FROM THE EDITOR: BASEBALL'S CREATION MYTH...AND OPTOMETRY'S CREATION MYTH?

In the opening years of the 20th century, sporting goods magnate A.G. Spalding organized a panel of baseball luminaries to establish a narrative for the origins of baseball, hopefully showing, like he believed, that baseball was a uniquely American game, rather than being derived from the English game of rounders. In 1908, the panel's conclusions were published in Spalding's annual baseball guide. They reported that the game of baseball was invented by Abner Doubleday at Cooperstown, New York, in 1839. Historians have since thoroughly debunked that myth, finding documents mentioning "base ball" (two words) well before that and uncovering evidence of various earlier bat and ball games from which baseball must have evolved.^{1,2}

It seems like optometry also has a sort of creation myth. One often reads optometric writers implying or even explicitly stating that optometry began near the start of the 20th century. It is unclear whether they are thinking of Charles Prentice's initial attempts to establish an optometry licensure law in New York in 1896. Or maybe it was when the first organizational meeting of the American Association of Opticians was held in 1897 or when they changed their name to the American Optometric Association in 1919. Or when the first optometry state licensure law was passed in Minnesota in 1901. Or when John Eberhardt proposed the adoption of the terms "optometry" and "optometrist" in 1903. Or when the first proprietary schools of optics started in the 1870s. Or when the

first optometry school at a university started at Columbia in 1910. Or when retinoscopy gained in popularity in the early 20th century.

Those are among the numerous pivotal events in optometry around the beginning of the 20th century. But Charles Prentice was practicing optometry before he started pushing for a licensure law, as was his father James before him. John McAllister, Jr., of the prominent Philadelphia optical family, and others, were doing vision testing for spectacles in the mid-19th century. And the book on the use of spectacles published in 1623 in Spain by Daza de Valdes clearly is describing the practice of optometry when he talks about conditions that we can readily recognize as presbyopia, myopia, refractive amblyopia and anisometropia, and when he presents "dialogs" which we can recognize as case reports.

Henry Hofstetter noted that study of optometry history shows it has "an honorable heritage, albeit under the rubrics of ophthalmic optician, sight-testing, spectaclemaker, and other identities," and that various lines of evidence and archival materials "clearly document optometry's centuries-long existence and emergence from a prestigious and sophisticated handicraft to its present academic stature, a truly proud history."³

The best way to reconcile optometry's "centuries-long existence" with its many impactful events at the turn of the 20th century that some talk of as our beginning is the classification of optometry history by Monroe Hirsch and Ralph Wick⁴ into periods. They

David A. Goss, OD, PhD

identified early optometry (about 1300-1900) as one period and modern optometry (since about 1890) as another. The invention of spectacles in about 1286 in northern Italy⁵ and subsequent advances in optical science and vision science led to the development of concepts for the testing of individuals for their proper lenses and other components of optometric procedure.⁶⁻⁸ A common view today is that the optometrists of early optometry were unsophisticated and lacking in knowledge, but many of them were accomplished individuals who also did other sophisticated work, such as building optical and scientific instruments, as James and Charles Prentice did.

Hofstetter submitted that a role of the Optometric Historical Society and Hindsight was "to try to dispel our depressing ignorance of optometric history."³ One of the ways we can do that is by educating our colleagues that our "truly proud history" extends much further back than the turn of

the 20th century. Early optometry in the six centuries before 1900 was just as important to the people it served as modern optometry has been since then.

References

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David A. Goss, OD, PhD
Editor
dgoss@indiana.edu

SPEAKING OF BASEBALL...

Ernest Kiekenapp and F. P. Barr with Hank Gowdy. Gowdy Field, Columbus, GA, 1925. 2016.IMG.0166. Image courtesy of The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO.

In the 1925 photograph above, Ernest H. Kiekenapp, Secretary of the American Optometric Association (1922-1957), and New York optometrist F.P. Barr shake hands with baseball great Hank

Gowdy in Columbus, GA. at the dedication of "Gowdy Field." The provenance of this photograph was discovered this fall as we processed the oral history collection held in The Archives & Museum of Optometry. The following excerpt is from Kiekenapp's 1970 oral history interview curated by The Archives & Museum of Optometry, a program of Optometry Cares – The AOA Foundation (OH 2015.507.22):

"We Meet Hank Gowdy

While attending the Southeastern Congress at Columbus, Georgia in March, 1925, one of the entertainment features was a visit to a newly built stadium to watch a pre-season Big League Ball Game. The new stadium was to be dedicated to Hank Gowdy, former Catcher for the New York Giants. He was known as one of baseball's all time great Catchers and hero of the 1914 World Series. The Stadium was to be dedicated as "Gowdy Field". When the word got around that a National Secretary of the American Optometric Association

was present, I was called down from the stand to have my picture taken with Hank Gowdy at home plate. This arrangement was made by F. P. Barr, an Optometrist then of New York. Obviously, I was surprised to be called down to home plate to have my picture taken with Hank Gowdy but thought that that was all there was to it. Then, coming home I had to change trains at Chicago and had a six hour wait. While walking down Michigan Avenue, I saw this picture of me shaking hands with Hank Gowdy in a bank window. I went in and asked the banker when that picture ran out (it was in a United Press frame). He said it runs out tonight. I said I happen to be one of the men in that picture. He said would like to have it and took it out of the frame and gave it to me. I have it framed among my other many souvenirs."

--Ernest H. Kiekenapp, "Autobiography," 1970