

## BOOK REVIEW

Sandra J. Wiersema,<sup>1</sup> B.S.

### Review of *The Judgement of Experts: Essays and Documents about the Investigation of the Forging of the "Oath of a Freeman"*

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**REFERENCE:** Gilreath, J., Ed., *The Judgement of Experts: Essays and Documents about the Investigation of the Forging of the "Oath of a Freeman,"* American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA, 1991, \$32.50.

This book, as the title implies, is a compilation of documents, correspondence, and firsthand accounts from the institutions and individuals that were involved in examining Mark Hofmann's forgery of the "Oath of a Freeman."

The "Oath" is allegedly the first document printed in America in 1638/1639 by Stephen Daye's Cambridge press. Until the Hofmann "Oath" surfaced in 1985, there was no known surviving copy of the original printing. If genuine, this document would be worth a great deal of money.

The editor of the book states that "the volume serves not only as an account of the examination of the forgery but also presents a partial inventory of the various means—scientific, forensic, historic, and literary—that investigators have available to test a printed document's authenticity." The book more than fulfills its stated purpose.

James Gilreath has compiled a chronological presentation of the examination of the "Oath." He begins with an account by Shiller-Wapner Galleries, the New York book-sellers chosen by Hofmann to represent him in the sale of the "Oath." They describe their initial impressions and examinations of the "Oath" and their eventual determination that authentication was absolutely essential.

The "Oath" was first sent to the Library of Congress for historical and scientific testing. It was examined and compared by optical microscopy, X-ray fluorescence, infrared spectroscopy, and chemical testing to the "Bay Psalm Book," a contemporaneous product of Stephen Daye's Cambridge press. A complete copy of the preliminary report is included in the book. The studies revealed ". . . no evidence that would contravene a mid-seventeenth century date . . ." for the "Oath."

The "Oath" was subsequently examined by the American Antiquarian Society, the Crocker Nuclear Laboratory at the University of California, Davis, and by Dr. Walter McCrone, McCrone Research Institute, Chicago, Illinois. Accounts of the examinations conducted by each are included. None of the testing up to this point could **PROVE** that the "Oath" was a forgery.

<sup>1</sup>Criminalist, Forensic Document Examiner, San Diego Police Department, 1401 Broadway, San Diego, CA 92101.

Ken Farnsworth, a homicide detective with the Salt Lake City Police Department, gives an excellent account of the investigation of murder and fraud which eventually led to the discovery of a negative of the "Oath" at a photoengraving store in Salt Lake.

Armed with this negative, Marvin Rennert, a forensic document examiner with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms was finally able to **PROVE** that the "Oath" was a forgery prepared from the negative.

The final pages of the book consist of transcripts of prison interviews between Mark Hofmann and the Office of the Salt Lake (Utah) County Attorney detailing the production of the "Oath."

My only negative comment is the poor quality of some of the reproductions of the documents and transcripts. All were prepared from photocopies and some are difficult to read.

This book makes fascinating reading for anyone, but is a must for forensic document examiners and other experts involved in examining or authenticating historical documents.