

A Brief History of the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners^{*}

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The American Society of Questioned Document Examiners (ASQDE), formally established on September 2, 1942, is the oldest and most prestigious organization of questioned document examiners in the United States. The first president and primary organizer of the ASQDE was Albert S. Osborn. Mr. Osborn is considered by many to be the father of the scientific examination of questioned documents in the United States. His *Questioned Documents*, first edition 1910, and *The Problem of Proof*, first edition 1922, were widely acclaimed by the legal profession, and public and private agencies concerned with promoting justice in matters involving questions about documents.

The ASQDE had its informal beginning in 1913, when Mr. Osborn initiated a program for the interchange of ideas and research information by inviting Mr. Elbridge Stein of Pittsburgh to discuss with him various questions relating to questioned document examination. Mr. Stein was a profound student and eagerly accepted Mr. Osborn's invitation. Within the next year or two, J. Fordyce Wood of Chicago, Curtice Shearman of Wichita, and John J. Lomax of Montreal were added to the list. These men also were eager to sit at the fountainhead and learn from Mr. Osborn. From the beginning they were asked to participate wholeheartedly in the discussions.

Mr. John F. Tyrrell of Milwaukee, a long-time friend of Mr. Osborn, was one of the early participants in the meetings. Albert D. Osborn, the son of Albert S. Osborn, was invited to attend in 1919 on his return from overseas service with the United States armed forces during World War I.

In 1926, Herbert J. Walter of Winnipeg, Canada, was invited; and within the next two years, Edwin H. Fearon of Pittsburgh, Harry E. Cassidy of Richmond, and Scott E. Leslie of Cleveland were brought into the group.

James Clark Sellers of Los Angeles was invited and attended the 1930 meeting. At that meeting, Rafael Fernandez Ruenes of Havana, Cuba, also attended. In 1931, John L. Harris of Los Angeles was asked to join this devoted group of specialists, which he willingly did. In the

meantime, George Walter, son of Herbert, became a member.

Elwin C. Leslie, son of Scott E. Leslie, attended and participated in the 1939 meeting. George J. Lucy, Houston, Texas, was invited and first attended in 1942 as did Warren T. Johnson.

Membership in this informal organization was entirely by invitation. Its meetings were completely educational in scope, and annual attendance and full participation in the program were absolute requirements for a continuing invitation. Thus, in 30 years of its existence a few individuals, whose names are not mentioned, attended two or three meetings and then dropped from the group because of a lack of indicated interest or inability to participate in such a rigorous program.

The previously named questioned document examiners were the core group which led to the formal organization in 1942. At the 1942 meeting it was decided to establish an organization to be known as "The American Society of Questioned Document Examiners" (ASQDE). The following were the elected officers and charter members of The Society:

Albert S. Osborn, President
James Clark Sellers, Vice President
Elbridge W. Stein, Secretary
John F. Tyrrell, Treasurer
Albert D. Osborn, Herbert J. Walter, Harry E. Cassidy, Edwin H. Fearon, Scott E. Leslie, Rafael Fernandez Ruenes, John L. Harris, George B. Walter, Elwin C. Leslie, George J. Lacy, and Warren T. Johnson.

In the ensuing 56 years The Society has grown to approximately 110 members. Twenty-four leading document examiners have progressively served as President of the ASQDE.

Stated Purposes of the ASQDE

The purposes of The Society and of its members are to foster education, sponsor scientific research, establish standards, exchange experience, provide instruction in the field of questioned document examination, and to promote justice in matters that involve questions about documents. To accomplish these purposes, The Society and its members subscribe to the following objectives:

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- (a) To establish and maintain high professional standards for ethics, education, training and for excellence in work performance.
- (b) To engage upon and to encourage scientific research and development in document examination and related matters, and to disseminate the results through presentation at annual meetings and in publications.
- (c) To prepare, maintain, and administer a comprehensive course of study in document examination; to record, preserve, and correlate significant experiences in solving questioned document problems.
- (d) To improve knowledge and understanding of the work of the document examiner by the public, the bar, the judiciary and among the forensic sciences.
- (e) To discover prospective document examiners of good character and potential for development, and to assist in their training.

Membership in the ASQDE

Membership in The Society currently consists of six classes:

Regular
Provisional
Corresponding
Life
Honorary
Affiliate

Provisional and Corresponding Membership in The Society is open to all persons who are Practicing Document Examiners and who meet the following minimum requirements:

- (a) hold a bachelor's degree or higher from a recognized institute of higher learning; and
- (b) have had two years' training or apprenticeship under the supervision of a recognized Practicing Document Examiner; and,
- (c) have two years' post training or post apprenticeship experience as a Practicing Document Examiner, or, in the absence of (b) or (c),
- (d) have six years full-time employment as a practicing document examiner whose particular training and qualifications have been reviewed and received the unanimous endorsement of the membership and Credentials Committee; and, in any case,
- (e) have submitted or presented at least one technical paper, acceptable to the Membership and Credentials Committee as a guest at a General Meeting of The Society within the previous five years.

Code of Ethics

The American Society of Questioned Document Examiners has for its purpose the promotion of justice through the discovery and proof of facts relating to questioned documents, and to maintain and advance the technical and ethical standards of the profession of questioned document examination. Each member of The Society

pledges to abide by the rules of conduct as specified in the by-laws of The Society.

Continuing Education

Members of The Society shall meet annually at a time and place determined by the executive committee. The annual meeting shall have as its chief purpose the exchange of technical and professional information, and shall provide for the transaction of all necessary business of The Society.

Copies of technical papers and research data presented at annual meetings are made available to Society members and invited guests. The Society publishes the newsletter "*The Society Pages*," and the *Journal of the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners*.

The Society maintains an internet web site at www.asqde.org. The Society web site contains continuing education information, membership information, numerous on-line QD databases, e-mail directories, referral pages, *ASQDE journal* abstracts, the "Society Pages" newsletter, links to numerous other forensic and internet sites of interest, and annual meeting information. The Society's e-mail address is asqdeinfo@asqde.org.

Conclusion

The ASQDE has always required of its members the highest possible qualifications and ethical standards. Each member must abide by The Society's strict code of conduct, including a pledge to maintain a constant spirit of fairness, combined with high ethical, educational, and technical standards, thereby promoting justice and creating increased confidence in the profession of document examination. In continuing to further its purpose and by maintaining the highest standards for membership and professional conduct, the ASQDE looks forward to the expanding role of the questioned document examiner in the next century.