

# 100 MOMENTS

## IOWA CRIMINALISTICS LABORATORY

By Bruce Reeve (1995-current)

The Iowa Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) was conducting forensic lab work as far back as the 1920s, however, the BCI Criminalistics Laboratory wasn't officially created by statute until July of 1969, and funding enabling the implementation of the laboratory was not obtained until July 1970. Laboratory Administrator Mike Rehberg and two chemists were added in early 1971 to an existing cadre of three special agents – creating the nucleus of the first BCI Criminalistics Laboratory. Three special agents from the BCI performed analyses in document examination, latent impression analysis, forensic photography, firearms/tool marks identification, and crime scene investigation.

The chemists began work in street drugs, crime scenes, trace evidence, serology and blood alcohol. The laboratory was created in response to a need for forensic science services in the state of Iowa and was started as the result of the diligent work of the director of the BCI, Mr. Robert Blair. It was placed in the Department of Public Safety by Governor Robert Ray.



THE FOUR LAB ADMINISTRATORS: (L-R)  
BRUCE REEVE, MICHAEL REHBERG,  
JERRY BROWN, DARWIN CHAPMAN

By 1972, we had a multi-service laboratory in the State Archives Building. The laboratory staff, which then numbered eight, was performing forensic analysis in all of the specialties noted previously, as well as forensic serology, urine alcohol and toxicology. The laboratory grew, not only in physical size (from 4,000 square feet to 9,000 square feet) but in personnel size as well (from 8 to 15 staff members). By 1977, the laboratory could truly be called a “full-service crime laboratory”, performing all kinds of forensic science. To the specialties noted above,

there had been added evidential breath testing, expanded forensic serology and trace evidence analysis, and the maintenance of a 3,000 gun firearms reference file.

In May of 1978, a new Division of Criminal Investigation Laboratory was completed in the Wallace State Office Building. This laboratory had 10,000 square feet and a staff of 22. It was a full-service crime laboratory, which outgrew this floor space in the first five years.

The BCI was consolidated with other plain-clothes police investigative services in 1977 and named the Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI). In the 30 years since it was implemented, the laboratory's operating budget had grown from approximately \$150,000 per year to \$3.2 million per year. Space in the Wallace Building was expanded to approximately 16,000 square feet.

On September 10, 2000, the laboratory was accredited by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors, Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD/LAB), the 232nd laboratory to receive this honor. The laboratory has continuously retained accreditation which has since transitioned to an international program based on ISO 17025 standards and is now administered by ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB).

By this time, services had been added that included DNA profiling, DNA databasing (CODIS), firearms computer search (NIBIN), computer crime investigation, computer evidence tracking (CRIMES), forensic education support for the criminal justice system (CJS) and

the new Datamaster cdm evidential breath program (EBT).

By 2001, the staff of the laboratory had grown to 55, including a lab administrator, 4 criminalist supervisors, 35 criminalists, 5 evidence technicians, 4 crime scene technicians and 2 photographers. Half of the lab was moved into a rental space for the next five years. This facility was called the SLAB (South Lab) as it was located on the south side of Des Moines.

With laboratory space becoming a severe challenge, in the early 2000s under the direction of DCI Director Darwin Chapman, Laboratory Administrator Jerry Brown and others, planning was renewed on a new DCI laboratory facility. This later became a more expansive state laboratory complex to include the DCI Criminalistics Laboratory, the Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner, the State Hygienic Laboratory, and the Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship Laboratory. The complex was to be located on the Des Moines Area Community College campus in Ankeny. A groundbreaking ceremony for the new complex was held on July 29th, 2002.

The Iowa Laboratories Facility was substantially completed by the end of February 2005. The complex consists of approximately 175,000 square feet of space and was built with a total cost of \$51.8 million dollars. The staff of the DCI Criminalistics Laboratory was the first to move into our space in the complex which consists of approximately 56,700 square feet (gross) on two levels. In addition to the laboratory structure, the building budget included funding for the replacement of older

instrumentation with the latest technology available. With substantial completion accomplished and building security systems operational, the DCI Criminalistics Laboratory moved into our new state-of-the-art forensics laboratory in March of 2005.



1 OF 686: THE DCI CRIME LAB IS ONE OF 686 ASCLAD LABS IN THE WORLD

Today, the laboratory looks much the same as it did in 2005. Since that time there have continued to be rapid advancements in forensic science requiring us to keep up with the latest in scientific instrumentation, equipment and training. The DCI Criminalistics Laboratory now has a total staffing level of sixty-four dedicated individuals who serve the positions of criminalists, forensic science technicians, evidence technicians, clerk specialists, supervisors, and administrators in our efforts to provide the highest quality forensic science service. The Laboratory provides laboratory services and expert testimony in the following areas: trace evidence analysis, fire and explosives analysis, impression evidence examination, questioned documents examination, breath alcohol, toxicology analysis, drug identification chemistry, DNA analysis, firearms and tool

mark examination, photography, crime scene processing and evidence room processing. In the calendar year, 2020 the DCI Criminalistics Laboratory received 18,322 case assignments and completed 19,726 case assignments in support of Iowa's criminal justice community.