RARE OPHTHALMIC PERIODICALS: THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE PROFESSION AT RISK

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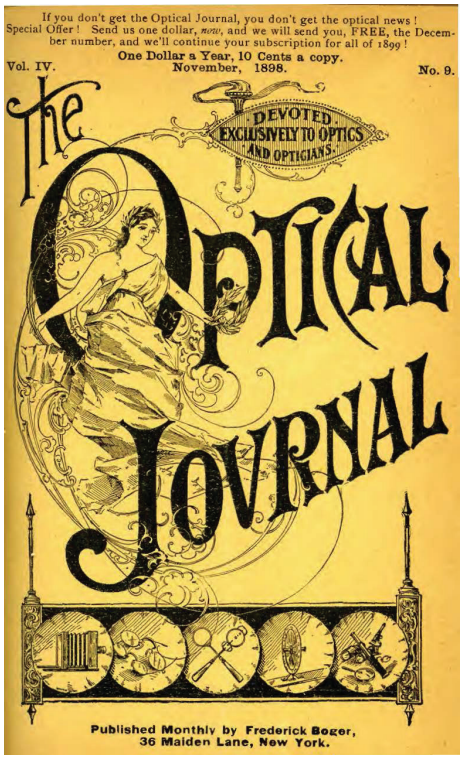
During the course of the last 50 years, The Archives & Museum of Optometry and its predecessors have collected and curated historical ophthalmic periodicals that chronicle the development of the profession since 1890. Some of these periodicals are profiled in Dr. David Goss' three-part series *A History of Some Optometric Periodicals* (see Part 3 of this series on page 52 in this issue). These journals, newsletters and magazines are invaluable primary source material for optometry historians, providing granular insight into the state of the profession, clinical practice, ophthalmic technology, vision science and the optical industry at particular points in time. Periodical literature also gives us clues about the socioeconomic and cultural context in which optometry has developed and changed. Taken in the aggregate, historical periodicals offer a sweeping view of the evolution of all aspects of the profession. But how long will we have the chance to re-examine the canon of optometry history held in these historical periodicals before they disappear from library shelves and special collections?

The Case For Preserving Historical Periodicals: New Historiography

Saving these periodicals is important not only because of their intrinsic value as resources for creating new historical research, but also for their as-yet unexploited utility in evaluating and forwarding the state of optometry historiography.[1] The sub-discipline of optometry history has been largely ignored by professional historians and rarely appears in scholarship on the history of medicine. Perhaps in response to this inattention, optometrists have always been, and continue to be, relatively prolific in publishing and producing their own historical research, much of it appearing in ophthalmic periodicals like *The Journal of the American Optometric Association [Optometry] and the Optical Journal and Review of Optometry [Review of Optometry]*.

But there is a downside to writing one's own history. First, the majority of the articles and books on the history of optometry focus on—and are produced by—optometric institutions, organizations and "significant" individuals in response to anniversaries, transitions, deaths or other pivotal events. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this, it does render the work narrow in focus and celebratory in nature. This, in turn, means that the scholarship is necessarily imbued with *conscious* bias intended to reflect the best aspects of the subject. Second, since these works are written mostly by avocational historians (who are also optometrists) for their peers, they are almost universally free of both reflective and reflexive evaluation that professional or academic historians are required to perform to acknowledge *unconscious* bias. On the whole, these deficits have resulted in a historiography that has failed to diversify and move forward. A re-evaluation of these histories in the form of historiographical essays would reinvigorate the field.



Cover of The Optical Journal, Volume 4, Number 9, November 1898. The journal contains the only extant copy of the American Optometric Association's first Constitution and Bylaws drafted in October 1898. The OJRO is often the only source for organizational records of the AOA and affiliates. Image courtesy The Archives & Museum of Optometry.

The problem with optometry historiography lies both in methodology and in theory. Historians must critically evaluate the sources and their creators for veracity and bias. Further, researchers must think critically about the biases *they* bring to the table when using sources, and acknowledge the lenses through which they view a source and its creator. This *reflexive* process must also be extended backward to include a critique of the selection of a topic in the first place—why do we choose to write about certain people, places, events, institutions and objects and not others? Historians also are expected to *reflect* on how these

omissions and inclusions have shaped the narrative of optometry history and their own scholarship. Through review, they must call on others to evaluate their work based on the same criteria. Finally, they must not only *perform* these reflexive and reflective activities, but also document them as part of the histories they produce. This sort of social science methodology is not likely to occur in an article submitted to a periodical with a journalistic style; it should, however, expected in an academic journal like *Hindsight* and historiographical essays are the first step in rectifying this lack of methodological rigor.

The second lapse takes place in the realm of theory. It would be a mistake to believe that optometry's self-appointed historians are objective truth-tellers reporting the facts. Theory or, at least, a set of assumptions that operate as theory, often masquerades as a style, approach or attitude that is merely replicated from other sources. While it can be a tricky business to anachronistically ascribe theory to a writer, in the case of histories published in early ophthalmic periodicals, the influence of Thomas Carlyle's "great man" theory, gilded heavily with 20th century progressivism, is obvious. Given the popularity of these ideas in the contemporary popular culture in which these pieces were written, this is not surprising. This tendency persists today through our focus on biographies and memoirs, oral histories, timelines and commemoration. Optometry history has been similarly influenced by other social and political theories, but these have remained unacknowledged because authors were not (and are not) publishing in academic history journals or for historians, and because the scale of the research does not lend itself to this sort of analysis.

Fortunately for us, however, we *can* move the historiography forward by evaluating past works through a theoretical lens to create historiographical essays. Historical periodicals contain ample material to support this effort and this would enrich the scholarship and allow the historiography to mature, opening new avenues for research and building new narratives that engage multiple sources and voices. More importantly, we can advance the current historiography without abandoning our love of biography and the commemoration, simply by shifting our gaze to under-represented groups and subjects, and by applying the method and theory of the microhistorian. Microhistory encourages the examination of a single event, life or work of an individual, or activities of an organization as a way to shed light on larger themes and trends. As a relatively new approach, microhistory holds a lot of possibility for optometry historians. But none of this will be possible unless the historical periodicals are preserved and made accessible.

Preservation and Access: Digitization

While libraries and archives have made great strides in increasing access to rare books, periodicals and manuscripts in the last decade, finding resources online often remains a challenge for those seeking more obscure titles. Many of the ophthalmic periodicals have yet to be digitized and time is running out. Libraries are under increasing pressure to downsize their collections. Strained budgets and the expectation that current literature is, or will soon be, available online have justified shrinking shelf-space dedicated to historical materials and decreased the footprint of academic libraries. Digitization is an expensive and time-consuming undertaking and librarians select items for digital imaging carefully. In truth, while millions of pages of archival material and rare publications have been digitized, what is available online is only a small fraction of what exists in archives around the world. Furthermore, in a large library or a small special collection, the biases at work may well devalue many of these small trade publications.[2,3] Moreover, even digitized works are not always accessible due to copyright considerations and the technical complexity of constructing quality content discovery platforms. Since microfilm remains the archival standard,[4] many libraries opt to preserve their holdings this way and put off digitization indefinitely.

The best example of a successful large-scale digitization and discovery project was the Google Books scanning initiative launched in 2002 with the ambitious goal of digitizing the world's libraries. The project stalled in 2011 due to a copyright lawsuit and failed to reboot when the case was eventually dismissed in 2013. However, the partner libraries—mostly university-based repositories—used their copies of digitized materials to organize HathiTrust Digital Library.[5] Through the HathiTrust, many rare books and periodicals—a number of them ophthalmic—are available in both full-text and "snippet view" which allows discovery of small bits of text using targeted searches. HathiTrust is one of a growing number of searchable databases that allow public access to digitized archival material.

However, there are a few issues that complicate access to these materials. First, as mentioned before, copyright

laws restrict access even to digitized material. Only works published prior to 1923 are in the public domain and so a HathiTrust search may only turn up a catalog record. Restricted digitized works can be made open to the public if the copyright holder files a CreativeCommons license with HathiTrust. Hopefully, more entities will see the benefits of providing access to these materials. Additionally, while digitization projects at the various repositories enrich the body of work available online, OCR enhancement is not always available which means a researcher must know where to look for materials to get a "hit" when searching for a resource

Historical Periodicals at the AMO

Digitization will continue to provide access to an ever-expanding variety of materials in the next decade. In the meantime, special collections like the AMO are often the only place to find many of these publications. The following list of rare and historical periodicals in the AMO collection has been annotated to help researchers find these resources online. By searching HathiTrust Digital Library (www.hathitrust.org), Google Books (books.google.com), WorldCat (worldcat.org), the Internet Archive (archive.org) and PubMed (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed), I have tried to point researchers in the right direction. If a periodical title is not annotated, this means that the item is available in paper or microfilm at several national libraries.

This list will be posted with links on the AMO web page on aoa.org and the Optometric Historical Society bibliography as time allows. Please note that this list does not include the publications we hold published by state optometric affiliates and societies or optometry schools.

Historical Ophthalmic Periodicals held at The Archives & Museum of Optometry
American Journal of Physiological Optics, 1920-1926 Early editions (1920-1921) are available on as downloadable OCR enhanced eBooks at Google Books and 1920-1922 are available as downloadable PDFs at HathiTrust.
American Journal of Optometry and Physiological Optics, 1924- 1988 The American Academy of Optometry has digitized all of their past issues and provided free access to their archives here: https://journals.lww.com/optvissci/Pages/issuelist.aspx
Associated Journal of Optometry, 1936-1954
Association of Independent Optical Wholesalers News Bulletin, February 1943-March 1952
Barstow's Bulletin for Optometrists, 1931-1969
Better Eyesight, 1922-1927 Early editions (July 1920-June 1921) available at Hathi Trust. July 1919-June 1930 available at Google Books online. eBook available to purchase.
[The] Columbia Optometrist, 1927-1954 This periodical has not been digitized and is very rare. Only the National Library of Medicine and The Archives & Museum of Optometry retain copies of the entire series.
Contact Lens Forum, May 1976-April 1991
[The] Contact Lens Times: The Magazine of Vision, March 1960-December 1963
[The] Contact Lens World, 1961-1963 This periodical has not been digitized and is very rare. Only the National Library of Medicine and The Archives & Museum of Optometry retain copies of the entire series.
[The] Dioptric News: Journal of the British Optical Association, 1947-1960
Efficient Seeing: The Optometric Digest of Vision Care Information, (1:10)-June 1976 (39:4)
[The] Eye Glass: A Little Publication Worth Looking Through, January 1919-February 1928 Canadian publication available mostly in microform.
EyeTalks, August 1931 Not found in other repositories.
[The Educational] Focus, 1940-1972 Selected issues digitized and searchable at HathiTrust and Google Books, but not yet available for full text view.
Gems of Knowledge: Newsletter of the Plastic Contact Lens Co, 1959- Available at SUNY, Indiana University and The Archives & Museum of Optometry only.
Jeweler's Circular Weekly [and Horological Review], 1903-1907 HathiTrust 1897, 1912; 1917-1922 available online; 1923-1935 search only. Selected volumes available for free on Google Books, 1899-.
Journal of Optometric Education, 1975-2007 Digitized and available at the ASCO website at https://journal.opted.org/the-journal-of-optometric-education-1975-1990/

[Interim] Journal of the New England Council of Optometrists [New England Journal of Optometry], 1949-1995 Digitized copies of some issues are available to through snippet view at HathiTrust.
[The] Keystone Magazine of Optometry [Optical Age], 1909, 1918-1921 1909 available through HathiTrust. 1910 available on Google Books and HathiTrust.
Kryptok Sales Company Bulletin [General Optical Company or Kryptalks], 1914-1920 Not found in any other repository.
Midwest Optometric Journal, 1936-1955 Not found in any other repository.
North Central Optometric Viewpoints, 1991- Indexed in SCO's VISIONET
Ophthalmic Optician, 1914-1985 HathiTrust limited search snippet view 1961-1976
Optical Age, 1921-1924 [See Keystone Magazine of Optometry] Early issue available on Google Books and HathiTrust (1910)
Optical Developments (Bausch & Lomb Optical; Riggs Optical Company), 1931-1957 Available in paper and microfilm only.
Optical Index, 1951-1971
Optical Review 1907-1910 Most available on HathiTrust or Google Books.
[The] Optist: Omega Epsilon Phi, International Optometric Fraternity News, 1950-1979 Not found in any other repository.
[The] Optical Journal [& Review of Optometry], 1895-1970 Available on HathiTrust 1920-1922. Google books allows download of 1922. Many institutions have portions of this title in paper and microfilm, but few have the entire collection. Extant publication as the *Review of Optometry*.
[The] Optician, 1891-1955 Available in digital format from Rhodes College in the UK, but not publicly accessible. Available at global libraries in paper and microform.
Optometric Management, 1964-1978
Optometric Daily, 1921-1925 Not found listed in any other repository.
Optometric Weekly, 1914-1985
Optometric World [Western Optometric World], 1914-1982
[The] Optometrical Record, May-October 1914 Available on Hathi Trust and Google Books.
Optometrists Exchange, 1974-1981 Not found listed in any other repository.

Optometry Field Magazine, 1916-1919 Very rare. Available only in paper format.
Optometry Progress Report, Department of the Air Force, September 1967-August 1977 Not found listed, but may be available from the US Airforce.
[The] Orthoptist: Devoted Exclusively to the Problems of Correct and Comfortable Eye Coordination, November 1936-October 1960 Very rare. Only found in paper form at two other repositories.
Newsletter of the Plastic Contact Lens Company [aka Gems of Knowledge], 1953-1970 Very rare. Only found in paper form at two other repositories.
[The] Practice Builder, 1938-1950 [Dental] Some available on HathiTrust.
[The] Reflector, 1920-1932 Volumes 1-3, 1920-1922 available on Hathi Trust.
Riggs Optical Reporter, April 1928 and Spring 1945
Shur-On Chronicle, 1918-1922 Very rare even in paper format. Only available at two other repositories.
Shur-On Continental Digest, July/August 1940-Summer 1965 Very rare even in paper format.
Southern Journal of Optometry, 1959-1999 Limited view onn HathiTrust.
Southern Optometrist, 1947-1956
Titmus Tidings: Devoted to the News and Interests of the Optical Profession, November 1939-April 1971 Very rare. Not listed in WorldCat, but found in paper format at University of Virginia.
[The] Univis Bulletin, May/June 1938-1951 Not found listed in any other repository.
[The] Univis Digest, (1:1)-October 1972 (2:3) Not found listed in any other repository.
Vision. Association of Optical Practitioners, 1948-1964 Not found listed in any other repository.
Your Eyes: A Publication Devoted to Better Vision, April 1931-September 1958 Not found listed in any other repository.
[The] Ultex Hatchet: A Periodical of Progress, December 1917-October 1923 Very rare even in paper format. Only found at the Indiana Historical Society in paper format

Reference

1. For an examination of published works on optometry history see: Goss, DA. The State of the Study of Optometry History. Hindsight: Journal of Optometry Hiistory, 2007;1:3-7.
2. Ogilvie, B. Focus: The History of Archives and the History of Science, Scientific Archives in the Age of Digitization. 2016. ISIS: A Journal of the History of Science Society. Volume 107, Number 1 March 2016. University of Chicago Press Journals. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/686075
3. National Archives and Records Administration. Microfilm. Retrieved on July 24, 2018 from https://www.archives.gov/preservation/formats/microfilming.html.
4. Flecker, D. Preserving Digital Periodicals. Council for Library and Information Resources. Retrieved on July 23, 2018 from https://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub106/periodicals/.
5. Howard, J. What Happened to Google's Effort to Scan Millions of University Library Books? EdSurge. August 10, 2017. Retrieved on July 27, 2018 from https://www.edsurge.com/news/2017-08-10-what-happened-to-google-s-effort-to-scan-millions-of-university-library-books.