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LEGAL MEDICINE AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Frances Glessner Lee

Mrs. Frances Glessner Lee has contributed much toward the development of the Department of Legal Medicine at Harvard University and the entire training program carried on by that department. She has given considerable financial support as well as a great deal of personal time and attention to the Department of Legal Medicine. She originated and has taken a very active part in the Harvard Homicide Investigation Seminars which are conducted twice a year for state police officers. Because of her special interest in her own state police force she was signally honored by an award of the title of Captain and Educational Director in the New Hampshire State Police. In the present article Captain Lee describes the history and work of the Department of Legal Medicine at Harvard University.—
EDITOR.

The Department of Legal Medicine at the Harvard Medical School, founded in 1931, became active in 1938. Its first head was the late Dr. George Burgess Magrath, Chief Medical Examiner of Suffolk County, Massachusetts. When he became emeritus, he was succeeded by Dr. Alan Richards Moritz, who in turn was succeeded in 1949 by Dr. Richard Ford, the present incumbent. The George Burgess Magrath Library of Legal Medicine, a part of the Department, was presented to Harvard in 1934. It contains some three thousand volumes at present, and is said to be the largest library entirely devoted to this subject in the United States or elsewhere.

Since Legal Medicine has been defined as "The application of medical knowledge and skill to the uses and purposes of the law," it is easily evident that there are many groups whose members would be interested in this subject and who could profit by its study. Some years ago, the writer was greatly surprised to learn that nowhere in America was Legal Medicine, as thus described, being taught. There was nowhere to go for the special training required by these groups. It was her good fortune at that time to be able to endow a Department of Legal Medicine at the Harvard Medical School, and to provide it with its library, and its success has more than justified her ambitions for it.

The purposes of the Department are twofold: Research into the causes of unexplained death, and the practical application and teaching of the results of that research to those who will use it throughout the land in the interests of science and justice. Its teaching is preeminently practical and has been made available to doctors, lawyers, coroners, and coroners' physicians, the police and members of the United States armed forces. A chief objective is to correlate the work of the public prosecutor, the medical investigator, and the law enforcement officer so that each may find his investigation easier, more efficient, and more accurate in its results.

The teaching of the Department is of several kinds:

1. A series of lectures to medical students in their third year; a series of lectures to Law School undergraduates at Harvard and other schools; and lectures in the Schools of Dentistry and Public Health.

2. Training of young graduate doctors, preferably with at least two years of Pathology, over periods of from six months to two or even three years, to fit them to become medicolegal experts and to take positions as Medical Examiners, Coroners' Physicians, et cetera. For the funds which make this possible, as well as for the moral support which makes it stimulating, the Department is indebted to the Rockefeller Foundation. Graduates of this training hold, or have held, positions of Chief Medical Examiner of Maryland; Chief Medical Examiner of Virginia; Medical Examiner of the City of Denver, Colorado; Coroner's Physician of Cincinnati, Ohio; State Pathologist of Vermont, which includes medicolegal services to the Vermont State Police; Pathologist in the office of the Coroner of Cuyahoga County (Cleveland), Ohio; and Research Professor of Law and Medicine and Director of Law Science Institute at Tulane University in Louisiana.

3. Seminars, of a week's duration, for various groups—doctors, medical examiners, coroners and coroners' physicians, district attorneys, members of the Press, municipal police, and State Police. All but those for State Police have been temporarily discontinued. Medical Seminars have been attended by doctors and others from many states and even from as far away as Honolulu, Scotland, England, and China. Twelve State Police Seminars have been held since 1945, including the latest in November 1951. The regular State Police Seminars consist each of about twenty-five students, and membership is by invitation only, through the State Police Superintendents. Not more than two students from an organization are accepted at one time. The following states have sent representatives: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Iowa, Michigan, and Texas; the Canadian Provinces of Ontario and British Columbia; and the United States Air Force and the Corps of Military Police of the United States Army. The management of these Police Seminars has been placed in the hands of the writer.

An interesting development of these State Police classes is the formation of the Harvard Associates in Police Science—a society made up of those who have completed one of the State Police Seminars in Homicide Investigation. This organization meets once a year for a two-day

refresher course. The programs for these meetings are still largely on the medicolegal side, but sometimes go a little farther afield.

Every effort, during these meetings, as indeed, during the State Police Seminars, is made to develop friendships amongst the representatives of the different states, and some excellent results and pleasant and valuable connections are already evident.

The teaching staff of the Department consists at present of: Dr. Richard Ford, head, who is also Chief Medical Examiner for Suffolk County (the City of Boston and some suburbs) and Consulting Pathologist to the Massachusetts Department of Public Safety, which includes the State Police; Dr. Michael Luongo, an Associate Medical Examiner of Suffolk County and Consulting Pathologist to Waltham Hospital at Waltham, Massachusetts; and Dr. Joseph T. Walker, chemist in charge of laboratories of the Massachusetts State Police. For the Seminars, additional lecturers—the best of each of their special fields—are brought in. These include, amongst others, Dr. Milton Helpern of the New York City Medical Examiner's Office; Dr. Russell S. Fisher, Chief Medical Examiner of the State of Maryland; Dr. LeMoyne Snyder, medicologist, of East Lansing, Michigan; and Professor Fred E. Inbau of Northwestern University Law School.

Some of the teaching tools especially developed for this department may be of interest. Collections are being established of plaster casts in natural color of heads, to illustrate peculiarities of certain types of injuries; targets showing, also by plaster casts in color, actual wounds made by various types of bullets and powders at certain set distances; mounted specimens, in various stages, of the insect life sometimes infesting human remains, and others of similar nature are under way. There already is a completed set of abortionist's instruments.

A collection of miniature models of scenes wherein an unexplained death has occurred, called "Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death," perhaps require a somewhat fuller explanation. Since time and space are at a premium for the Seminars, and since visual studies of actual cases seem a most valuable teaching tool, some method of providing that means of study had to be found. The writer has for many years worked sporadically at miniatures, hence these presented themselves as the solution. Since 1944 these models have been under construction, and there are now nineteen completed and others nearly so. They are currently exhibited in a room especially built for them in the Department and are built on the scale of one inch to the foot. They vary in size from an 8" x 14" shack to a 30" square three-room dwelling. No effort has been spared to make every detail perfect and complete. No model

attempts to actually reproduce the scene of any case, but everything demonstrated has actually happened, although not always under just the conditions shown. An effort has been made to illustrate not only the death that occurred, but the social and financial status of those involved, as well as their frame of mind at the time the death took place. Not all cases shown are crimes—some are accidents, some are deaths due to natural causes—some, because of inexpert or careless investigation, remain undetermined.

The Seminar students each have two of these models assigned to them to study and are given about an hour and a half for each model. Later during the course, they make a verbal report before the class and after some discussion, the point intended to be illustrated by each model is disclosed. It must be understood, these models are not “whodunits”—they cannot be solved merely by looking at them. They are intended to be an exercise in observing, interpreting, evaluating and reporting—there is no “solution” to be determined. One of the essentials in the study of these Nutshells is that the student should approach them with an *open mind*—far too often the investigator “has a hunch,” and looks for *and finds only* the evidence to support it, disregarding any other evidence that may be present. This attitude would be calamitous in investigating an actual case.

Believing firmly that the efficient policeman is an informed policeman, the writer has made every effort to provide the police students with the most modern and progressive scientific training possible to procure for them. The old days are gone—the days when “brogue and brawn” were the requisites to make a city foot-policeman, and today the policeman is an educated, well-trained gentleman. But he still has to live down that old reputation, which he is doing with speed and ability—let’s give him a hand.

It is with these thoughts in mind that the program for the Seminars in Homicide Investigation at the Harvard Medical School have been developed. It is regrettable that there are but two of them held each year. The students are given practical and usable advice on what to do and how to do it, and *why*, when they first receive the order to investigate a case at a certain place; they are taught new methods of making an identification, even when a body has been badly mutilated or has reached an advanced stage of decomposition; they are given new as well as old ways of determining the probable time at which death occurred, and they are trained in many special techniques governing the peculiarities of deaths due to certain specific causes—fire, hit-and-run accidents, drowning, and many others. All of this teaching is in-

tended to give the police officer more knowledge and therefore greater security in his work, to build up his efficiency and his morale to the end that he may rightly command the trust and respect of the community.

It is the earnest hope of the writer that these courses may soon be made available to the doctors and lawyers, as well as to the law enforcement officers, to the end that the techniques of the administration of justice may be improved and made more easily and readily available for use. The Seminars in Legal Medicine at the Harvard Medical School should not be for the police officer alone, but should be shared alike with the doctor and the lawyer.

Technical skill, scientific knowledge, and professional training, however, are not all there is to Legal Medicine. There is something else—something hard to define—which must accompany them. “The application of medical knowledge and skill to the uses and purposes of the law” is not the whole story. It is far more than that. It is an unremitting quest for *facts*; it is a constant and continuous search for *truth* in the interests of science and justice, to expose the guilty, to clear the innocent. It is a dedication of its own peculiar wisdom and experience to the service of mankind.