



Questioned Documents Section - 2015

J8 Cut-and-Paste Manipulation of a Quitclaim Deed

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a greater awareness of how cut-and-paste manipulation may be used in the fabrication of a fraudulent document.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by enhancing forensic document examiners' knowledge of how cut-and-paste techniques may be used in the fabrication of fraudulent documents and by providing a case example of an unusual document fabrication involving extensive use of cut-and-paste manipulation.

A quitclaim deed is a legal instrument that transfers one party's interest in real property (the grantor) to another party (the grantee). Quitclaim deeds are often used between family members to transfer property interests.

In early 2014, a father and son were involved in a civil suit over a piece of real estate. The father presented a copy of a quitclaim deed, allegedly signed by the son, granting the father interest in the property. The father also presented a copy of a second quitclaim deed which granted the son interest in the property. The father claimed the second deed was not genuine.

The son claimed the quitclaim deed presented by the father as genuine was actually fraudulent and that the document had been fabricated through a cut-and-paste manipulation of the genuine quitclaim deed. The son presented an original quitclaim deed for examination along with the copies of the documents presented by the father.

Subsequent examination of the documents produced by the son disclosed that the purportedly genuine quitclaim deed presented by the father had actually been produced by extensive cut-and-paste manipulation of a copy of the original quitclaim deed. A number of sections within a page and between pages were rearranged to change the father from the grantor to the grantee. The son was changed to the grantor rather than the grantee.

The cut-and-paste manipulation of the document was skillfully done. Due to the copy quality of the document, there was very little evidence of cut-and-paste on the document. Only one serious mistake was found. When the son's signature was transferred from the second page to the first page, a vestige of a short line was transferred with it. Other than this error, there was minimal internal evidence of the cut-and-paste manipulation on the document. Fortunately, the availability of the original document made the determination that the document had been fraudulently produced a relatively simple task.

Although it was not difficult to determine that the deed presented by the father was an altered version of the original, the difficulty would have been greatly increased had the original document not been available for examination. Without the original document for comparison, it would have been impossible to determine that a number of entries on the document were manipulated through cut-and-paste.

This presentation provides an example of the use of cut-and-paste techniques in an actual document and is also a cautionary tale for forensic document examiners.

Questioned Documents, Handwriting, Alterations