

DNA Evidence and Crime-Solving

“Man, 50, is arrested in two-year series of arsons in the D.C. region; Break in case develops from DNA at fire in Va.” The Baltimore Sun April 28, 2005

Authorities arrested Thomas A. Sweatt yesterday for a series of arsons that have frightened people throughout the region since 2003. Police matched his DNA to evidence found at four fire scenes. Sweatt’s voluntarily provided DNA sample matched DNA from a strand of human hair found at a fire in Washington in September 2003, from fabric of a pant leg found at a Silver Spring fire in February 2004, from an athletic sock found at a D.C. fire last September and from Marine trousers found at the scene of a fire in Arlington, Va.

“Man pleads guilty in break-ins” The Boston Globe April 28, 2005

Anthony Webb, 34, pleaded guilty yesterday to charges that he broke into four convenience stores and an office building last year. In each case, Webb left blood as he broke glass to gain entry, and the blood was later linked to Webb through DNA tests.

“Cigarette butt led to arrest in Collman case; Documents reveal evidence in slaying” The Courier-Journal (Louisville, Kentucky) April 28, 2005

A discarded cigarette butt helped lead to the arrest earlier this month of Anthony Stockelman, 38, the man accused of sexually molesting 10-year-old Katie Collman. A court document released yesterday revealed that DNA found on the girl's body and on a cigarette butt at the scene matched Stockelman's DNA.

“Victims Never Saw the Rapist, But Some Clues Can't Be Hidden” The New York Times April 28, 2005

Fletcher A. Worrell has been linked by DNA sampling to 25 rapes in three states. In many of these cases, the victims could not describe the features of their assailant, but DNA technology that did not exist in 1973 when Mr. Worrell was first indicted for a rape in Manhattan has enabled authorities to link him to samples stored for up to 32 years.

“ ‘Spit kits’ nail two bus offenders” The Herald (Glasgow) April 27, 2005

Two passengers have been found guilty of assaulting a bus driver and a member of coach security staff, in separate incidents, following the use of DNA “spit kits.” The convictions are the first of their kind since the DNA sample kits were distributed among staff on First buses in Glasgow in September 2003.

“Killer tells why he left gran to die” Daily Telegraph (Sydney, Australia) April 23, 2005

Clarence Herman White has pleaded guilty to the murder of 81-year-old Phyllis O'Brien in her Blue Mountains home on August 29, 2003. The 35-year-old originally denied murder, but changed his plea when DNA evidence collected from a cigarette butt linked him to the crime.

“DNA match helps St. Louis police catch suspect in rape case; Detectives say they hope to link Texas man to second attack here.” St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri) April 23, 2005

DNA found on a rope used to tie up a woman who was severely beaten and sodomized was matched through CODIS, a national DNA database system, to Gus Grady. His DNA sample had been taken when he was an inmate in the Missouri prison system. Police are looking for a DNA link to connect Grady to another assault that occurred five days earlier.

“Man, 28, is charged with beating and killing woman” St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri) April 22, 2005

Wendell D. Adams, 28, was charged this week with first-degree murder in the death of Nadia Whitmore. The suspect's DNA was found on the victim, records show.

“Lawyers question DNA tactic; Subpoenas in Red Lake case are seeking samples from witnesses.” Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN) April 26, 2005

A federal grand jury in Minneapolis this month subpoenaed at least seven potential witnesses in the March 21 shooting at Red Lake High School and asked some for a sample of genetic evidence. Several attorneys have questioned whether it is an appropriate use of a grand jury's investigative powers, arguing that prosecutors in the Red Lake case should seek a search warrant to get any DNA evidence.

DNA Database Funding and Backlog

“DNA test backlog worsens in Mass. DAS blame new US rule” The Boston Globe April 23, 2005

The backlog for testing DNA samples at the State Police Crime Laboratory has doubled in the last few months due to a new requirement that the DNA from convicted felons in Massachusetts be tested twice before it is submitted to the FBI's national data base. The lab test for an individual DNA sample can take six to eight weeks, but since the new requirement took effect it takes 15 months on average for a DNA sample to come back from the lab

Expanding the DNA Databank

“YIES; Top cop tells conference NPA to create DNA database” The Daily Yomiuri (Tokyo) April 28, 2005

In a move to improve public safety, the National Police Agency will start collecting DNA samples from criminal suspects upon gaining court permission and entering them into a database. In December, the agency started collecting DNA information obtained from blood and other bodily substances recovered from crime scenes. However, the agency has not yet stored information on the DNA of suspects because it is considered private information.

“Escape accused wants DNA samples destroyed” The Dominion Post (Wellington, New Zealand) April 27, 2005

Alleged escaper Arthur William Taylor, 48, appeared in the High Court at Wellington yesterday, asking for his DNA samples to be destroyed because they were unlawfully obtained. The order forcing Taylor to provide DNA was not served till four months after he was convicted for theft. His lawyer Mark Lillico said the law required compulsory DNA orders to be served as soon as reasonably practical after an offender was convicted.

“Missouri is now taking DNA samples from all felons; It may take years to complete the process, but law enforcement officers and prosecutors expect a payoff in years to come.” St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri) April 23, 2005

In Missouri's new effort to collect DNA samples from all felons, state lab officials already have had 16 "hits" in a database of unsolved crimes since Jan. 1. Illinois expanded its DNA testing to cover felons in August 2002.

DNA-based Post Conviction Challenges

“DNA Clears Murder Convict, Defense Says” The New York Times April 28, 2005

DNA tests of evidence from a murder in New Jersey more than 17 years ago show that Larry Peterson, who has been in prison serving out a life sentence since 1987, was not connected to the evidence. Peterson had demanded DNA testing of the evidence for 10 years. Tests of semen and other evidence showed that it was from an "unknown male," while hair samples belonged to the victim. If the court overturns the conviction and prosecutors choose not to retry him, Mr. Peterson, 54, will be the first homicide defendant in New Jersey to be cleared by DNA evidence.

“Case a new test for project; For first time, group that freed 2 will go to trial in bid to prove man's innocence” Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (Wisconsin) April 25, 2005

Evan Zimmerman, a former police officer who was convicted for the 2000 killing of his ex-girlfriend, goes on trial again today. The Wisconsin Innocence Project has taken on his case, as his conviction was based mostly on circumstantial evidence. His attorney had failed to tell the jury about DNA from hairs found on the victim's clothing, as well as scrapings from her fingernails, that did not match Zimmerman.

“Death row inmate denied new trial in slaying of 4; More appeals seen in '83 hatchet case” The San Diego Union-Tribune April 23, 2005

A San Diego federal judge rejected death row inmate Kevin Cooper's bid for a new trial yesterday. Cooper was to be executed for murdering three members of the Ryen family and a family friend when a federal appeals court ordered additional testing. Cooper's lawyers argued that hair found in one of the victim's hands came from a stranger and that blood found on a shirt was planted by police. DNA testing found that the hair belonged to members of the Ryen family.

“Man wrongfully convicted of rape feels "cheated" out of his life” St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri) April 23, 2005

Anthony Woods, 42, was exonerated Thursday, more than 21 1/2 years after being arrested on suspicion of raping a 15-year-old girl at knifepoint near her home in St. Louis. Woods was cleared after it was determined that Woods' DNA did not match a DNA sample from semen taken from the victim in 1983. The exoneration makes Woods the first person eligible to collect under a state law that calls for \$50 a day compensation for an inmate cleared by DNA.