



J16 Contested Estates: A Bloody Mess

Khody R. Detwiler, BS, Lesnevich & Detwiler, Roaring Spring, PA 16673*

Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand how blood differs from writing ink formulas within the scope of the forensic document examination field, and why many certain writing production methods and instrumentation are simply not compatible with materials such as blood.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by: (1) showing the intricacies of conducting an analysis of extended handwritten entries produced entirely in blood, and (2) providing a unique perspective into the limitations that blood may impose upon certain production methods and writing instruments.

From examining letters and notes in homicide cases to identifying authors of forged checks, Forensic Document Examiners (FDEs) are often called upon to provide opinions in a variety of complex situations. Many of these cases unfold through a unique web of interesting facts and circumstances. Some of the most captivating cases seen in the forensic document examination field arise when family members become embroiled over money and assets in highly contentious estate matters. This presentation focuses on one such case involving the authenticity of a handwritten codicil, which determined the true heirs of a multi-million dollar estate. Although this may have seemed like a straightforward forensic handwriting case, it was anything but, as this codicil was written entirely in blood.

To make matters even more interesting, opposing counsel took the position that if the writing was deemed genuine, then the codicil was nothing more than a fabrication produced with the aid of an autopen or some other similar mechanical writing instrument. In addition to completing a forensic handwriting analysis to determine the authenticity of the writing at issue, counsel's position required further research to be conducted into identifying how or why certain methods of production would, or would not, be plausible due to the writing at issue having been produced with blood. This stage of the analysis revealed quickly that very little information is available within the scientific community pertaining to the examination of writings produced with blood.

This presentation will walk attendees through the entire examination and testimony process, highlighting the specifics of the actual analysis and research conducted, and will further discuss how the evidence was presented at trial, leading to a successful outcome.

Handwriting, Blood, Fountain Pen