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BOGUS CHECK FILE CLASSIFIED BY TRADEMARKS

Orville B. Livingston

Orville B. Livingston, Handwriting Technician, Bureau of Identification, Milwaukee Police Department, was appointed to the department in 1925 as a civilian clerk. In 1938 Mr. Livingston first testified as a handwriting expert although he had been handling these problems for several years. His present duties include the responsibility of maintaining files of various classes of documents picked up in criminal investigations with the result that he has developed an efficient means of filing fraudulent checks for future comparisons. Because of the constant need for new methods of suppressing the activities of the professional check writer the Journal is pleased to be able to publish for the information of other police examiners this description of the "Trade-mark" section of the Milwaukee Police Check Files.—EDITOR.

Newer and better weapons helped the Allies win the late war. The best in methods and weapons of various kinds are needed to win the unending war of law enforcement against the criminal. Consequently, the details of this method, a sort of secret weapon, should not have unlimited circulation outside of the large group of workers engaged in or friendly to law enforcement.

In efforts to make use of habits of persons writing bad checks it was decided in November 1944 to experiment with an original filing system in addition to the effective methods already employed to identify bad check operators. This system was to identify the writer from the check alone, without necessarily considering the swindle method or the description of the passer, both of which are sometimes lacking. It is based on the manner of writing the amount, something appearing on every check whether or not it bears date, number, or notation as to its purpose. Certain people are consistent in check writing habits, others vary somewhat, while still others are very inconsistent. A file based on personal trademarks should assist greatly in the identification of many of the first two groups and occasionally with writers of the third class.

EXPERIMENTAL STEPS

In the experimental stages of the idea, 3x5 inch unruled index cards were filled out with the typewriter, headed "Check Trademarks." Next appeared filing information and typewritten check form, into which handwriting was copied from the check by drawing with a pen.

This file led to eight indentifications since 1946—not made

from memory or from a search of card index of names and method of operation. Some were made very simply, without extended search since the new specimens fell next to the earlier entry.

INFORMATION WITH FILED SPECIMEN

Since the idea has proved itself workable, photostatic copies of bad checks have been used for most entries since April, 1948. These are pasted on 5 x 8-inch cards, plain salmon color stock being used for the productions of unidentified persons, and white for those of known authorship. The Check Trademark heading is applied, also the filing order decided upon if the checks happens to be of a border-line type, not clearly fitting into one definite section. Color, sex, birth date, name and description of the person believed responsible, if this information is available, appear next. The bank's notation, title of offense, complaint file number or other reference, complainant name, the names of any officers assigned, daily bulletin listing, and cross reference between any succeeding entries and the original one against a given check body writer also appear above the check copy. If succeeding entries against the same person are made in other divisions of the Check Trademarks section, usually the first one is marked "Main File" in the upper right portion, and all later entries are cross-referenced to this.

CARD INDEXING

The original entries from complaint, warrant or correspondence cases are indexed on 3 x 5-inch cards in duplicate by names of writers and other names used on the checks, thin carbon paper used to make two cards with a single writing. Succeeding aliases, or names of swindlers learned later, are also carded. If the method of the swindle is distinctive, index cards are made as in the past but in duplicate and filed under headings which may help identify the crook. One set of name and modus operandi index cards is filed in the fingerprint name index of the Bureau of Identification, where the document identification units are maintained. The other set is filed in the general index of the Detective Bureau Clerical Division, where the check complaints are kept in file drawers separate from other criminal complaints. Criminal correspondence and warrants are also filed in that office.

Efforts are made to secure "Check Trademarks" entries in cases in which bad check warrants received by the Police Department are obtained by complainants directly without previous complaints to police. On occasions the copying of checks in warrant cases has resulted in the serving of a warrant obtained against a forger under an alias; also identifying a forger's production from a check to which he had on a previous occasion signed his correct name. When possible and desirable, arrested persons with bad check records are asked to fill out specimen checks. Some of these are placed in the Check Trademarks unit and indexed from the prisoner's fingerprint name index card and description sheet.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY CLASSIFICATIONS

The primary classification in the "Check Trademarks" section of the document file is based first on the manner of writing the "cents" part of the amount in figures, going from simple to complex forms in the order chosen for arranging the primary guides. The secondary classification is based on the manner of filling out the second amount line on the check, ending in the printed word "DOLLARS" or "DOLLARS.....CENTS." Only two habit factors need to come together to make possible identification of the writer of the body of a check by this method, irrespective of change in name or alias on the part of the writer.

ENTERING CHECKS WITH SINGLE WRITTEN AMOUNTS

In case in which the questioned amount appears in figures only, in the \$. space, but not in the space for the amount in words (. DOLLARS), an entry is placed in the front part of the proper primary classification. If the amount appears only in words, with the \$. space empty, entry is made in the special secondary division at the rear of the file, headed "RARE SECONDARY TRADEMARKS." If desired, very rare and distinctive ways of writing secondary amounts can be entered in the latter section, even though the primary amount in figures is present; but such an entry should be a cross reference from the entry in the proper primary division. Also, a special section at the rear, headed "RARE PRIMARY TRADEMARKS", is provided for extremely rare and unusual ways of writing the amounts in figures.

ORDER OF PRIMARY GUIDES

Primary guides appear in the file in this order:

1—	$\frac{\cdot\text{oo}}{\text{oo}}$	$\frac{\text{xx}}{\text{oo}}$	$\frac{\text{no}}{\text{100}}$
:	$\frac{\cdot\text{oo}}{\text{oo}}$	$\frac{\text{no}}{\text{oo}}$	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{100}}$
=	$\frac{\%}{\text{oo}}$	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{xx}}$	$\frac{\text{no}}{\text{100}}$
"	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{oo}}$	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{xx}}$	$\frac{\text{no}}{\text{100}}$
#	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{oo}}$	$\frac{\text{xx}}{\text{xx}}$	$\frac{100}{\text{oo}} - \frac{100}{\text{xx}}$
%	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{oo}}$ (also in- cludes more than 3 under- lines)	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{ooo}}$	$\frac{000}{\text{ooo}} - \frac{000}{\text{xxx}} - \frac{000}{\text{100}}$
1 00 (decimal point omitted)			
.00	$\frac{\text{xx}}{\text{xx}}$	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{xxx}}$	RARE PRIMARY TRADEMARKS
/00	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{r}} - \frac{\text{oo}}{\text{rr}}$	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{100}}$	<hr/>
.00¢	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{o}} - \frac{\text{oo}}{\text{x}}$	$\frac{\text{no}}{\text{100}}$	RARE SECONDARY TRADEMARKS
.00	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{oo}}$	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{100}}$	
<u>.00</u>	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{oo}}$	$\frac{\text{oo}}{\text{100}}$	

BORDER-LINE CASES

In deciding whether to use the horizontal filing or "slant" filing section for a given check, the lines varying not more than about 10 degrees from horizontal are considered for horizontal filing, unless they extend considerably beyond the figures they accompany. If the line is long extended and slanting, even though the angle is 10 degrees or less, the entry is given the appropriate "slant" filing. If the same slant trend continues in future specimens by the same writer, after a horizontal entry has been made, an entry can be made profitably in the "slant" division also. Curving and reverse curve lines are filed with straight lines and slant classified as to whether the left end of the line is higher or lower than the right end, or about horizontal with it. In a collection where many thousands of specimens are expected to be filed, separate primary guides could be used for lines with pronounced curves and filed after the corresponding straight line guides.

ORDER OF SECONDARY GUIDES

As in the primary guides, proceeding from simple to complex determines the secondary filing order. Secondary guides used

in the commonest primary division .00 are arranged as follows:

(Before first secondary guide, specimens with primary amounts only; then secondary amounts in figures instead of words, or combinations of numerals first and then words)	$\frac{00}{100}$	AND $\frac{00}{100}$
	$\frac{XX}{100}$	AND $\frac{NO}{100}$
	$\frac{NO}{100}$	& 00/100
	$\frac{NO}{100}$	& NO/100
One--	00/100	AND 00/100
One fifty (latter word for ϕ)	NO/100	AND NO/100
DOLS. <u> </u> CTS. (form)	$\frac{NO}{1000}$	& $\frac{00}{100}$
		& (words)
DOLS. <u>00</u> CTS. (form)	$\frac{100}{00}$	DOLLARS
		DOLLARS--00
DOLS. <u>XX</u> CTS. (form)	&	DOLLARS $\frac{00}{00}$
DOLS. <u>NO</u> CTS. (form)	AND	DOLLARS $\frac{00}{100}$
--X (Example: Ten--X)	& 00	DOLLARS $\frac{NO}{100}$
one # (Example: Ten #)	& NO	DOLLARS $\frac{NO}{100}$
--%	AND 00	DOLLARS 00/100
--00	AND NO	DOLLARS NO/100
--XX	& $\frac{00}{00}$	DOLLARS $\frac{00}{XXXX}$
--NO		DOLLARS--CENTS
00 (regardless of $\frac{00}{00}$ slant)	& $\frac{NO}{00}$	DOLLARS &
	& $\frac{00}{XX}$	DOLLARS & $\frac{00}{100}$
$\frac{XX}{00}$		DOLLARS & 00/100
	& $\frac{00}{XXX}$	DOLLARS & <u> </u> CENTS
$\frac{NO}{00}$		DOLLARS AND <u> </u> CENTS
$\frac{00}{XX}$	& $\frac{00}{100}$	DOLLARS & <u> </u> HUNDREDTHS
$\frac{00}{XXX}$	& $\frac{XX}{100}$	CHECKWRITER
	& $\frac{NO}{100}$	

This does not include all the possible guides in the secondary filing division but gives an idea of what can be done, more guides being added in logical order as needed. Not all of these

would be needed in a small or beginning collection, but the same general order could be followed. In the secondary filing, what is considered about normal is “ — & $\frac{00}{100}$.” When “&” or “and” is omitted from the amount in words and figures, or when the amount is given as words only (example: “Twenty Five..” for the words amount on a \$25 check), the entry is filed nearer the front of the secondary group. If an unnecessary word, “DOLLARS”—already printed in the form—is inserted, the entry is made toward the rear in the proper primary division. If the writer of the check has used the check form with secondary line ending in “.....DOLLARS.....CENTS” but has disregarded the form in the writing, it is also disregarded in the filing order.

An example of the order chosen, when the denominator is the same but the numerator varies, is this: $\frac{00}{00}$, $\frac{XX}{00}$, $\frac{NO}{00}$. Thus if the same writer, reasonably consistent, makes out a check for an even amount, with either of the latter two forms for numerator, a check by him for an odd amount, ending in \$.98, for instance, would be filed, $\frac{98}{00}$, in the $\frac{00}{00}$ division, near to where the even amount check copy would be placed.

When the dividing line of the fraction is absent, thus: “Sixty Five and no 100”, the specimen can be filed as if the missing slanting line were present: “. .and no/100”. An entry also can be made in the Rare Secondary Trademarks section at the back of the file.

Factors considered in the secondary filing order are: presence or absence of “&” or “and”, unnecessary insertion of word “DOLLARS”, number and character of numerator and denominator numerals, or letters, and their arrangement; slant of fractional bar where figures, etc., are otherwise alike. Presence or absence of the decimal point generally has no effect on the filing order, an exception being in the “1 00” primary guide. Presence of a colon in the primary amount, instead of decimal point, is rare and justifies an entry in both the “:” (colon) primary section and the $\frac{00}{100}$ section in an example of this kind:
 $\$25 : \frac{00}{100}$.

BREAKDOWN FOR CROWDED DIVISIONS

In those sections which have largest accumulations, special guides for typewritten checks can be inserted to shorten the search. Consideration can be given to other guides for pen-

printed and rubber stamp check amounts. In large accumulations of longhand checks in certain divisions, a breakdown could be made on the basis of skill of the writer—"poor," "medium" and "good" divisions suggested.

Those checks bearing checkwriter impressions in addition to the longhand, rubber stamped, or typewritten amount in figures are filed at the rear in the respective primary division of the file. In each case, within a particular secondary classification, the checks are filed in numerical order according to the amount of each, the smallest amount in front.

NUMBER OF ENTRIES PER WRITER

At this writing, Sept. 21, 1948, specimens or copies of check body writing filed in our Check Trademarks section are believed to have been written by about 1211 different persons. The total number of entries is figured at 2083, including hand drawn copies, photostatic, and photographic copies, and requested specimen checks. This means an average of about 1.72 entries per person. This should increase slowly as new specimens by persistent local check swindlers are added. No attempt is made to enter a copy of every bad check ascribed to one person, but if the new check is written in such a manner as to fall in a part of the file not already supplied with a copy of that person's work, a new check copy is placed in position to identify the swindler if this variation occurs again.

USING THE FILE

In trying to determine whether a newly reported check is connected with any previously recorded, or with the writing of any known check swindler, the experienced check examiner will identify a reasonable percentage from memory, with little or no hesitation. He searches name indexes, except possibly for checks with the commonest names; also any applicable modus operandi index cards. Next comes search of the Check Trademarks section, checking one or two divisions frequently being sufficient. Likely variations the examiner thinks of may lead to checking a few more sections. The border-line specimen, not falling clearly into a certain division, takes more searching if this is well done.

One forger, using many names in various states several years, is so consistent in amount writing that if all his checks were copied and entered in the file they would be almost immediately next to each other. All the variations occurring in more than

22 checks by a forger recently convicted here were covered in 3 entries in the Check Trademarks section. Two would have been enough. In a series of typewritten 2-party checks, signed with many names by a woman, payable to many aliases, each preceded by the title "MR.," and passed mostly by a man in cities from California to Indiana, all the Wisconsin specimens examined here would have come to just one spot in the Check Trademarks section and could have been identified there easily as in one series, had they not been linked through memory. A young forger of 18 checks recently sentenced was much less consistent. Also he used old and new style check forms. Entries were made from 11 bad checks and 2 specimens he wrote in custody. If he resumes forgery here it is expected he will be identified quickly.

"DEAD" SECTION

So as to have the least possible number of places to look, always an efficiency principle in indexing, known and unidentified specimens, from both cleared and unsolved cases, are filed together in one arrangement. To avoid unnecessary handling of material no longer useful, a separate section is kept for Check Trademarks specimens by writers known to be dead. The entries are in the same filing order as in the main section, so that if an old check needed to be compared with specimen check writing of dead persons this could be done conveniently.

VALUE OF FILE

A keen memory, valuable in all phases of law enforcement, can hardly be fully replaced by this file method, but it makes easily available to newer personnel much that might have been found without difficulty only through memory otherwise. It is the author's belief that this file, properly used and diligently maintained, can do things for check law enforcers that even the finest of memories cannot. It offers hope of identification of forgers through systematic search of short to reasonable length. Such a file will not take the place of investigation, communication with various agencies, and sending the productions of known or suspected transient check swindlers to the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington, D. C., for examination and file search. The F.B.I. Laboratory has given us much help in identifying check offenders.