

1958

A Method of Lifting and Photographing for Evidence

James Watson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

James Watson, A Method of Lifting and Photographing for Evidence, 49 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 89 (1958-1959)

This Criminology is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

A METHOD OF LIFTING AND PHOTOGRAPHING FOR EVIDENCE

JAMES WATSON

The author is a Senior Police Photographer in the Scientific Investigation Division, Photographic Laboratory, of the Los Angeles Police Department. He has had eleven years of experience with the Los Angeles Department and has published articles in other Journals. The method which is described in his present article was presented last spring at the annual meeting of the California Association of Criminalists in Pasadena.—EDITOR.

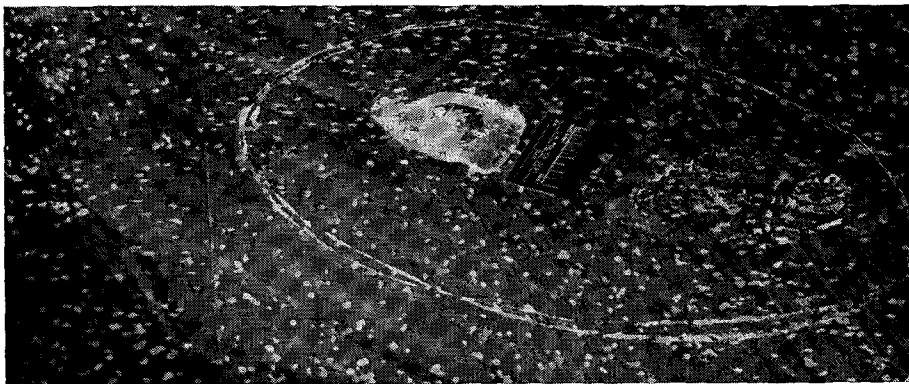


Figure 1

Often in the course of police work it becomes necessary to photograph dust-impregnated foot and heel prints. Oblique light, the usual method, sometimes will not illuminate the print sufficiently for photographing, and no amount of manipulation of the light source will make the print visible at the film plane of the camera. At other times, the background may be a variegated or unusually colored surface such as linoleum or mottled tile. In these cases, it is much easier to "lift" the print and photograph it without the distracting background.

Dust prints on hard surfaces such as wood floors, table tops, chairs, or similar surfaces are the easiest to lift, but it is also possible to lift from newsprint, letters, and papers found lying about the scene of a crime. All such papers should be examined with oblique light for possible liftable material. Often the lift will contain more material than does the apparent print on a given piece of paper.

The Los Angeles Police Department has tried many materials in an attempt to work out the best possible method of lifting prints, and the most

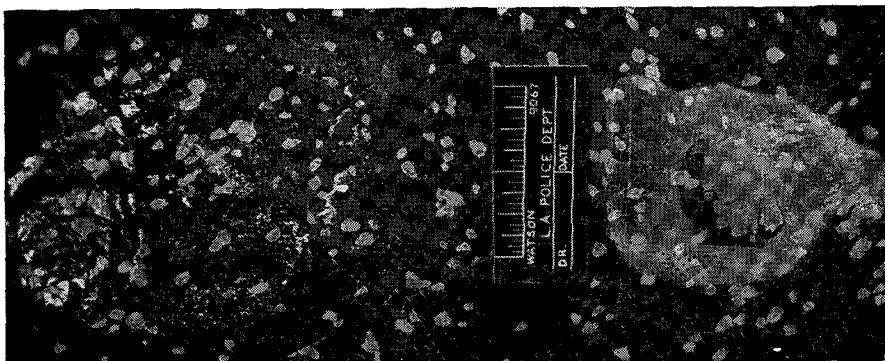


Figure 2

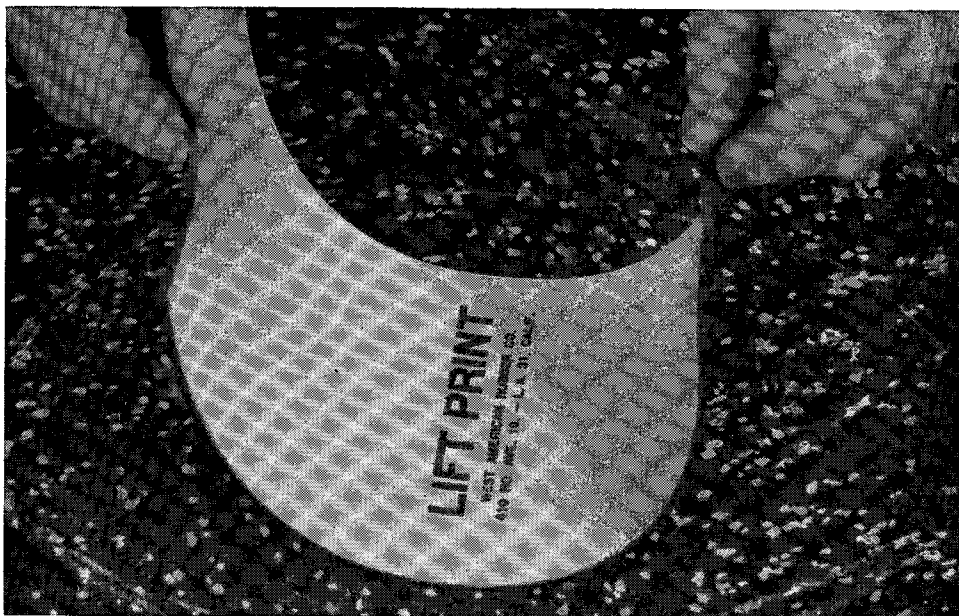


Figure 3

successful material to date has been neoprene. This material has all of the necessary properties—flexibility for application, sufficient “tackiness” to pick up the dust-print without absorbing it, reusability, which makes for economy, and good storing properties for ease of carrying.

The most effective use of neoprene is explained by the accompanying series of photographs.

Figure 1 shows a print against a typical mottled floor tile. The print is good, but the background is distracting. Note that oblique light has been used in order to better examine the print.

Figure 2 was taken from the proper camera position. Here the poor background becomes quite apparent.

Figure 3 shows the proper positioning of the neoprene for lifting the print. The center of the material is placed on the print first, the ends lowered into place, and gentle rubbing is then applied to the back of the sheet.

Figure 4 shows the removal of the neoprene from the surface. The print is now a clear impression.

The next step is, of course, photographing the lift. Any high contrast film may be used—Kodak-lith, Reprolith, or Process. Extreme side-lighting

is necessary to give maximum results. Standard film developers should then be used, for extreme contrast developers will over-emphasize the contrast.

In cleaning neoprene for further use, care must be taken to avoid grinding dirt or sand into the surface by rubbing. A strong flow of water is usually sufficient to dislodge all particles. The fingers should be run gently over the surface of the material in order to test for foreign particles. When the material has been cleaned, a squeegee should be used to wipe the surface.

Neoprene is also effective for lifting various types of prints made in dust. Figure 5 shows a portion of a palm print made on cardboard, and figure 6 shows this same print after lifting. Note the improved ridge rendition in figure 6. Neoprene may also be used with excellent results for making exemplars of shoes or heels.

Properly used, neoprene is an effective and inexpensive material which requires a minimum amount of practice in handling. Its use greatly simplifies the gathering of a type of evidence which, normally, is one of the most difficult to photograph.

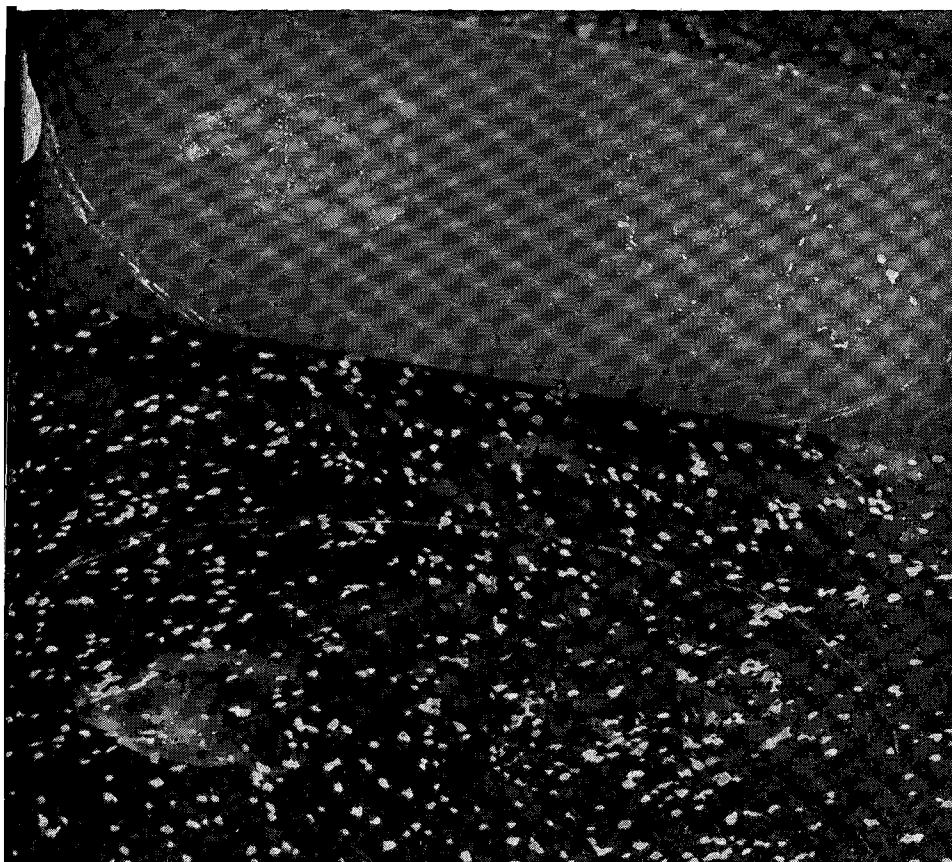


Figure 4

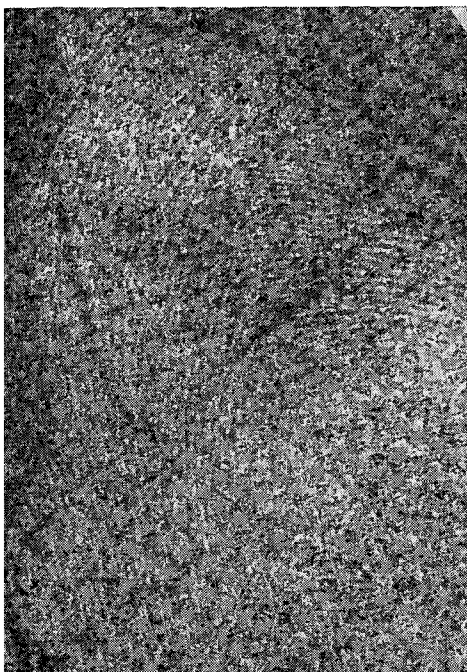


Figure 5

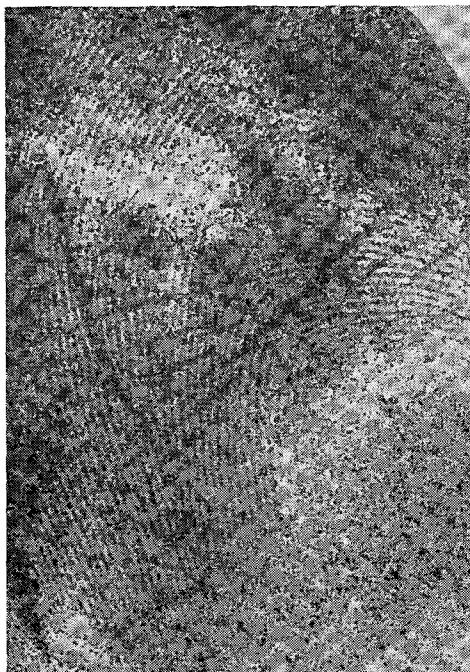


Figure 6