IMPORTANT HAPPENINGS IN OPTOMETRY ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

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ABSTRACT
This paper discusses important events in optometry in 1922 and 1923. Included for 1922 are the First Conference to Establish Standards, a pivotal meeting in the development of optometric education; the founding of the American Academy of Optometry; and the 25th annual meeting of the American Optometric Association (AOA). Events noted for 1923 are Pennsylvania State College of Optometry becoming the first school to grant an OD degree approved by a state legislature; the establishment of the optometry school at the University of California, Berkeley; and the annual AOA meeting.

KEYWORDS
American Academy of Optometry, American Optometric Association, optometric education, optometry history.

By 1922, all states in the U.S. had passed optometry licensure laws, Missouri and Texas having passed such legislation the previous year. A licensure law would be passed in the District of Columbia in 1924. In 1922, the prominent optometry periodicals were Optical Journal and Review of Optometry and Optometric Weekly and the Optometrist & Optician. The term optometrist was becoming more common, although some optometrists referred to themselves as optometrist and optician, and optometry was a sideline for some jewelers. This paper examines three important happenings in optometry history in 1922 and 1923.

FIRST CONFERENCE TO ESTABLISH STANDARDS
A resolution passed at the 1921 convention of the American Optometric Association (AOA) authorized a conference with representatives of the International Federation of Optometry Schools, the International Association of Boards of Examiners in Optometry, and the AOA’s optometry education council to establish standards for optometric education. At the time, there were about 30 optometry schools, and there was a lack of uniformity in curriculum, quality of instruction and length of study.

The First Conference to Establish Standards was held in St. Louis, Missouri in January, 1922. Representatives of the International Federation of Optometry Schools came from various optometry schools across the country, and included (note that most of these schools are no longer in existence or their names have changed): Dr. Howard D. Minchin, Òho State University; Dr. A. P. DeKeyser, DeKeyser Institute of Optometry, Portland, Oregon; Dr. E. A. Hutchinson, Los Angeles Medical School of Ophthalmology and Optometry, Los Angeles, California; Dr. Louis L. DeMars, DeMars School of Optometry, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Dr. W. B. Needles, Needles Institute of Optometry, Kansas City, Missouri; Dr. H. Frank Brown, Missouri College of Optometry, St. Louis, Missouri; Dr. Ernest Petry, Rochester School of Optometry, Rochester, New York; Dr. Frederic A. Woll, Columbia University, New York, New York; Dr. Theodore Klein, Massachusetts School of Optometry, Boston, Massachusetts; Dr. George W. McFarich, Northern Illinois College of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology, Chicago, Illinois; Dr. George A. Barron, University of Massachusetts, Boston, Massachusetts; Dr. Claude Wolcott, Texas College of Optometry, Dallas, Texas; Dr. Joseph I. Pascal, American Institute of Optometry, New York, New York; and Dr. P. H. Hoard, Missouri College of Optometry.

Representing the AOA’s optometric education council was Dr. Charles Sheard, Southbridge, Massachusetts. Representing the AOA’s Executive Council was Dr. H. M. Bestor, Rochester, New York. Representing the International Association of Boards of Examiners in Optometry were Dr. William S. Todd, Hartford, Connecticut; and Dr. Howard C. Doane, Boston, Massachusetts. Also attending was Dr. Oliver Abel, AOA President. W. S. Todd chaired the conference, and H. C. Doane served as secretary of the conference.

Among the resolutions passed at the conference were the recommendation to states that they change or amend their optometry laws to eliminate apprenticeship clauses, the statement that no credits or diplomas should be given for correspondence courses for any person in the United States or Canada, and the assertion that the publication of additional suitable optometry text books should be promoted. One of the most significant resolutions was that the syllabuses prepared by Frederic Woll should be adopted as guides for the contents of a two-year course in optometric education. Woll was an optometrist who also held a Master of Arts degree from Columbia University and a Ph.D. from New York University. He served on the faculties of the
optometry school at Columbia and the Department of Hygiene at City College of New York. Woll’s syllabuses covered a wide range of topics in anatomy and physiology of the eye, theoretical optometry, theoretical optics, practical optometry, practical optics, physiological optics and diseases of the eye.\(^5\)

Probably the resolution with the greatest impact was the adoption of a set of standard essentials for an optometry school and the establishment of a system of grading or rating optometry schools. Criteria to be used to grade schools included number and qualifications of faculty, student to faculty ratios, curriculum, completeness of courses, entrance requirements, adequacy of records and grading, hours required, adequacy of the building used, space for classrooms and laboratories, clinical space and facilities, laboratory equipment, student fees, endowments and scholarships, qualifications of students admitted, student organizations, performance of students on state board examinations and reputation in the profession.\(^4\) As a consequence of that resolution the International Association of Boards of Examiners in Optometry, which was also known as the International Board of Boards or IBB, formed an education committee in 1923 to investigate and rate the schools.

After a preliminary investigation of the approximately 30 schools, the Education Committee of the IBB determined that only 16 were worthy of additional examination.\(^5\) Frederic Woll volunteered to visit each of the 16 schools to gather data. After Woll’s data gathering in 1925 and 1926, the IBB Education Committee met in 1926 to assign grades to the schools. Eleven schools received A, B, or C ratings based on the criteria established at the First Conference to Establish Optometric Standards.

Six schools received an A rating: Columbia University, Los Angeles School of Optometry, Ohio State University, Pennsylvania State College of Optometry, Rochester School of Optometry, and University of California. Two schools were given B ratings: DeKeyser School of Optometry and Massachusetts School of Optometry. Three schools received C ratings: Missouri College of Optometry, Oregon College of Ocular Science, and Washington School of Optometry. Northern Illinois College of Ophthalmology and Otology and the Needles Institute of Optometry were not rated, presumably because they were in the process of merging to form the Northern Illinois College of Optometry.

After the rating of the schools, there were closures of many optometry schools. The DeKeyser School of Optometry and the Oregon College of Ocular Science merged to form North Pacific College of Optometry. Thus, by the late 1920s, the number of optometry schools was down to nine. The number of schools would remain relatively constant between nine and 12 until the 1970s.

Similar to the effect of the 1910 Flexner Report on medical education and the practice of medicine, a direct consequence of the First Conference to Establish Optometric Standards was a significant elevation of optometric education with resultant elevation of optometric practice. The conference was said to be one of the most important actions in optometry since the original enactment of optometric licensure laws.\(^6\)

**FOUNDING OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF OPTOMETRY**

The earliest concepts of the idea of an American Academy of Optometry appear to have been expressed by E. LeRoy Ryer in 1905. Elements of Ryer’s concept of an academy included a challenging entrance examination for membership, the promotion of original research, and the facilitation of work addressing pressing questions in optometry.\(^7\) Some leaders in optometry, such as John H. Ellis (AOA president from 1901-1903), John C. Eberhardt (AOA president from 1903-1904), and Eugene Wiseman endorsed the idea, but it failed to gain broad support, in part perhaps because many felt that another organization wasn’t necessary. Various states and cities formed their own academies of optometry in the 1910s, but it would be 1922 before the formation of the American Academy of Optometry (AAO) that continues today.\(^7\)

In January of 1922, Morris Steinfeld of Paducah, Kentucky called a meeting held in St. Louis with ten of his colleagues from Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky and Missouri for the purpose of planning the formation of an American Academy of Optometry. A second meeting was held in June 1922 after the AOA meeting to form the permanent organization. Morris Steinfeld was elected chairman; C. S. Brown, Richmond, Missouri, vice-chairman; and Carel C. Koch, Minneapolis, Minnesota, secretary and treasurer. Later in 1922, E. LeRoy Ryer and Charles Sheard became members of the executive council.\(^8\) The first AAO meeting at which papers were presented was held in St. Louis in December 1922, with ten persons attending.

The stated purposes of the AAO at its founding were to provide educational opportunities for members, encourage optometric research and raise standards of optometric education, ethics, and practice.\(^8\) Requirements for membership included practicing in an office rather than a retail establishment, charging an examination fee of at least three dollars, and not engaging in any form of advertising. Some educators were invited to join, so that by 1923 there were 40 charter members.\(^8\) Steinfeld served as chairman in 1922 and 1923, with Eugene Wiseman following in that position from 1924 to 1928.
TWENTY-FIFTH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE AMERICAN OPTOMETRIC ASSOCIATION

The first meeting of the AOA was held in 1898. At that time the name of the organization was the American Association of Opticians, reflecting the fact that the terms optometry or optometrist were not then in common usage. Later the name was changed to the American Optical Association, and finally in 1919 to the American Optometric Association.

The 25th annual congress of the AOA was held June 26-29, 1922 in Indianapolis, Indiana. The meeting was held at the Athenaeum, an ornate building in downtown Indianapolis, designed by the architectural firm of Bernard Vonnegut, Sr., and Arthur Bohn, the former being the grandfather of the writer Kurt Vonnegut. William S. Todd was elected president of the AOA at the meeting, taking over from Oliver Abel.

The 1922 AOA meeting has been described as showing “intense floor fighting and factionalism.” One source of disagreement was the AOA constitution, some questioning its legality. The issue was not resolved at that congress.

Another source of controversy was the re-election of Reginald C. Augustine as director of the AOA’s Department of Public Information, a sort of “fieldworker” for optometric public relations. Augustine practiced optometry in Decatur, Illinois, and was the only person to serve as AOA president for three years (1918-1921). There was no denying his “great zeal” for organizational work or “his boundless enthusiasm for optometry.” He was an excellent speaker, said to be able to “charm an audience like few optometrists before or since.” He traveled extensively speaking to optometric and non-optometric audiences, one year visiting 35 states and five Canadian provinces. Augustine made many contributions to optometry in addition to his promotional work, including, for example, work in organizing the structure of the AOA and emphasizing the importance of children’s vision. The reason for the controversy over Augustine’s reappointment in 1922 was that his contract carried a $10,000 salary and $2,500 for office expenses, held by many to be too much given the organization’s financial status at that time. In the end, however, membership approved Augustine’s contract.

After a dispute over dues, a doubling of annual dues to $4 was approved. The 1922 AOA convention was well attended by women optometrists compared to many years in the mid twentieth century. There were 24 women optometrists registered at the meeting, with seven from the host state of Indiana.

A highly significant action at the 1922 AOA meeting was the election of Ernest Kiekenapp, an optometrist from Minnesota, as secretary. Kiekenapp would go on to serve as AOA secretary for 35 years, also serving as the founder and editor of the AOA’s journal. Gregg noted that Kiekenapp’s election “gave the AOA the continuity so desperately needed. As a result, record keeping, reporting, financial control, and communications improved immeasurably.”

Reginald C. Augustine, AOA president in 1918-1921 and AOA’s Director of Public Information in 1922. (Photo from Gregg JR. American Optometric Association - A History. St. Louis, MO: American Optometric Association, 1972)
1923 – PSCO BECOMES FIRST SCHOOL TO GRANT OD DEGREE APPROVED BY A STATE LEGISLATURE

In the late 19th century and early 20th century there was no standardization of length of study, quality of instruction, or curricular content in the dozens of optometry schools that existed then. Likewise, schools offered various certificates, diplomas, and ‘degrees.’ Examples of the latter include Graduate in Optometry, Doctor of Optics, Doctor of Refraction, and Doctor of Optometry.18

In 1923, the Pennsylvania State College of Optometry (PSCO), which later changed its name to Pennsylvania College of Optometry, became the first non-proprietary school to grant a Doctor of Optometry (OD) degree approved by a state legislature.19 PSCO was founded in 1919 by Albert Fitch. In October of that year, 33 students enrolled in a night class program of three years duration. In the school’s second year, a second night class and the first day class of two years’ duration were enrolled. In June 1922, PSCO’s first graduates were celebrated, 19 from the three-year night class program and seven from the two-year day class program.20

On March 19, 1923, a bill granting PSCO the power to confer the Doctor of Optometry degree upon its graduates was introduced into the Pennsylvania legislature at the request of Dr. Fitch. It was passed by both Houses of the state legislature and on April 23 was signed by the governor.19 On June 7, 1923, 36 members of the PSCO graduating class received their OD degrees. In his address at the graduation ceremonies, Fitch stated: “In recognition of the greater responsibility this places upon the Faculty and Management, the Board of Trustees has increased the College term one year, making it a three-year optometric course, thus placing the Profession of Optometry on a more equal basis with its allied professions.”21

It wouldn’t be until 1947 that a university (Pacific University) granted OD degrees and 1970 that all optometry schools granted OD degrees to their graduates. PSCO had another first in 1955 when it became the first optometry school to increase its length of study to a minimum of two years collegiate pre-optometry work plus the four-year professional curriculum. By 1967, all ten of the optometry schools then in existence had adopted that standard.22-24

OPTOMETRY SCHOOL ESTABLISHED AT UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BERKELEY

In 1923, an optometry school began operation at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB). It became the third optometry school started at a university, after Columbia (1910) and Ohio State (1914).

The first discussions of California optometrists about an optometry school at UCB occurred in about 1906 or 1907, and in 1908 the California State Association of Optometrists (CSAO) formed a committee to work toward establishing the school.25 The leader in promoting the formation of the school throughout the years of effort it took was Berkeley optometrist George L. Schneider (1874-1928). Schneider was a founding member of the California State Association of Opticians (Optometrists) in 1899, serving as its first secretary and later its president.26 In 1911-1913, Schneider was president of the American Optical (later Optometric) Association.27

Initial negotiations for the establishment of the optometry school led first of all to a course of lectures in optics given by UCB physics professor Ralph Minor to practicing optometrists in 1915. In 1917, Schneider and the CSAO Optometry Course Committee went before the University Council to request the establishment of the school. The council appointed physics professor E. P. Lewis as chair of a committee to work with the optometrists to study the feasibility of the school and to make preliminary plans for its implementation. Lewis and Ralph Minor provided significant help in negotiating administrative hurdles.25

In 1919, the University Council agreed to propose the formation of the school to the Academic Senate. In November 1920, the Academic Senate recommended an optometry program to the president and regents of the university. In order for the program to come to fruition, it was necessary for the optometrists to raise funds for the school until a new state law went into effect increasing optometry license fees for a portion to go to UCB for the optometry school. In June 1923, after Schneider submitted pledges to the Board of Regents, they approved the optometry program.

Classes started in August 1923. Ralph Minor was placed in charge of the optometry program and taught optics of vision. Schneider was assigned lecturer in practical optics and theoretical optometry. Courses in the four-year curriculum included chemistry, English, mathematics, hygiene, economics, physics and electives in the first two years, and optometry, physics, ocular anatomy and zoology in the second two years.

In 1923, George Schneider wrote to some of his local optometric colleagues urging them to contribute along with him to the school, saying in part: “All the material gain I have in this world I must credit entirely to optometry. The little knowledge I have, by which I am able to render fair service and exact certain pecuniary returns, has come to me by virtue of those who sacrificed before me… I hope this little contribution will help maintain our profession on a standard sufficiently high to cause my children and young friends in the future to be proud of my having been an optometrist.”28

AOA MEETING IN 1923

In 1923, the AOA had its annual convention at Hotel Sherman in Chicago. James Gregg wrote that in contrast to some of the disagreements the previous year, the tone of the meeting was congenial, with previous discord over the constitution being ironed out.29 Two other important items discussed were the need for an update to the 1908 Code of Ethics and the formation of a Council on Education,29 although it would be several years before both of these goals were achieved. The Council on Education was finally formed in 1930, and a new Code of Ethics was adopted in 1935.30,31
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