

Book Review

Review of *Scientific Examination of Questioned Documents*, 2nd Edition

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Kelly, Jan Seaman and Lindblom, Brian S., Editors (2006). CRC Press, Taylor and Francis Group. ISBN 0-8493-2044-5

Glancing at the 2nd edition of *Scientific Examination of Questioned Documents*, the reader may ask, 2nd edition of what? The answer is found in the footnote of the 2nd edition Preface which reads, "Ordway Hilton (1913-1998) authored the first edition (1956) of this book." While some of the chapter titles in this 2nd edition are the same as the revised edition (1982) of the classic textbook by Ordway Hilton, *Scientific Examination of Questioned Documents* (1956), make no mistake: this book is a major overhaul, with only some traces of Mr. Hilton's original work. There were good reasons for this undertaking, as Ordway Hilton is quoted (from the Preface of his revised edition) in the 2nd edition Preface:

Now another 20 years has elapsed since an up-to-date treatise has appeared. During that period, many new instruments and materials for preparing documents have been introduced....At the same time workers in the field have developed other new methods...to answer older questions more completely and accurately....

In the period since the 1982 edition, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the science and profession of forensic document examination has undergone a major upheaval in the laboratory and the courts as the computer age has evolved and as challenges to the validity of the methodologies used have been addressed. The manner in which documents are prepared, manipulated, distributed, examined, and stored has changed dramatically over the past 20 years. These are global manifestations of the new information age, and the forensic document examiner must constantly strive to stay abreast of the rapidly

changing technologies, both in the production of documents and in the examination of documents of questioned authenticity. Indeed, some of the examinations have become subspecialties of forensic document examination, where there are fewer experts capable of providing a really thorough examination to address more specific and often complex issues. The 1990s saw numerous challenges to the admissibility of testimony by forensic document examiners as a result of the Daubert decision.¹

The editors of this book, together with 13 notable forensic document examiners from the United States and Canada, have created a textbook that serves its 2 stated purposes well:

...first, to inform the layperson about the field of forensic document examination, the accepted methodologies, and the qualifications of a properly trained forensic document examiner (FDE); and second, this book is offered to the forensic document examination community as a reference for trainee document examiners and journeymen alike.

The contributors are Bonnie L. Beal, William J. Flynn, Susan L. Fortunado, Robert Gervais, Frank Hicks, (Ordway Hilton,) Kirsten Jackson (Singer), Mary W. Kelly, Carl R. McClary, Susan E. Morton, Dan C. Purdy, Howard C. Rile Jr., Farrell C. Shiver, and Tom Vastrick. The contributors bring expertise in specific areas and have numerous years of experience in case work, testimony, and training.

The lengthy treatment of older writing instruments and older machine-printing technology

¹*Daubert v. Merrill Dow Pharmaceuticals, Inc.*, U.S. Supreme Court, 509, U.S. 579, 1993

in the 1st and revised editions of this text is gone. This book has been modernized to reflect contemporary document production. There is an excellent chapter on typography by William J. Flynn. Some of the most welcome and timely new material is found in Section V: "Mechanical and Electronic Impression Examinations and Comparisons," which includes chapters on just about all the ways documents are produced, from writing instruments to mechanical evidence (staples, stamp impressions, checkwriters, typewriters) to electronic evidence (computer-generation, facsimile machines, photocopies). Section IX: "Digital Photography and Enhancement" also provides updated information on cameras, scanners, and how images may be enhanced.

All of the chapters in Section IV: "Handwriting Examination and Comparison" are well organized, and new information about software tools available is included. Section V: "The Document Case" provides a good overview of the proper steps to maintain compliance with administrative and technical standards set by accrediting bodies such as American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD/LAB). The multifaceted approach to determining the age of a document addressed in Section IX is also well presented.

A valuable addition to this edition is the overview of the role that the Scientific Working Groups for Forensic Document Examination (SWGDOC) and the Coalition of Private Practice Examiners (COPPE) have played in the development of ASTM standards since 1997. Any trainee or layperson interested in understanding more about the science of forensic document examination should study the concept behind and the use of these consensus standards.

Three aspects of this new book that make it so valuable for the training of examiners are the illustrations, the chapter references, and the glossary. There are numerous demonstrative illustrations within each chapter, and especially noteworthy are the 28 pages of color plates that include printing production methods and case exhibits. The chapter references include recent research publications. The glossary has been expanded to reflect the newer technology and professional advances. A minor shortcoming is a lack of detail about color contrast and how infrared reflectance and infrared luminescence work.

For the layperson and the examiner alike, there are worthwhile discussions about qualified and unqualified examiners and the process of

preparing for a Daubert hearing on the admissibility of forensic document examination. In Chapters 6 and 36, Jan Seaman Kelly and Kirsten Jackson (Singer) provide historical information and thoroughly lay out how the profession meets all 5 of the Daubert factors for reliability. Also useful in this chapter is the summary of the controlled studies conducted by Moshe Kam, from 1994 and continuing today, regarding proficiency test performance of forensic document examiners.

Last, but certainly not least, all of the contributors provide precautionary advice regarding the limitations inherent in all types of document examinations that may preclude conclusive findings. This is especially important for evidence such as line intersections, ink dating, signatures of the elderly, and typography. This advice can only come from examiners who have a wealth of experience, and the editors are to be commended for their selection of contributors.

This text is a welcome addition to any forensic library, and the forensic document examination community is well served by this valuable new resource.