



MEET THE PEOPLE

BURIAL 144 Disabled, But Cared For

This man of European heritage died in his late thirties. He stood 5 feet 2 inches tall and weighed 142 pounds.

He was remarkable in an important way: after reaching adulthood, he suffered a brain trauma of some sort and developed cerebral palsy. He lived the rest of his life as a disabled person.

Cerebral palsy is a brain disorder that affects a person's muscle coordination and muscle control. People born with it today normally do not live much past 25 years of age. Back in the mid-1800s, life expectancy probably would have been even shorter. But cerebral palsy also can develop from head injuries sustained in an accident. Unusually large and deep vein tracks extend along the midline of Burial 144's skull, starting at his forehead. This physical evidence supports the suggestion that a head injury may have been the cause of his condition.

Investigators decided Burial 144 had suffered from cerebral palsy because they found a quarter- to half-inch-long canal at the place where his jaw attached to the base of his skull. It showed that his jaw had contracted strongly to the right, caus-

ing him to pull-up his right shoulder to his jaw. Although he holds his mouth closed in his portrait, it is doubtful he would have had the strength to do so for long.

His front teeth showed little or no wear, but the teeth on his right side were more worn and had cavities. Given how he held his head, food would have gotten trapped between his teeth and gums on a regular basis.

Strong neck muscle markings were present on his right collar bone, but not on his left. This suggested the kind of neck muscle pulling shown in his jaw.

His legs look normal, but the involuntary *spasms* (contractions in the muscles) of cerebral palsy leave no traces on bones. Based on what is known about people who suffer from this disease today, muscle spasms could have made it very difficult for him to walk.

He ate more corn-based foods than most people of European descent interred in the Old Frankfort Cemetery, a sign that his family was poor. Perhaps, given his condition, his family fed him mush.

Growth lines in his teeth show that he experienced several periods of prolonged poor nutrition or severe illness. This happened from shortly after his first birthday to when he was 5 years old.

Before his injury, Burial 144 may have worked at a job that required heavy lifting. This is reflected by the arthritis in his lower back.

At his death, Burial 144's family placed his arms along his sides and folded his hands at his waist. Then they likely wrapped him in a shroud and placed his body in a rectangular wooden coffin. There is no evidence that he was buried wearing clothes. However, clothes lacking fasteners, like pull-over shirts or nightshirts, do not leave any evidence behind.

Burial 144's coffin was placed in a simple pit dug in the Lower Area. Based on the rectangular shape of his coffin, he died sometime after 1835. His death could have been brought on by complications due to his cerebral palsy. Muscle spasms can cause seizures and make it difficult to breathe, which can lead to death. Despite his condition, we can infer that his family cared for him and took care of him as best they could.