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NEWSLETTER

OF THE

OPTOMETRIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

(7000 Chippewa Street, Saint Louis, Missouri, U. S. A. 63119)

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John Levene re-elected:

Almost half of the members sent in their votes, and all three candidates made a very respectable showing, with a substantial lead by Dr. Levene for a second term, this one for five years.

Presently the Executive Board is voting on its choices of officers.

Reminisce-in rescheduled:

Wednesday, June 19, 2:30-4:30 p.m., is the time scheduled for the second reminisce-in sponsored by the Optometric Historical Society. The place is Washington, D.C. at the American Optometric Association Congress on the same day as Family Time, so there should be very little conflict with other events.

Dr. Spurgeon Eure, President of Southern College of Optometry, is in charge. Everyone interested in hearing or telling about fascinating events in optometry's past is invited and welcome.

How much history is taught?

Prompted by an O.H.S. member who was curious to know whether optometry's history is routinely included in today's curricula, I fired off the following letter to Jerald Strickland, O.D., Secretary of the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO).

"Dear Jerry,

"Interest has been expressed in the coverage of optometric history in the various optometry curricula. I know, of course, what is included in the course at Indiana University, but I, personally, have never seen an outline for an optometry history course elsewhere. Does such information, perchance, exist in any of the ASCO collections of materials from its member institutions?

"Essentially what we would like to know is, 'What topics does the term "optometric history" conjure up in the academic/professional mind and what sort of resources are utilized by the student and teacher?' Whatever handouts or course outlines or introductory statements instructors may use for history of optometry courses or for the historical parts of more comprehensive courses would be appreciated.

"This is not a missionary ploy to enable someone to pass judgement on, or otherwise rate, optometry curricula or history courses. I would merely like to be able to make a reasonably accurate statement as to the coverage of optometric history in today's curricula."

Dr. Strickland promptly distributed photocopies of my letter to all of the ASCO member institutions, 16 I believe, and I have already received responses from five. I hope to be able to prepare a summary in the next issue.

1776 optometry coming into focus:

In my own course on History of Optometry last fall, I asked each of my 66 students, all in their first year of optometry, to submit a short paper on a topic which would give me some insight as to the status of optometry, optics, visual science, etc. in the second half of the 18th century. Impressed by many of the papers, I forwarded them to Mr. Roy P. Stealey of The Optometric Weekly. Mr. Stealey hopes to publish about 15 of them as a series.

I also made photocopies of all 66 papers and will place this collection in the Indiana University Optometry Library for general reference purposes.

An archivist's appeal:

A few months ago I received a copy of a letter which Maria Dablemont, Librarian/Archivist, American Optometric Association, 7000 Chippewa Street, St. Louis, Missouri, 63119, wrote to an optometrist who had acquired ownership of a deceased optometrist's practice of many years' standing. Though the letter was very informally written it illustrated so well the professional endeavours of a good archivist. The following few paragraphs deserve repeating here.

"As we are not aware of what you received and what you wish to donate to our Archives, we will give below an example of what we usually collect and add to individual archives and to the holdings of the library:

- "1) Whenever possible, models of instruments invented by optometrists including drawings, patents and personal correspondence related to the invention.
- 2) Personal papers -- correspondence, autobiographies, published and unpublished manuscripts.
- 3) Memorabilia -- photographs, slides and tapes, plaques, certificates, emblems, seals, medals, trophies, awards, and honors.
- 4) Antique eyeglasses.
- 5) Early instruments.
- 6) Early optometric classics -- textbooks, correspondence courses.
- 7) Optometric school (current and discontinued) publications, bulletins, yearbooks, fraternity publications, etc.
- 8) Early rosters, directories and listings of Optometric bodies

- 9) Early catalogs and serials published by firms and organizations of manufacturers and opticians such as Optical Developments.
- 10) Blue Books of Optometrists prior to 1928.
- 11) Any journal or newsletter published by Optometric State Organizations prior to 1960.
- 12) Any AOA publication prior to 1952.
- 13) Any optometric periodicals published by "professional" press such as Optical Journal and Review, Optometric Weekly, etc., prior to 1950.

"Thank you so much for the attention you may give to this letter."

Centenary sparsity:

Just out of curiosity and late in 1973 O.H.S. member John R. Levene searched his notes for names of persons in the history of visual science who were born in '73, any century. He came up with Alexis Carrel (1873-1844) (anatomy, tissue culture) and John Cunningham Saunders (1773-1810) (early cataract surgery). These tidbits were too late for a 1973 issue of the Newsletter, so Dr. Levene hastened to find some names for '74. He found two, as follows: C.P. von Pirquet (1874-1929) (allergy) and Benjamin Gibson (1774-1812) (bacteriology). He also found one, Arthur Jacob, who died in '74 (1790-1874). The layer of rods and cones in the retina is known as Jacob's membrane.

O.D. lived to be 100:

Almost a year ago, O.H.S. member Paul Grattan sent me a clipping from the February 20, 1973, issue of the The Times Record of Troy, New York, reporting that Dr. John W. Hamilton, optometrist, of Stillwater, New York, would celebrate his 100th birthday on March 2, 1973. His career included the operation of a jewelry store and eight years as town postmaster and several years as town clerk. He was still driving a car at 92. His last few years were in residence at The Pleasant Valley Infirmary, Argyle, New York.

My recent, January 1974, note to Dr. Hamilton brought back the response that he is deceased.

Early blind school aided by Rev. Beecher:

Circumstances leading to the establishment of a school for the blind are described in a book by Jane Shaffer Elsmere entitled "HENRY WARD BEECHER, The Indiana Years, 1837-1847" and published by the Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, 1973, pp. 243-244, as follows:

"The efforts of James M. Ray and others to establish a school for the blind in Indiana similar to that already in existence in Kentucky likewise drew Beecher's interest. Ray was a leader in attempts to better the lot of the state's unfortunate citizens. He had helped organize the first Sabbath School in Indianapolis, been

secretary of the first temperance society, and served as treasurer of the Indianapolis Benevolent Society. Beecher had known Ray, a Presbyterian, ever since coming to Indianapolis. They decided it would be a good time to focus attention on the plight of Indiana's sightless citizens when the state legislature convened in 1846. Ray brought a blind educator, William H. Churchman, and a group of the latter's pupils from the Kentucky School for the Blind to Indianapolis. Several lectures were delivered by Churchman and others on behalf of the blind at the Second Presbyterian Church. In addition to these speeches, the legislators and public saw examples of the work of the blind pupils who demonstrated their accomplishments and, in general, proved that blind people could learn useful skills and care for themselves.

"The lectures were well attended by the public. That the problems involved in teaching the blind were imperfectly understood, however, was made too clear in one instance when a member of the legislature attempted to help with a demonstration of the prowess of a blind pupil. To the amusement and embarrassment of the audience the lawmaker wrote a problem, held the paper before the sightless eyes of the pupil, and then with his own finger traced the problem while exhorting the pupil to solve it. The incident did not discredit the efforts of Ray; and may, indeed, have aided them by keeping the episode before the legislators as a subject for conversation. From this time until October 1, 1847, when Indiana opened its own School for the Blind on North Street in Indianapolis, Henry Ward Beecher worked toward that goal."

Student and collector:

O.H.S. member Richard E. Schugar, 6060 Crescentville Road, Apartment East D-5, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 19120 writes us as follows:

"I have been a history buff and antique collector for many years. Since my enrollment at P.C.O., I have naturally added old optometric equipment and spectacles to my list of collectables. Certainly there must be other members of the Society with the same interest. If you are aware of anyone who is interested in exchanging information about particular pieces or perhaps trading old equipment or spectacles, I would be very appreciative if you could forward their names to me."

Sought but not found:

Mr. Schugar, who is a student at Pennsylvania College of Optometry, wrote us further as follows:

"After reading the January Newsletter, I went to the PCO library to try and find the last issue of The Optical Journal Supplement. Unfortunately, our library doesn't have any issues. Our earliest issue of The Optical Journal is dated June 28, 1906 (Vol. XVIII, No. 1). There is no mention of the Supplement in this volume. I'm sorry I couldn't be of more assistance."

Rubin receives response:

Responding to Jack Rubin's request in the January Newsletter, O.H.S. member Schugar wrote him as follows, with a copy to me:

"I am also a collector of antique optometric instruments and read with interest your letter to Dr. Gregg which was reprinted in the Newsletter of the Optometric Historical Society. I too have one of the devices you describe and believe it is called an optometer. It was given to me by Dr. Theodore Coleman, who practiced optometry in Philadelphia from 1950 until his death in 1973. He also gave me a few smaller optometers which have only six lenses and no fixed distance for a reading card. He had received them over a period of years through the mail.

"The larger one came from C.G. Optical Co., 20 East Delaware Place, Chicago 5, Illinois. The smaller optometers are from Advance Spectacle Co., 537 South Dearborn Street, Chicago 5, Illinois.

"Since Dr. Coleman began practicing in 1950, the selling of prescription spectacles must have been legal in Illinois after that date. Perhaps someone from that state can give you the exact date. I hope I have been of some assistance to you.

"I would be interested in knowing what other old instruments you have in your collection. I started acquiring old instruments and spectacles when I began optometry school four years ago. The majority of my collection dates after 1900. I shall look forward to hearing from you."

Reflections on Archimedes:

The SCIENCE column of the November 26, 1973, issue of TIME, p. 60, describes a recent experiment conducted in Athens, Greece, to test the plausibility of Archimedes' alleged "burning glass" that focused the sun's rays to set fire to Roman Ships besieging his home town of Syracuse around 214 B.C. Engineer Ioannis Sakkas decided that the "burning glass" of legend "was probably highly polished metal - most likely, the shields of Syracuse's soldiers." So Sakkas lined up 70 mirror-bearing sailors on a pier and directed them to reflect sunlight on a rowboat 160 ft. offshore. The improvised mirrors were 3 X 5 ft. sheets of polished copper.

". . . when they finally coordinated their efforts, the rowboat began smoking within two or three seconds. It was soon engulfed in flames."

The Time Magazine article prompted a somewhat more sophisticated and impressively referenced response by Klaus D. Mielenz entitled "Eureka!" in Applied Optics, Vol. 13, no. 2, February 1974, pp. A14-A16. Mielenz tells us that "the feasibility of Archimedes' accomplishment had been demonstrated about 225 years ago by the French

naturalist Buffon (1707-1788)." Buffon did his experiment with a rectangular array of 168 plane mirrors, each 8 inches by 10 inches in size and individually adjustable, so that their spots could all be superimposed on the target. Altogether Buffon performed about a dozen experiments, all successful.

Two additional letters to the editor in the same issue, pp. A16 and 452, include further interesting comments.

Who was Meissner?

In a letter to the late Gordon L. Walls, back in 1956, I suggested that Daza de Valdes was the "first optometrist." He responded promptly with "But, wouldn't the 'first optometrist' have had to be the first man who matched a particular strength of lens to someone's particular refractive error? Wouldn't that have been Meissner in 1260?"

I immediately asked him for a reference, but I do not believe I ever received it. Then I forgot about it. Now I wonder who Meissner was. A recent one-hour search in the library was not successful.

A 50 year history:

Apparently published in late 1972, or very early 1973, is a 60 page 14 X 22 cm booklet entitled A HISTORY OF THE SOUTHERN COUNCIL OF OPTOMETRISTS AND ITS WOMAN'S AUXILIARY. I received a copy from the present executive director Mr. Felton Gordon, Box 18617, Atlanta, Georgia, 30326.

The 50th Anniversary year was celebrated on February 2-6, 1973, in Atlanta, Georgia.

The booklet is packed full of facts, names, places, and events.

London Refraction Hospital:

"50 years of the LRH" is the title of an article in two parts by L.A. Swann in the December 8 and 22, 1973, issues of The Ophthalmic Optician, Vol. 13, Nos. 24-25, pp. 1401-1403 and 1466-1468.

The author had registered as Student 21, ticket no. 15, a Life Students ticket of the London Refraction Hospital, on February 26, 1923, for which he had paid ten guineas.

H.W. Hofstetter, Editor