The Bertillon System
Bertillon System

- Alphonse Bertillon, of Paris, France, used body measurements as a form of identification.
- This was the first scientific system of identification.
- Began around 1879
Anthropometry

- Anthropometry is based on the measurements of certain bony structures of the body that do not change after maturity.
The Bertillon measurements included:

1. Standing Height
2. Outstretched reach of both arms
Anthropometry

3. Trunk height
Anthropometry

4. Width of head
Anthropometry

5. Length of head
6. Length of right ear
Anthropometry

7. Width of right ear
8. Length of left foot
9. Length of left middle finger
10. Length of left little finger
11. Length of left forearm
Anthropometry

- The Bertillon measurements included:
  1. Standing Height
  2. Outstretched reach of both arms
  3. Trunk Height
  4. Width of head
  5. Length of Head
  6. Length of Right Ear
  7. Width of Right Ear
  8. Length of Left Foot
  9. Length of Left Middle Finger
  10. Length of Left Little Finger
  11. Length of Left Forearm
Bertillon Measurements

• System was used to identify people based on their individual measurements.
• Bertillon believed that no two people would have the same measurements.
• Cards were printed for each individual with their measurements and a fingerprint.
Possible Problems

- Relied upon the recorder being exact when making the measurements.
- If the recorder were tired or inattentive, measurements could fail to identify a person.
- Suspects who were drunk, ill, or uncooperative could result in inaccurate measurements.
The Bertillon system was used for over thirty years until approximately 1903.
The Will West case caused an upset in the system.
The West Case

- In 1903, a prisoner by the name of Will West was sentenced to incarceration at the United States Penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas.
- During his inprocessing, the records clerk obtained Will West’s Bertillon measurements and photograph.
Will West denied ever being incarcerated at the facility.
The records clerk doubted this information, and referenced his Bertillon measurements into the system, retrieving the Bertillon card for a William West.
The West Case Continued

• Will West continued to deny that the William West card was his.
• Subsequent investigation disclosed that William West was already incarcerated in the facility as of September 9, 1901, serving a life sentence.
The West Case Continued

- By examining the photographs, one can see the failure of the Bertillon system.
- Compare the Bertillon measurements in particular, keeping in mind the various factors that would affect the measurements.
- Recent opinions suggest that Will and William West were related, therefore the closeness in measurements, however this is not a definite fact.
Will & William West

Will West
178.5; 187.0; 91.2; 19.7; 15.8; 6.6; 28.2; 12.3; 9.7

William West
177.5; 188.0; 91.3; 19.8; 15.9; 14.8; 6.5; 27.5; 12.2; 9.6
The West Brothers
Now What???

- The failure in the system strengthened the science of fingerprints as the normally accepted method of personal identification.