

Concluding Report IAI Standardization Committee

By virtue of a Resolution unanimously adopted at the 55th Annual Conference of the International Association for Identification at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in July of 1970, a Standardization Committee was appointed and was assigned two specific tasks: (1) To determine the minimum number of friction ridge characteristics which must be present in two impressions in order to establish positive identification, and (2) To recommend the minimum requirements of training and experience which a person must possess in order to be considered qualified to give testimony on friction ridge impressions before a grand jury or court of law.

Agreement was reached among the members of the Committee that attention would initially be given to the first of the tasks enumerated above. Interim reports were presented to the delegates at the Annual Conferences in 1971 and 1972, and a final report with respect to task #1 was presented in 1973 and was unanimously approved. The critical portion of that report, which subsequently received world-wide attention in the criminal justice field, read as follows:

"The International Association for Identification, assembled in its 58th Annual Conference at Jackson, Wyoming, this First Day of August, 1973, based upon a three-year study by its Standardization Committee, hereby states that no valid basis exists at this time for requiring that a pre-determined minimum number of friction ridge characteristics must be present in two impressions in order to establish positive identification. The foregoing reference to friction ridge characteristics applies equally to fingerprints, palm prints, toe prints and sole prints of the human body."

An analysis of the foregoing statement shows that the Standardization Committee, after extensive research over a period of three years, came to the conclusion that it was impractical to establish any set minimum as regards the number of matching ridge characteristics that must be present before testifying as to a positive identification of two impressions. Although this might be interpreted as a negative position . . . and certainly a position contradictory to the conventional attitude taken in some political entities that a minimum of at least 10 or 12 matching characteristics must be clearly definable before identification can be established . . . the value of the statement rests in the fact that a positive position had finally been adopted by the International Association for Identification and could be reliably quoted by an expert witness when giving testimony in the future. In short, the

I. A. I. adopted the position that each identification represents a unique set of circumstances, and the number of required matching characteristics is dependent upon a variety of conditions which automatically rule out the practicality of mandating a pre-determined minimum.

Having completed the first task assigned in 1970, the Committee immediately turned its attention to the feasibility of recommending minimum requirements of training and experience which an examiner should possess in order to be considered qualified to give testimony on friction ridge impressions.

The Committee felt that a comprehensive survey should be made of identification agencies throughout the world in order to determine (1) whether any laws or local regulations might exist in any jurisdiction which mandate the amount of training and experience which an examiner must possess, and (2) assuming that there is no such legal requirement, whether any strict departmental policies exist regarding the qualifications which an examiner must have before being permitted to give latent print testimony. In the event that training and experience requirements were not controlled by law, local regulations or departmental policy, the agencies surveyed were requested to advise the Committee as to the amount and type of training and experience which they believed an examiner should have before being allowed to give testimony.

Survey questionnaires were sent to a total of 111 local, state, provincial and national identification agencies throughout the world. Responses were received from 76 agencies, or 68% of those surveyed. Copies of all responses were made available to each member of the Standardization Committee for analysis and review.

The replies that were received indicated that (1) none of the responding agencies operate under any **law or local regulation** which stipulates the amount of training or experience which a person must have before being permitted to give testimony concerning friction ridge impressions; (2) although many agencies do have a definite policy regarding the amount of training or experience required, there is great diversity among such agencies, and (3) as regards those agencies that do not have a definite policy at the present time, there is an equally great diversity in the opinions of the respondents as to what amount and type of training an examiner should possess before being allowed to testify.

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The presentation of friction ridge evidence in court, whether it pertains to fingerprints, palm prints, toe prints or sole prints, is a vital and significant part of the criminal justice system. The value of such evidence quite obviously suffers if persons not adequately versed in the identification profession are permitted to testify. Several instances that have been brought to the attention of our members in recent years have quite clearly demonstrated the inherent dangers that are involved when totally unqualified individuals are allowed to present friction ridge evidence, or are permitted to assume the role of an expert in attempting to discredit valid technical evidence presented by a qualified examiner.

Although the establishing of definite minimum standards of training and experience would perhaps eliminate this danger to some degree, the Committee is constrained to recommend, based upon a careful study and review of existing practices, that the setting of such minimum standards at this time would be impractical.

While refraining from recommending precise minimum standards, and while recognizing the fact that whether an individual is qualified to provide expert testimony is a matter solely within the jurisdiction of the courts to determine, the Standardization Committee of the I. A. I. hereby endorses the belief that the value of friction ridge testimony would be greatly enhanced if all departments developed minimum standards with regard to the training and experience needed by their personnel prior to the presentation of friction ridge testimony. These standards should provide for, but not necessarily be limited to (a) minimum educational requirements, (b) formalized training and practical experience in the classifying and searching of fingerprints, and in developing, photographing, lifting, comparing and charting of latent impressions, (c) satisfactory completion of one or more recognized courses of instruction in the theory and techniques of friction ridge identification and, when economically feasible, membership and active participation in local, state and worldwide professional identification associations, (d) familiarization with approved texts on the subject of identification and (e) a proven and demonstrated aptitude to participate in latent print work.

In making the foregoing recommendations with respect to the minimum standards to be developed by all departments, the Standardization Committee recognizes full well that the amount of practical training

and experience will necessarily vary among different departments, the scope of its identification files, the volume of latent print work, and the availability of qualified instructors and trained supervisory personnel. The fact remains, however, that, in the opinion of the Committee, the minimum standards as recommended above are both practical and attainable by a vast majority of the law enforcement agencies throughout the world.

With this report the Committee concludes the specific tasks assigned to it via the Resolution of 1970. Sincere appreciation is extended to those agencies and individuals who responded to the survey questionnaires, and most particularly to those officials who supplemented their responses with personal comments that provided invaluable assistance and guidance to the members of the Committee in reaching the conclusions expressed in this report.

Signed by the members of the Standardization Committee of the International Association for Identification:

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