



Questioned Documents Section - 2013

J12 The Wills of Michael Renslow

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain an understanding of the various types of forensic document examinations that were relevant during the evaluation of the hand-printed holographic wills of Michael Renslow. Each area of consideration provides critical evidence that led to the ultimate conclusion of the wills authenticity. The various considerations in this case example are relevant to the examinations of many similar questioned documents that are challenged in legal proceedings.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing overwhelming evidence that addressed the issue of genuineness that existed between the contested wills. This evidence will be presented in a logical, cogent sequence within a framework and understanding that the author, who was trained in a formal, conventional manner consistent with ASTM standards, was opposed by two, less formally trained individuals who had arrived at diametrically opposite findings.

This case example involves the various holographic hand printed wills of Michael Renslow and the various forensic document examinations that were conducted to determine the authenticity of these wills.

In this matter, the author was opposed by two examiners who arrived at findings totally opposite from the author. When such a condition occurs, it is a legitimate endeavor to consider why this happened and whether formal training — or the lack of it — might be the underlying cause. The author was formally trained as a forensic document examiner in the mid-1970s in accordance with the requirements outlined in ASTM Standard E-2388 (*Standard Terminology for Expressing Conclusions of Forensic Document Examiners*), which requires — among other things — a minimum of two years of formal training in this field. The training of the opposing examiners did not meet the requirements of this ASTM Standard (indeed, one of them was originally a graphologist and was primarily self-trained in forensic document examination). Additionally, the author has been certified by the American Board of Forensic Document Examiners (ABFDE) since its inception in 1978; while one of the opposing examiners was certified by the American Board of Forensic Examiners (ABFE). Although both Boards have received accreditation by the Forensic Specialty Accreditation Board (FSAB), only ABFDE was initially sponsored by the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) and other national and international prestigious forensic document examiner organizations. In many ways, this case is a perfect example why formal training should be a prerequisite for individuals who claim expertise in this field.

A total of three wills were purportedly written and signed by Mr. Renslow over a two-month time span in latter 2010. Each will bequeathed all of Mr. Renslow's money, property, and other valuable assets to his girlfriend/fiancé of eight years, Ms. Susan Pinar Ilkin. Mr. Renslow's relatives, who were not mentioned in the wills, challenged the authenticity of the wills and retained an attorney to represent them. In turn, the author was retained by that attorney. The opposing examiners were retained on behalf of Ms. Pinar Ilkin.

This hand printing and signature case involves considerations such as disguise, simulation, tracing, alterations, erasures, indentations evidence, erasable ink and pencil writing, multiple authors, and other important aspects that, ultimately, led to a determination of the authenticity of the wills. Often, holographic will contests involve only several of these considerations; however, this case involved all of these and more. Attendees will be provided with the overwhelming evidence that was available for consideration all of which led directly to the determination of genuineness.

Each of the relevant aspects that were considered and explored in the examination of these wills will be discussed. While each of these aspects directly addressed the issue of the wills' authenticity, the opposing examiners apparently either did not consider these various aspects or they discounted them.

Holographic wills, to be considered authentic by the court, must be written and signed in their entirety by the decedent. Critical to the evaluation of the authenticity of such wills is the body of known writings. A sufficient quantity of comparable genuine (known) handwriting, hand printing and signatures is a pre-requisite for such an evaluation. In this case, a significant quantity of the "known" writings was provided by the proponent of the wills, Ms. Pinar Ilkin. Section 7.10 of ASTM Standard E 2290 (*Standard Guide for Examination of Handwritten Items*) requires, among other things, that the known writing must be inter-compared to assure that it was all written by one individual. Had this guide been considered and appropriately employed by the opposing examiners, they would have discovered that the known documents contained the writing of more than one individual. Had such a discovery been made, presumably their findings would have been different.

Finally, this presentation will consider that possibility that, if Michael Renslow didn't write and sign his purported holographic wills, then who did?

Holographic Will, Forgery, Simulation