



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Uncovering History: New Jersey Students Link Human Remains in New Hampshire to 19th-Century Family

Investigative Genetic Genealogy Traces Skull Displayed in Law Office to Its Historic Lineage

Mahwah, N.J.- A human skull that was on display in a New Hampshire attorney's office has been connected to a family line dating back more than 200 years ago. Students in the Ramapo College of New Jersey Investigative Genetic Genealogy Certificate Program provided information about the origin of the skull based on case research, bringing closure to the skull with unknown origins for decades.

In 2019, a student at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) presented [Dr. Amy Michael](#), assistant professor of anthropology, with a human skull. The student explained that the skull was displayed in the Claremont, NH attorney's office in which her father worked. The father believed that the skull had been in the office since the 1980s.

The skull remained in the care of the UNH Forensic Anthropology Identification and Recovery (F.A.I.R.) Lab. The identity of the skull remained a mystery, however. "UNH students in the F.A.I.R. Lab were very curious to learn about the origins of this individual," said Michael, who is also the lab director. "Archival research and anthropological methods only got us so far in the investigation process."

In 2024, with permission from the New Hampshire Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME), the UNH F.A.I.R. Lab contacted the [Ramapo College Investigative Genetic Genealogy \(IGG\) Center](#) to utilize advanced DNA testing in an attempt to identify the skull.

In July of 2024, the IGG Center sent a portion of the skull to [Astrea Forensics](#) in Santa Cruz, CA to develop a DNA profile suitable for investigative genetic genealogy.

In November of 2024, the profile was successfully developed and subsequently uploaded to the [GEDmatch PRO](#) database. Students in the [Ramapo College IGG Certificate Program](#) began research on the case and were able to develop a hypothesis about the origins of the skull, supported by close genetic relatives in the DNA database.



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The skull is believed to belong to a child of Samuel Matchette (1781-1854) and Sarah Shields (1800-1848), who both died in Quebec, Canada, a region with historic ties to Sullivan County in New Hampshire, where the town of Claremont is located.

“This was an incredible opportunity for our students to practice research on what turned out to be a historic case,” said Cairenn Binder, director of the IGG Certificate Program. “We are so grateful to the New Hampshire OCME and the UNH F.A.I.R. Lab for trusting our team to bring it to a satisfactory resolution.”

To learn more about the cases and work performed in the Ramapo College IGG Center, visit ramapo.edu/igg.

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ABOUT RAMAPO COLLEGE

Ramapo College of New Jersey is the state’s premier public liberal arts college and is committed to academic excellence through interdisciplinary and experiential learning, and international and intercultural understanding. The comprehensive college is situated among the beautiful Ramapo Mountains, is within commuting distance to New York City, was named one of the 50 Most Beautiful College Campuses in America by *CondéNast Traveler*, and boasts the best on-campus housing in New Jersey per Niche.com. Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor’s degrees in the arts, business, data science, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include business, education, nursing and social work. In addition, the College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels, and offers graduate programs leading to master’s degrees in Accounting, Applied Mathematics, Business Administration, Contemporary Instructional Design, Computer Science, Creative Music Technology, Data Science, Educational Leadership, Nursing, Social Work and Special Education, as well as a Doctor of Nursing Practice.