

DNA Evidence and Crime-Solving

“DNA evidence leads to murder trial,” Courier Mail (Queensland, Australia) March 15, 2005.

Clive Anthony Nicholson has pleaded not guilty to murdering his wife, Julie Rose Nicholson, whose body has still not been recovered. DNA evidence from the couple’s daughter was used to identify blood stains in the couple’s room as that of Julie Nicholson. Clive Nicholson reportedly confessed to the murder in letters to the police.

“DNA Test Links Man to 1994 Kidnap, Rape,” The Boston Globe March 13, 2005.

State Police have solved a ten year old rape case after matching DNA from the crime to samples in the DNA database. Martin Lovato, 44, has been charged with six counts of rape, one count of kidnapping, and five counts of indecent assault.

“Nation in Brief,” The Washington Post March 13, 2005.

Investigators say that Bart A. Rose, 57, confessed to murdering the mother and husband of federal Judge Joan Lefkow in notes found in his van. Rose was also linked to the murders by DNA evidence found at the crime scene.

“DNA seals fate for sex offender,” The Press (Christchurch, New Zealand) March 17, 2005.

John Patrick Round, 42, was found guilty of sexual violation after sexually assaulting a sleeping 15-year-old girl. A DNA sample that was found on the girl led to the conviction.

“Folsom man sees tougher rape charge; New evidence prompts change,” Times-Picayune (New Orleans) March 17, 2005.

After new evidence was presented in the aggravated rape trial of a 82-year-old woman, Derrrick Garrett, 46, has been charged with the rape after retesting of the evidence showed the woman’s DNA in Garrett’s underwear.

“Grandson gets life in prison; the 24-year-old man is convicted of brutally killing his grandmother and stealing her car,” The Denver Post March 16, 2005.

Danny Pommerville, 24, has been convicted of first-degree murder in the beating death of his grandmother. Pommerville was connected to the crime through his DNA which was found on cigarette butts at the crime scene.

“In 4th Trial, Man Found Guilty In Firebombing,” Buffalo News (New York) March 11, 2005.

After three mistrials, Jimmy Hernandez, has been convicted of firebombing a couple’s home. Hernandez was convicted after police used DNA testing of Hernandez’s girlfriend to link him to the Molotov cocktails that were recovered from the fire.

Controversies Concerning DNA Databanks and Laboratories

“DNA lab forced to farm out tests,” Courier Mail (Queensland, Australia March 17, 2005.

In an effort to relieve the DNA backlog of testing, the John Tonge Centre will begin outsourcing 20,000 DNA cases that are property related. This reduction however, will not affect the backlog of drug cases that has embarrassed the state government.

“Lab accreditation vowed,” The Dallas Morning News March 17, 2005

Houston Police Department’s crime lab, excluding its DNA testing section, will most likely be accredited within the next 90 days according to HPD’s chief of Police, Harold Hurt.

“Lab delays prompt judge to throw out court cases,” Courier Mail (Queensland, Australia) March 16, 2005.

Due to the backlog of DNA testing at the John Tonge Centre, two accused drug offenders had their charges dropped. According to the magistrate, scientific testing had taken too long and accused criminals have a right to a speedy trial.

“HPD: Crime lab audit offers no surprises; Review of 280 boxes of evidence not thorough, attorneys say,” The Houston Chronicle March 11, 2005.

The cataloging of items in 280 boxes of evidence that was recently reviewed by the Houston Police Department and the Texas Rangers has been completed. Questions have arisen, however, regarding the thoroughness of the review. The evidence was only reviewed in cases where it was requested at trial, not in cases where the evidence may not have been known to exist at the time of trial. All the cases that involved capital murder evidence or post conviction DNA testing were referred to the Harris County District Attorney’s Office.

DNA Database Funding and Backlog

“Trial Logjam Plagues Court System State Problem Most Acute In Suffolk County,” The Boston Globe March 14, 2005.

In Suffolk County, the number of felony cases that take more than a year to go to trial has doubled since 2001. Two years ago in a study commissioned by Supreme Court Justice Margaret H. Marshall, the Massachusetts court system ranked among the slowest court systems in the country. The backlog has gotten worse due to a variety of reasons including the time it takes to analyze DNA evidence and poor oversight.

“DNA may solve 1996 killing; Detroit man will be arraigned in a Lathrup Village death after blood is analyzed,” The Detroit News March 17, 2005.

In a murder case that went unsolved for almost nine years, police now believe they have found the killer. Using DNA from blood found at the crime scene, police were able to match the sample through the DNA database to convicted felon Reginald Dale Light, 37, who has been charged with the crime. The delay in Light’s arrest was due in part to the massive DNA backlog of old cases because state police crime lab workers spend the majority of their efforts on current cases.

Expanding the DNA Databank

“EU pressed to agree on data storage rules,” Financial Times (London), England, March 16, 2005.

Interior ministers from France, Italy, Germany, the UK and Spain, have agreed to improve on the sharing of DNA, criminal records, fingerprints and other information on suspects.

DNA-based Post Conviction Challenges

“Pataskala Mom's Killing Takes Rocky Route to Trial; Man who recanted is scheduled to testify against man whose DNA was on knife,” Columbus Dispatch (Ohio) March 15, 2005.

Three years ago, Richard Nichols Robinson was convicted of murdering Rhonda Boggs after he confessed to the crime under interrogation. Robinson spent 10 months in prison before he recanted his confession and investigators uncovered DNA evidence from the crime that linked another man, Christopher Williams, to the murder. Williams has now been charged with the murder and Robinson exonerated.

“From Jail to Joy; a rape conviction put him in prison 24 years ago. DNA has set him free,” Times-Picayune (New Orleans) March 12, 2005.

The New York State Innocence Project has been working for the past 7 years to exonerate convicted rapist Michael Williams. This past week they finally succeeded and the now 40 year-old man who was sentenced to life behind bars when he was sixteen has been exonerated through DNA evidence.