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TYPEWRITING—ORIGINAL AND CARBON COPIES

JOHN L. HARRIS

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Many years ago the counterpart of a typewritten carbon copy of a document was made with a pair of scissors. The debenture was cut zig-zag across the page at a point above the writing. One party kept the lower part with the text and signatures on it. The holder of the upper section could be identified with the transaction, but he had no protection against an alteration of the original text which might occur subsequent to the execution of the signatures. Modern typewritten carbons—when genuine—furnish a facsimile of the original text and are an improvement over the scissors method.

However, even this method is not perfect. Original, or carbon copies of the same document get lost, stolen, or are purposely concealed and altered. In some cases fake imitations are substituted for fraudulent purposes. Disputes arise, lawsuits result, and the document examiner is challenged to establish what really happened.

As with most questioned document problems, there is a limitation as to what can be determined by only examining the document itself. Definite proof may depend upon comparison with other documents, or facts, which can be authenticated. Especially is this true of typewritten documents when it is necessary to prove where they were typed, when they were typed, and who typed them. The common sense approach in beginning an inquiry of this kind would, therefore, be to obtain all the available information from the lawyer, or client, who knows the background history of the case.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CASE

1. What typewriter was used?
2. When and where was the typewriter obtained?

3. Records of typewriter repairs and servicing.
4. Who was the typist? Are typists' initials on the document?
5. How many typists were available?
6. Was alleged typist working on date of document?
Check payroll; illness, vacation, etc.
7. How many typewriters were available?
8. Is there other material typed by the same typist? Same machine? Same date?
9. Are there shorthand notes for verification with typing?
10. Are there comparable typewritten documents to be found in other offices, public records, etc.?
11. It is advisable to check purchases of stationary, paper, carbon paper, typewriter ribbons, etc.
12. Check other sources of information as correspondence, memorandums, affidavits, depositions, transcripts of testimony, etc.

The following is a list of the most common problems arising out of the relationship between original and carbon copies of typewritten documents, with suggestions to follow in examination of the documents.

FROM EXAMINATION OF ORIGINAL RIBBON COPY WAS A DUPLICATE CARBON COPY MADE?

1. Check the depth of the impressions on the back side of the original. Most likely the paper will not be punctured unless there was more than one sheet of paper in machine.
2. Sometimes on a hard platen sharp letters have a tendency to cut deeply, or entirely through the original copy if only one sheet of paper is in the machine.
3. If the spacing between lines of typing is more

than six to the inch there must have been additional sheets, or loading, to cause the spread on the original.

4. Examine microscopically the holes made by punctuation marks on the back of the original. If there are two colors around the torn areas one color is from the ribbon, and the other is from the carbon paper.

WERE CARBON COPIES ALL TYPED TOGETHER?

1. Superimpose copies over transmitted light and check arrangement and spacing.
2. Check for same type faces, type defects, type alignment, and type pressure variations in all letters and figures. Examine under type gauge for uniformity in spacing of letters, lines and margins.
3. Test and compare color of toner dyes in carbon impressions with solution of 5% glacial acetic acid and 95% ethyl alcohol.
4. Examine depth of color range of one copy to another. The first copy is usually the darkest and also has the sharpest type impressions.
5. The use of different colors or brands of carbon paper in a multi-page document may be excusable, but, if different brand pulp papers were also used, suspicion of fraud would be increased.
6. Erasures, overstriking of letters, skip spacing, and other characteristics due to the typist should be carefully looked for and examined.
7. Look for "carbon trees" and smudges. The same "carbon tree" pattern may be found on other dated unquestioned documents.
8. Malalignment of lines may be due to imperfect operation of old or loose rollers against the platen which cause the papers to shift positions, especially near the bottom of the page.

FRAUDULENT CARBON COPIES

1. If subjected to the same tests as outlined in previous section, most fake carbon copies can be proven to be fraudulent.
2. If there are no additional carbon copies to compare with the questioned carbon and furthermore no genuine ribbon copy for comparison, then the examination procedure follows the same pattern as would apply to the examination of any typewritten document to determine the age and origin of the exhibit in question. This type of case applies when one party claims to have written a document and sent the original to the opposite party

who denies they every received it, or have no record of it.

IS THE DOCUMENT A RIBBON OR CARBON COPY?

1. The recent use of carbon ribbons complicate this problem and calls for careful examination.
2. Ordinarily a carbon impression is more blurred and fuzzy than a ribbon impression and a ribbon impression being more liquid than carbon and wax, has more covering capacity over the surface of the paper.

ERASURES, ALTERATIONS, AND INTERLINEATIONS ON CARBON COPIES

1. Fraudulent alterations on a carbon copy are usually more difficult to perfect than with ribbon copies because the type positions have to be calculated with the top sheet and carbon paper over the already typed carbon copy.
2. If changes were honestly made at or about the same time as on the original, they must have been done with the same typewriter and carbon paper.
3. Check carefully for erasures, difference in sharpness and color of carbon impressions, and malalignment.

PHYSICAL MARKINGS

1. A ribbon and carbon copy, or different carbon copies, can sometimes be identified with each other by paper fastener markings, folds and creases in the paper, stains and blemishes, and ink spots and ink off-sets.
2. Embossings from impressions of heavy handwriting may be imprinted from the ribbon copy to the carbon, or vice versa.
3. The approximate age or the authenticity of a carbon copy may sometimes be estimated by finding an offset of the carbon impressions on a sheet of paper in a file that was tightly pressed against the carbon copy. Such a copy would most likely be as old as the date of the other document that had the transfer impression.
4. In carbon copy cases do not overlook the carbon paper itself. In an anonymous letter case investigators found in the suspect's room a single sheet of carbon paper with nothing but an imprint of the letter clearly outlined on the carbon paper. He confessed.