

# JACK RUNNINGER (1923-2017), OPTOMETRIC PRACTITIONER, AUTHOR, EDITOR, AND HUMORIST

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Jack Runninger, OD. Image courtesy DePauw University, <https://www.depauw.edu/news-media/latest-news/details/18337/>. Accessed 4 April 2018. From article "Jack Runninger '45 Inducted in National Optometry Hall of Fame October 26, 2006"

Jack Runninger (1923-2017) practiced optometry for over 40 years and influenced countless optometrists through his writings, organization activities, and informal advice. He was born and raised in northern Illinois. After attending DePauw University in Greencastle, IN, and serving in the United States Navy in World War II, he started studies at Southern College of Optometry.

After completing his Doctor of Optometry degree in 1948, Runninger entered practice in Rome, GA. He

held various leadership positions including presidency of the Georgia Optometric Association and of the Southern Council of Optometrists. Dr. Runninger served as editor for three different significant optometry journals, *Southern Journal of Optometry*, *Optometric Management*, and *Optometric Economics*. He wrote regular editorials and columns for those publications.

Runninger's one or two page columns are well known for their common sense and sage advice gained from experience told in an

entertaining and humorous fashion. Irving Bennett, OD, whom Runninger followed as editor of *Optometric Management*, likened him to Mark Twain. Bennett noted that similar to Mark Twain, Runninger "cleverly, skillfully and ingeniously combined wisdom and humor in such a way that readers smiled and learned something."<sup>1</sup> Runninger wrote a column appropriately titled "Lessons Learned" for *Optometric Management* until 2015.

Over a hundred of Runninger's optometry columns were collected



Jack Runninger, OD (left), editor of the *Southern Journal of Optometry*, accepts Association of Optometric Editors "Best Editorial" award, July 9, 1974. 2016.IMG.2080. Image courtesy The Archives & Museum of Optometry.]

in a book titled “You’ll Do Great, If You Communicate!” These columns do not deal with technical matters, but rather tell stories that demonstrate principles of effective communication with patients, public relations, and practice management.

Runniger also wrote five books of humor for the lay public and a frequent column for his local newspaper, the Rome News-Tribune. Some appreciation for his humor may be gained from the obituary he wrote for himself for that newspaper,<sup>2</sup> excerpts from which can be read here:

## References

1. Bennett I. The Mark Twain of optometry. *Optom Management* 2017;52(8):12.
2. Dr. Jack Runniger. [http://www.northwestgeorgianews.com/rome/news.obits\\_death\\_notices...](http://www.northwestgeorgianews.com/rome/news.obits_death_notices...) June 25, 2017. Accessed July 11, 2017.

## Jack Runniger, OD

*“I couldn’t resist writing one more column for RN-T, so I have composed my own obituary. Prior to my demise, of course. William John ‘Jack’ Runniger was born July 16, 1923 in Aurora, Illinois. Although officially named William John by his parents, they proceeded to call him Jack instead. Which seems a rather stupid thing to do, and has caused all sorts of confusion during his life.*

*“He graduated from East Aurora High School, salutatorian of his class. Which seemed to set a pattern for his entire life, often second, never first. He then attended DePauw University. When World War II broke out, he joined the US Navy. He served as the Combat Information Center officer on the USS Newberry, an attach transport, and participated in the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa.*

*“When his ship was sent back to the States for repairs, preparing for the invasion of Japan, he married his high school sweetheart, Mary Gibson. Shortly thereafter, the Japanese surrendered, preventing the bloodbath that would have taken place in this invasion.*

*“Following the war, his new bride and the GI Bill paid his way through his schooling at the Southern College of Optometry, and he graduated in 1948 with a Doctor of Optometry degree (again as salutatorian). He then came to Rome to practice, not realizing at the time how lucky he was to be coming to such a wonderful community. He was*

*in the private practice of optometry in Rome for almost 45 years.*

*“In addition he also became an optometric journalist, serving as editor of three different national optometric journals. (Only two of them folded under his leadership) In addition he wrote a monthly column for these journals for some 35 years. He also served for many years as the United States consulting editor for Points de Vue, an international optical journal. Success with these columns led him to write a periodic humor column for the Rome News-Tribune for more than 30 years. He wrote more than 500 articles and columns for professional and lay journals, six books, and lectured at more than 100 meetings and colleges in 28 states.*

*“Modesty prevents him from mentioning a few honors he achieved along the way. Such as being chosen for the National Optometry Hall of Fame; awarded an honorary Doctor of Ocular Science degree; Benedict Professor, University of Houston; Lifetime Achievement Award from his alma mater; elected Distinguished Practitioner, National Academies of Practice; member of the Governor’s (Maddox) Health Planning Council; the American Optometric Association Distinguished Service in Journalism Award; and in 1935, the prestigious C.M. Bardwell grade school award for best posture. His first wife, Mary Gibson Runniger, his wife of 60 years, passed away in 2005. He married Helen Hayes Cobb in 2008.”*