

John J. Harris: The 2004 Albert S.

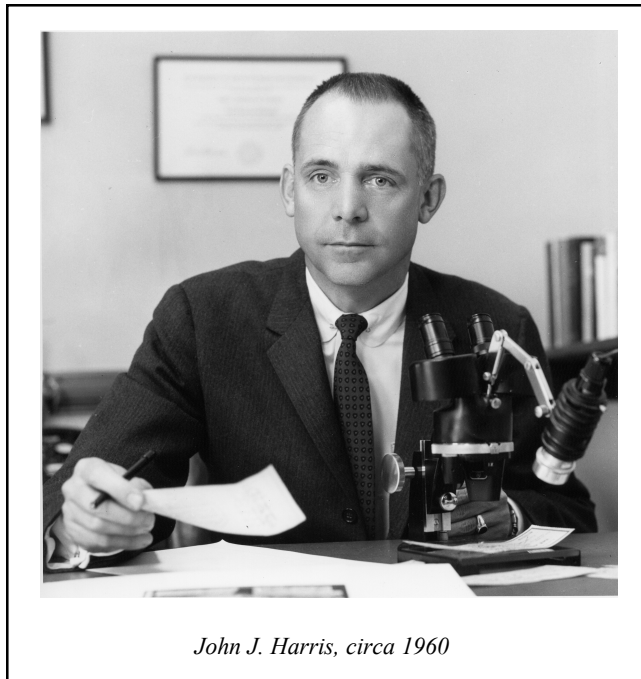
Howard C. Rile, Jr.

The American Society of Questioned Document Examiners is now into its 7th decade of existence. The success of the ASQDE over several generations is due to the hard work and devotion of many individuals. The Albert S. Osborn Award of Excellence was created to recognize those individuals who have contributed above and beyond what is expected of a Society member. It is entirely appropriate for these individuals to be recognized by their peers for their exceptional contributions.

The criteria for the ASO Award are as follows:

- A. The recipient must be a living member in good standing of the ASQDE and may be either a Regular or Life member at the time of the nomination.
- B. The recipient must have been active in the field of questioned document examination for a period of at least 25 years and must have been a member of the ASQDE for a period of at least 20 years.
- C. The award shall only be bestowed on persons who have attained exceptional distinction in terms of:
 1. Cumulative activities, such as professional research or literary accomplishments which advance the field of questioned document examination, and

2. Outstanding service to the ASQDE over a long period of time, such service resulting in generally recognized and beneficial improvements in the Society.



John J. Harris, circa 1960

To date, this award has only been awarded twice. The inaugural honoree was the late James V. P. Conway. The second recipient of the ASO Award was Roy A. Huber.

At the 2004 AGM in Memphis, the third recipient of the ASO Award was announced. The Executive Committee unanimously decided to honor Life member John J. Harris for his dedicated and exceptional service, not only to the ASQDE, but to the larger field of forensic document examination.

Prior to his career as a forensic document examiner, Jack served almost four years during WWII in the U.S. Merchant Marine. He has a Bachelor

of Science degree from the United States Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, New York. He also has a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California at Los Angeles.

Beginning in 1948, Jack was trained by his father, John L. Harris, who was a document examiner for over 25 years and the fourth president of the ASQDE. Jack became a probationary member of the ASQDE in 1949, a Regular member in 1951, and served as president from 1966-1968, the youngest person to ever hold that position. In addition to his affiliation with the ASQDE, Jack is also a member and fellow of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, he was on the Board of Trustees of the Forensic Science Foundation, and from 1973 to 1976, on the Board of Directors of the AAFS. In

1983, Jack was awarded the AAFS Questioned Document Section Award and in 1998 he was awarded the AAFS Distinguished Fellow Award.

Jack was an instructor in questioned document examination at the college level for more than 20 years, first at the University of Southern California and later at California State University of Los Angeles.

From 1951 until his retirement in 1997, Jack testified in hundreds of cases, most notably *People v. Juan Corona* (1972 and 1982), *Estate of Howard Hughes* (1978), *The Queen v. Amos Dawe* (1981), and *Estate of J. Paul Getty* (1983).

Osborn Award of Excellence Recipient

Arguably, the most significant contribution that Jack has made to the field was the major role that he played in establishing the American Board of Forensic Document Examiners (ABFDE).

Jack, along with Maureen Casey Owens, James Horan, Roy Huber, Jim Kelly, Ordway Hilton, Linton Godown, and many others, had realized the need for an independent certifying body in the field of forensic document examination. The idea of establishing this Board had been a constant source of discussion since the 1940s. The central idea was to recognize the professionalism of not only those who belonged to the ASQDE, but many other qualified examiners who, for whatever reason, were not members of the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners.

With the support of the AAFS and a grant from the LEAA, Jack and the fellow committee members were able to establish the ABFDE as an independent certifying body. Jack was the first president of the Board and was granted Certificate #1 in 1978.

Jack is one of our few members who have a historical perspective on our field and actually knew many of the individuals who were so instrumental in establishing forensic document



*Denver 1949 ASQDE meeting (from left):
Jack Harris, Ordway Hilton, Ed Fearon, Albert D. Osborn*

examination as we know it today. He had the privilege of meeting Albert S. Osborn when, at age 14, he was allowed to attend the 1937 Society meeting in Los Angeles. He, along with Don Doud and Lucille Lacy, are the surviving members who became well acquainted with most of the Charter Members of the ASQDE, including those who testified in the Lindbergh Kidnapping case.

It was the distinct pleasure of President Grant R. Sperry to present to John J. Harris the Albert S. Osborn Award of Excellence on August 25, 2004. Jack's acceptance speech was one of the highlights of the meeting. I'm happy

to report that Jack's eloquent and thought-provoking acceptance speech was recorded and will be incorporated into the CD of the meeting that will be available to all members in 2005.

I'm also happy to report that Jack has agreed to continue the third installment of his historical review of the ASQDE at the 2006 AGM, which will be held in Portland.

The Executive Committee, on behalf of the entire ASQDE, appreciated the opportunity to bestow recognition to Jack Harris for his many years of



devoted service and significant contributions to the ASQDE.