

PIONEERING WOMEN IN INDIANA OPTOMETRY: BOYD AND METZGER—A FAMILY AFFAIR

Kyle W. King, O.D.

Evansville Eyecare Associates
Evansville, IN

kywking@indiana.edu

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Drs. Virlee Metzger (left) and Dr. Miriam Boyd (right). Image courtesy the author.

ABSTRACT

This memoir is a summary of an oral interview conducted by Kyle W. King, O.D. with fellow Indiana-based optometrist Miriam Boyd, O.D. about her career in optometry and the career of her mother, Virlee Metzger, O.D. Dr. David Goss performed historical research to supplement Dr. Boyd's memoir. Taken together, the Metzger and Boyd's careers spanned 80 years (1933-2015) and represent an impressive professional legacy that endured changes both in society and in the scope and nature of optometric practice.

KEYWORDS

Virlee Metzger; Miriam Boyd; women's history; optometry history; Indiana University; Richard Tubesing; Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary; Illinois College of Optometry

INTRODUCTION

I was recently asked to contribute an article on two pioneering women in optometry, Drs. Virlee Metzger and Miriam Boyd. I first met Dr. Boyd ten years ago at a local optometric society meeting. The following is based on a phone interview I conducted with her in mid-August 2019.

Indiana Trailblazers: Metzger and Boyd

Healthcare was in Dr. Miriam Boyd's genes. Her mother, Dr. Virlee Metzger, was an optometrist in Jasper, Indiana, sharing office space with Boyd's grandfather and uncle, who were dentists. By the second grade, Boyd knew that she wanted to become an optometrist. She credits her mother as the inspiration for this choice, watching her practice during her childhood, and notes that Dr. Metzger was supportive of her decision to go into optometry. Dr. Metzger was on a committee at the Indiana University (IU) School of Optometry at the time and helped to recruit students into the profession. Boyd recalls that her mother often used her as a test subject for new technologies and innovations, especially in contact lenses.

Both Metzger and Boyd were trailblazers in the world of optometry. Dr. Metzger was one of the first women to practice optometry in the state of Indiana. She attended what is now the Illinois College of Optometry and began her practice in Jasper in 1933. (Figure 1) She continued her practice there for the next 56 years. Dr. Metzger was a longtime member of the Indiana Optometric Association (IOA) and American Optometric Association (AOA). When Dr. Boyd decided to go into optometry, she applied and was accepted into the fledgling program at Indiana University. Boyd was the first woman to enroll at the IU Division of Optometry, later the School of Optometry, where she also served as president of her class. After five years of study, she received a Master of Optometry degree in 1962, which was the terminal professional optometry degree at IU at the time.

After graduation, Dr. Boyd moved to Indianapolis and began practicing with Dr. Richard Tubesing. In the mid-1960s she and her husband moved to Boston, where he had been accepted into a didactic year of oral surgery at Boston University. Dr. Boyd had the good fortune to land a job at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary (MEEI). She credits a connection with her friend, Joan Exford, O.D., who was the second woman to graduate from the IU School of Optometry, for this position.¹



Fig. 1 Virlee Metzger, NICO, June 1933.

Dr. Boyd worked in the Cornea Service Department at MEEI, where she fit scleral contact lenses and took pictures of corneal pathology. During this time, she co-authored two articles on scleral lenses in the *Archives of Ophthalmology*.^{2,3} "I learned a lot and saw many interesting things," Boyd said of her time at MEEI. After her employment at MEEI, Boyd returned to the Indianapolis area, where she returned to work with Dr. Richard Tubesing in his office in Speedway, Indiana. Dr. Tubesing was heavily involved with the American Academy of Optometry (AAO), and during this time both Dr. Boyd and Dr. Metzger also became fellows in the AAO.

Boyd and her husband were from southwestern Indiana and decided to start their respective practices there. At the time, Vincennes, Indiana had no oral surgeons, and so they chose to settle there, only 50 miles from their hometowns. "I thought about joining mother in her practice, but it just didn't work out." Her husband opened his oral surgery practice in 1969 and during this year, Dr. Boyd worked in his office to help it get off the ground. In 1970, she opened her practice, which she maintained until 2015. She did not sell her practice when she retired, but instead donated much of her office equipment to missionaries working in Ukraine.

When asked what she enjoyed most about optometry, Dr. Boyd said, "It gave me a great sense of contributing to the welfare of my community." She greatly enjoyed fitting contact lenses, especially hard bifocal lenses. "Things are a lot different now than when I started, especially diagnosing and treating eye diseases," Boyd remembers. "I was not able to dilate or treat anything when I first started." Optometry was a male-dominated profession during the careers of both Dr. Metzger and Dr. Boyd, but Boyd says neither of them faced any discrimination from men in the profession, "I never had any problems with my male colleagues."

CONCLUSION

Dr. Boyd was active for many years in the IOA and is a lifetime member of both the IOA and AOA. On a personal note, I can recall seeing Dr. Boyd at almost every local society meeting until her retirement. At a spry 80 years young, Dr. Boyd remains active in her community of Vincennes. She currently volunteers with the United Way of Knox County and the League of Women Voters. Joining friends to watch Indiana Hoosier basketball is also favorite pastime of hers in the winter months. Dr. Boyd is active in her

church community of St. Francis Xavier—the first Catholic Parish established in Indiana—which seems to be fitting. To close my interview, I asked Dr. Boyd if she had any final thoughts on her career and the legacy of both she and her mother and she simply stated, "I loved optometry, and I know mother did too."

References

1. Dr. Joan Exford would become the first woman president of the American Academy of Optometry and is the subject of an article scheduled for publication in *Hindsight* 2020;51(2).
2. Miller D, Holmberg A, Carroll J, Boyd M. Comparison of two methods in molding scleral contact shells. *Arch Ophthalmol* 1966; 76:422-425.
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