

Evaluation and Use of Superimposition of Unidentified Marks on Bone¹

James A. Bailey, PhD, Minnesota State University Mankato, Department of Political Science and Law Enforcement, 109 Morris Hall, Mankato MN 56001

The purpose of this presentation is to discuss marks on bone in an historical case. Some marks on the bone can be identified while others cannot. One mark or defect in the thoracic region is evaluated with the use of superimposition. The case involves the alleged skeletal remains of Sam Wells AKA Charley Pitts. Pitts was one of eight members of the Jesse James – Cole Younger gang who robbed the First National Bank in Northfield, Minnesota in 1876. After the robbery, the surviving members divided into two groups and left town. A posse caught up with Charley Pitts and the Younger brothers in Madelia, Minnesota. At the shootout in Madelia, Pitts was fatally wounded by a gunshot wound to the chest. Since Pitts' body was unclaimed, it went to the Surgeon General in St Paul, Minnesota. Pitts' body was subsequently dissected by medical students and his skeleton was prepared as a medical specimen.

In 1981 an articulated skeleton identified as the remains of Charley Pitts was donated to the Northfield Historical Society in Northfield, Minnesota. The skeleton came from The Stagecoach Museum in Shakopee, Minnesota. However, there is no known acquisition record indicating how the remains became property of The Stagecoach Museum. Controversy surrounds the identity of the skeletal remains and the nature and origin of some of the marks on the bone. Specifically, the mark in the thoracic region is believed by some to be a bullet hole. A photograph of the alleged victim's skeleton is superimposed over a photograph which shows the victim's gunshot injury to the chest to determine if the two marks align. If the marks do align and the skeletal remains are identified, the superimposition offers supporting evidence that the mark may have been produced by a bullet.

¹Abstract for paper presented at the 7th European Meeting for Shoeprint and Toolmark Examiners, Madrid, Spain, 2008.