

# Forensic anthropologist helps police

By Lynn Mongar

Many people hide skeletons in their closets.

Richard McWilliams displays his. Because of his interest, he has a few skulls, and other bones, in his closets and his garage. McWilliams, a retired UNL anthropology professor and co-author of "Forensic Anthropology" has been working with Nebraska law enforcement officers to determine the identities of accident or murder victims.

The physical anthropologist is one of about 12 persons in the United States whose work involves recreating likenesses of faces from skulls.

"It's like reading a diary," he said. For example, he said, he was able to determine that one man had been a heroin addict because of the condition of his teeth.

Douglas County Sheriff Richard Roth asked McWilliams about a week ago to construct likenesses of the heads of two murder victims in order to determine their identities. Police are paying for McWilliams' expenses.

The bodies of the two men were found on a bank of the Elkhorn River in April 1973.

Both men, believed by police to be part of a motorcycle gang, had been shot repeatedly in the face, McWilliams said.

The bodies of the two were exhumed July 8, and the skulls were removed. Ef-

orts at identifying the two men by dental records and other methods were unsuccessful.

Police have not used forensic anthropology much because they are unfamiliar with it and are uncertain how to use it, he said.

However, he said he expects forensic anthropology to be used more frequently by police in the future.

He said he has helped Nebraska law enforcement agents on several cases before.

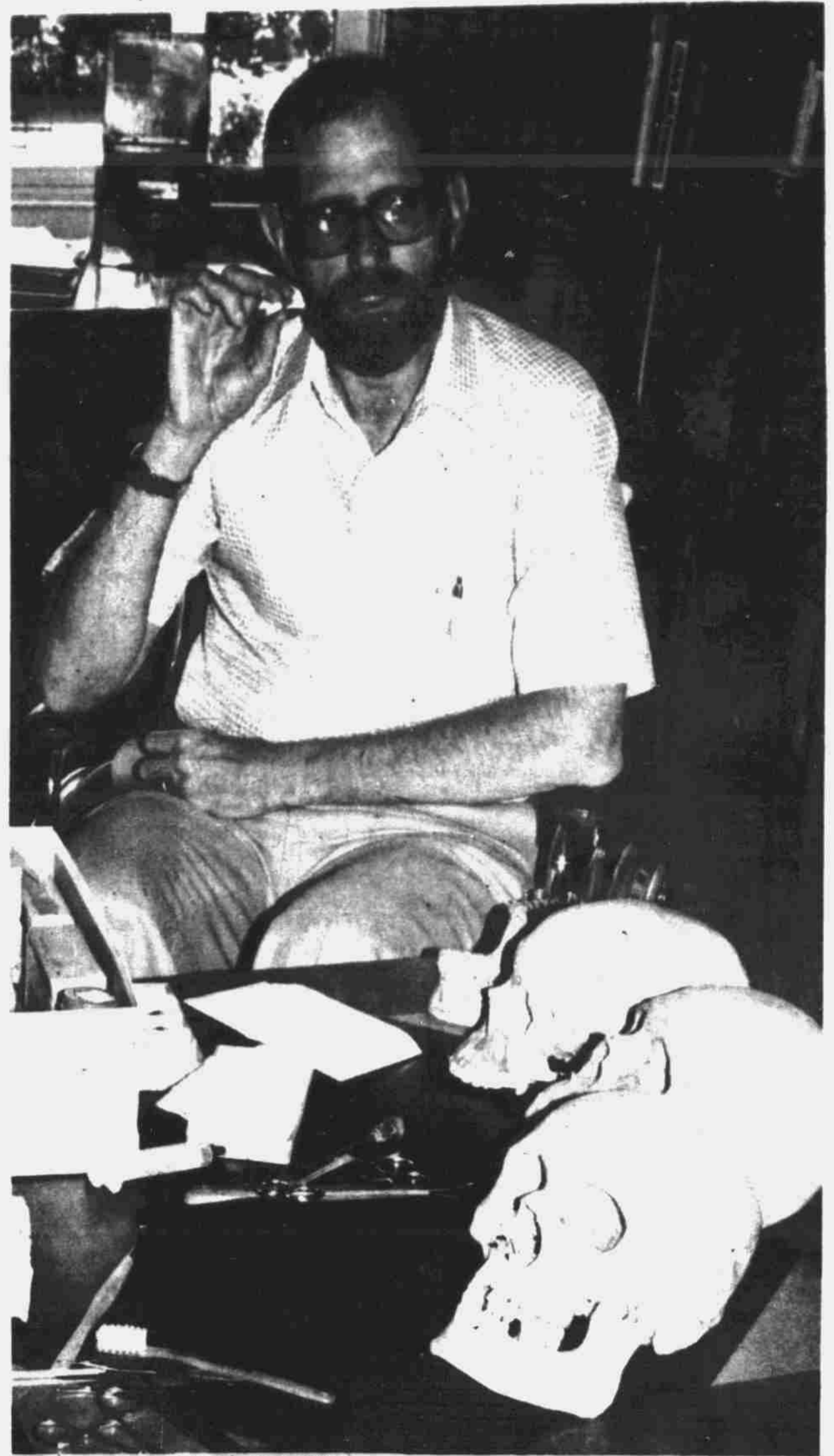
"Probably in every small town police station, they have bodies, or skulls they can't identify," he said. "It's a real problem."

Usually a physical anthropologist or medical artist is contacted after police have tried other ways to identify the victims.

As his silent companions stared at him, McWilliams pointed to 15 to 20 landmarks on the skull, where there is a known skin thickness that varies according to gender. McWilliams then glues pencil erasers of varying thickness on those 15 to 20 landmarks.

"The skull looks like a porcupine after you're finished putting on the erasers," McWilliams said. Then he said he fills in the gaps between erasers with the proper amount of clay. He buys wigs from the Salvation Army for the hair. He adds glass eyes, he said, because they "make the skull look like it's alive."

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Anthropologist Richard McWilliams.

Staff Photo by Janel Hamner



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