

Albert S. Osborn Award of Excellence

Dan C. Purdy

*The American Society of Questioned Document Examiners is now into its 7th decade of existence. In 1997, the ASQDE established the Albert S. Osborn Award of Excellence. This is the most prestigious award that can be offered to a member of this organization. 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. 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.

In the November 2005 issue of this newsletter, a notice appeared inviting members to nominate individuals who



they felt meet these stringent requirements. Two letters were received, one from Maureen Casey Owens and the other from Jim Hayes, recommending David J. Purtell as a worthy recipient.

The worth or calibre of a forensic document examiner can be measured in many ways:

- by the number of years he/she spent in the profession,
- by the number of cases examined or the number of times expert testimony was given,

- by the number of promotions received during a lengthy career,
- by the number of articles published in scientific journals or presented at forensic conferences, and,
- by special awards or honours granted by other organizations.

Dave's achievements in all of these areas are truly exceptional and out-standing.

Dave began his long and illustrious career as a document examiner in 1947 while working for the Chicago Police Department. At that time, Chicago police force did not have its own document section so Dave was trained by Herbert J. Walter - a private examiner who was one of the Society's founding members and a close friend of Albert S. Osborn. Dave was a quick study - he completed not only his understudy training but earned a baccalaureate degree with a major in Mathematics and Chemistry from Northwestern University in 1949.

Dave was not only a good document examiner but he was also a good administrator. He rose quickly through the ranks of the Chicago Police Department, being promoted first to captain and later to lab director in 1968. He retired from the police force in 1974 to operate a busy practice in downtown Chicago.

Dave attended his first ASQDE meeting in 1951 and joined the Society a few years later - one of the first

2006 Honoree: David J. Purtell

government examiners to do so. He was an active member of our Society serving on several committees and two years as ASQDE President from 1970 to 1972.

No slouch when it came to conducting research, Dave authored more than 30 papers that dealt with a wide variety of subjects including handwriting, typewriting, rubber stamps, writing instruments, training issues and other topics. These papers were either presented at forensic conferences, published by recognized forensic journals or both.

Dave also worked on several noteworthy cases during his career. One case involved Chicago mobster Paul "The Waiter" Ricca. Following the shooting of President Robert F. Kennedy, he assisted the House Select Committee on Assassinations who was interested in knowing if any evidence supported the theory that there were two Lee Harvey Oswalds. His findings were summed up in a report that unequivocally stated, "One person wrote the signatures, Lee Harvey Oswald, Lee H. Oswald, and Lee Oswald on the contested documents."

Dave provided assistance to other organizations as well as the Society. He helped establish the American Board of

Forensic Document Examiners as the premier certifying body for document examiners on this continent. He also



served in a leadership capacity with the AAFS Questioned Document Section from 1954-58 and as a member of the Academy's Executive Board from 1962-64. In 1998, Dave received the Northwestern University Alumni Merit

Award that is given to alumni who have distinguished themselves by outstanding professional and personal achievements.

Dave regularly lectured at courses offered by Northwestern University, the University of Illinois, the University of Indiana and St. Joseph's College. He was always keenly interested in raising people's level of awareness concerning his profession - a goal most of us aspire to.

Maureen Casey Owens wrote a biography on Dave that appeared in a recent issue of the Society's *Journal*. In that article, she mentioned how Dave enjoyed training young document examiners and that he was especially encouraging in their initial encounters with the Society. I was treated to Dave's

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Jim Hayes, Maureen Casey Owens, Dave Purtell, Dan Purdy

In Memoriam: Paul A. Osborn

Paul Albert Osborn, past president of the ASQDE and highly respected friend and colleague, passed away at the age of 75 on February 23rd, 2007.

During his career as a forensic document examiner, Paul provided expert testimony on hundreds of occasions in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and seventeen other states, as well as in the Panama Canal Zone, Virgin Islands and Canada. His experience spanned from criminal matters to complex civil cases and often specializing in matters of document alteration. His detailed and thorough reporting was well known, as was his abilities as an expert witness. His expertise was recognized internationally. He was joined in the now century old, four generation practice by his eldest son, John Paul Osborn, in 1982 with whom he worked for 24 years.

Paul lectured on the subject many times, to groups at Indiana University, the New York Law School and Brooklyn Law School, as well as many banking and bar associations. He was published in a number of professional and legal journals, including the Journal of Forensic Sciences. Paul was Questioned Documents Section Chairman of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, as well as holding other offices throughout his career. His highest honor, however, was to serve as President of the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners from 1990 to 1992, completing his term in that office during the 50th anniversary of the Society founded by his grandfather.

Paul leaves behind his wife of 50 years, Shirley Cooper Osborn; three sons, John Paul Osborn and his wife



Susan; Mark Albert Osborn and his wife Rebecca; and Matthew Cooper Osborn and his wife Susan; as well as seven grandchildren and two great grandsons. According to Paul's wishes, donations to your favorite charity in his memory or to the Cedar Grove Rescue Squad are requested in lieu of flowers.

ASO Award Honoree: David J. Purtell

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congenial hospitality when I attended my first ASQDE meeting in 1971. At the noon break, Dave and Don Doud stopped on their way out of the meeting room to ask if I would mind joining them for lunch. That's the kind of fellow Dave was....he didn't care how old you were, how much (or how little) experience you had or what your background was. He just wanted to encourage newcomers and make them feel welcome.

In January 2006, the Executive Committee unanimously agreed to present David J. Purtell with the Albert S. Osborn Award of Excellence. Unfortunately due to medical reasons, he was unable to make the lengthy Florida-Portland trip to receive the

award in person at our 2006 meeting. On November 16th, I had the pleasure of presenting the Albert S. Osborn Award of Excellence to Dave at a luncheon held in Dunedin, Florida that was attended by approximately 20 of his close friends and colleagues. Dave was both delighted and humbled to receive the award and commented:

I wish to thank the members of the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners for the significant honour that they have bestowed upon me as the 2006 recipient of the Albert S. Osborn Award of Excellence. Looking back, one of the most significant moments of my document career

was the day I was voted into Regular membership in the Society, joining the ranks of the finest document examiners in the country. The intervening years have held many exceptional experiences as a member of the ASQDE, and to receive this award from my peers at the close of my career is truly heart warming. Thank you.

Maureen Casey Owens and Jim Hayes deserve special thanks for organizing and making this event possible.