photographs may be found in the National Anthropological Archives in Photo Lot 6A, Photo Lot 6B, Photo Lot 73-26C, Photo Lot 78-42, Photo Lot 83-41, and Photo Lot 97.

### Preferred Citation

United States Army Medical Museum records concerning skeletal material transferred to the Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

### Restrictions

The United States Army Medical Museum records concerning skeletal material transferred to the Smithsonian Institution are open for research.

Access to the United States Army Medical Museum records concerning skeletal material transferred to the Smithsonian Institution requires an appointment.

### Conditions Governing Use

Contact the repository for terms of use.

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## Historical Note

The United States Army Medical Museum (AMM; now the National Museum of Health and Medicine of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology) was established by the Surgeon General in 1862 during the course of the Civil War. Its initial focus was on specimens of morbid pathology mainly derived from victims of the war, but as the museum developed, its purpose expanded and around 1864 it was organized into surgical, photographic, medical, and microscopic sections. In 1867, it reorganized into medical, microscopical, anatomical, comparative anatomical, and miscellaneous sections.

Of particular interest here is the anatomical section, for to it were assigned specimens of normal human anatomy, including a growing collection comprised mainly of human skulls but also including other normal human bone specimens. Most of the anatomical specimens were remains of American Indians but also included were remains of people of European and African descent as well as those from populations of Asia and Oceania. The purpose of the collection was anthropological research.

The collection grew as the result of a Circular No. 2 issued in 1867 by the Surgeon General. It called upon military medical officers to collect crania together with specimens of Indian weapons, dress, implements, diet, and medicines. More immediately, however, the collection was developed from arrangements with the Smithsonian Institution by which the Smithsonian transferred its collection of human remains that had begun in the early 1850s. The Smithsonian also agreed to transfer such specimens as it would obtain in the future. In return, the AMM agreed similarly to transfer to the Smithsonian artifactual and other ethnological specimens that came into its possession.

Among specimens acquired by the AMM under the terms of this agreement were items collected by the United States Exploring Expedition of 1838-1842 (also known as the Wilkes Expedition). Other official expeditions that contributed specimens were those of Ferdinand V. Hayden (including the United States Geological Survey of the Territories), George M. Wheeler's United States Army Geographical Explorations and Surveys West of the 100th Meridian, and John Wesley Powell's Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Regions. Also going to the AMM were specimens acquired by the Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, including the many specimens of human remains recovered by its large-scale survey of mounds east of the Rocky Mountains. Individual mound explorers, army personnel, medical officers, and private physicians contributed to the collection through donations to the Smithsonian or through direct gifts to the AMM.

Although several early AMM staff members--including George A. Otis, Washington Matthews, and Daniel S. Lamb--were relatively active in research on the anthropological collections, later curators had but little interest in it. Consequently, by the late 1890s, the collection was virtually unused. In 1897, William Henry Holmes, the head curator of the newly formed Department of Anthropology in the Smithsonian Institution United States National Museum (USNM), noticed the collection during a visit to the AMM. He informally requested transfer of the specimens--especially the American Indian skulls that had come to form the bulk--to the USNM, and officials at the AMM, eager to devote space to active collections, agreed. This arrangement was formally proposed and approved through exchanges of letters between the Surgeon General and the Secretary of the Smithsonian; and, in May 1898, 2206 skulls were transferred to the Smithsonian.

With such a collection in hand, Holmes pursued a cherished plan to establish a division of physical anthropology in his department. With the great wave of immigration to America, imperialistic expansion abroad, and questions about race and mixtures of races scientifically current, he argued the utility of physical studies of the American people. As a result of his efforts, Aleš Hrdlička, a physician and physical anthropologist, was appointed a curator in the USNM in 1903. Following Hrdlička's appointment, a second major transfer of bone materials from the AMM was arranged. This time some 674 items, including articulated skeletons, pelvises, brains, and physical anthropological instruments, were involved. This second transfer of specimens was made in January, 1904.

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## Scope and Contents

The records consist mainly of memoranda prepared by the AMM staff and letters and notes which document the specimens. There are also invoices, lists, labels, and printed items. Indexed are names of correspondent, collectors, and donors.

Please note that the contents of the collection and the language and terminology used reflect the context and culture of the time of its creation. As an historical document, its contents may be at odds with contemporary views and terminology and considered offensive today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the Smithsonian Institution or National Anthropological Archives, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

## **Arrangement**

Arranged by United States Army Museum number.

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## **Names and Subject Terms**

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Biological anthropology