



A Brief History

The American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) was founded in 1948 and served as the parent organization of the American Board of Forensic Odontology (ABFO). The early composition of the Academy consisted of the Jurisprudence, Pathology & Biology, Psychiatry, Questioned Document and Toxicology sections. Before 1970, the few dentist members of the AAFS were first assigned to the Pathology & Biology section and later to the General section. The Odontology section was added in 1970 at the recommendation of Academy officers. The required number of dentists was recruited from the General section.

In 1962, the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP) began to include forensic odontology in its list of course offerings with dental lectures and laboratory sessions presented by several oral pathologists and one of the ABFO's charter members, Dr. David Scott. Various experts from other disciplines also gave background presentations on forensic pathology, toxicology and the law. The course content and emphasis began to change when the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) evaluated identification procedures at disaster sites. There was a pressing need to establish an accepted protocol for these situations and to teach these protocols to interested and involved individuals. Many dentists who participated in this early effort with the AFIP were charter members of the ABFO.

Colonel Robert Boyers, Chief of Oral Pathology at the AFIP, was very influential in the creation of the American Society of Forensic Odontology (ASFO) in 1970. He was concerned that many individuals interested in this field but not actively engaged in the practice of forensic dentistry through a formal affiliation with some forensic agency could not become members of the Odontology section of the Academy. The ASFO was founded to allow anyone interested in forensic odontology to meet and further their knowledge in this area. Today, it is an important organization serving forensic odontology through its education programs and publications available to all.

In the mid-1970s, police agencies and the Courts were recognizing the potential role of dental evidence in personal identification and criminalistics. The National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, United States Department of Justice gave grants to the Forensic Sciences Foundation, Inc. in 1973 to establish certifying boards in various forensic disciplines, including forensic odontology. These boards were to be established in order to identify and certify experts in their respective fields. As a result, in 1976 with initial recognition by AAFS and the encouragement and assistance of the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME), the American Board of Forensic Odontology was formed.

The charter members of the ABFO were Doctors Edward Woolridge, Richard Souvion, Curtis Mertz, Arthur Goldman, Gerald Vale, Stanley Schwartz, Lowell Levine, Robert Dorion, Paul Stimson, David Scott, Manuel Maslansky and George Ward. These charter members made the decision not to be grandfathered into the organization. Instead, they took the time and effort to meet the required personal criteria on education, experience and forensic cases and take the certifying examination that had been established. Thus, these charter members became the first Diplomates of the ABFO.

The charter members were very active in establishing important professional and public relations through their leadership in many fields: private practice, organized dentistry, dental education and research, specialty practice, military dentistry, and so on. Their contributions were invaluable in helping to build a sound foundation for organized forensic odontology.

Dr. Curtis Mertz served as the ABFO's first President from 1976 until 1978 and was very influential in establishing the direction that the ABFO would take during the early years. He was followed by Doctors Arthur Goldman (1979-1980), Lowell Levine (1981), William Giles (1982), Gerald Vale (1983), David Scott (1984), Robert Dorion (1985), Raymond Rawson (1986), Richard Souviron (1987), Thomas Krauss (1988), Stanley Schwartz (1989), David Sipes (1990), Paul Stimson (1991), William Alexander (1992), Wilbur Richie (1993), Gary Bell (1994), Jack Kenney (1995), Ann Norrlander (1996), George Isaac (1997), David Averill (1998), Harry Mincer (1999), L. Thomas Johnson (2000), Michael Tabor (2001), Joseph Gentile (2002), Bryan Chrz (2003), John Lewis (2004), James McGivney (2005), Jack Kenney (2006), Richard Dial (2007), Peter Hampl (2008), David Senn (2009), Frank Wright (2010), Robert Barsley (2011), Tom David (2012), Gregory Golden (2013), Peter Loomis (2014), Gary Berman (2015) and Adam Freeman (2016), Paula Brumit (2017), Richard Weems (2018), David Senn (2019) and Jim Lewis (2020).

While the primary function of the ABFO as a certification and re-certification body remains paramount, the ABFO has long recognized an ongoing need for continuing education and research, promotion of public and professional relations and enhancement of its commitment to the law and to the public. To this end, the first major effort to develop guidelines for scientific analysis of bite-mark evidence was undertaken in a 1984 ABFO workshop.

Over the ensuing years, it became clear that the other aspects of forensic odontology should be addressed as well, given the broad scope of the discipline. In the early 1990s, the ABFO became more active in establishing guidelines and setting standards for these various areas. The ABFO was restructured to include (in addition to the administrative committees) five standing committees for Standards, Methods and Procedures: a) Civil Litigation, b) Bite Mark and Patterned Injuries, c) Human Abuse and Neglect, d) Mass Disaster, and e) Missing and Unidentified Persons.

In general, the duties of these committees were to "*...encourage the study of, improve the practice of, enhance the standard for and advance the specialty areas of forensic odontology*" (Article V, Section 3, ABFO Bylaws and Code of Ethics). Specifically, these committees were directed to establish guidelines and set standards for their respective areas and to educate the membership and the forensic community at large on the specifics of these guidelines and standards. With these objectives in mind, additional workshops in bite marks, body identification, civil litigation, human abuse and neglect and developing a disaster dental identification team have all taken place. Further, the ABFO and the Council of Dental Practice of the American Dental Association sponsored the first and second National Symposia on Forensic Dentistry's Role and Responsibility in Mass Disasters, held in Chicago in 1986 and 1996.

The governing body of the ABFO consists of five officers and a maximum of fifteen directors who collectively comprise the Board of Directors. All officers and directors are elected from the general membership at the annual meeting. Annual meetings and workshops are typically held in conjunction with the AAFS and ASFO meetings during February at a site designated by the AAFS.

A total of 175 Certificates of Proficiency in Forensic Odontology have been awarded since the founding of this organization. Diplomates of the ABFO have served as officers and in other leadership roles in the AAFS and other forensic and dental organizations throughout the country and the world.