

**EXAMINING AN ECCENTRIC NECROPHILE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

As far back as historical documentation goes, necrophilia has always been a macabre constant.

In earlier times, Herodotus (who lived from 484 BC - 425 BC), documented in his record writings that bodies of remarkably stunning women were no longer embalmed immediately after their deaths in Ancient Egypt, to deter a repetition of a situation where it was exposed that an embalmer had intercourse with the corpse of a freshly deceased woman (1). Hundreds of years later, the Babylonian Talmud (3rd–5th centuries AD), records a chosen maiden killing herself to avoid marrying King Herod of Judea, as she had no desire to be with him. It continues to state that following her suicide, the king had her corpse conserved in thick honey for seven years so that he may have sex with her body at a later date (2). Later still, Gilles de Rais, a knight, lord, leader in the French army, and companion-in-arms to Joan of Arc, was “noted to have sexually violated the dead bodies of his victims” (3) until his death in October 1440. Continuing onward in time, notable criminologist Herschel Prins, proved that up until the 19th century, if an engaged woman in passed away in Central Europe prior to her marriage, the male betrothed to her may copulate with her body (4). Again, necrophilia has plagued every era throughout history and will continue to do so throughout the future, as paraphilic behaviors are neither preventable nor curable. They are, in fact, “innate, driven by some complex interactions between androgenization of the brain and neurohormonal changes” (5).

The difference between necrophilia cases of the past and necrophilia cases in modern times is that today’s necrophile can be studied, understood, and categorized rather than simply blamed, punished and shunned. Forensic psychology was not in existence as a social science during the days of the earliest necrophilia cases, but in current times, the latest version of the DSM acts as a diagnostic tool for many forensic psychologists with necrophile patients who show comorbidity. These include those professionals on the treatment team for Anthony Merino, a 24-year-old man working in patient transport in 2007 at New Jersey’s Holy Name Hospital who was found having sex with a 92-year-old

woman's corpse inside the building's morgue (6), and the like. Since all historical and current versions of the DSM only addresses necrophilia as "Other Specified Paraphilic Disorder", necrophilia diagnosticians must also utilize the "ten tier classification of necrophiliacs based on increasing severity of disorder" (7) issued by the world's authority on the subject. New Delhi's own Anil Aggarwal, MD is not only a professor of forensic medicine at the Maulana Azad Medical College, and the founder of the Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, but he is also considered the leading authority on necrophilia, insofar as to bring forth his detailed categorization of the paraphilia.

The purpose of this article, in a sense, is to bring the past to the present and the present to the past. Let us take a notable necrophile from pre-DSM and pre-Aggrawal times and utilize modern day diagnostic resources to better understand him with retroactively diagnoses and by categorizing his specific class of necrophilia according to its characteristics. For purposes of this article, the subject of posthumous study will be Carl Tanzler, one of the most interesting and extraordinarily-eccentric necrophiles ever to be arrested for crimes against the dead. Tanzler died in 1952, the very same year that the first edition of the DSM was published, making understanding him, diagnosing him, and classifying his necrophilia type and comorbidity absolutely impossible at that time. This article will do so today, retrospectively.

## **CARL TANZLER (1877-1952)**

### CARL TANZLER'S EXISTENCE PRIOR TO THE CRIMES

The Second Reich, or Imperial Germany, was the setting for Carl Tanzler's early years as he was birthed on February 8, 1877 in the city of Dresden. In his childhood years, Tanzler would admit to having visions of a deceased, alleged ancestor, Countess Anna, who exposed the face of his true love, a striking brunette woman, to him (12). His childhood and adolescence were dredged in both Germanization and antisemitism under governmental rule (8), but under unknown circumstances, Tanzler ended up in India

and then Australia in his twenties, just before the beginning of World War I. His goal at that point was to gather gear, appropriate ships, and to become familiar with dominant weather and sea circumstances so that he may travel to the South Seas Islands (9). A decade after his arrival in Australia, Tanzler's knowledge swelled and he believed his dream of the South Sea Islands was soon to be realized. He began to build a trans-oceanic vessel for the voyage. Unfortunately, he never would see the South Sea Islands.

At this time, the war broke out and military authorities placed him in a concentration camp for 'safe-keeping' along with many officers of India and China who were prisoners of war. Tanzler was transferred to Trial Bay Gaol, prison on the cliffs that resembled a fortress. At the war's end, no detainee was allowed to go back to his prior home, so Tanzler and his fellow detainees were transported to the prisoner's exchange in Holland. Had not the war ended, Tanzler and Nyanatiloka Mahathera, a fully ordained Buddhist monk, planned to escape from Trail Bay Gaol in a sailboat the two were secretly constructing together (10).

Once released, Tanzler's mission was to locate his mother back in Germany to see if she had survived the war. Discovering his mother endured, harm-free, he stayed in Germany for three years, observing the bedlam that shadowed in the wake of the war. It was at this time, Tanzler's mother advised that he go to be with his sister in the United States (10). He did so, but not before marrying Doris Schäfer in 1920. Strangely, "Georg Karl Tänzler" was the name on the German marriage certificate, though "Georg" was never his given name. The pair had two daughters, Ayesha Tanzler and Clarista Tanzler (11).

Following his mother's recommendation, Tanzler took to the United States. By way of Havana, Cuba, Tanzler settled in Zephyrhills, Florida to join his sister, along with his wife and two daughters. This did not last long, as Tanzler had to leave his family in Northern Florida in order to take a position as a radiology technician, a occupation he had never even studied, in Southern Florida. He took the job at

the U.S. Marine Hospital in Key West, Florida under the unofficial pseudonym "Carl von Cosei", under the hoax that he was knowledgeable and experienced in the field of medicine. He managed to gain United States citizenship, and his citizenship papers (oddly enough), displayed his name as "Carl Tanzler von Cosei". Furthermore, his hospital records were signed "Count Carl Tanzler von Cosei", although he was never actually worthy of this European historical title of nobility. His youngest daughter, Clarista, then died of diphtheria (12).

#### TANZLER MEETS DE HOYOS

There is very little about Maria Elena Milagro de Hoyos' life that is known and recorded prior to her meeting Karl Tanzler. What can be verified is that her father was a cigar maker and she had two sisters named Celia and Florinda, the latter of the two sisters being the one to expose Tanzler's crimes later on. It is also verified that Cuban-born Maria Elena Milagro de Hoyos married Luiz Mesa in February of 1926, and was estranged from Mesa after moving to Miami after suffering a miscarriage with his child (13). It was around this time that tuberculosis was running rampant, not only throughout the United States, but throughout De Hoyos' family. Her brother-in-law had just succumbed to the illness, and she exhibited so many symptoms that her mother accompanied her to the U.S. Marine Hospital in Key West, Florida. The date was April 22, 1930. This marks the first time Tanzler laid eyes on De Hoyos. Convinced that De Hoyos' face was that of his true love, that of the striking brunette woman from the visions he experienced in his younger years shown to him in visions by the dead, supposed ancestor, Countess Anna (14). Tanzler's obsession with De Hoyos began immediately. What followed that momentous day in the U.S. Marine Hospital in Key West was not simply an examination and later diagnosis of tuberculosis, but a fixation and extraordinary crimes.

#### TANZLER'S ATTEMPTS TO KEEP DE HOYOS ALIVE

As time passed, De Hoyos lost the majority of her immediate family to tuberculosis, the most fatal of diseases during that decade. This did not deter Tanzler. He convinced De Hoyos' remaining family members to allow him to "treat" her where she lived in her parents' Key West home, assuring them of his "doctor" status. With his self-proclaimed medical training, he tried to remedy De Hoyos with a plethora of medications, the utilization of x-ray and other electrical contraptions, that he stole from the hospital and brought to her residence (13). In addition to her "treatment", Tanzler bombarded De Hoyos with presents including jewels and clothing. De Hoyos was very ill, and no proof was ever shown to indicate that any of his fondness was reciprocated (9). Although Tanzler was determined to cure De Hoyos, passed from tuberculosis mother and father's home in Key West on October 25, 1931 (12). Tanzler took it upon himself to foot the bill for De Hoyos' funeral with her family's consent. Also, with their consent, he paid for a mausoleum to be constructed for De Hoyos' body in the Key West Cemetery. Unbeknownst to De Hoyos' family, Tanzler held the only key to the tomb. Tanzler was seen visiting De Hoyos' gravesite every night, with the exception of only a few here and there for approximately two years' time (15).

#### THE BODY-SNATCHING AND BEYOND

By this time, DeHoyos' corpse was well into the final stage of decomposition, despite Tanzler's nightly efforts injecting her tissues with formaldehyde and applying oils to her ever-decaying skin (16). A cemetery setting does not provide the privacy and period required for him to preserve her body to the best of his ability, as visitors would enter at the gate's opening in the morning. In addition, after his arrest, Tanzler would report that De Hoyos's soul would come to him often as he sat in her mausoleum, requesting that he sing a favorite Spanish song to her corpse. He made mention, too, that "she would often tell him to take her from the grave" (12). So, he took her body home with him on an April evening in 1933. He transported her corpse by way of toy wagon from the crypt to his residence (16).

Tanzler was living out of a barn-like structure and utilized it triple-fold as his home, his laboratory, and his workshop. It was here that he brought De Hoyos's remains. He was terminated from his position at the U.S. Marine Hospital in Key West for obvious reasons, and his days and nights were free to tend to what he felt were the needs of De Hoyos's corpse. Tanzler began his reconstructive work immediately. He connected DeHoyos' bones to one another with piano wire and form-fitted glass doll's eyes into her orbits (eye sockets). Tanzler replaced DeHoyos' rotting surface flesh and skin with wax-soaked silk cloth and topped that foundational layer with plaster of Paris. Scalp decomposition and the falling out of DeHoyos' hair allowed for Tanzler to create a wig from her locks (16). Both DeHoyos' chest and abdominal cavities were stuffed with cloth rags, allowing the body to keep a form very similar to its original state during life. Tanzler, in addition, utilized profuse quantities of perfumed sprays, decontaminators, and protective tinctures to guise the wretched smells and stall the effects of the body's skeletonization any further. These were the findings of the two physicians, Dr. DePoo and Dr. Foraker, who upon Tanzler's arrest, attended the autopsy of DeHoyos'. In addition to these findings of attempted preservation and reconstruction, they noted "a makeshift vaginal tube had been inserted in the vaginal area of the corpse that allowed for intercourse" (16).

Tanzler managed to evade authorities for nearly a decade, as he lived with DeHoyos' corpse and slept with it in his bed for seven years. Tanzler treated DeHoyos' corpse as if it were a living being, clothing it in stockings, gloves, and dresses, and adorning it with jewelry. The time he did not spend with DeHoyos' body was spent perfecting the "spacecraft" he was building outside his home/laboratory/workshop which he called "Elena's Airship". His ultimate plan was to eventually launch DeHoyos' remains "high into the stratosphere so that radiation from outer space could penetrate her tissues and restore her life" (14). However, this plan never came to pass, as Tanzler was arrested prior to its completion. In addition, Tanzler was in no way, shape, or form, a molecular

physicist, a spacecraft engineer, or an astronaut, ensuring that this crude spacecraft would have never left the ground.

#### TANZLER'S DISCOVERY, ARREST, CHARGES, AND TRIAL

Tanzler no longer visiting DeHoyos' mausoleum for seven years, after having done so religiously for the first two years after her demise, seemed odd to neighbors of the cemetery. His absence from the graveyard was noted by Key West locals. However, what truly raised suspicion was a young, local boy who informed many Key West adults that he had seen Tanzler dancing in the window of his home/laboratory/workshop with a life-sized doll (16). In October of 1940, DeHoyos' sister, Florinda, became aware of the rumor. Then, so consumed with the local gossip regarding Tanzler disinterring her dear sister's body, she confronted him at his place of residence and forced her way inside. She found what she thought to be a life-sized doll of her sister's likeness. Disgusted, she called authorities (5). Upon their arrival and some investigative examination, the news was broken to Florinda that what she thought was a doll, was actually her sister (16).

Tanzler was promptly arrested and detained (18), and while he was held, DeHoyos' body was waked at Key West's Dean-Lopez Funeral Home, where the viewing was open to the public. The notoriety of the case brought forth approximately 6,800 people to pay their respects and to get a peek of Tanzler's handywork, as it was an open casket (9). The year was 1940, and the time period of Tanzler's arrest posed a problem with charging him with what would seem appropriate according to today's standards. Unfortunately, it was not until the very recent year of 2011 that the Florida State Senate passed a law against necrophilia. Today it reads as follows:

"872.06 Abuse of a dead human body

(1) As used in this section, the term "sexual abuse" means:

(a) Anal or vaginal penetration of a dead human body by the sexual organ of a person

- or by any other object;
- (b) Contact or union of the penis, vagina, or anus of a person with the mouth, penis, vagina, or anus of a dead human body; or
  - (c) Contact or union of a person's mouth with the penis, vagina, or anus of a dead human body.
- (2) A person who mutilates, commits sexual abuse upon, or otherwise grossly abuses a dead human body commits a felony of the second degree." (17)

As no specific laws forbidding necrophilia existed in the State of Florida in 1940, Tanzler was simply charged with "wantonly and maliciously destroying a grave and removing a body without authorization" (12), which was essentially the equivalent of a misdemeanor during that time period. His psychiatric exam resulted in deeming him mentally competent to stand trial. Again, the law remained in Tanzler's favor because at his preliminary hearing at the Monroe County Courthouse in Key West, Florida, his case was dropped and he was released on account of the crime's statute of limitations running out. Tanzler walked out of the courthouse, Scott-free in October of 1940, but not before asking the judge if he may, again, take possession of DeHoyos' corpse. His request was swiftly and abruptly denied (13).

### THE AFTERMATH

Largely because of Tanzler's appeal to the judge to yield illegal custody of DeHoyos' for a second time, her remains were, in due course, returned to the Key West Cemetery. However, this time they were buried in the ground in an unmarked grave, at a secret location, to deter additional meddling (12). There are no reports indicating any further grave tampering to date.

Once DeHoyos' corpse was buried at a site undisclosed to Tanzler, he utilized her death mask (which he made previously while her corpse was in his possession) to make a life-sized wax dummy of her. He lived with this effigy until he died July 3, 1952 at the age of seventy-five (9). At the time of his

death, Tanzler was still pining for DeHoyos, but was somehow being supported by his once-estranged wife, Doris. Tanzler's body was not discovered until three weeks after his demise.

### **SEEING 1940'S TANZLER THROUGH A 2022 LENS**

#### Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)

According to the DSM-5, "The case formulation... must involve a careful clinical history and concise summary of the social, psychological, and biological factors that may have contributed to developing a given mental disorder" (19). Number one, Tanzler was never a patient in a clinical, therapeutic, or forensic setting, so an exact post-mortem diagnosis was and is moot. Secondly, being that Tanzler is long deceased, an intensive qualitative interview with him is not even possible. All that can be utilized in categorizing his possible psychiatric disorders are recorded facts of the decades-old case and what little is known of his personal history. In addition, no official, on-the-record diagnoses could be made ethically and according to guidelines posthumously. Therefore, for purposes of this article, terms like "*it is likely* that Tanzler suffered from" or "*Tanzler may have suffered from*" will be used.

Under the umbrella of Trauma and Stressor-Related Disorders, it is more than likely that Tanzler suffered from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder – 309.81. After having been born into the hectic surroundings of Imperial Germany, forced to move from country to country during youth, imprisoned for years in a concentration camp while wondering if his mother had died in the midst of the war that took over his homeland, and later enduring the loss of his youngest daughter, Clarista, to diphtheria, it is sufficed to say that Tanzler likely suffered from PTSD. While no indications of PTSD have ever been noted with regard to Tanzler, even the strongest individuals would have exhibited some sort of symptoms after having gone through similar events. At the very least, he prospectively would have experienced Acute Stress Disorder – 308.3 after each of the distressing events named above.

Under the umbrella of Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders, it is fair to state that Tanzler may very well have suffered from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder – 300.3 in that his fanatical ways with DeHoyos persisted for years from the moment they crossed paths, and that his repetitive behaviors to tend to her (in life and death) never ceased. During her living years, Tanzler’s fixation was curing her. After her death, his fixation was preserving her. He ever went as far as to ensure future fixation by constructing Elena’s Airship which would’ve (in Tanzler’s mind) launched her into the cosmos.

Under the umbrella of Personality Disorders, specifically Cluster A, Tanzler may have suffered from Schizotypal Personality Disorder - 301.22. This is proposed due to his history of having “inappropriate feelings” (19) toward DeHoyos during her life and after her death, and his behaving “peculiarly or eccentrically” (19) by buying clothing and jewels for an inanimate corpse that he body-snatched. This is additionally proposed due to Tanzler’s “odd perceptual experiences and strange thinking” (19) in that he had visual hallucinations of a departed, assumed predecessor, Countess Anna, who showed him the face of his true love, a beautiful brown-haired woman (12). Also, the fact that Tanzler built Elena’s Airship to launch her corpse “high into the stratosphere so that radiation from outer space could penetrate her tissues and restore her life” (14), shows that he did possess “strange beliefs or magical thinking that influenced behavior and that was quite different from subcultural norms” (19). Based on documentation, Tanzler did indeed possess the five symptoms required in today’s standards for a diagnosis of Schizotypal Personality Disorder.

Under the umbrella of Personality Disorders, specifically Cluster B, Tanzler may have suffered from Narcissistic Personality Disorder, as the details of his case ensure that he met all criteria. He definitely “exaggerated achievements and had a grandiose sense of self-importance” (19) when passing himself off as both a count and a doctor when in reality he was not even qualified to hold the position of x-ray technician that he lied to acquire at the U.S. Marine Hospital in Key West. He was also “preoccupied with power” (19), believing he had the ability to cure Elena from Tuberculosis, an illness

that all other medical professionals of the time declared a disease of certain death. He was also preoccupied with “fantasies of ideal love” (19) as when he looked at DeHoyos’ putrefied corpse in his bed for seven years, he only saw her as the “beautiful and perfect love of his life” (12). Lastly, Tanzler showed a sense of entitlement, a lack of empathy, and was interpersonally exploitative when he deceived DeHoyos’ family into allowing him to have a mausoleum build for her. He did not take into account that her family may have wanted a key to the mausoleum. He did not take into account how they would feel when he disentombed her body. He truly believed it was his to take home with him.

Under the umbrella of Paraphilic Disorders, it is sufficed to say that Tanzler suffered from what is classified only as Other Specified Paraphilic Disorder in today’s DSM-5. Tanzler was a necrophile. His “frequent, intense, sexually arousing fantasies and behaviors” (19) toward DeHoyos’ corpse was evident. Dr. DePoo and Dr. Foraker, the team who autopsied DeHoyos described the “makeshift vaginal tube [which] had been inserted in the vaginal area of the corpse [as] worn and bacterium-riddled” (16).

#### Aggrawal’s Ten Tier Classification of Necrophiliacs Based on Increasing Severity of Disorder

After careful examination of the recorded history and documentation on Tanzler, it would be fair to say that if Aggrawal’s Ten Tier Classification system was brought forth in 1940, he would be classified as a Class II, which is categorized as the second to least severe group of necrophiles types. Class II necrophiles are grouped by Aggrawal as *Romantic Necrophiles*. More specifically, they are “bereaved people, who would mummify a [part of a] body of their recently departed loved ones, and keep it with them in order to get psychosexual stimulation, who would not show a similar interest in any other dead body, i.e. body of a person with whom they were not romantically involved in life” (7). While Tanzler was not actually romantically involved with DeHoyos during her life, he was indeed so within the confines of his own mind. In addition, there is no indication, to date, that Tanzler has ever shown any interest in sex with the dead prior to or after DeHoyos. This single, beloved victim concept is

synonymous with *Romantic Necrophiles* as a group. Tanzler would not fit into the remaining nine classes, as he was not a role player, not a mere fantasizer, not a tactile, not a fetishistic, not a mutilator, not an opportunist, not a regular, not an exclusive, and not a homicidal necrophile.

## CONCLUSION

At the very least, this article acts as a means by which to better understand the mind and behavior of a necrophile from the past with modern-day tools. Had the DSM-5 and Aggrawal's Ten Tier Classification been available in 1940, we social scientists could've easily diagnosed Tanzler and all of the comorbidity that came along with him. We could have collaborated on treatment plans, and even worked together on prevention strategies for Tanzler's future if he were to reach remission with regard to one or all of his disorders. But alas, we missed him by some decades. It is quite dismaying to know that timing truly is everything.

## GALLERY



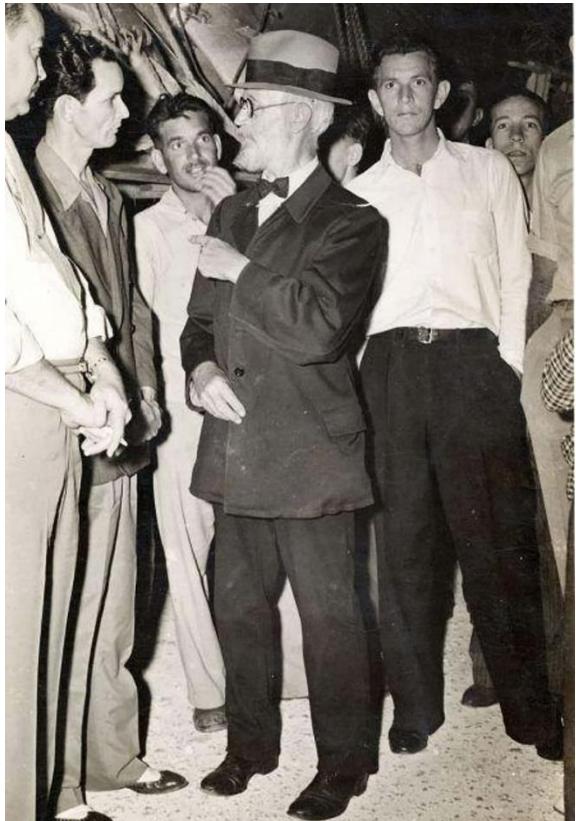
Maria Elena "Helen" Milagro de Hoyos prior to falling ill. Florida Keys Public Libraries.



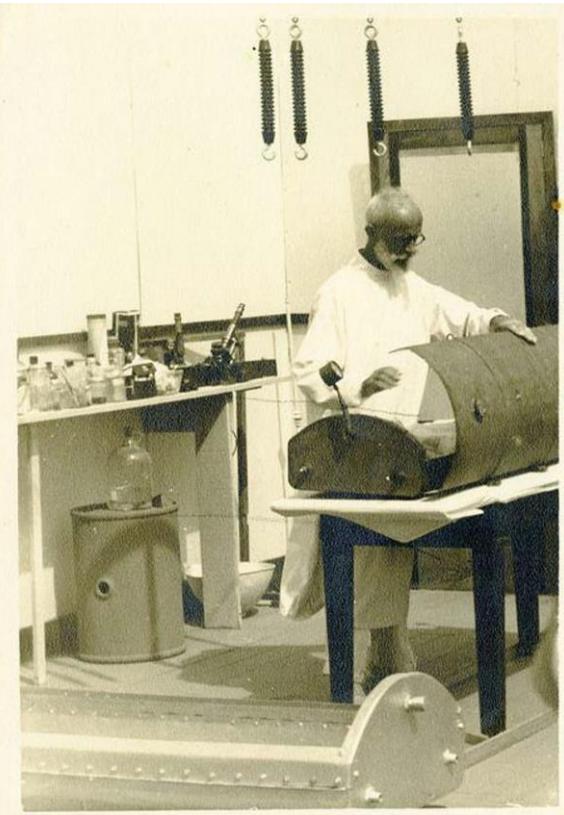
Maria Elena "Helen" Milagro de Hoyos photo (1) found in the possession of Tanzler. Florida Keys Public Libraries.



Maria Elena "Helen" Milagro de Hoyos photo (1) found in the possession of Tanzler. Florida Keys Public Libraries.



Carl Tanzler poses as count and physician. Florida Keys Public Libraries.



Carl Tanzler at work as a technician at the US Marine Hospital. Florida Keys Public Libraries.



Count Carl Tanzler von Cose at his home lab on Flagler Avenue. From the DeWolfe and Wood Collection in the Otto Hirzel Scrapbook.



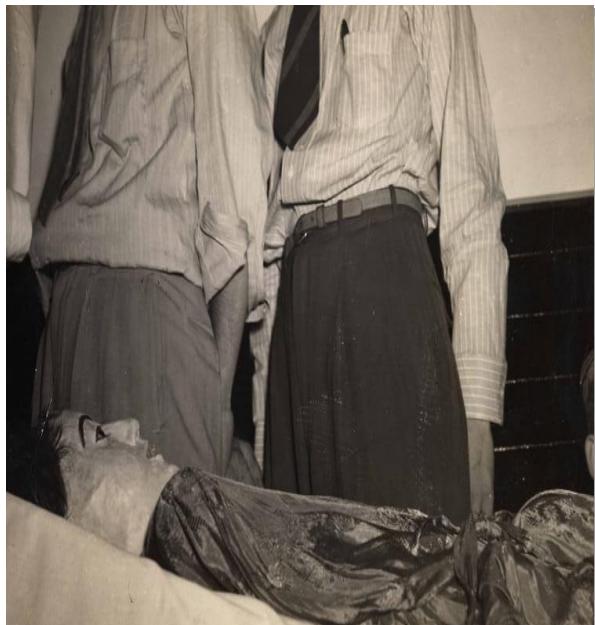
Mausoleum of Maria Elena "Helen" Milagro de Hoyos. Florida Keys Public Libraries.



Von Cose's Laboratory. Florida Keys Public Libraries.



Tanzler holds his de Hoyos death mask he molded from her head while the body was in his home. Florida Keys Public Libraries.



Authorities discover the stolen corpse of Maria Elena "Helen" Milagro de Hoyos. Florida Keys Public Libraries.



Dr. Foraker peels back layers of waxen silk and removes glass eye from during autopsy. Florida Keys Public Libraries.

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