



Robert F. Borkenstein
6th ACJS President
1968-1969

Robert F. Borkenstein was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, on August 31, 1912, to German immigrant parents, and grew up bilingual, later writing scientific papers in both English and German. When Bob finished high school it was the beginning of the Great Depression. Unable to afford college, he began work as a photographic technician, and soon invented a new means for developing color photographs and two new cameras. It was these skills that allowed him to secure a position with the Indiana State Police (ISP) in 1936 in their newly formed forensic science program. Two years later, he was offered a position in the ISP laboratory in Indianapolis. Shortly after moving there, he met his future wife, Marjorie J. Buchanan.

While working for the ISP in the lab, Borkenstein became involved in a number of inventions, including working with John Larson and his polygraph. His most noted invention, however, was the development of the Breathalyzer. A Professor Harger had developed the Drunkometer, but it was large, cumbersome, and difficult to interpret. Borkenstein assisted in the fielding of the device for the ISP, but he began working to make a smaller, more efficient device. His result was a small box, with minimal parts, that was highly efficient. In 1954, he had invented and commercially produced the Breathalyzer. As Borkenstein explained, "The strength of the Breathalyzer is its innate stability. It requires less skill on the part of the operator, and its life expectancy is unlimited. There's nothing to wear out. The Breathalyzer is so simple and direct that it will be hard to kill."

During this same time period, Borkenstein began gravitating to many of the science and foreign language classes offered by Indiana University, and eventually earned enough credits to receive his Bachelor's degree in Forensic Science in 1958. That was the same year he retired as Captain of the ISP Laboratory, for he was offered a position with the faculty at Indiana University as Chairman of the Department of Police Administration. It was also during this time frame that he met V.A. Leonard, a friend of John Larson's, and Leonard encouraged Borkenstein to join the American Society of Criminology. In 1963, when Leonard retired, Borkenstein flew to Washington for Leonard's retirement party, thus becoming part of the new International Association of Police Professors (IAPP).

Borkenstein was elected the sixth president of the IAPP and served from 1968 to 1969. The emphasis of his presidency was to make criminal justice (as it was now being referred) an academic discipline. Also during his tenure as president, Borkenstein began conducting research with the Breathalyzer to determine the risk of a driver being involved in an accident as a function of his or her blood alcohol content (BAC). The famous Grand Rapids Study revealed that mild BAC rates, up to .03, made driver's safer (on account they are more relaxed), but that anything beyond .08 posed increased risks. This study proved to have a profound impact on public policy in both the United States and Canada.

Retiring in 1987, he was elevated to Professor Emeritus and was awarded an honorary LL.D. from Indiana University. The National Safety Council inducted him into their Hall of Fame and established the Robert F. Borkenstein Award, still issued today.

His wife of 60 years died in December of 1998, and Robert Borkenstein followed on August 10, 2002, at the age of 89. His papers are today located in the Indiana University Archives.