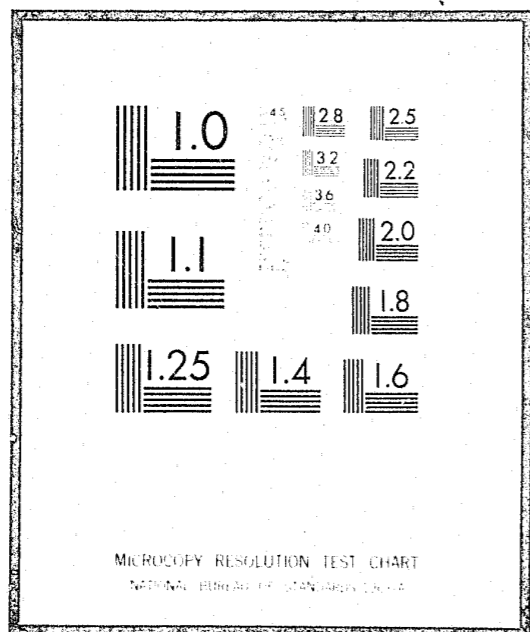


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LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFERENCE SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20531

8/24/77

Date filmed,

LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION (LEAA)

POLICE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REPORT

SUBJECT: A Study to Determine Ways to Improve The Dallas County Forensic Crime Laboratory's Capability in the Field of Questioned Document Examination.

REPORT NUMBER: 76-183/096

FOR: County of Dallas, Texas, Forensic Crime Laboratory -

Population: 816,000
Police Strength: 604

Square Mile Area: 270.8 sq. miles

CONTRACTOR: Public Administration Service
1776 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20036

CONSULTANT: John J. Harris

CONTRACT NUMBER: J-LEAA-002-76

DATE: February, 1977

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ACQUISITIONS

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FOREWORD

This report originated in response to a request from the Institute of Forensic Sciences of the Office of the Medical Examiner, Dallas County, Texas, for an on-site inspection of its laboratory facilities and personnel to determine how the Institute might improve and expand its questioned document services and capabilities. The consultant was John J. Harris, and other personnel involved with the assignment were:

R. O.: Charles S. Petty, M.D.
Director, Dallas County Forensic Crime Laboratory

A.A.: N. T. Fisher
Police Specialist
LEAA Region VI (Dallas)

I. INTRODUCTION

The Institute of Forensic Sciences at Dallas is unique in that it is not part of a sheriff's office or police department. Its Forensic Crime Laboratory, under the Medical Examiner, handles all of the forensic science problems in criminal cases for Dallas County. Dr. Charles S. Petty, Director, and Dr. I. C. Stone, Chief of the Physical Evidence Section, wanted an independent analysis of the laboratory's questioned document capabilities and equipment as well as recommendations on how to expand and improve their services in the questioned document field.

On-site evaluation took place on December 16-17, 1976, and included consultations with Drs. Petty and Stone and with Mr. Harry L. Felker, Document Examiner at the laboratory, and his assistant, Mr. Roger Smith. On the first day, the consultant toured the laboratory, visited the various departments, met most of the personnel there, and discussed with them their evaluating procedures for questioned documents. During the second day, the consultant compiled data and again held discussions with Dr. Petty, Dr. Stone, and Mr. Felker.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

Questioned document examination can be an important function and service for most major forensic science laboratories. It is not feasible for smaller laboratories with small case loads, since such examination should not be attempted as a part-time activity by a criminalist or anyone engaged in another field of forensic science. The Dallas area appears large enough to provide sufficient cases to justify full-time employment for document examination specialists. Their duties, in addition to examining handwriting and signatures, should include problems relating to typewriting, ink, paper, age of documents, special document photography, and fingerprint restoration. In addition, the document examiner should be available to instruct local law enforcement personnel on collection and preservation of this type of evidence. Finally, the expert should be prepared to testify in court regarding his laboratory findings.

At the present time, all of the questioned document work in the Dallas Laboratory is handled by Mr. Harry L. Felker. In order of importance, his case problems consist of disputed checks, legal and bank documents, suicide notes, credit card slips, and -- occasionally -- a typewriting problem. He rarely has ink-identification or age-of-document problems. He testifies in perhaps 25 cases a year.

There is no specific laboratory or room devoted exclusively to this type of work. The present floor plan of the laboratory would probably require a major change in order to set aside an area for document examination, which may or may not be practical.

Under the Civil Service provisions, Mr. Felker is classified as a Criminalist II; there is no Civil Service classification for a document examiner. Mr. Felker, although he is assisted by Roger Smith, does not officially have an understudy.

Although the facility has a well-equipped medical and chemical laboratory, it is not well equipped in all areas for questioned document work since it is primarily used for pathology problems. There are stereo microscopes, infrared microscope, magnifiers, and a photographic laboratory on the ground level. There are few books and reference materials on questioned documents; there is no typewriter identification file; there is no separate photographic laboratory for photographic document problems; and there is not even a separate office area.

III. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

While the Institute of Forensic Science is an impressive organization with cooperative, candid personnel who have a real interest in expanding and improving document examination capabilities, it has certain shortcomings. Mr. Felker is doing a fine job, but he lacks the physical layout, reference materials, and photographic equipment essential for the task of handling a wide range of questioned document problems. These deficiencies can be overcome by providing more space -- either by allotting additional space in the present building or, preferably, by designing a document-oriented area when the building is expanded -- and by obtaining the services of another qualified document examiner in order to increase the capabilities of the laboratory in all areas of questioned document work.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. General Recommendations

- A. If the laboratory building is to be expanded, e. g., by adding another floor, set aside a particular area for two or three questioned document examiners. North light is desirable (see attached layout). Actual plans can be copied from the Postal Service Laboratory at Washington, D. C., or the one at San Francisco. The space should provide desks, large tables, filing cabinets, controlled lighting, outside light, and convenient electrical outlets. There is no need for a separate chemical laboratory.
- B. Incorporate a photography laboratory adjacent to the questioned document section, consisting of a camera room, a small darkroom to develop films, and a larger one for producing enlargements up to 16 x 20 inches (this photographic facility can also be used by the criminalists).
- C. When additional personnel are available, increase local educational activities so that law enforcement personnel in Dallas County and surrounding areas become more familiar with these expanded and improved facilities offered by the laboratory.

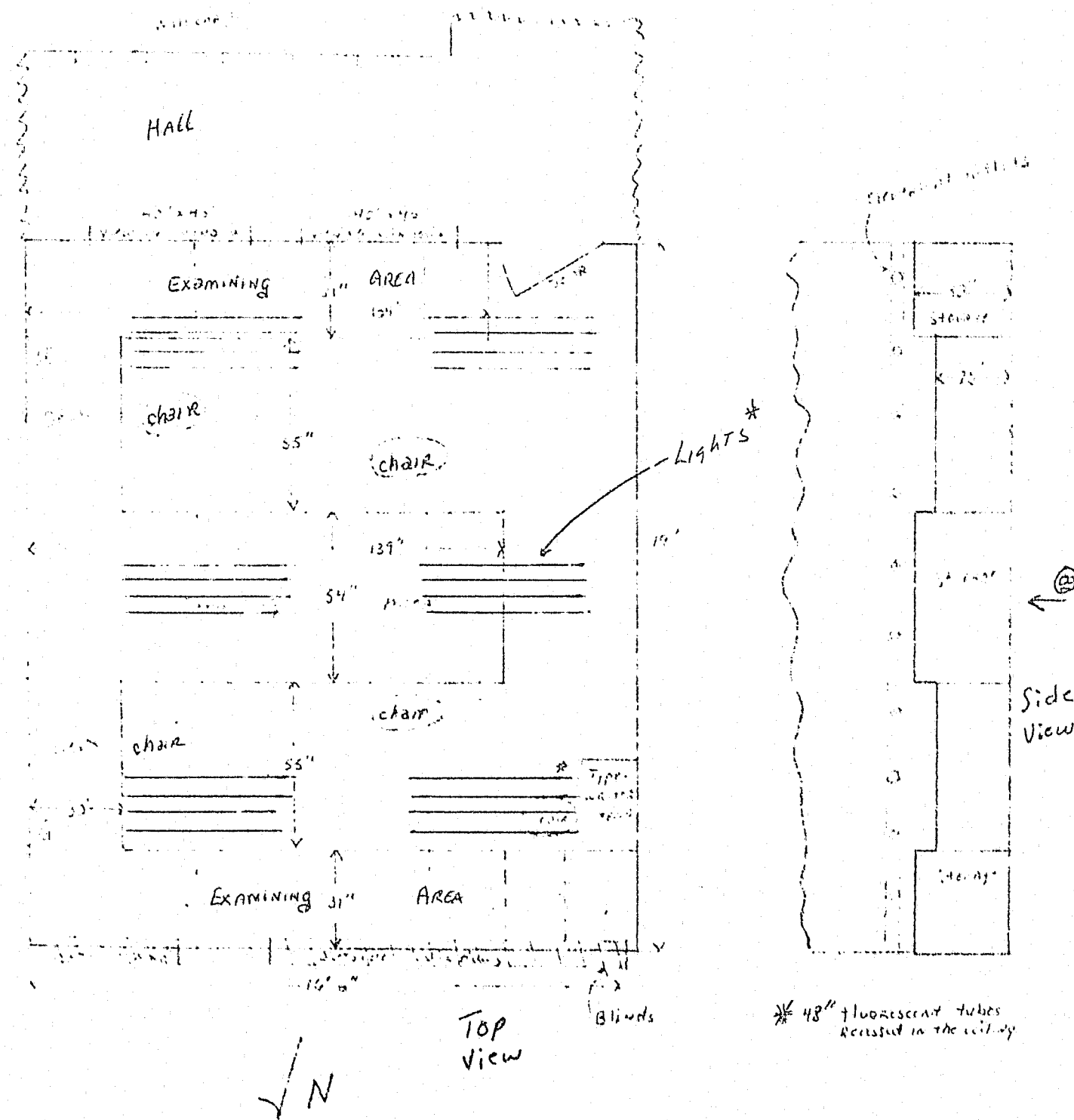
2. Specific Recommendations

- A. Begin immediately to gather reference materials and books and to organize a typewriter-reference file. (See Scientific Evidence in Criminal Cases by Moenssens for a beginning bibliography.)
- B. Change the Civil Service classification of assigned personnel from Criminalist II to Questioned Document Examiner.
- C. Begin to accumulate, if possible, photographic equipment such as a 4x5 view camera, enlarger, fixed-focus camera, a 35mm camera system for document examiners and criminalists.
- D. Set out budget items that will permit questioned document laboratory personnel to attend the annual meetings of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners. These are continuing education programs with opportunities to both receive new information and participate in mutual discussions. If it is not possible to establish a special photographic laboratory, utilize the photo laboratory on the ground floor and also, if practical, use the photographic facilities at the hospital.

- E. When budgetary allocations permit, arrange to employ a second fully qualified document examiner. A metropolitan area the size of Dallas should have more than enough cases to keep two specialists busy. One person hardly has time to accumulate a typewriter file, attend meetings, prepare papers, and keep up with the case load. While Mr. Felker has a comfortable case load at present, once the facilities are expanded, it can be anticipated that the case load will increase accordingly. Further, experienced and fully qualified document examiners of a caliber suitable for the Dallas laboratory are hard to come by, and it may take some planning and timing to find the right person.

RECOMMENDED QDE LABORATORY LAYOUT

To accommodate two examinees



END