

HISTORICAL REVIEW

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The field of forensic document examination has a rich history. Particularly in the early 1900s, before expert testimony concerning the identification of writing and other aspects of this discipline were readily accepted by courts in the United States, the pioneers of this field had the daunting task of proving its worthiness and usefulness to deciders of fact. Among those pioneers was Albert S. Osborn. Mr. Osborn's contributions to this field are widely known through the books he wrote on the subject. The Osborn family archives hold many of these original articles and, beginning with the article presented in this issue of *The Journal of The American Society of Questioned Document Examiners* many of these writings will be published or re-published.

The first article is *The Relation of Light to the Proof of Documents*, which was a paper originally presented at the eighth annual convention of the Illuminating Engineering Society at Cleveland, Ohio in September of 1914. The article was reprinted in the *Scientific American Supplement* in October of 1914 and again, in *Law Notes* (an early legal publication) in November of 1914.

Albert S. Osborn's concerns about the conditions present in courtrooms throughout the United States was memorialized in *The Mind of the Juror* in 1937. This article was one of the very early writings concerning this subject.

The Relation of Light to the Proof of Documents[★]

Albert S. Osborn

Examiner of Disputed Handwriting and Documents, New York; author of "Questioned Documents"

I can think of no association that bears a name which affords such a temptation to the manufacture of figures of speech as an Illuminating Engineering Society. The name at once suggests the dark places that need your assistance. Every department of human activity does indeed need illuminating engineers and what we all want everywhere and all the time is more light.

Light is an important factor in the proof of documents and light engineers can promote justice by making it easier to prove the facts regarding dis-

puted documents. Anything relating to the subject of illumination that affects the quality of human vision is of vital importance in all forgery investigations. Justice has been defeated many times because court-rooms like cathedrals have been lighted with a dim light somewhat in harmony with some of the hampering old legal precedents. Partly because of poor illumination, judges and jurors in many instances have not been able to see properly, where the case depended chiefly upon visible evidence. This partial blindness in the past has been due in some degree to an ancient legal procedure that threw a twilight gloom around legal investigations, weaving such a network of restrictions about them as made it difficult to prove a physical fact. Strange to say, objections are still

[★]A paper read at the eighth annual convention of the Illuminating Engineering Society, Cleveland, O., September 21-24, 1914. Reprinted in *Law Notes*, November, 1914; Reprinted in *Scientific American Supplement*, October 17, 1914.