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A NOTE ON IDENTIFYING TYPEWRITING

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The qualities of typewriting impressions most useful for identifying the individual machine on which writing was done were well established before 1910. In *Questioned Documents* by A. S. Osborn, First Edition, the following major classes of identifying characteristics were listed:

1. The design, size, and proportions of the characters.
2. The vertical and horizontal alignment of each character in its relation to others.
3. The vertical alignment of characters with respect to the mechanical horizontal base line of the writing.
4. The comparative weight of the impressions resulting from the degree of alignment of the plane of the typeface with that of the paper surface.
5. The condition of each typeface with respect to defects or damage.

Departure from new machine condition in these five qualities forms the framework for identification of the work of any particular typewriter. The mechanical construction of some electric typewriting machines suggests at least one additional

class:

6. The relative weight of impression of one character as compared to others.

Aside from this addition and a few other minor occasional considerations, the five basic factors still cover the identifying characteristics of typewriting just as they have for fifty or more years

Of the six, perhaps the most obviously convincing is No. 5, the defects, bruises, or scars resulting from accidental damage. Such identifying characteristics are exemplified by the typewritten material presented in the comparison chart, figure 2. Here the typewritings shown side by side involve numerous points of damage to serifs and other parts of letter outline. Comparing the numerous similarities in damaged type, with allowance for the variation in impression due to slightly differing machine and ribbon conditions that might prevail at different times, the chart presents a very persuasive demonstration identifying the typewritings as having a common source. Such a conclusion would be based solely on condition of the typeface.

Unfortunately, an opinion so conceived would

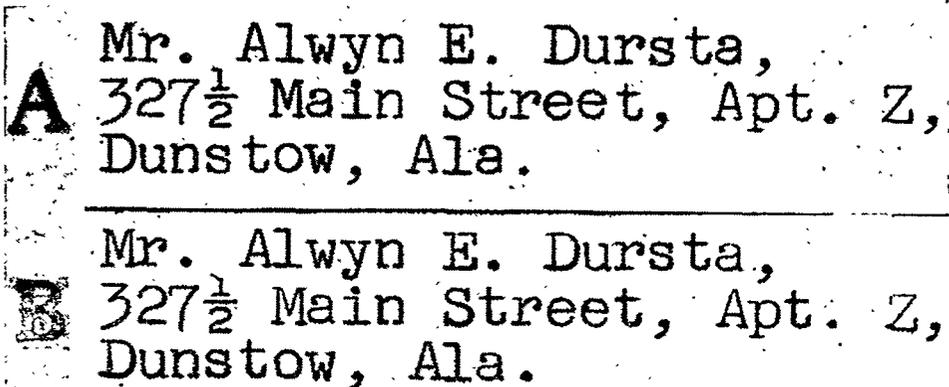


Figure 1

Two typewritten addresses in question. Were these prepared on the same typewriter? See figure 2 for detailed comparison.

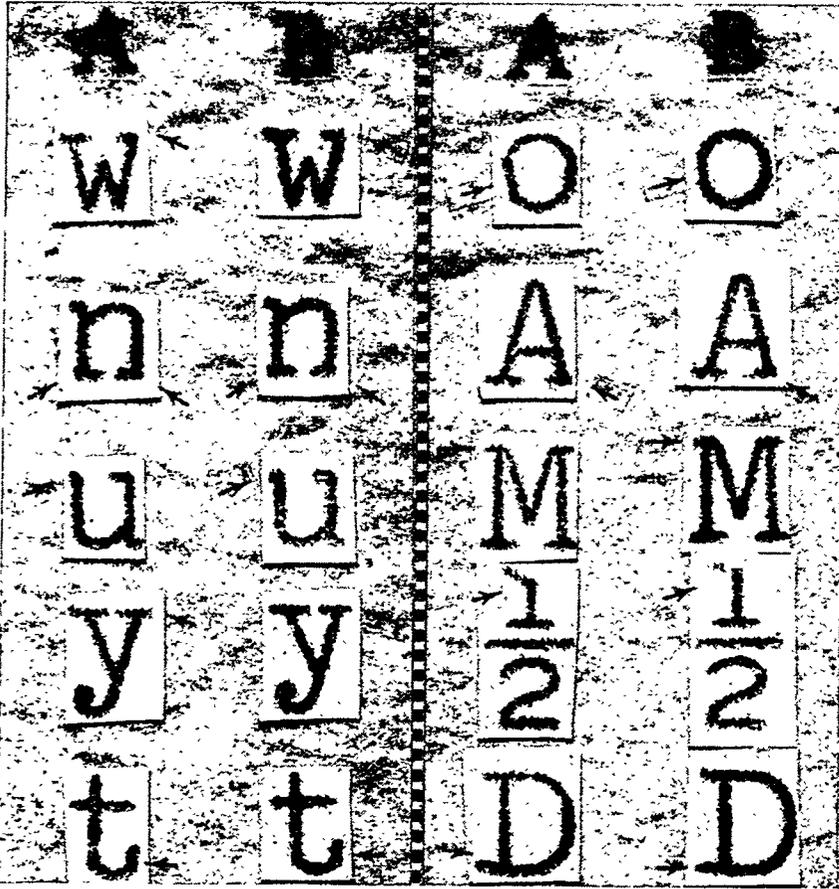


Figure 2

A comparison of letters taken from the two addresses of figure 1. Arrows point to prominent areas of damage in specific letters. Is one justified in stating that both were typewritten on the same machine?

a Mrs. David Z. Fovmisk,
#795 Ulmfosh Blvd. (front),
Dunstow, Alabama.

b Mrs. David Z. Fovmisk,
#795 Ulmfosh Blvd. (front),
Dunstow, Alabama.

Figure 3

A second address originating from the same sources as "A" and "B" in figure 1. Address "a" of this illustration corresponds to address "A" of figure 1.

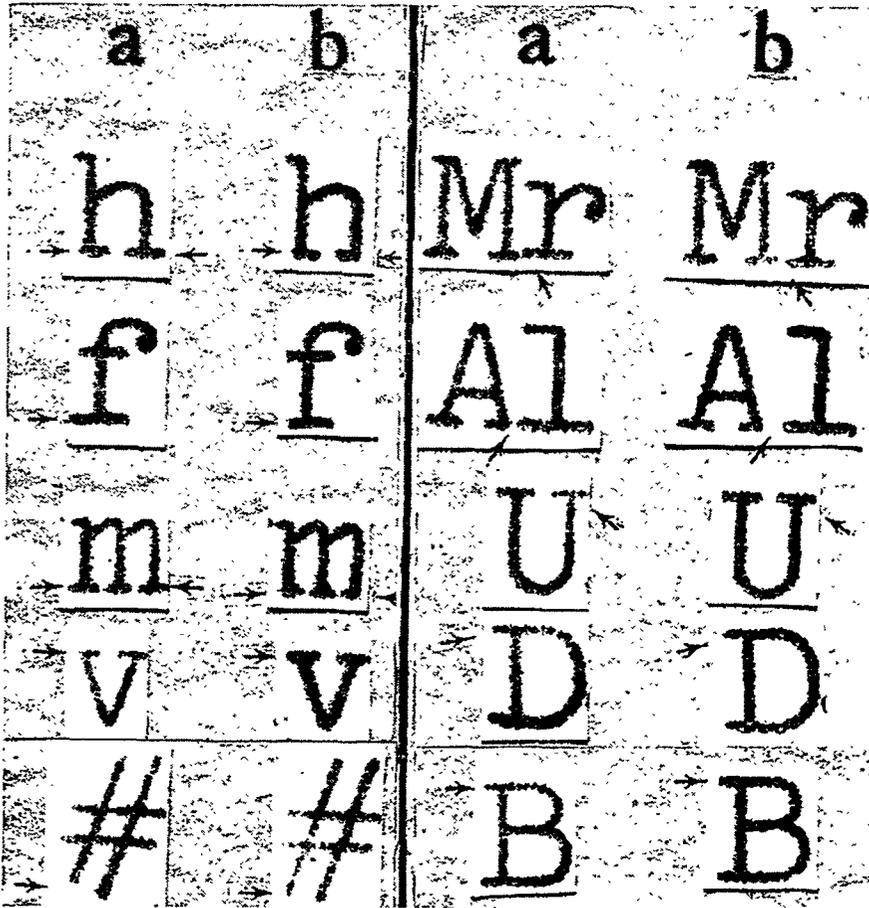


Figure 4

A comparison chart based upon the material contained in figure 3 demonstrates clearly that specimen "a" was written on a different machine than specimen "b." While the damaged type face of "h", "f" and "m" are dissimilar and did not appear in the material contained in figure 1, the differences in vertical alignment of the "M" and "r" of Mr. is also a part of the typewriting of figure 1. Likewise, the "Al" combination in which the spacing between letters differs can be found in the addresses of figure 1, as well as difference in the uneven impressions of the "D's".

be completely in error. The two typewritings are not the work of the same typewriting machine on different occasions but of different machines located in the same office which by coincidence suffered very nearly the same damage to particular letters over a period of time. With a limited amount of typewriting to compare, such as is shown in figure 1, and failure to consider the other typewriting identifying qualities, a serious but plausible identification error could be easily made. With different or additional writing, such as shown in figure 3, the work of the two typewriters can be readily differentiated, based on damaged type alone. In figure 4 the characteristics of the letters "h," "f," and "m" clearly demonstrate this.

Returning to figures 1 and 2, had the examiner

not been overly influenced by the obvious damaged type so that he also observed and considered other factors as alignment of characters and the weight of impression, the work of the two typewriters would have been correctly differentiated. (See figure 4 for 3 such defects.) Some uncertainty might still have remained as to the possibility of writings being the work of a single typewriter at different periods in its history.

The illustrations were prepared to emphasize the potential danger in failure to consider and evaluate every class of evidence in typewriting machine identification. Full examination becomes imperative with limited comparison material, and the typewriting quality of every character present must be studied and weighed.