

Fingerprint expert gives impressions

8-74-86
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SANTA CRUZ — Fingerprints have been used since the turn of the century to identify criminals, a print expert testified Wednesday at the preliminary hearing of murder suspect Edward Bowman.

Scientific research shows that a person's prints develop between the fourth and fifth months of the fetal stage and remain the same throughout life.

There are no known duplicates, said Martin Collins of the state Department of Justice.

When asked by Public Defender Jerry Christensen of the likelihood that two people could have identical prints, Collins said, "If would be the same likelihood of two monkeys sitting down beside each other and each correctly

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Fingerprints

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typing the entire U.S. Constitution.

Christensen smiled. He'd heard that theory before. A veteran of numerous big criminal cases, Christensen has developed his own expertise in the area.

He asked whether comparisons are based on ridges, ridge-endings, bifurcations (splits), enclosures (islands), short ridges and dots. Collins agreed.

Identification, Collins said, is not made on the basis of whirl, arch or loop patterns, which are readily apparent when one glances at his fingertips.

Collins said he normally dusts the surfaces on which the fingerprints appear with a black powder and then lifts the print from the surface with tape. The tape is then put on a white card for contrast. He said he examines the prints under a five-power magnifying glass.

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There is no national standard, Collins testified. But, he said, the FBI issued a booklet in the 1940s showing a picture of a comparison of 12 points. That quickly

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became the adopted number.

Since then, Collins said, the FBI has decided that fewer points of similarity suffice.

Under questioning by Christensen, Collins said analysts in Great Britain will make identification on eight points, but will not go to court unless they have 16.

In the United States, the usual number of points for courtroom purposes is eight.

Collins testified that he matched Bowman's palm print to two prints taken from the Prophet Elias Greek Orthodox Church, where Bowman is accused of murdering Father John Karastamatis.

He said he matched Bowman's right palm print with one lifted from the rear door of the church. Collins said he believes he found 11 points of similarity on the two prints.

He said he is not conscious of the number of points when he makes a comparison.

As for a bloody palm print on a wall near where the priest's body was found, Collins said he found at least 10 points of similarity with the right palm print of Bowman taken by police.

Collins said the most number of points he's found on non-matching prints is four. Aside from that were many discrepancies, Collins said.

He testified he found no discrepancies in the two palm prints he said were Bowman's.

Collins testified that he went to the church hours after the killing and lifted more than 100 latent (lifted) fingerprints.

Many went unidentified, he said, against the prints of some 60 to 70 people supplied by Santa Cruz police.

Collins testified that besides Bowman's palm prints, he identified Father John's prints 10 times and family members' nine times. He said there were no other identifications.

Collins has been with the Department of Justice for 14½ years. He said he has spent the past seven years comparing latent prints.