We have finished our first complete academic year at the Mount Vernon campus. On the whole, things have gone well. We share laboratory space in the Acheson Science Center with chemistry, biology and geography. We are able to schedule laboratory work mornings and afternoons two days a week and in the late afternoon the rest of the week. We have benefitted from having all forensic science classes in two adjacent buildings — rather than spread out in Foggy Bottom from E Street to K Street. There are still some challenges ahead of us: Next academic year our courses will have to comply with the Mount Vernon time bands which have evening classes running 6:10 to 8:00 pm and 8:00 pm to 9:50 pm.

Ted Robinson has been able to work out an MOU between the University and the Office of the DC Medical Examiner. According to this MOU, sections of ForS 256: Forensic Pathology will be taught at the DC Medical Examiner’s office by Dr. Marie-Lydie Pierre-Louis and her staff of pathologists.

The Dean of the Columbian College was able to procure two tenure track positions for the department: an associate or full professor to serve as department chair and an assistant professor with a background in forensic molecular biology. The faculty search for a department chair was unsuccessful this academic year but may be reinstated in the near future. The closing date for applications for the assistant professor position was May 17th and the faculty search committee has begun to evaluate applications. Hopefully, the search will be completed before the start of the Fall 2010 semester.

The Department submitted its application for Forensic Education Program Accreditation Commission (FEPAC) accreditation in February. When the application is accepted the Department will have to submit a self-study and have a site visit. We have already completed most of the self-study. In order to meet FEPAC requirements, the Department has also made a number of changes to the programs of study of the on-campus concentrations. All students will be required to conduct an independent research project. This project

Chair’s Column: Our First Year at The Mount Vernon Campus

Dr. Walter Rowe, Chair, Forensic Sciences

The Department submitted its application for Forensic Education Program Accreditation Commission (FEPAC) accreditation in February.
Chair’s Column, cont’

may be a research project completed as a thesis, as a ForS 295 project or as a part of one of the non-law courses. All research projects which students want to be considered as satisfying the independent research project requirement will be evaluated by a committee of the full-time faculty. A new course, ForS 292: Graduate Seminar, has also been instituted. All students will be required to take ForS 292 twice during their degree program: In their first semester and at the end of their degree program. The graduate seminar will introduce the students to the scientific method and critical thinking in science, to ethics in forensic science and to the professional literature in forensic science and crime scene investigation. When students at the end of their degree programs take the graduate seminar they will take the data from their independent research project and prepare a manuscript for publication; they will also prepare and deliver a PowerPoint presentation on their research. All of these changes have been approved by the Dean’s office and the Office of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs; they will take effect in Fall 2010.

Student News:
Leo Rancier, Security Management, received a the Marvin C. Beasley, CPP Memorial Scholarship, from the National Capital Chapter of the American Society of Industrial Security, International (ASIS).

Heather Charron, Crime Scene Investigations, and our new President of the AFSS, was been awarded a $1000 scholarship from the Association of Firearms and Toolmark Examiners (AFTE)

Faculty News

Professor Walter Rowe

In February, Professor Rowe attended the annual meetings of the ASTM Committee E30 and the American Academy of Forensic Sciences in Seattle, Washington. He gave two papers: “The Implications of the National Research Council’s Report Strengthening Forensic Science In The United States: A Path Forward for Graduate Forensic Science Degree Programs” and “Where There’s a Will There’s a Way: The Howland Will Case,” a paper in the Last Word Society session. The Howland Will case was discussed in an earlier newsletter. In April Professor Rowe was an invited speaker at the 4th International Conference of the Egyptian Forensic Medicine Authority, which was held in Cairo. He gave two presentations: “Current State of Forensic Science in the United States” and “Chemometrics in Forensic Science.” In May Professor Rowe gave a paper entitled “Statistics and Probability in Forensic Science” at the annual meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Association of Forensic Scientists at State College, Pennsylvania.

Professor Moses Schanfield

Dr. Schanfield received a CCAS faculty grant. He also presented two posters at the American Association of Physical Anthropology meeting in Albuquerque.

Alumni News:

John Crews (MS, ’00), who took a number of the Department’s courses as a part of his master’s degree in genetics, was the subject of a profile in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences Newsletter (“For War Victims, GW Alumnus Finds Missing Pieces of the Puzzle”). John is chief of forensic genetics and laboratory director of the Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala.


Wesley P. Grose (MFS, 1984) was just elected President of the California Association of Crime Laboratory Directors.

Bobbie (BJ) Spamer (MS, ’04) one of our CSI graduates, is now Program Manager - Unidentified Persons at University of North Texas Center for Human Identification.
The Psychic Detective versus The Forensic Scientists: Peter Hurkos, Psychic Detective

In his day, Peter Hurkos was as well known a psychic as Uri Geller and John Edward are now. In the 1950s and 60s he frequently appeared on TV shows where he liked to perform his signature shtick: Starting stopped wrist watches by thought projection (a mentalist trick which digital timepieces have somehow rendered obsolete). Hurkos claimed that his psychic powers originated with a head injury due to a fall from a ladder when he was working as a housepainter in Holland before World War II. During the war his reputation as a psychic grew when he was imprisoned by the Nazis. He supposedly astonished his fellow prisoners by accurately predicting their fates. After the war Hurkos abandoned his career as a housepainter for the more exciting world of entertainment and psychic detection. At one time he claimed to have solved twenty-seven murders in seventeen countries. Among the famous crimes he claimed to have solved were the theft of the Stone of Scone, the Boston Strangler murders, the Manson Family murders and the Michigan Coed murders. However, for his biographer Norma Lee Browning Hurkos’s greatest triumph as a psychic detective came in the Jackson Family Murder Case. This case pitted Hurkos’s paranormal abilities against the skill and determination of forensic scientists at the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The Crime

On January 11, 1959, Carroll V. Jackson, his wife Mildred and their two young children, Susan Ann (five years old) and Janet (eighteen months old) disappeared from Louisa County, Virginia. According to press accounts, they were returning to their home in Apple Grove, Virginia, after a visit to Carroll Jackson’s parents in Buckner, Virginia. The trip should have taken only half an hour but the Jacksons never arrived. The next day a relative searching for the missing family found their abandoned car on Virginia Route 609 near Buckner.

A police search for the missing family turned up nothing. Speculation about their fate filled newspapers in Virginia and Washington, DC. For example, the March 4, 1959, edition of the Washington Evening Star reported that the Virginia State Police had received an anonymous letter claiming that the Jacksons were still alive. Unfortunately, this letter was quickly shown to be a hoax. The next day newspaper headlines announced that the bodies of Carroll Jackson and his daughter Janet had been found roughly a mile and a half west of Fredericksburg, Virginia, near the site of an abandoned sawmill. The father had been clubbed with a pistol and then shot to death. The blow struck with the pistol had been so hard that its grips had broken off. The grips were found by a member of the Fredericksburg Rescue Squad and turned over to police. Because of the advanced state of decomposition of both bodies it was impossible to determine the child’s cause of death: She had either been smothered by the weight of her father’s body or had died of exposure.

Further bad news was in store. On March 22 the bodies of Mildred and Susan Ann Jackson were found in a shallow grave near Gambrills, Maryland, a crossroads hamlet northeast of Washington, between Fort Meade and Annapolis. According Maryland Medical Examiner Russell Fisher, Mildred Jackson had been severely beaten; Susan Ann had suffered a fractured skull. Although there was a stocking wrapped around Mrs. Jackson’s neck, she had probably died as a result of strangling on her own blood. Ironically, mother and daughter were buried near the site of another abandoned sawmill. Police investigators would fruitlessly search for sawmill workers who had worked at both sawmills. A former sawmill worker would make a false confession to authorities.

An ultimately more fruitful line of investigation would develop when police investigators saw a possible link between the murders of the Jackson family and the murder of Mrs. Margaret Harold in 1957. Mrs. Harold and Army Master Sergeant Roy D. Hudson were parked on a rural road a short distance from the future site of the grave of Mildred and Susan Ann Jackson when a bushy-browed white man confronted them with a gun. When the assailant tried to force the couple into the back seat of their car his pistol accidentally discharged, the bullet striking Mrs. Harold in the head and killing her instantly. Sgt. Hudson bolted for safety and succeeded in making good his escape. Police made a thorough search of the crime scene and its environs. In the basement of a cinderblock shanty nearby they found a collection of photographs of semi-nude women and clippings of magazine articles about sex crimes.

A Washington-area task force was formed by police
from Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia to solve the murders of the Jackson family. Within days of the discovery of the bodies of Mrs. Jackson and her daughter, law enforcement authorities advanced the theory that the murderer of the Jackson family was responsible for five other murders in the Washington, DC, area: The Harold murder, the murders of two teenage girls who were abducted together in Beltsville, Maryland in 1956 and the sniper shooting of two teenage girls in a Maryland park in 1955. Despite the efforts of this task force and of Federal law enforcement agencies, months passed without an arrest.

Peter Hurkos Comes to Town

Early in June 1960 a local psychiatrist, Dr. F. Regis Riesenman, hired Peter Hurkos (who was then living in Miami) to come to Washington to solve the Jackson family murders. Dr. Riesenman was a staff psychiatrist at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in the District of Columbia; he had had a long-standing interest in paranormal phenomena. In company with Dr. Riesenman and Virginia State Police investigators, Hurkos made a whirlwind tour of locations associated with the murders: The graves of the family in Apple Grove, the sites in Virginia and Maryland where the bodies had been found and the site of the Harold murder. In Vienna, Virginia, a suburb of Washington, he directed police to the home of John A. Tarmon, a 34-year-old trash collector. In Tarmon’s absence, Hurkos and Riesenman worked for hours on Tarmon’s wife until she finally agreed to sign involuntary commitment papers for her husband. Tarmon was taken into custody by police and brought before a three-man lunacy commission shortly after midnight on June 10, 1960. Fairfax County Judge J. Mason Grove headed the commission. The psychiatric member of the panel was none other than Dr. F. Regis Riesenman! The commission was rounded out by Dr. Jesse Cover, the physician for the Fairfax County Jail. After a two-hour hearing, the lunacy commission committed John Tarmon to the Southwestern State Hospital for the Criminally Insane in Marion, Virginia.

Later that same day Hurkos and Riesenman held a celebratory press conference to explain how they had cracked the Jackson Family Murder Case. According to Hurkos, the image of the murderer and the murderer’s house had become plain when he visited the grave sites. The perpetrator would have two scars on his left leg and a tattoo on his arm. Hurkos had been able to identify the murderer’s house by a chair in the front yard. Hurkos also asserted that the murderer had actually committed nine murders. John Tarmon had been questioned earlier by police in connection with their investigation of the Jackson family murders. However, investigators were forced to admit to the press that they had no evidence on which to base any criminal charge against him.

Hurkos’s Triumph Turns to Ashes

Shortly before he returned to Miami, Hurkos was interviewed on a Washington radio station. He predicted that in two weeks there would be further revelations in the Jackson Family Murder Case. This would turn out to be a remarkably prescient remark. On June 25 the front page headlines of Washington newspapers announced that FBI agents had arrested Melvin Davis Rees in West Memphis, Arkansas, for the murder of Margaret Harold, the victim of the 1957 shooting. The next day Rees was also charged in the deaths of Mrs. Jackson and her daughter Susan Ann. When FBI agents searched the home of Rees’s parents in Hyattsville, Maryland, a number of interesting items were turned up, including a .38 caliber revolver and a journal describing in detail Mrs. Jackson’s death. Ultimately, Federal and Virginia state judges would rule the journal inadmissible on Fifth Amendment grounds; however, the pistol would
prove to be Rees's undoing.

For a year, the FBI had considered Rees a strong suspect in the Jackson Family Murders. In the course of the investigation of the murder of Margaret Harold in 1957 Rees had been picked out of a police lineup by Sgt. Hudson. However, Maryland police had not had enough evidence at that time to charge him with Harold’s murder. After the murders of the Jackson family, the man with whom Rees was sharing a beach cottage in Norfolk, Virginia, had informed the FBI of his suspicion that Rees was involved in the Jackson Family murders. According to Rees's roommate, Rees was on his way to Washington the night that the Jacksons disappeared. Rees was a semi-professional jazz musician who supposedly had a gig in the Washington, DC, area.

The FBI's arrest of Rees was precipitated by the results of careful forensic examinations carried out by questioned document examiners at the FBI laboratory. Among the soft-core pornography found in the shanty near the scene of the Harold murder was a photographic portrait of a young woman. The picture appeared to have been clipped from a high school or college yearbook. Eventually FBI document examiners determined that the picture had been clipped from a University of Maryland yearbook. They were able to identify the young woman in the picture and provide her name to investigators. Although she at first denied knowing Rees, the young woman finally acknowledged dating him. She had stopped when she found out he was married.

Reporters for the Washington Evening Star contacted Peter Hurkos and sought his reaction to the arrest of Rees. Hurkos candidly admitted that he had had no "brain waves" about Rees. Despite prodding by reporters Hurkos declined to venture an opinion as to whether or not the FBI had arrested the right man. Hurkos and his supporters would eventually evolve a convoluted explanation to account for his misidentification of the murderer of the Jackson family: Tarmon was an accomplice or he and Rees had crossed paths, throwing Hurkos off the "scent."

Melvin Davis Rees was brought to trial in Federal court in Baltimore for the interstate kidnapping of Mildred and Susan Ann Jackson. The .38 caliber revolver found in the Hyattsville home and the gun grips found with Carroll Jackson's body were important parts of the prosecution case. An FBI serologist testified that the revolver had traces of human blood on it; however, they were too minute to type. The slug removed from Carroll Jackson's body was too damaged for a ballistic match. However, FBI Special Agent George Berley testified that impressions of tool marks on the inside surface of one of the pistol grips found with Carroll Jackson's body matched machining marks on the frame of the .38 caliber revolver found in the Rees family home. When Rees clubbed Carroll Jackson with the butt of his gun the force of the blow embossed an impression of the surface of the frame on the inside surface of the plastic grip. According to Washington Post reporter Constance Feeley, Berley's description of matching the marks on the pistol grip to a test impression made from the frame of the pistol left the courtroom in absolute silence. Berley's tool mark match is shown in Figure 1.

Rees was convicted on February 24, 1961. The jury did not recommend the death penalty; the judge had no choice but to sentence him to life in prison. Rees was then remanded to the custody of Virginia authorities. He was brought to trial in Spotsylvania County, Virginia, for the murder of Carroll Jackson. The grand jury had declined to indict Rees for the death of Janet Jackson, possibly because her cause of death was unknown. George Berley repeated his testimony about matching marks on the plastic gun grip to the revolver found in Rees' parents' home. Rees was convicted of murder and sentenced to death. After a number of
unsuccessful state and Federal appeals, Rees’ case reached the US Supreme Court where it joined two other cases on the Supreme Court’s Special Docket – a docket of cases which the Supreme Court declined to hear or decide and which were continued indefinitely until the defendants died. Rees was apparently deemed too mentally ill to participate in formulating his appellate strategy or to participate in a new trial should one be granted. In 1985 he gave an interview to a reporter for the Richmond News-Leader in which he acknowledged his guilt in the Jackson Family murders. He also confessed to murdering the two teenaged Maryland girls in 1956. He did not confess to the 1955 sniper slaying. Governor Gerald Baliles of Virginia commuted Rees’ death sentence to life in prison in 1988. Virginia’s death penalty had been overturned by the US Supreme Court in 1972 and the governor apparently wished to bring Rees’ sentence into conformity with the Supreme Court’s ruling. Rees died in Federal custody of natural causes in 1995, having spent decades under heavy medication.

The psychiatrists at the institution reported that in their judgment Tarmon was sociopathic but not psychotic. Because he was not in their view insane they recommended that he be released.

Peter Hurkos, Psychic Detective, cont’

John Tarmon by the American Civil Liberties Union sought a writ of habeas corpus for his release from the Virginia mental institution to which he had been committed. The psychiatrists at the institution reported that in their judgment Tarmon was sociopathic but not psychotic. Because he was not in their view insane they recommended that he be released. In the end Tarmon was held for nearly three weeks against his will. Judge Grove ruefully admitted that Dr. Riesenman should not have served on the lunacy commission that committed Tarmon. Judge Grove probably did not know that Dr. Riesenman was not quite the disinterested party that he appeared to be. His retaining of Hurkos to solve the murders should have suggested a lack of objectivity on his part. Reisenman also apparently had a more serious conflict of interest: According to Hurkos’ biographer Norma Lee Browning, two of Dr. Riesenman’s own patients had been questioned by police about the murders.

Tarmon sought unsuccessfully to sue the Virginia State Police and local investigators who had collaborated with Hurkos for his detention and commitment. He claimed that these officers had roughed him up when he was taken into custody. Tarmon apparently did not attempt to pursue the principal authors of his woes: F. Regis Riesenman and Peter Hurkos. A Washington Post editorial concluded: …[I]t remains a shocking reproach to civilized concepts of justice that such unsubstantiated evidence as telepathic vibrations could be used as the basis for depriving a man even temporarily of his liberty.

Conclusion

In Jackson Family Murder Case Peter Hurkos, one of the world’s most prominent psychic detectives, accused an innocent man – indeed secured his incarceration. Only the dogged laboratory examinations of forensic scientists at the Federal Bureau of Investigation had led to the identification of the actual perpetrator and his eventual conviction. Hurkos learned nothing from his experience in the Jackson Family Murder Case. Shortly after this case, Hurkos was involved in the Michigan Coed Murder Case; again he directed police attention at an innocent man (like Tarmon already a police suspect). Ironically, Hurkos’s involvement in that case did lead indirectly to the arrest of serial killer John Norman Collins. Collins committed his last murder as a challenge to Hurkos, but left behind evidence that led to his conviction.

The Trashman’s Progress

Shortly after the arrest of Melvin Davis Rees a lawyer retained on behalf of Manson Murders: among the cases Hurkos claimed to have solved
Peter Hurkos, Psychic Detective, cont’

Further Reading:

Few if any of the published accounts of the Jackson Family Murder Case get all of the essential facts correct. The above article is the result of a careful review of contemporaneous articles in the Washington Post, the Washington Evening Star and several Virginia newspapers from 1959 through 1995.


Unfortunately, these authors accept psychic detection as a real phenomenon. Finally, Gabriel J. Chin and Sara Lindenbaum provide fascinating accounts of the three cases on the Supreme Court’s Special Docket in “Reaching Out to Do Justice: The Rise and Fall of the Special Docket of the U.S. Supreme Court” Arizona Legal Studies, Discussion Paper No. 10-04 (The University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law: February 2010). This is available online at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1549697. Graduates of The George Washington University and long-time residents of the Washington, DC, area will find case S-3 (disbarment proceedings against Diana Kearny Powell) of considerable interest.

Hurkos and his supporters would eventually evolve a convoluted explanation to account for his misidentification of the murderer of the Jackson family: Tarmon was an accomplice or he and Rees had crossed paths, throwing Hurkos off the ‘scent.’

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“When you leave here, don’t forget why you came”

“All our dreams can come true...if we have the courage to pursue them.”

“The secret of success is constancy of purpose.”
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Alan F. Boehm (MFS,1988), Joanna Lynn Collins (MFS,’03), Gary D. Eager (MFS, 1993), Diana L. Freas-Lutz (MFS,1994), Beth Carlson Kimmerling (MFS, 1992)

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Thank you!

Looking for Students

Across the country rising seniors are beginning to think about graduate degree programs. If you know of someone who is considering a career in forensic science, you should put in a good word for your alma mater. The George Washington University has the oldest forensic science degree program in the United States and has graduated more forensic scientists than all the other forensic science degree programs combined. The Washington area also has the largest concentration of forensic science laboratories in the country, so that there are unparalleled internship and research opportunities.

The Department offers the Master of Forensic Science degree with concentrations in the following areas:

- forensic molecular biology
- forensic chemistry
- forensic toxicology
- crime scene investigations
- high technology crime investigation