

DNA Current News, July 8–14, 2005
Compiled by Julie Park

DNA Evidence and Crime-Solving

“Suspect in rapes hangs self in Boulder jail; Bradford Wagner, charged in a series of 1990s rapes after a DNA match, was scheduled for a court hearing today.” The Denver Post, July 14, 2005

Bradford Wagner, 37, a suspected serial rapist, hanged himself Wednesday in the Boulder County Jail, a day before a scheduled court hearing related to his criminal case. Wagner was accused last year of committing at least four rapes in Boulder. Boulder police used databases of property owners and other public records to find people who lived in three of the places where the assaults occurred, which led them to Wagner. An undercover detective arranged a business meeting with Wagner and obtained DNA samples from a handshake, the handlebars on his bicycle, a door handle on his car and the front doorknob at his home.

“Stalker in the City; Police Task Force Are Hunting for a Suspect Which DNA Has Connected to at Least Five Sex Offences” The Toronto Sun, July 10, 2005

Peel Regional police are searching for a sex offender who remains at large and is believed to be in Brampton. DNA evidence has linked the suspect to three indecent acts and two sexual assaults between 2001 and February of this year. Two months ago Peel police did a large-scale canvas of certain Brampton neighbourhoods and eliminated approximately 1000 persons of interest. Officers are now focusing on getting DNA samples from specific individuals and are not conducting any more sweeps.

“Law & Order” Tampa Tribune (Florida), July 9, 2005

A DNA match led to the arrest of a Plant City man in connection with a burglary committed eight months ago. Clifford Wise, 19, of 2206 N. Merrin St., was arrested after blood from the burglary scene was identified by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. He was charged with armed burglary, grand theft firearms, being a felon in possession of a firearm, criminal mischief and resisting arrest.

“Ex-Cab Driver Guilty of Killing Woman, 86” Columbus Dispatch (Ohio), July 8, 2005, Home Final Edition

Roland Davis was found guilty of aggravated murder and four other felonies yesterday in connection with the murder of 86-year-old Elizabeth Sheeler in her Newark apartment five years

ago. A grand jury had indicted Davis in September after his DNA was linked to Sheeler's slaying.

“Serial Rape Suspect Is Busted” Daily News (New York), July 8, 2005

An ex-con suspected of being the "Spider-Man rapist" who terrorized Manhattan women was arrested yesterday, cops said. Reginald Swinton, a 49-year-old from Harlem, was linked to the crimes after a palm print and DNA evidence linked him to three attacks in Manhattan last month, police said.

DNA Database Funding and Backlog

“New DNA testing lab expects to be busy; Private venture is state-of-the-art, will help public labs meet growing demand for analyses.” The Indianapolis Star (Indiana), July 11, 2005

Scott Newman, a former Marion County prosecutor, and Mohammad A. Tahir, a former leader at the local crime lab, will officially open their private DNA testing laboratory in Indianapolis this month. The grand opening of Strand Analytical Laboratories will be held on July 21. Experts say the private lab, which would be the first of its kind in Indiana, could help address the problem of the county's current backlog of 111 DNA tests.

Expanding the DNA Databank

“Chuck Wants National Perv Registry” Daily News (New York), July 11, 2005

Senator Chuck Schumer is backing legislation to create a national sex-offender registry that would track convicts using DNA - and calls for up to five years in prison if they fail to sign up. Schumer said state registries are inadequate, citing a man who became a foster parent in upstate New York despite being convicted of the statutory rape of a 16-year-old in Oregon. The national registry, proposed by Sens. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and Joseph Biden (D-Del.), also would contain a DNA database of offenders, but would not replace state registries and would not be accessible to the public.

DNA-based Post Conviction Challenges

“Justices order new trial for man convicted of 1980 rape, homicide; DNA evidence is key in court's 4-3 decision” Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (Wisconsin), July 13, 2005

On Tuesday, Wisconsin's Supreme Court voted 4-3 to overturn convictions in a 1981 Madison rape and homicide case, ordering that Ralph Armstrong get a new trial in the brutal June 1980 slaying of 19-year-old University of Wisconsin-Madison student Charise Kamps, whose body was found naked in bed in her apartment. Prosecutors had presented as evidence hair and semen found at the scene, but later DNA tests showed that neither was from Armstrong.

“Reopening Griffin case may sway debate over executions” St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri), July 13, 2005

On Tuesday a new report was released saying Larry Griffin was innocent of the drive-by shooting of Quintin Moss for which Griffin was executed 10 years ago. The report raised enough questions to persuade Circuit Attorney Jennifer Joyce to reopen the investigation. Although it will be months before she can issue findings, death penalty opponents are expected to raise Griffin's execution in arguments against capital punishment.

“Your Government; At the Courthouse; Court ruling may make getting DNA tests easier Local lawyers say recent case points to change” The Houston Chronicle, July 08, 2005

Last week, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals ruled that convicted killer Charles Raby, who confessed to murder, must be allowed to have tests done on clothing and other physical evidence found at the scene of the October 1991 stabbing death of 72-year-old Edna Franklin in her north Houston home. Sarah Frazier, one of Raby's pro bono attorneys, says last week's decision was the first time the Court of Criminal Appeals, the state's highest criminal court, has reversed a decision by a lower court in a question of post-conviction DNA testing.

DNA Evidence and Sentencing

“Critics say bill would limit court access to innocent” St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri), July 14, 2005

Opponents of a bill to streamline federal review of death penalty cases told the Senate Judiciary Committee on Wednesday that the measure fails to adequately guarantee a hearing for individuals with evidence of actual innocence. Supporters of the bill, sponsored by Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., said long delays between convictions and executions remain the norm, despite streamlining provisions Congress enacted in 1996. Seth B. Waxman, former U.S. solicitor general, cited four death-penalty cases since 2002 in which the Supreme Court had found serious constitutional violations that had been overlooked by state courts. Had the proposed law been in place, he warned, none of those four cases would have gotten to federal court.

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“Va. Man Granted Stay of Execution; High Court Agrees To Consider Case” The Washington Post, July 12, 2005

Virginia death row inmate Robin Lovitt was given a reprieve yesterday by the U.S. Supreme Court, just 41/2 hours before his scheduled execution. His sentence has been stayed until the fall, when the Court consider whether his case deserves a hearing on its merits. Lovitt's case had

raised unusual legal questions regarding capital punishment; four years ago, a court clerk mistakenly destroyed nearly all the evidence from his trial, including DNA from the pair of scissors that was used to kill Arlington pool hall manager Clayton Dicks, 45, in a robbery there in 1998.