

A 70-year-old Dakota male's skull found its way into a local dog's mouth three miles south of Mankato.

Leon Walters, 61, lives on 15 452nd St., Mankato and where the skull could have been picked up by his Boston terrier. The skull was identified by Lolita Lancaster, a professor in the Department of Anthropology at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and expert on human skeletal forensics.

"We can tell the relative health of a person when he or she died," Lancaster said. "This man was quite old, relatively speaking, when he died. The teeth in this skull were quite worn. I think he probably died a natural death."

Lancaster found that the skull was over 300 years old and was from a Mdewakanton Dakota male who was around 70 years old when he likely died of natural causes. Lancaster delivered the skull Saturday to the Lower Sioux Indian Community by Morton. The Dakota will properly bury the skull.

"It's only fitting that the remains of this man be turned over to those who are likely among his descendants," she said.

The skull was found by Walters' dog, Sally. He had been watching TV in his home when he saw her chewing on the skull and became worried.

"I thought maybe Sally found part of a murder victim or something," Walters said.

After wresting it from her, he contacted his friend Randy LaSalle, an officer with the Minnesota State Patrol, to take it.

"I texted Randy," he said. "I figured a state trooper might know how to handle the situation."

LaSalle picked up the skull 30 minutes later and took it to the Mankato State Patrol headquarters.

"The text from Leon was one of the weirdest things I've read in a long time," LaSalle said. "I could tell that skull was really old and not from a recent murder victim, at least."

The skull was examined by Janice Panish, a Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension homicide detective from St. Paul, Friday before she brought it to Lancaster.

"We have the equipment and knowledge to quickly determine factors related to the age, gender and race of human bones and teeth," Lancaster said.

Walters lives on a 10-acre farm site and has a salvage yard on his property. Walters is a lifelong bachelor living with his three dogs and six cats. Walters's three dogs are able to enter the house through the dog door, so Sally probably brought the skull in that way.

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