

Royal Digits

Nicholas and Alexandra: the inside story

HOW DID the Historical Collection in Radiology at the Countway Library of Medicine come to include the x-rays shown here of a man with a cufflink and of a woman with three rings and two bracelets: the hands and wrists of Emperor Nicholas II, the last czar to rule over Russia, and of Empress Alexandra?

The late Lloyd E. Hawes '33, M.D. '37, curator of the collection, told the following sketchy tale of the x-rays in the July 1970 *Harvard Library Bulletin*. At a lecture, a friend slipped him a bit of folded blue paper with a name and address, saying, "You must visit her!" Three days later Hawes and his wife called on Lilly Elizabeth Hoffmann, a weaver in Hopkinton, New Hampshire. She gave the radiographs to Harvard in 1969. A label, in Russian, records that they were made by a Dr.

H. Horne on March 23, 1898, three years after W.C. Röntgen discovered x-rays.

While vacationing in Lapland, Miss Hoffmann had met Mrs. Horne. "She had carried the X-rays out of Czarist Russia,"

wrote Hawes, "and presented them to Miss Hoffmann. Mrs. Horne vividly recalled the details of the royal X-ray session. The Czar had commanded the Hornes to bring their apparatus into the

St. Petersburg palace to take one of the new X-ray photographs. The apparatus was heavy and bulky. The initial energy came from the palace's electrical system. The exposure must have been made at night, for the room was plunged into darkness when the apparatus was plugged in. In the dark Mrs. Horne bumped into the Czar and apologized profusely. The Czar remarked that he would help find the trouble, and that getting the power back on was more important than apologies. To develop the plates, a clothes closet may well have been used. It was

necessary to tilt the trays back and forth to wash the plates with the chemical solutions. Would any details of the royal skeletons appear?...What a catastrophe, if there had been no image...."

