

A. S. Osborn

Subjects: Others

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Basic Information



Name: A. S. Osborn
(Nov 1858–Apr 1946)

Birth Location:	United States
Title:	Biography of A. S. Osborn (The Father of Questioned Document)
Affiliation:	Unknown
Honor:	Father of Questioned Document

1. Introduction

Albert Sherman Osborn, commonly known as A. S. Osborn (1858-1946), was a renowned forensic document examiner who is often referred to as the "Father of Document Examination". His contributions to forensic science and his groundbreaking work in the area of questioned document analysis have earned him recognition. Osborn, who started his career in document analysis in the late 19th century and established himself as a prominent authority in the subject, was born on November 4, 1858, in Fulton County, New York ^[1].

Albert Sherman Osborn (1858-1946) was an American lawyer and pioneer in the field of forensic document examination. He is considered one of the fathers of modern forensic science and is credited with developing the fundamental principles of handwriting analysis, which are still used today.

Osborn was born on April 23, 1858, in Medina, New York. He graduated from the University of Rochester in 1881 and from Albany Law School in 1883. He practiced law in Rochester, New York, until he retired in 1923.

Osborn's interest in forensic document examination began in the 1890s when he was asked to help identify the author of an anonymous letter in a local case. He soon realized that there were no standardized methods for handwriting analysis, and he began to develop his own techniques.

In 1910, Osborn published his groundbreaking book "Questioned Documents," which became the definitive text on the subject. In the book, he laid out the basic principles of handwriting analysis and described techniques for analyzing handwriting, ink, paper, and other elements of documents.

Osborn's work had a significant impact on the legal system, and he was called upon to testify as an expert witness in many high-profile cases. He was involved in the investigation of the Lindbergh kidnapping case and provided expert testimony in the trial of Bruno Hauptmann.

| 2. Early Life and Education

Osborn was raised in an upstate New York farming town where he was born. He worked on the farm and went to the local country school in Grass Lake. He did not want to live on a farm, so after completing his primary education he went to Lansing State College, where he grew interested in the art of handwriting ^[1]. Thereafter, he joined the State Normal School in Cortland, New York, where he received a teaching certificate. He then went on to attend Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1881. While at Hamilton, Osborn developed an interest in law and began to study legal principles and court procedures. Later in 1882, he received a letter from the Rochester Business Institute, offering him a position as a handwriting instructor ^[2].

| 3. Early Professional Life

After completing his education, Osborn spent several years working as a teacher and a school administrator. Nevertheless, he quickly understood that the practice of law was his actual calling and decided on the legal profession. At Albany, New York, he enrolled in the Albany Law School, where he graduated with a law degree in 1889.

Osborn practiced law for a while after passing the bar exam before being chosen as a special agent for the US Treasury Department in 1895. He was in charge of looking into instances of forgery and other financial crimes in this capacity. He became interested in the study of questioned papers during this time since he frequently had to look over documents for his investigations ^[3].

| 4. Career as Document Examination

Osborn's interest in document examination continued to grow, and he decided to focus his career on the field. In 1901, he was appointed as a document examiner for the New York State Library, where he was in charge of looking through records that were provided as evidence in court cases.

Osborn became the first American to establish himself as a top authority on the subject of questioned document inspection and forgery analysis while working at the New York State Library. In order to assess the authenticity of a document, he developed a methodical process that entailed examining the paper, ink, handwriting, and other aspects of the document ^[2].

In 1910, Osborn published his landmark book "Questioned Documents," He subsequently updated the second edition in 1929, quickly becoming a standard reference in the field. The book provided a comprehensive guide to document examination, including detailed descriptions of the techniques and procedures used to analyze various types of documents. It also included a collection of case studies and examples, which demonstrated the application of these techniques in real-world situations ^[4].

In 1913, his interest in questioned documents led Osborn to invite a few selected practitioners for informal educational gatherings at his house, which eventually led to the establishment of the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners (ASQDE) on September 2, 1942. He was appointed as the first president of the society and was deeply connected with discipline and society until his death.

Apart from this, Osborn's other achievements in subsequent years like The Problem of Proof (1922), The Mind of the Juror (1937), and Questioned Document Problems (1944), were much recognized and appreciated by the legal fraternities, the general public, as well as public and private criminal justice professionals ^{[3][5]}.

Osborn's work in document examination was instrumental in the development of the field. He established standards and procedures for document examination that are still in use today, and his techniques and approaches continue to be an important part of forensic science. He is a well-known expert in the discipline of document forgery and analysis and thus claimed that "no two individuals could create the same handwriting characteristics" ^[5].

| 5. Later Life and Legacy

Throughout his career, Osborn worked as a document examiner and was engaged in a number of high-profile cases, such as the murder of Mary Phagan and the kidnapping of Charles Lindberg, the latter of which was the subject of the 2011 movie J. Edgar, in which actor Denis O'Hare played Osborn. He was frequently asked to appear in court as an expert witness, and his testimony was crucial in getting people convicted in numerous cases ^{[2][4]}.

Osborn worked as a document examiner in addition to participating in a number of charitable and civic endeavours. He was a contributor to the Albany Institute of History and Art's library and a member of the institute. He also contributed to the establishment of several new schools in Albany and gave scholarships to a large number of worthy pupils.

At the age of 87, Osborn passed away on April 22, 1946. He is regarded as one of the most influential individuals in the history of forensics and his contributions to the field of questioned document examination are still felt today.

References

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