FROM THE EDITOR: A FOCUS ON OPTOMETRIC EDUCATION

In this themed issue on optometric education we present items on the history of optometric continuing education and of optometry fraternities, along with three brief histories of optometry schools that are celebrating significant anniversaries this year: New England College of Optometry, 125 years; Pennsylvania College of Optometry, 100 years; and University of Alabama at Birmingham, 50 years. It has been estimated that there were about 60 schools of various types in the United States that offered instruction in optometric procedures between 1872 and 1901, about 42 schools between 1901 and 1914, about 36 between 1914 and 1922, and about 30 between 1922 and 1926.¹ Efforts to improve standards in optometric education in the 1920s precipitated the closure of many schools.² The number of optometry schools remained relatively constant between 9 and 12 from 1927 to 1975, with five new openings during that period of time being partially offset by one closure (Columbia) and one merger (Northern Illinois College of Optometry and Chicago College of Optometry merging to form Illinois College of Optometry). A perceived need for more optometrists in the late 1960s resulted in a call for a doubling of the number of optometry schools, leading in turn to the opening of new schools beginning soon thereafter.³

Two of the schools discussed in this issue are among those that survived the push for improved standards in the 1920s, and one was established soon after the call for more schools in the late 1960s. The Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry website currently lists 23 member schools and

colleges. These schools and the years of their founding are as follows:

1. Illinois College of Optometry (Chicago), formed by mergers of various schools, the oldest being the Chicago College of Ophthalmology and Otology which started in 1872
2. New England College of Optometry (Boston), started as the Klein School of Optics in 1894
3. Southern California College of Optometry at Marshall B. Ketchum University (Fullerton, CA), started as the Los Angeles School of Ophthalmology and Optometry in 1904
4. The Ohio State University College of Optometry (Columbus), started as the program in Applied Optics at Ohio State in 1914
5. Pennsylvania College of Optometry at Salus University (Philadelphia), started as the Pennsylvania State College of Optometry in 1919
6. University of California Berkeley School of Optometry, 1923
7. Southern College of Optometry (Memphis, TN), 1932
8. Pacific University College of Optometry (Forest Grove, OR), 1945 (a continuation of North Pacific College of Optometry, which was founded in 1921 and which suspended operations during World War II)
9. Indiana University School of Optometry (Bloomington), 1951 (preprofessional classes started in 1951; first professional courses in 1953)
10. University of Houston College of Optometry (Houston, TX), 1952
11. University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Optometry, 1969
12. State University of New York State College of Optometry (New York), 1971
13. Michigan College of Optometry at Ferris State University (Big Rapids), 1975
14. Northeastern State University Oklahoma College of Optometry (Tahlequah), 1979
15. University of Missouri at St. Louis College of Optometry, 1980
16. Inter American University of Puerto Rico School of Optometry (Bayamon), 1981
17. Nova Southeastern University College of Optometry (Ft. Lauderdale, FL), 1989
18. Midwestern University Arizona College of Optometry (Glendale), 2009

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19. University of the Incarnate Word Rosenberg School of Optometry (San Antonio, TX), 2009
20. Western University of Health Sciences College of Optometry (Pomona, CA), 2009
21. Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences School of Optometry (Worcester, MA), 2012
22. University of Pikeville Kentucky College of Optometry (Pikeville, KY), 2016
23. Midwestern University Chicago College of Optometry (Downers Grove, IL), 2017

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PHI OMICRON: THE FIRST OPTOMETRIC FRATERNITY

Collegiate fraternities have been an American tradition since the Colonial Era, beginning with the secret “Flat Hat Club” (FHC) organized at the College of William and Mary (WM) in 1750, and the still-extant Phi Beta Kappa founded at WM in 1776.¹ The FHC was created by students—like Thomas Jefferson—frustrated with the prescribed classical curriculum purported to prepare men for the professions of law, medicine or theology. The FHC provided a safe space for the intellectually curious to pursue proscribed, rarified extracurricular scholarship based in empiricism.^{2,3} The FHC embodied three elements: suitable society, academic rigor and ethical conduct. These characteristics would come to define the kinds of fraternities we have today: social, academic honors (as PBK would become) and professional.

The first professional fraternity was created in 1819 for medical students.⁴ A century later, on August 2, 1904, American Association of Opticians (AAO) President John C. Eberhardt invited 18 fellow members attending the 7th annual AAO convention banquet at the lush Plankinton Hotel in downtown Milwaukee, WI to form the first ever optometric fraternity: Phi Omicron.⁵

The Greek letters Φ (Phi) and Ο (Omicron) were chosen to represent the words “Physiological” and “Optics.” The founding members of the fraternity defined themselves as “desirous of seeing the profession...elevated to [a] dignified position.” Members were pledged to “encourag[e] a fraternal spirit” and “observe and act with principles.” The purpose of Phi Omicron was to “discuss research and exert moral influence in abating methods derogatory to our science” thereby “obtaining respect and consideration of the general public.”⁵

Unlike the FHC, the first optometric fraternity was neither secret nor collegiate, but it was similar in character, embracing the ideals of fellowship, scholarship and ethics. Phi Omicron didn’t last long,

but optometric fraternities and honors societies popped up at almost every school during the next three decades. The following list includes the earliest, many of which still exist today.^{6,7}

Epsilon Psi Epsilon (OSU, 1911)
Pi Omicron Sigma (MSO, 1912)
Omega Delta (NICO, 1917)
Gamma Omega Phi (PSCO, 1919)
Omega Epsilon Phi (Columbia, 1919)
Phi Theta Epsilon (PSCO), 1920)
Phi Theta Upsilon (ICOO, 1925)
Pi Kappa Rho (NICO, 1928)
Mu Sigma Pi (NICO, 1932)
Omega Beta Sigma (LACO, TAQ 1932)
Omicron Delta Epsilon (PSCO, 1932)
Phi Beta Rho, Sor. (PSCO, 1934)
Phi Omicron Sigma, Sor. (OSU, TAQ 1940)
Gamma Omicron, (SCO, ca. 1975)

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