TWO VISIONARY OHIO WOMEN: LOIS BLACK BING, O.D. AND RUTH P. MORRIS, O.D.

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ABSTRACT

This article profiles the careers of the Ohio State University College of Optometry's most prominent mid-century women graduates: Dr. Lois Black Bing (1909-2009) and Dr. Ruth P. Morris (1920-2011). The author highlights Drs. Morris' and Bing's contributions to the profession, including Dr. Bing's leadership role in bringing together the fields of education, psychology and optometry to advance children's vision., and Dr. Morris' business model as a family practice serving the vision care needs of patients in all stages of their lives, and her role as a mentor for optometry students at the OSU.

KEYWORDS

Lois Black Bing; Ruth P. Morris; The Ohio State University; women's history; optometry history; private optometry practice; children's vision

Dr. Lois Black Bing (1909-2009)

After receiving her A.B. and teaching credential in 1931 from the College of Wooster in Ohio, Dr. Bing earned her optometry degree in 1948 from The Ohio State University (OSU). She continued her interest in education through graduate studies at Ohio State, Pittsburgh, and Case Western Reserve universities after becoming an optometrist.

Dr. Bing chaired the Visual Problems of Children and Youth Committee of the American Optometric Association (AOA) for a period of 12 years, 1951-1963. During that time, she represented the AOA at the 1950 and 1960 White House Conferences on Children and Youth. She wrote many articles on vision and reading for Reading Teacher, The Journal of Learning Disabilities and Clinical Reading, and many optometric publications. She also collaborated with Drs. Lillian R. Hines and George D. Spache in writing and illustrating a book titled Vision and School Success. In 1995, she contributed a chapter, "The Role of Vision in Reading Disabilities," in a new book published that year titled How to be a Better Teacher.

Beginning in 1951, and continuing for the next 45 years, she chaired the annual School Vision Forum and Reading Conference in Cleveland, Ohio. This interdisciplinary conference, which has been held at the OSU College of Optometry since 1997, always presents nationally prominent speakers in the fields of optometry, education and psychology. Her groundbreaking leadership in bringing these three independent and diverse professions together in 1951 set a very high standard for formal communication and collaboration that did not previously exist. When the conference was moved to Columbus in 1997, Dr. Bing said it was to stimulate interprofessional understanding and cooperation among the colleges of the university concerned with children's learning.

At the 50th annual Forum and Conference in 1997, Dr. Paulette Schmidt (OSU O.D. Class of 1973, MS Class of 1976) briefly

summarized the history of this interdisciplinary meeting. She said: "I believe Dr. Bing's vision was born here at Ohio State, in great part through the legacy of two giants: Professor Charles Sheard and Regents Professor Glenn A. Fry. ... Dr. Sheard is credited with saying '80% of what we learn in a lifetime is processed through the visual system... [And] Professor Fry developed ways of investigating vision and visual performance to answer both research and clinical questions. ... Eyesight (20/20 visual acuity in each eye) does not equal vision. Indeed, 20/20 vision alone is an inadequate measure of the ability of the visual system to meet the visual performance needs of our children. Dr. Bing has gone on to refine vision for optometrists, educators and others in terms of the visual performance demands on children in the classroom."

In recognition of her work in the areas of vision and reading, Dr. Bing received the Apollo Award for her distinguished service from the American Optometric Association; she also was named an Honorary Life Member of three prestigious professional organizations: the American Academy of Optometry, the Ohio Council of the International Reading Association, and the Ohio School Psychologists Association, as well as receiving many other accolades during her practice career of five decades. In December 1997, she received the prestigious Carel C. Koch Memorial Medal Award from the American Academy of Optometry at its annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas. This award was established in 1974 by the Academy to recognize a person who has made outstanding contributions to the enhancement and development of relationships between optometry and other professions. In 2002, she was inducted into the National Optometry Hall of Fame when the ceremony was held at the annual EastWest Eye Conference in Cleveland. And in 2006, she was honored by The Ohio State University Alumni Association with its Alumni Citizenship Award.

In 2006, when asked about her long-term interest in, and commitment to, working with other health care professionals, Dr. Bing said: "... two factors have led me to my involvement in

interprofessional activity. I felt that my license to practice carried with it the concept that we each are responsible for the public's concept of our profession. We each could add good, nothing in particular, or a negative concept. This led me to be willing to take time out of my practice to represent optometry in healthcare programs which included vision The second factor which led to my being involved with interprofessional activity was my professional interest in seeking answers as to why a child with normal or superior intelligence goes to school and finds it difficult to learn what others find it easy to learn. Vision is involved in many ways There is no more important matter with which we can concern ourselves than the essential need for a multi-professional approach to the problems of children."

In 2002, Dr. Bing and her son, Dr. James D. Bing (OSU BS-Optometry Class of 1960), established the Bing Pediatric Vision Library at the college, which provides students and faculty both historically-important and "cutting-edge" knowledge in the field. Dr. Bing died in 2009 at the age of 99.

Dr. Ruth P. Morris (1920-2011)

While a student at Ohio State, Ruth Penrod funded her optometric education by working for 25 cents an hour at the White Haines Optical Company in Columbus. In her last year of optometry school, she married Warren G. Morris. While her new husband was in the Army, she began her practice of optometry in Toledo with an established optometrist who, unfortunately, passed away only nine weeks after her arrival. For the next three years, Dr. Ruth Morris worked hard to learn the business side of an optometric practice; and her efforts were so successful that her husband was able to join her after he returned from WWII and later earned his optometry degree from Ohio State in 1949.

Drs. Ruth (affectionately known to all as "Ruthie") and Warren Morris practiced together for 37 years, until his sudden death in 1986. They served five generations of patients in northwest Ohio. Their division of labor and love in the office was to have Dr. Ruth care for the vision needs of adolescent and adult patients—including contact lenses—while Dr. Warren cared for the children. Both emphasized visual performance and said many times: "Our patients must be able to use their vision comfortably and effectively at work and play or we have not done our jobs as optometrists." Together, they assured that each child received vision care regardless of his or her parents' finances. And they educated their patients, as well as the teachers in their community, about the importance of eye safety, vision care, and reading performance.

They also "adopted" many optometry students who visited their office and provided invaluable counsel and resources to assure that each of their "optometry kids" achieved his or her own professional goals. Dr. Kevin Alexander, OSU OD Class of 1976, who was an OSU faculty member and then went on to become president of both the Ohio Optometric Association and the American Optometric Association, dean at the Michigan College of Optometry, and president of the Marshall B. Ketchum University in Fullerton, California, said the Morrises loaned him some money to open his private practice in Columbus. And he was told at the time, "just pay us back whenever you can."

Dr. Ruth served her community as well as her profession by being on the boards of Toledo civic and performing arts

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organizations. She participated vigorously at local, state, and national levels in Business and Professional Women (BPW). And in her early BPW years, she developed a program to educate the public about seat belts and driver safety. In her later years, she established a vision clinic for indigent patients in Toledo. And in optometry, she chaired the education committee of the Ohio Optometric Association for many years and established the Optometric Recognition Award (ORA) at the state and national levels for optometrists who attend a higher number of continuing education courses than the minimum necessary for annual licensure renewal. She also served on the American Optometric Association's Council on Clinical Optometric Care, during which time she helped to establish quality assurance measurements for the profession.

Figure 1: Dr. Ruth P. Morris and Dean Richard M. Hill, 1991.

One of The Ohio State University College of Optometry's most distinguished alumni, Dr. Ruth gave the convocation address on June 13, 1991, to that year's graduating class. She said: " . . . FOLLOW YOUR DREAM . . . Be prepared to take some risks . . . Risk and change will be with you all your life. Both are synonymous with opportunity. Only you can know, shape, and control the dream you have in your heart tonight . . ." (Figure 1).

Also in 1991, Drs. Ruth and Warren Morris were posthumously awarded the H. Ward Ewalt Medal for Service to Optometry by The Ohio State University College of Optometry. Due to the enduring legacy that Ruth and her beloved husband, Warren, gave to Ohio optometry, the Ohio Optometric Association's highest annual award is titled "The Warren G. and Ruth P. Morris Optometrist of the Year" for outstanding contributions to the profession of optometry and public service. The recipient of this high honor has the privilege of keeping Dr. Warren Morris' mounted spot retinoscope for one year, and then presenting it to the next year's honoree at the OOA annual convention. Dr. Ruth Morris died in 2011 at the age of 92.

Editor's Note

This article was previously published by Dr. Newcomb in 2014 as a portion of his book entitled *Our History in Focus: The First 100 Years of The Ohio State University College of Optometry*.