

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of "An Introduction to Criminalistics"

REFERENCE: O'Hara, C. E. and Osterburg, J. W., *An Introduction to Criminalistics*, 2nd ed, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind., London, England, 1972, 705 pages, \$17.50.

When *An Introduction to Criminalistics* was written in 1948, it was a fine book. It led the way in a great surge forward in the scientific approach to criminal investigation. It deserved the high esteem in which it was held by most persons in the forensic sciences. But today it is a worthwhile part of any police science library largely as a record of early tools and methods. It is simply too antiquated to be of much practical value on a day-to-day basis.

In 1948-49 the various disciplines in the forensic science field were quite different from what they are today. The academic community had paid scant attention to the pressing need for forensic scientists and was only beginning to train students in that area. For the most part the term "Police Crime Lab" was a misnomer. There were only a few departments that could boast of having an operating crime laboratory. Most had only a few marginally effective workers doing basic photographic and fingerprint work, while a few of the larger departments provided some type of firearms expertise.

There has, of course, been a great increase in the number of laboratories and properly trained workers in the field. There are literally hundreds of academic programs at the college level which deal with the forensic sciences, criminalistics, and police science. The great concern over rising crime rates and restrictive court decisions has caused most municipalities, as well as the Federal government, to pour vast sums of money into the scientific crime detection area. This money has made it possible for existing crime labs to purchase new equipment and to train present personnel and employ better educated employees. It has also been the catalyst for private industry to develop new technology. There are now a number of associations dedicated to the professionalization of the forensic science field. These associations have provided a yearly forum where workers have presented hundreds of scientific papers, many important additions to the literature of the various disciplines.

In the 25 years since the original publication of this book, more research and change

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have occurred in the field than in the 100 years preceding its publication. Most of the machines and equipment described and pictured are now outmoded, unavailable, and in some cases are actually museum pieces. Many of the techniques described have not been in use for years. The text references at the end of each chapter do not list a paper or a book written after 1948. For all practical purposes it would be impossible to obtain most of them, even if their subject matter were still appropriate to today's needs.

In this second copyrighted edition, the preface discusses the reasons for permitting the reprinting of the text. The authors recognized that there were many new tools such as "neutron activation analysis, mass spectrometry, gas chromatography, and neutron radiography" currently in use that were not mentioned in the book. They considered expanding the book to include these topics, but rejected the idea, "in favor of retaining the text within manageable size." They further state, "the book does not pretend to be a comprehensive manual nor is it designed to include the latest developments in analytical instrumentation. Rather, it purports to describe the basic principles and tools which are most generally applicable to police laboratory work."

It seems unfortunate that these respected authors did not seize this opportunity to rebuild this text into a usable tool for today's forensic science workers. This would have been a welcome contribution to the field, partially satisfying the need for good text material. The book could have been kept within manageable size if the outmoded material had been deleted to provide space for coverage of current techniques, such as instrumental analysis, stereo chemical analysis, and computers. The authors felt that "it was well within the power of the serious student" to acquire these techniques. It would have been a positive contribution, then, to provide the means for assisting him in acquiring that knowledge.

Most disciplines of the forensic sciences have grown in complexity to the point where individual texts dealing with each area would seem the logical approach. These texts should outline current problems and demonstrate how to solve them using modern technology within the scope of today's legal system. The sum of the knowledge needed today in each branch of the forensic sciences (or, indeed, any field) is so great that there is no time to learn yesterday's techniques.

The authors felt compelled to permit the reprinting of the book because of the acknowledged shortage of good texts in the field. I do not feel that this reprinting has in any way satisfied that pressing need.