

MINERVA H. WEINSTEIN (1893-1982): THE FIRST WOMAN LICENSED BY EXAM TO PRACTICE OPTOMETRY IN NEW YORK CITY

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doi 10.14434/hindsight.v5i1i.29134

ABSTRACT

Dr. Minerva H. Weinstein (1893-1982), was the first woman licensed by examination to practice optometry in New York City and the fourth woman licensed in the State of New York. In 1915, Dr. Weinstein graduated from the American Institute of Optometry, becoming the third generation in her family to forge a career in applied optics. She began her practice at one of three family-owned optical shops in the Bronx, where she remained for more than 40 years, diligently serving the needs of her community's most vulnerable members and tirelessly researching new techniques to improve care for the most difficult vision problems. During her career, she founded the Bronx County Optometric Society and organized the local Woman's Auxiliary for the Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn, as well as the New York state affiliate of the national organization. She was a founding member of the Bronx County Optometric Service, the first free optometry clinic in New York, and went on to expand the service to two additional locations. She also participated in professional women's organizations, charitable foundations and civic clubs, and represented optometry at community events. Dr. Weinstein's narrative is unique, but in many ways her family's story was typical of many immigrants arriving in the U.S. during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who were successful in improving their lot and passing on a professional legacy to the younger generation—and it is a story that is particularly common among optometry's founders, and one that resonates in the first two decades of the twenty first century. The story of her career, and the personal details that serve as its backdrop, are also representative of the many challenges faced by the generation of professional women who helped establish the profession of optometry during the inter-war years. This biographical sketch, made possible through research in Minerva Weinstein Papers (MSS 501.4.11) held at the Archives & Museum of Optometry, sheds light on the tremendous debt optometry owes to its founding mothers and highlights the work that remains to complete the narrative of optometry history through new scholarship in hidden collections.

KEYWORDS

Minerva Weinstein; Minerva Remaud; Minerva Abramowitz; Minerva Yurman; optometry history; New York State Optometric Association; Bronx County Optometric Society; women's history; immigrant history; Jewish history; history of medicine; history of optometry; history of profession

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Minerva Weinstein was proud of the many “firsts” she achieved during her long career in optometry: a first-generation American,¹ the first woman in her family to run her own business, and the first to take and pass the examination to become a licensed optometrist in New York City. She was also often the first—and only—woman in overwhelmingly male-dominated professional organizations, a challenge she met with confidence in her abilities and an uncompromising attitude that she deserved the same respect afforded to her male peers. Her biography, constructed from research in materials donated to the International Library, Archives and Museum of Optometry (ILAMO), not only reveals not only a story of perseverance and success in the face of personal and professional trials, but also paints a remarkably intimate portrait of a professional woman in early-twentieth-century New York. In this way, Dr. Weinstein's story demonstrates how the narratives of those rarely featured in historical research—women, the disabled, ethnic minorities and immigrants—are often hidden gems languishing in archival collections, and shows how uncovering these stories can add new

perspectives, insights and voices to the evolving body of scholarship in optometry history.

The Weinstein Family in New York: A New American Optometry Legacy

Minerva H. Weinstein was born on April 1, 1893 in College Point, Long Island, New York to Abraham and Anna Bertha Sobel Weinstein, the first member of her nuclear family to be a native-born American citizen.^{2,3,4} The elder Weinsteins had immigrated to New York from Russia in 1890 with their infant son Morris—part of a wave of more than two million Jews seeking both refuge from persecution and the opportunity to prosper in the burgeoning industrial centers of the United States in last few decades of the nineteenth century.^{5,6} According to family lore, Abraham was the second generation to practice opticianry, but like many new immigrants it would take time to rebuild and reclaim the family legacy in his new home.^{2,7}

By 1892, the Weinsteins had settled in Queens where Abraham found work in a factory producing “hard” rubber, also known as Vulcanite, that was used for consumer goods such as hair combs, pipes and eyeglass frames.^{3,8,9} Situated in the northwest corner of Queens County in the vicinity of Flushing, College Point was



Minerva Weinstein, 1915. From *Representative Optometrists of New York, 1895-1915*. Print. MSS 501.4.11.

a fortuitous place for the industrious and intellectually curious Weinstens to land. The thriving village was home not only to rubber factories, silk mills and marine works,¹⁰ but also a strong tradition of public education. The town itself was designed by benevolent rubber magnate Conrad Poppenhusen in 1854. Poppenhusen's model community was one of several constructed by forward-thinking industrialists who hoped to protect their workers from the desperate conditions in New York's tenements and, in turn, insulate their profit margins from unions and labor strikes. In 1870, Poppenhusen founded the United States' first free community kindergarten, "The Poppenhusen Institute," to serve the families under his patronage.^{9,10,11,12} Although little Minerva had contracted polio at the age of 18 months,² she recovered well enough to attend the Institute, which later expanded to include an elementary school. Meanwhile, her father sought to better the Weinstein family circumstances.

In 1895, the three immigrant members of the Weinstein family became naturalized citizens and Abraham found employment as a jeweler.⁵ He took another step toward reclaiming his birthright in 1897, completing a correspondence course in optometry from the South Bend College of Optics.^{2,13,14} The following year the family relocated to the Dutch Kills neighborhood of Queens near the current Roosevelt Island Bridge and,¹⁵ in 1904, they crossed the East River and resettled in a rented apartment near extended family in the Jewish enclave in central Harlem.^{16,17,18,19} Shortly thereafter, the Weinstens relocated to the lower Bronx where Minerva enrolled at Morris High School, the state's first co-educational secondary school housed in a new state-of-the-art building at the corner of East 166th Street and Boston Road.^{2,20,21} Firmly established in the Bronx, Abraham and Anna began to expand the American branch of the family's optometry practice: Weinstein's Optical Parlors.

On May 21, 1908, just shy of the tenth anniversary of the first meeting of the American Optometric Association (AOA),²² New York passed a law regulating the practice of optometry. In 1909, Abraham was granted a license by exemption,²³ easily meeting the law's requirement to have been in practice at least two years prior to May of 1908.²⁴ In the 1910 census the Weinstens are listed for the first time as owner-operators of their own store.²⁵

The First Woman Optometrist Licensed by Examination in New York City

While 18-year-old Minerva assisted at the shops, she had not yet settled on optometry and was instead studying at the prestigious four-year women's institution Hunter College.^{2,25,26,27} Hunter was originally a "normal" school specializing in teacher training, but by the time Minerva matriculated the curriculum had shifted toward educating women interested in advanced degrees in the arts and sciences.^{27,28} By 1914, she had made her decision, enrolling in the American Institute of Optometry (AIO), established in that same year by Dr. Joseph I. Pascal, a recent graduate of the Rochester School of Optometry.^{29,30} Pascal's optometry school, situated in the Flatiron District of Manhattan, demanded a strong academic and financial commitment. The program ran between six and eight months and required students to attend 8-hour days at a total cost of \$300—the equivalent of \$8,000 in 2019.^{31,32} At the AIO, Minerva found her niche, beginning her studies in earnest in January 1915. She showed an early interest in participating in collegial activities

as well as an artistic and literary bent, contributing the cover design and one of many poems she would write throughout her life to the undergraduate paper "The Institute Record."^{29,33} (P. 15, Fig. 1) She earned her certificate of completion on June 25³⁴ and four days later she walked into New York's Grand Central Palace—the only woman in a class of 30—and sat for the examination on Practical Optics.^{2,26,35} Later that year she became the first woman licensed by examination to practice optometry in New York City and one of only four licensed in the entire state.³⁶

In 1915 the Weinstens were managing three locations.^{2,37,38} The first two were in the Claremont Village neighborhood: the main store at 3814 Third Avenue at Claremont Parkway, and another at 1311 Boston Road at McKinley Square near 169th Street. A third store was located about two miles north at 252 East Fordham Road at Valentine Avenue (Webster). Abraham managed the main store with Morris, and Minerva and her mother took over the management of the Boston Road store a ten-minute walk away. Under Abraham's watchful eye, Morris and later his younger brother, Gottfried, took turns managing the Fordham Road store.³⁹ With three stores and family members to run them, the Weinstens were now ready to invest in their business. In 1915, they spent over \$4,000 outfitting all three locations with new instruments, equipment and furniture, and an additional \$1,000 on lenses and hardware, to equip each store with an examination room, in-house optical laboratory, mercantile display and signage.³⁷ (P. 15, Figs. 2 and 4)

Minerva's store was probably the most exciting of the three. She shared her block with two millinery shops and a delicatessen and from her storefront she could walk a few paces to bustling McKinley Square. The Boston Road office also shared a wall with the famous Yiddish McKinley Square Theatre—a cultural landmark for the Bronx's large Hebrew and Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrant population.^{38,40,41} Dr. Weinstein's clientele was well-served by a doctor who shared their linguistic and cultural background; among her belongings donated to the ILAMO in 1970 was a set of vision test cards with Italian and Hebrew on either side, demonstrating her dedication to meeting the needs of a community comprised largely of new and first-generation Americans.⁴² In 1916, her neighborhood at 169th and Boston Road was described by one contemporary source as "a very good section of the Bronx . . . [with] good stores and modern apartment buildings. While stores are not very large, they are clean and well kept. Grocers, butchers and delicatessen stores are numerous. The inhabitants of this section represent a substantial class of people of moderate means who live comfortably."³⁸ By contrast, the same publication described the environs of her father's store on Third Avenue as "rather poor" with "cheap stores, which cater to the daily household needs of the poorer class."

Heartaches and Obstacles: Personal and Professional Trials and Accomplishments

In choosing Boston Road for Minerva, Abraham and Anna had wisely placed their ferociously bright, diminutive daughter, still plagued with a slight limp and a fragile constitution from her childhood illness, in the safest possible place while also allowing her to explore her professional horizons. They appear to have had good reason for keeping a close eye. In 1918, she was swept off her feet by a dashing young Frenchman, John A. Remaud,

reputedly a World War I aviator—or “flying ace”—in the employ of the French High Command in Washington, D.C.⁴³ The couple married a few months after the end of the war on January 26, 1919.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, Remaud, whose given name was Joseph R. Abramowitz, was not all he appeared to be, and the union marked the beginning of a relatively dark period in Dr. Weinstein’s story that she later described as a time punctuated by “... many heartaches and obstacles which beset me because I was a woman.”⁴⁵

Abramowitz was the eldest son of a very successful family of Parisian furriers headed by Scholom and Amalia Abramowitz (aka Remaud).^{45,46} Like the Weinsteins, the Abramowitzes were Russian Jewish immigrants, but they had initially settled in France where they were living at the outbreak of the war. Twice per year they visited New York for business and after the end of the conflict, they emigrated again, moving to New York where they established the family residence in Kingston upstate and opened an outlet on Central Avenue near several Manhattan fashion houses under the direction of Joseph’s younger brother Armand.^{46,47} At the outset of his courtship of Minerva, Joseph was estranged from his father, apparently having developed an addiction to “dope” and run up significant debt in the family name.⁴⁸ Perhaps as a result of the drugs or an underlying condition, his behavior throughout his marriage would soon become erratic and often dangerous, characterized by emotional extremes including bouts of mania accompanied by episodes of abuse, followed by deep remorse and thoughts of suicide.^{18, 48, 49, 50, 51}

In January of 1920, all seemed to be going well enough. Minerva and Joseph were living with the Weinsteins in the family home at 689 East 170th Street and Joseph was working alongside his wife and father-in-law in the shops.⁴ By June, however, Abramowitz had absconded.⁵² For the next several years he wandered the state, treating himself to fine clothes, throwing lavish parties, taking lovers, staying in expensive lodgings and, occasionally, landing himself jail due to his excesses.^{18,43} For a short time early on, he reconciled with his father who put him in business with Armand. During this brief period of reform, he sent a string of long, rambling letters to both Abraham and Minerva filled with protestations of love for them both, expressions of regret and grand plans for subsequent success.⁴⁹ The couple reunited long enough to produce a child, Quentin Howard, who was born in the Bronx on August 12, 1923.^{53,54} Eventually, however, Joseph drifted away again leaving Minerva and young Quentin on their own.

Dr. Weinstein did not let her personal troubles keep her from continuing to improve her skills and education. By the end of 1920, she had completed the course at Columbia University’s School of Optometry.¹³ After Quentin’s birth, she spent “more than a year” in Europe, beginning in England and travelling to Germany and then France where she reportedly was engaged in “research studies and study of the mechanics involved in the manufacture of various types of optical glass.”⁵⁵ She may have had an additional reason for going abroad. In New York, divorce was virtually impossible to acquire prior to 1966 except in proven cases of adultery.⁵⁶ Couples were grudgingly granted separations in cases of abandonment or extreme cruelty, but even well-founded cases could drag on for years and the penny-press exploited the situation by printing the proceedings in excruciating and humiliating detail. Many desperate spouses hired actors to

play “the other woman” (or man) or orchestrated elaborate sting operations to catch and document philanderers in the act. Those with means would go abroad, specifically to France.^{57, 58} In 1923 alone, hundreds of Americans seeking divorce and were granted relief by French courts.⁵⁹

Whatever the case for Minerva, she returned from Europe more well-educated but still married under New York law. In 1929, the police arrested Remaud on other charges and Minerva’s attorney had him hauled into court.⁶⁰ After a trial which included the testimony of a Pennsylvania hotel clerk who was a witness to Remaud’s infidelity and carousing, the judge awarded Minerva a decree of divorce and alimony, although she “never saw a penny” of the latter and claimed Abramowitz “never so much as bought a ten cent rattle” for Quentin.^{43,61,62} Although Dr. Weinstein told the court she had to borrow money initially to make ends meet, she also boasted proudly that she was eventually able to provide for her family through optometry practice and earnings of “\$2,500 per year”—an impressive sum for a woman at the time.⁶³ Immediately following the divorce, Remaud attempted suicide by extinguishing the gaslights in his Greenwich Village brownstone but was rescued by his brother and a police officer by the name of Porco. The entire saga was documented in a series of news articles, one sensationally entitled “Ace Tries to Die for Love.”⁴⁶ After this incident Minerva was mostly free of her ex-husband, but she approached future relationships with an abundance of caution, not marrying again until after his death over three decades later.^{2,64}

Despite—or perhaps because of—her domestic difficulties, Dr. Weinstein threw herself into her career, not only continuing to improve her education by taking courses on optics and optometry at the New York City College,² but also representing optometry in both professional and civic organizations and working to improve eye care for New Yorkers from all walks of life. She and her father were longtime members of the AOA and the New York State Optometric Association (NYSOA), and in 1925 she organized the Bronx County Optometric Society (BCOS), recruiting its first 13 members and serving as Secretary until 1931.⁶⁵ When the society grew to 50 members, Weinstein ascended to the position as Second Vice President and three men were appointed to take over her secretarial duties. At the same time, she served as the Chair of the Publicity Committee where she successfully lobbied the NYSOA to hold its annual convention in the Bronx.⁶⁶

In almost all of these organizations, Dr. Weinstein maintained distinction as the only woman member and while optometry was relatively inclusive of women compared to many healthcare professions, women were still a minority and individual men were not always well-disposed toward women without a male champion—particularly one who demonstrated such unapologetic ambition. Dr. Weinstein had never been shy about expressing pride in her accomplishments and her correspondence with her contemporaries often bristled with indignation when she felt the sting of disrespect. In 1931, her successor to the office of Secretary of the BCOS omitted her name in the list of officers submitted for publication in the *Optical Journal and Review of Optometry*⁶⁷ and she wasted no time in calling out the slight with strongly worded letter: “What’s the idea of intentionally forgetting the Second Vice-President’s name? If you are ashamed of a woman’s name in the organization, be man enough to admit it! I am only too glad to resign. My activities will depend on a retraction... unless you rectify the omission.”⁶⁸ She signed the letter

with her title in all capital letters. In response to Dr. Weinstein's threat, Secretary Milton Friedlander corrected his error in a hastily written note to the editor and a curt apology to her.

While she continued to enjoy the favor of the New York state leadership, conflict with her colleagues in the local she had chartered grew worse over time. The Bronx County's "Vigilance Committee," designed to ferret out spectacle-by-mail fraud, began to harass her about her signage and her "research work" which included alternative therapies.⁶⁹ The Boston Road storefront of which she was once so proud (P 15, Fig.2), with its beautiful window displays, electric signage and lush parlor, was now a point of contention under organized optometry's new obsession with "ethics" which it articulated as a stay on certain kinds of advertising.^{70,71} Weinstein was appalled that members of the BCOS were employing "underhanded" techniques, such as calling to make appointments they never intended to keep in order to try to catch her making false claims.⁶⁹ Here again, she did not surrender easily, at one point threatening legal action against rival who called her a "quack" and spread a rumor that she was "not allowed to practice," eventually extracting an apology and retraction in writing from him through her lawyer.⁷² By 1932, she had had enough. In her resignation letter, she described her work at the BCOS as one in which she "accomplished that which no other woman dared," and communicated that she was mentally and physically drained from the effort of working against the grain: "[I have] carried a handicap from infancy, and lifted myself over hurdles of obstructions, pushed myself against a world of bigotry, and finally have given every ounce of my strength."⁶⁵

In view of all her other activities, it is no wonder she was exhausted. Even with her fragile health, she maintained a private practice and raised a young child alone all the while participating in her many extracurriculars. In 1929 she organized the Bronx County Ladies Auxiliary and went on to help set up the Manhattan and Brooklyn chapters.^{73,74} Her success earned her praise, but also more work. In 1931 she was appointed by NYSOA President John Jarvis as chair of the association's Ladies Auxiliary Committee, the body created to organize the national auxiliary affiliate.⁷⁵ She was then elected as its first president.⁷⁶ At the same time, she worked with Jarvis to establish a "junior auxiliary" which they both hoped would organize lay people to promote optometry in schools and liaison with other community organizations as had been done on behalf of dentistry and medicine.^{77,78,79,80} In her quest to spread "the Gospel of good sight thru Optometry"⁶⁵ to the public, Dr. Weinstein gave or arranged many speeches and presentations to community organizations during the following two decades.

Dr. Weinstein also worked tirelessly on behalf of the poor and underserved, launching some of optometry's earliest charitable programs. She was a founding member of the Bronx Optometric Service, a free clinic inaugurated in 1928 at the Mott Haven Methodist Episcopal Church at 157 East 150th Street⁸⁰ (P. 15, Fig. 3) and she was instrumental in the expansion of the program to Manhattan and Brooklyn, as well as coordinating fundraising activities through the local auxiliaries.⁶⁵ In the 1929-1930 fiscal year, the Service's Chief Director, Lester Beacher, O.D., reported to Weinstein that the clinic had treated 400 people at the Bronx location alone,⁸¹ where minority communities were most impacted by the economic downturn at the beginning of the Great Depression.⁸² Dr. Weinstein was also a charter member,

Secretary and then Vice President of the Bronx Chapter of the Women's Auxiliary for the Aid of Crippled Children (AACCP), an organization founded to assist children "regardless of race or creed"^{83,2} who, like Minerva herself, survived polio but suffered lifelong disabilities and other health problems. Even after retiring from leadership positions, she continued to serve on the organization's Welfare Committee for a decade more, resigning her duties just after the end of World War II.

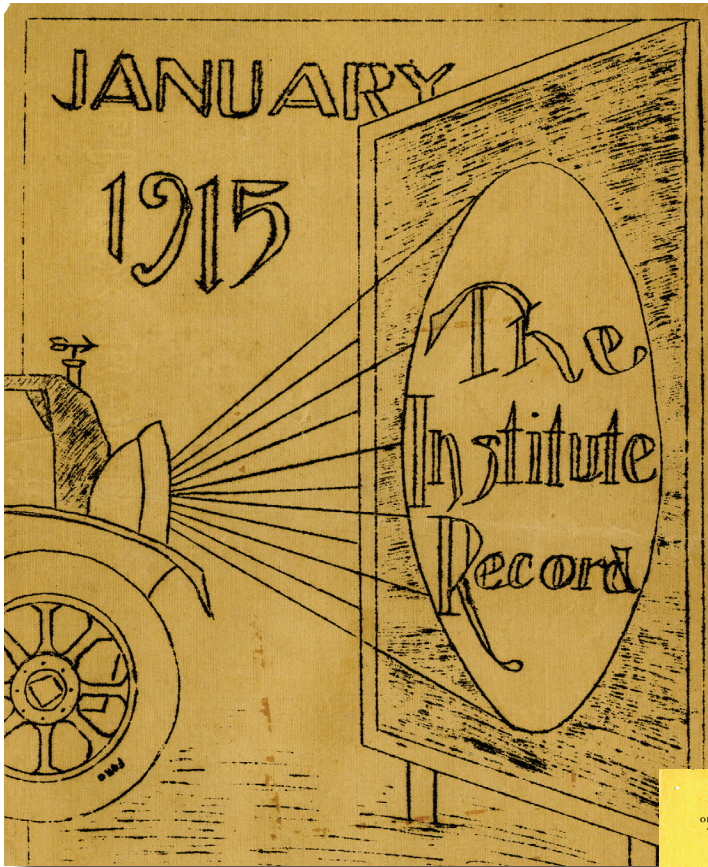
In addition to her optometric work, Dr. Weinstein was active in organizations that supported women professionals, political causes and human rights. She was a charter member of the Bronx Soroptimist Club and served for years as the organization's Chairman of Health.^{2,84} (Figure 1) She belonged to the Jackson Democratic Club for two decades and joined the American Legion Optometry Auxiliary in 1925, marching every year in the Legion's annual parade down 5th Avenue for a decade.² For her public service, she was nominated and won inclusion on the list of the "20 most distinguished citizens of the Bronx" and received a write-up in *The Bronx Home News* where she used her platform to promote optometry as a "good field for women with professional ambitions... both considering remuneration and the character of the work" but cautioned "the studies necessary for a would-be optometrist are so difficult to pursue that only women with a certain scientific talent can hope to succeed."^{55,85}



Figure 1: The Bronx Professional Women's Club (Soroptimists), 1931. Weinstein is standing at left. MSS 504.1.11..

Dr. Weinstein's commitment to serve the needy was stalwart. She moved her practice and her residence several times between 1930 and 1955, largely due to changes in both the physical and demographic constitution of the Bronx, always remaining near the free clinic at Mott Haven.⁸⁶ Whereas Jews and Irish immigrants were the dominant groups in this area in the early twentieth century, by mid-century Puerto Rican and African-American migrants from neighboring Harlem and other points south comprised 30% of the population with more arriving every year. Just as Jewish immigrants moved from factory towns across the East River into Harlem and then to the Bronx chasing economic prosperity, so did other groups follow along beginning in 1930. As one demographer reported: "the story of the lower Bronx... has been for most of its history... a story of shifting people. ... a way stop on the social and economic ladder" and "... a surprisingly faithful mirror of the immigration patterns for the entire middle Atlantic seaboard."⁸⁵ To meet the rapid influx of migrants, the government began to erect housing

1



1. Cover design of the American Optometric Institute student publication by Minerva Weinstein.

2. Photograph of Dr. Weinstein and her dog in front of her store at 1311 Boston Road, 1915.

2



3



3. Bronx County Optometric Service prescription slip and photo of the Mott Haven free clinic, Minerva Weinstein at center, 1929.

4. Inventory and price list for Weinstein's Optical Parlors, 1915.

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projects in residential neighborhoods and faced mounting opposition from homeowners. As projects fell into disrepair and the ravages of poverty took hold, the area suffered from tension among the more established residents. The resulting “white flight” further destabilized the neighborhoods in the southern part of the County. Soon, the Bronx began to fracture along racial and economic lines, and residents of the wealthy, white neighborhoods in the north would “wear a lorgnette” to “[look] down...and shudder” at their “less affluent cousins in a welter of apartments”⁸⁵ to the south. While Dr. Weinstein resisted this urge to move either her residence or her practice out of the lower Bronx where the need for her services was greatest—even after her father died in 1939⁸⁶—by 1956 her age and declining health combined with a frightening encounter with “hold-up men” forced her hand.²

A Second Chance

Even after she moved north to 1504 Sheridan Street, Dr. Weinstein did not entirely give up her practice or her dedication to helping those that others could not. She specialized early on in more difficult patients, particularly those she called “medical rejects” including migraine sufferers, those with undiagnosed vision-related maladies and children with learning problems that traditional treatments had failed.² For these individuals, Dr. Weinstein engaged in experimental methods including vision therapy, even developing her own system of color therapy using tinted lenses. Whatever her colleagues in the BCOS thought of her practice, her files were full of patient testimonials lauding her treatments and listing the positive impact they had on their quality of life, and she received referrals from physicians who knew her work.⁸⁷ In 1962, alternative medicine advocate Lesley Kuhn published a book on Weinstein’s color therapy technique entitled *Vision and the Magic of Color: A Concise Guide to Minerva Weinstein’s Color Lens Therapy*.⁸⁸ It was through her activities in non-optometric organizations that Dr. Weinstein met her second husband, Dr. Louis Arthur Yurman. Dr. Yurman was a Manhattan-based chiropractor and physio-therapist associated with the AACP whom Dr. Weinstein also invited to speak at the Soroptimist Club and the BCOS in the early 1930s.⁸⁹ They maintained a warm acquaintance for many years and, in 1965 at the age of 72, Dr. Weinstein became Mrs. Minerva Weinstein Yurman.⁹⁰ The Weinstein-Yurmans remained in practice for at least another decade.

CONCLUSION

Like so many other “firsts” on her resume, Dr. Weinstein was a charter member of the Optometric Historical Society (OHS).⁹¹ Between 1968 and 1973, AOA Librarian and OHS Secretary Maria Dablemont, on a search for optometry’s “firsts” to document in the OHS newsletter, began a correspondence with Dr. Weinstein.⁹² Weinstein sent Dablemont a series of long letters detailing her biography in tiny, immaculate script. Her letters were accompanied by objects, photographs, newspaper articles, correspondence and other records carefully annotated as evidence of her long career and active life. They also included proud descriptions of her son Quentin’s success as a maritime engineer, listed the accomplishments of her two grandchildren,

and remarkably frank and poignant recollections of more painful episodes.

Unfortunately, the collection was never processed and, over the years, was split among donor records, biographical and subject files, unprocessed collections and unattributed museum objects—her story fractured by its disassembly. In 1982 at the age of 89, Dr. Minerva Weinstein Yurman died and was laid to rest Sinai Memorial Park in Springfield, Massachusetts.⁹³ Dablemont retired in 1988⁹⁴ and the ILAMO staff dwindled and, finally, the library was closed in 2009. In 2019, the Archives & Museum of Optometry staff took up telling the stories still hidden in our collections once again, and reassembled Dr. Weinstein’s accessions. The reconstruction and preservation of the Minerva Weinstein Papers (MSS 501.4.11) not only allows us to share the story of Dr. Weinstein’s “firsts” but also to craft a richer narrative of how a woman optometrist navigated a less-liberated time to make an impact on optometry and on society. In this way, the story of an individual woman, unearthed in forgotten files, adds another dimension to a story we thought we knew.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Bronx County Historical Society and Dr. Lloyd Ultan, Professor of History, Fairleigh Dickinson University, for their assistance in researching this article.

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7. The Weinstein Optical Parlour stationery and business cards make the claim “est. 1890,” however it is well-documented that Abraham and Annie arrived in the United States in that year. The first time that the Weinstein’s are listed as owner-operators of their own business is in 1910 (see footnote 25) and the Weinstein Optical Parlor on Third Street is first listed in a city directory in 1913: Trow’s general directory of the boroughs of Manhattan and Bronx, city of New York [Internet]. New York: Trow Directory, Printing and Bookbinding, 1913. [cited 2019 Dec 10]. Available from: https://archive.org/stream/trowsgeneraldir1913p3trow/trowsgeneraldir1913p3trow_djvu.txt. Since the Weinsteins claim opticianry as the family business prior to immigration, perhaps the 1890 date was chosen to emphasize

- continuity and intent despite temporary forays into other lines of business due to legal, financial and logistical issues.
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 16. Ancestry.com. 1900 United States Federal Census, Queens, New York. Abraham Weinstein.
 17. FamilySearch.org. New York State Census, 1905. Manhattan, New York: State Archives. Election District 31, Enumeration District 6: p. 2.
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 26. Although Minerva graduated from the American Institute of Optometry in 1915, she was admitted to the exam based not on her education, but rather on her three-years of experience working under the direction of a licensed optometrist, presumably her father. Assembly of the State of New York, 140th Session 1917; 15(50) [Internet]. Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company, 1917: 1021 [cited 2019 Dec 9]. Google Books, 2010. Available from: <https://books.google.com/books?id=EjEbaQAIAAJ>
 27. Hunter College 1870-1920. New York, NY: Hunter College, n.d.: 2. [Internet]. Located at: City University of New York Libraries. Available at: https://library.hunter.cuny.edu/old/sites/default/files/pdf/archive_articles/hunter_college_1870-1920_0.pdf
 28. History of College. In: Catalog and Course of Study, Hunter College, July 1941:51-2. [Internet]. [cited 2019 Dec 09]. Available at: https://library.hunter.cuny.edu/old/sites/default/files/pdf/archive_articles/history_of_college_061941.pdf.
 29. American Institute Personals. The Optometrical Record. 1914;1(12): 733.
 30. Twelfth Annual Report of the Education Department for the School Year Ending July 31, 1915; 1: 876. Transmitted to the Legislature April 19, 1916. Google Play [Internet] [cited 2019 Dec 10]. Available from: <https://google.books.com>.
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 34. American Institute of Optometry, Certificate of Completion of Course of Instruction in the Theory and Practice of Optics and Optometry for Minerva H. Weinstein (25 Jun 1915), Joseph I. Pascal, Director. New York City, New York. Located at: Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Oversize framed media.
 35. 22D Optometry Examination: Practical Optics, Tuesday, June 29, 1915. (Scored exam sheet and essay answers by Minerva Weinstein.) The University of the State of New York. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
 36. Weinstein was the second woman to be licensed by examination in the state of New York (license #91) and one of only four to be licensed at all by October 1916. The first license issued to a woman in New York by exemption was awarded to Cora May Hanson of 276 Carolina Street in Buffalo on December 30, 1902 (license #32) and the second was issued to Minnie Black at 170 East 78th Street, New York City on January 28, 1909 (license #510). The claim to “first” by examination belongs to Rae L. Carlson, a Russian immigrant living in Rochester who graduated from the Rochester School of Optometry in 1915 and sat for the exam on Practical Optometry in June. Carlson received her certificate on July 1. [List of firsts documented in: Uttal D.K.(Secretary, New York State Optometric Association). Letter to: Minerva Weinstein. 1928 Apr 17. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.; See footnote 30 for documentation of Carlson’s licensure; Carlson’s background and subsequent practice documented at: Ancestry.com.1915 New York State Census. Monroe County, Rochester, NY. Line 70. Carlson, Rae.] Weinstein sat for the exam on Practical Optics on June 1 and she later requested a review of her paper written on that day to be considered as a submission for the October exam in Practical Optometry. Charles Prentice, President of the State Board of Examiners, forwarded the paper for re-evaluation in September and she was granted a license in October, scoring 94%. [Bissel W (Secretary, University of the State of New York, State Board of Examiners in Optometry). Letter to Minerva Weinstein. 1915 Sep 10. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1; Hamilton H. (Assistant, Professional Examinations, University of the State of New York State Department of Education, Examinations Division). Letter to Minerva Weinstein. 1915 July 28. 1

- leaf and attachment (23D Practical Optometry Exam, The University of the state of New York, October 6, 1915 scored 94:100). Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.] Almost half (42%) of all applicants for licenses in 1915 were rejected. [For statistics on examination success rates, see footnote 30, page 148].
37. Instruments, Tools and Machinery. Manuscript inventory and price list for Weinstein's Optical Parlors, 1915. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
38. Globe and Commercial Advertiser, New York. Graphic Commercial Survey of New York City, Covering Manhattan And the Bronx. New York: The Globe and Commercial Advertiser, 1916. [Internet]. [cited 2019 Dec 09]: p. 23; 71. Available from: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.319510024618557&view=1up&seq=12>
39. Ancestry.com - New York, City Directories [Internet]. General Directory of New York. Section W. 1916: p. 1750. [cited 2019 Dec 10].
40. McKinley Square Theater; King Theatre (Demolished 2002) [Internet]. [cited 2019 Dec 18]. Available from: <https://www.theclio.com/entry/59082>
41. According to Bronx historian Dr. Lloyd Ultan, Yiddish and Hebrew were the second-most widely spoken languages in the Bronx at 1920. [Hebert, Kirsten. (Heritage Services Specialist, The Archives & Museum of Optometry). Conservation with: Lloyd Ultan, Ph.D. (Historian, Bronx County Historical Society, Bronx, New York). 13 Nov 2019.] For more on the growth and evolution of the Jewish population of New York see: Sarna JD, Golden J. The American Jewish Experience in the Twentieth Century: Antisemitism and Assimilation, The Twentieth Century, Divining America: Religion in American History, TeacherServe, National Humanities Center [Internet]. Nationalhumanitiescenter.org. 2019 [cited 2019 Dec 3]. Available from: <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/jewishexp.htm>.
42. Temporary Custody Receipt 228 and Inventory List of Minerva Weinstein Donation 1970 Feb 13. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; RG 100 AOA Records, SE 140 ILAMO, Donor Records.
43. Bronx Wife of Aviator Wins Divorce Action. 1929 Feb/Mar. Newspaper clipping. (New York). Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
44. FamilySearch.org. [Internet]. New York City Marriage Records, 1829-1940. Joseph R. Abramowitz and Minervon [sic] H. Weinstein, 26 Jan 1919. Bronx, New York. Original located at: New York: New York City Municipal Archives. FHL microfilm 1,941,355.
45. Weinstein MH. Letter to: Maria Dablemont (AOA Librarian). 1972 Oct 22. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
46. Ace Tries to Die for Love. North Side News. (New York). 1929 July. Newspaper clipping. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
47. The Abramowitz family sent emissaries to New York twice per year to attend fur auctions. On one such trip in 1915, Scholom, Amalia and Joseph all traveled to New York together [Familysearch.org. [Internet]. New York Passenger Arrival Lists (Ellis Island), 1892-1924. 26 Sep 1915. S.S. Rochambeau, Bordeaux France to New York. List of Manifest of Alien Passengers. Page 1, Line 5. Abramowitz, Joseph. Digitized from Roll 2434, Volume 5626-5628, 1 Oct 1915]. Scholom fatefully chose to return to France separately, boarding the doomed Lusitania. He later gained momentary fame as the commander of Lifeboat 13 and the savior of an infant thrown from the sinking ship by her desperate caregiver. More of his story can be found here: Poirier M and Jossa M. Mr. Samuel Abramowitz: The Lusitania Resource [Internet]. Rmslusitania.info. 2015 [cited 2019 Dec 1]. Available from: <http://www.rmslusitania.info/people/second-cabin/samuel-abramowitz/>; here: People's stories - Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool museums [Internet]. Samuel Abramowitz. [cited 2019 Dec 24]. Available from: <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/visit/floor-plan/lusitania/people/peoples-stories.aspx?id=14424>; and here: The Lusitania : Part 16 : Appendices - Page 3 of 4 - Gare Maritime [Internet]. Abramowitz Shalom. 1915 Mar 16. [cited 2019 Dec 24]. Available from: <https://www.garemaritime.com/lusitania-part-16-appendices/3/>.
48. Abramowitz J (Fort Stanwix Hotel, Johnstown, PA). Letter to Abraham Weinstein (252 E. Fordham Road, NY). 1920 Jun 11. 6 leaves. A Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
49. Abramowitz J. Letter to Minerva Weinstein (1311 Boston Road, New York, NY). 1920 Oct 22. 2 leaves. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
50. Abramowitz J. Letter to Minerva Weinstein (689 East 170th Street). 1920 Sep 22. 2 leaves. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
51. Weinstein M. Manuscript note [unsigned]. Circa 1920-1929. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
52. Abramowitz J (New York, NY). Postcard to Minerva Weinstein (1311 Boston Road, New York, NY). 1920 Jun 23. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
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55. Secretary Sees Field for Women Optometrists. Bronx Home News. (New York) 14 June 1931. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
56. Grossman J. Divorce Denied: "Social Abandonment" Insufficient Grounds in New York. Findlaw.com. [Internet]. [cited 2019 Dec 09]. Available from: <https://supreme.findlaw.com/legal-commentary/divorce-denied-social-abandonment-is-insufficient-grounds-in-new-york.html>
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- Bates L.T. The Divorce of Americans in France. Law and Contemporary Problems 1935;2(3):322-328. Available at: <https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1760&context=lcp>
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60. Ancestry.com. [Internet.] Bronx County, New York, Divorce and Civil Case Records, 1914-1995. Abramowitz Joseph and Minerva Abramowitz. March 19 1929. 2: p. 455. File number 1909
61. Hammer Justice. Decisions. Supreme Court, Bronx County Special Term. 23 Feb 1929. Abramowitz v. Abramowitz. Motion Granted. Newspaper clipping located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.

62. In 1929, Dr. Weinstein's stated income was more than twice the annual income of the average man in 1937 and over four times the average annual income of American women. For more on women's salaries and employment in this era, see: Women in the 1930s & 1940s: HIST18.2: History of Women in the United States Since 1877: Section 0972: Donegan A [Internet]. [cited 2019 Dec 9]. Available from: <https://canvas.santarosa.edu/courses/24761/pages/women-in-the-1930s-and-1940s>
63. Died Abramowitz [Obituary]. The Kingston Daily Freeman. (Kingston, New York). 1966 Jan 7: p. 6. Newspapers.com [Internet]. Available from: <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/90396651/>
64. Weinstein MH. Letter to: John W. Jarvis (President, NYSOA). 1932 Mar 1. 1 leaf. Enclosure: Annual Report to NYSOA for the New York State Woman's Auxiliary: May 1931-February 1932. 1932 Feb 27. 1 leaf. And Letter of Resignation. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
65. Friedlander M (Secretary, University of the State of New York, State Board of Examiners in Optometry). Letter to Minerva Weinstein. 1931 Jan 28. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
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67. Weinstein MH (Second Vice President, Bronx County Optometric Society). Letter to M. Friedlander (Secretary, Bronx County Optometric Society). 1931 Jan 23. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
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71. Berg Julius (Attorney at Law, 225 West 34th Street, New York). Letter to: Minerva Weinstein. 1929Apr 25. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
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73. Weinstein MH. Letter to: John W. Jarvis (President, New York State Optometric Association). 1930 Oct 4. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
74. Weinstein MH. Letter to: Jarvis, JW. 1931 Jun 29. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
75. Weinstein MH (Secretary, Bronx County Optometric Society). Letter to: John W. Jarvis (President NYSOA). 1932 Jan 16. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
76. Weinstein MH. Letter to: John Jarvis (President, NYSOA). 1931 Apr 29. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
77. Weinstein MH (Secretary, Bronx County Optometric Society). Letter to: John W. Jarvis (President NYSOA). 1930 Aug 20. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
78. Jarvis JW (President NYSOA). Letter to: Weinstein MH (Secretary Bronx County Optometric Society). 1930 Aug 23. 2 leaves. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
79. Jarvis, John W, O.D. (President NYSOA). Letter to: Weinstein MH (Secretary, Bronx County Optometric Society). 1930 Sep 4. 2 leaves. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
80. Becher, Lester, O.D. (Chief of Clinic, Bronx County Optometric Service). Letter to: Minerva Weinstein. 9 Jan 1931. 1 leaf. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein. Box 1.
81. United States Congress. House. Investigation of Housing, 1955[-56]. Hearings before the Subcommittee on Housing of the Committee on Banking and Currency; 1955 Oct; 84th Congress. First Session on HR 203, Part I. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1955: 284. Books on Google Play [Internet]. [cited 2019 Dec 10]. Available from: <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=LJHX4vbSVbQC&rdid=book-LJHX4vbSVbQC&rdot=1>
82. There were many analogous organizations with similar names and functions as the AACP, one of the oldest being the Auxiliary to New York's Children's Aid Society established in 1899 [see History - Foundation For Child Development [Internet]. [cited 2019 Dec 1]. Available from: <https://www.fcd-us.org/about-us/history/>]. For a more thorough history of these organizations see: disability history museum--The Care, Cure, And Education Of The Crippled Child: Disability History Museum [Internet]. [cited 2019 Dec 11]. Available from: <https://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/lib/detail.html?id=1449&print=1> According to letterhead in Dr. Weinstein's papers, the AACP was an affiliate of the Foundation for Medical Massage Research. "Medical Massage" was an alternative moniker for physio-therapy, the specialty practiced by Dr. Weinstein's second husband, Dr. Louis Arthur Yurman. Physiotherapy was the predecessor of the modern profession of Physical Therapy. The letterhead also lists Dr. Weinstein's position on the Welfare Committee and articulates the organization mission. Located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
83. Colby, May. (Organizing Secretary, Bronx Soroptomist Club.) Letter to: Membership. 1929 Feb 9.
84. Woman Optometrist Named for Place on "Most Distinguished Citizen List." Opt J Rev 1931;67(15): 28.
85. According to her licenses, Dr. Weinstein moved her practice several times in the 1930s before moving to the north Bronx: 2374 University Ave, NYC (1931), 991 Boston Road (1932), 3295 Third Ave (1935), 3297 Third Ave (1937-1941), and 420 Willis Ave (1954). Original documents located at: The Archives & Museum of Optometry, St. Louis, MO; MSS 501.4.11, Minerva Weinstein Papers. Box 1.
86. Findagrave.com. [Internet.] Weinstein Abraham, d. 1939. Mount Hebron Cemetery in Flushing, New York - Find A Grave Cemetery. [cited 2019 Dec 9]. Available from: <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/64154/mount-hebron-cemetery/map>.
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89. We Hear Dr. Yurman. The Bronx Soroptomist. 1931;3(3):3.
90. Ancestry.com. [Internet.] Minerva Weinstein and Louis Arthur Yurman, License #5434. 1965. New York, New York, Marriage License Indexes, 1907-2018.
91. Editors. Newsletter of the Optometric Historical Society. 1970;1:1.
92. Editors. Another Thrilling First: OHS Member Minerva H. Weinstein. Hindsight. 1973;3:34.
93. Findagrave.com. [Internet]. Sinai Memorial Park in Springfield, Massachusetts - Find A Grave Cemetery. [cited 2019 Dec 9] from: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/97395993/yurman-minerva>
94. International Library, Archives and Museum of Optometry. Centennial: ILAMO 100 Years. St. Louis, MO: ILAMO, 2008, p. 7.