HINDSIGHT

Newsletter of the
Optometric Historical Society
243 North Lindbergh Boulevard, St. Louis, Missouri 63141, USA

Volume 26 JANUARY 1995 Number 1

Truman and his glasses:

I was fascinated by the prominence of the very plain spectacles in the portrait of Harry S. Truman (1884-1972) on the wrapper of the massive 3½ lb. (1.6 kg.) thousand-page book TRUMAN by David McCullough, Simon & Schuster, 1992. It prompted me to note pages on which the author or citations made reference to Truman's wearing of glasses as follows:

P. 41 [1890]:
It was Mamma . . . who hustled him off to Kansas City for expensive eyeglasses. Though he had been badly handicapped by poor eyesight all along—"blind as a mole," in his words—no one seems to have noticed until the night of a July Fourth fireworks when Matt saw him responding more to the sound of the skyrockets than to the spectacle overhead. The Kansas City optometrist diagnosed a rare malformation called "flat eyeballs" (hypermetropia, which means the boy was farsighted) and Matt agreed to a pair of double-strength, wire-rimmed spectacles at a cost of $10.

All at once the world was transformed for him, as if by magic. And as quickly he became a curiosity, small boys with eyeglasses being almost unknown in rural Missouri.

Still more change followed in the summer of 1890, the summer of the eyeglasses, when Mamma announced they were leaving the farm, moving to Independence, so that Harry could receive proper schooling.

P. 42:
For Harry, whose world, through the new eyeglasses, had only just come into focus, the next few years were to be a time of great adjustment.

P. 42 [1893]:
By all surviving evidence he was an exceptionally alert, good little boy of sunny disposition who, with the glasses that so greatly magnified his blue eyes, looked as bright and interested as could be.

P. 45:
Reminiscing long afterward, he spoke of the teasing he endured because of his glasses. "To tell the truth, I was kind of a sissy," he would say, using the hated word. He ran from fights, he admitted. Yet his brother Vivian had no memory of Harry being teased about his glasses, and to judge by the recollections of several boyhood friends he wasn't considered a sissy exactly, only different, "serious," as one recalled.

P. 61 [at high school age]:
But the slender, straight-backed youth with the round eyeglasses who sat at the [piano] keyboard in the half-light of dawn every morning was in dead earnest.

P. 62:
People knew who he was and people liked him, and partly because of the music role and the eyeglasses.

P. 65:
Harry had removed his glasses for the [high school class] picture.

P. 67: [1901]:
West Point had turned him down because of his eyes.

P. 72 [1905, in the National Guard]:
"They needed recruits," he also said later, in explanation of how, with his poor eyesight, he passed the physical exam.

P. 91 [1913, in a self-effacing letter to Bess]:
Just imagine a guy with spectacles and a girl mouth doing the Sir Lancelot.

P. 94 [1914, when acquiring his first car, a 1911 model Stafford]:
Not since his first pair of eyeglasses had anything so changed his life, ...

P. 102 [1917, upon rejoining the National Guard]:
His eyes were far below the standard requirements for any of the armed services.

P. 105 [facing a regular Army physical for the first time]:
He was stripped, weighed, measured, examined for hernia, gonorrhea, piles, fallen arches, and defects of vision. He managed to pass the eye examination, according to his brother Vivian, by memorizing the chart. (Harry, Vivian liked to say, couldn't see over the fence without his glasses.) The actual record of the examination shows that Harry had uncorrected vision of 20/50 in the right eye, 20/400 in the left eye, which theoretically meant he was blind in the left eye.

P. 107 [anticipating departure for France]:
Faced with another physical exam and a doctor who twice refused to pass him because of his eyes, Harry simply kept talking until the doctor relented.

P. 108 [in admiration of his superior officer Col. Danford]:
That Danford was among the few officers who also wore eyeglasses must have provided still further reason to admire him.

P. 110 [1918, on leave in New York before sailing]:
Shopping on Madison Avenue, he was touched by the patriotic feelings of an optometrist who charged him just $17.50 for two pairs of aluminum-framed glasses, much less than he would have had to pay at home. To be on the safe side Harry was going to France with six pairs of glasses, all pince-nez.

Pp. 110-111:
"I imagine his vision with glasses is 20/20, but without the glasses he couldn't recognize his brother twenty feet away," another officer named Harry Vaughan would later explain. "So, he always has had several pair on hand in case . . . he would be so helpless without them, and he was advised that he could not wear the ordinary glasses with the side pieces over the ears in

action, because it would interfere with wearing your gas mask, you see. It would leave a hole in either side that you would be able to get gas through. So he brought . . ., believe he said, four or five of his lens prescriptions in pince-nez."

P. 117 [1918, in France upon Captain Truman's taking over as a battery commander]:
A private named Vere Leigh would recall "a rather short fellow, compact, serious face, wearing glasses. And we'd had all kinds of officers and this was just another one you know." To others Harry looked, with the pince-nez spectacles, like a store clerk or a professor and totally out of his element.

Pp. 130-131 [at the front]:
Later that same night, as the battery moved on, Harry was on horseback when he was hit in the face by a low-hanging branch and suddenly found himself without his glasses and unable to see. The horse kept moving with the column. Harry turned frantically in the saddle to look behind, only to find the glasses sitting nicely on the horse's back.

P. 144 [June 1919, his wedding]:
The groom also wore a pair of his Army pince-nez spectacles and appeared, as he stood in front of the church, to have arrived directly from the barbershop.

P. 147 [November 1919, upon opening the "Truman & Jacobson" haberdashery]:
Harry, who called it "the shirt store" would stand poised for business between two of the showcases, an elbow on one countertop, a hand on the other, his shoes shined, tie straight, the overhead lights glinting in his thick glasses.

P. 148 [1920]:
Harry joined the Kansas City Club, the Triangle Club, and the Kansas City Athletic Club, where, with relentless determination, he taught himself to swim, using a strange, choppy, self-styled sidestroke, his head above water, so he could keep his glasses dry.

P. 209 [1934, as a candidate for the Senate]:
He smiled constantly—a big politician's grin, his even, white teeth looking whiter than usual because of his tan, his eyes flashing behind the steel-rimmed glasses.

P. 270 [1941, as Chair of a Senate Committee]:
"When he got down to business, the twinkle in his eyes would be replaced by a look of concentration. At such times, at close range the thick lenses of his glasses gave his eyes a fearsome, eerie stare so stern that it gave the weird illusion that one was confronting an entirely different person."

P. 326 [1944, compared to Theodore Roosevelt]:
They could have talked books, Army life, or the boyhood handicap of having to meet the world wearing thick spectacles.

P. 334 [as Vice-President, described by John Gunther]:
"The gray-framed spectacles magnified the gray-hazel eyes, but there was no grayness in the mind."

P. 347 [1945, being sworn in as President]:
His "sharp features taut," as a reporter noted, Truman looked straight ahead through his thick, round glasses.

P. 352 [upon first occupying the President's desk and chair as reported by Secretary Daniels]:
"It seemed to me, indeed almost Roosevelt's sun which came in the wide south windows and touched Truman's thick glasses."

P. 371 [citing W. Averill Harriman]:
Truman had been reading steadily from the Map Room files, night after night, so much that he feared he might be seriously straining his eyes.

P. 380 [White House head usher J.B. West's first close-up look at the new President]:
West was struck by how large Truman's glasses made his eyes appear. "I had the feeling he was looking at me, all around me, straight through me."

P. 386 [using the swimming pool Roosevelt had had built in the ground floor]:
Truman tried to do six or eight laps in his choppy, self-styled sidestroke, head up to keep his glasses dry . . . .

P. 403 [describing Truman's desk in the White House]:
Besides a large green blotter and telephone, there were several pairs of eyeglasses in separate cases, two small metal cases, two small metal ashtrays for visitors, a model cannon, a clock, two pen sets, pencils, date stamp, calendar, two magnifying glasses, glass inkwell, and a battered old ice-water vacuum pitcher, the one item from among FDR's personal effects that Truman had asked to keep.

P. 494 [1946, faced with labor strikes]:
On the surface he was all restraint, unrattled, entirely his familiar, chipper self, the double-breasted suits smoothly pressed, shoes shined, a spring to his step, a look of alert vitality behind the thick glasses.

P. 501 [striding into a special meeting of the Cabinet]:
The gray-blue eyes blazed behind his glasses.

P. 709 [1948, responding to the cheers when Dewey conceded the election]:
"Thank you, thank you," Truman kept saying, shaking hands, and behind the thick glasses there were tears in his eyes.

P. 717 [in a lead story in Life]:
Truman was now "the durable hero in shining spectacles," "one of the fightin'est men" who ever went through a campaign.

P. 729 [1949, taking the oath of office]:
He stood bareheaded in the wind, his right hand raised, a straight-backed, bespectacled figure with closely cropped gray hair, his expression deadly serious.

P. 735 [vacationing at Key West]:
. . . but he enjoyed a daily swim, or rather churning the turquoise water in his self-styled sidestroke, head up to keep his glasses dry . . . .

P. 793 [1950, upon being advised by Dulles to retire MacArthur]:
But that, replied Truman, his blue-gray eyes large behind his glasses, was easier said than done.

P. 859 [1951, in his seventh year as President]:
Only in the eyes, behind the thick glasses, could the fatigue sometimes be seen.

P. 927 [1953, when returning to Independence]:
A cartoon in the Saturday Review showed a small boy with glasses and a book under his arm, a boy very like Truman had been, walking beside a friend who said, "O.K., so you grow up to be President, and you even get reelected, that's still only eight years."

P. 978 [1961, identifying himself as having been a kind of sissy boy]:
Wearing glasses, he said, "makes a kid lonely and he has to fight for everything he wants."

P. 983 [1964, having tripped on a door sill]:
He fell, cracking his head against the washbasin, his glasses shattering and cutting him badly over the right eye.

P. 984 [after the fall]:
He began losing weight, his face becoming drawn, the eyes behind the thick glasses appearing disproportionately large.

H.W H.

Spectacles for fun:

Unique among the year's end greeting cards in 1992 was that of optician-optometrists P.H.M. and C.J.M Aangenendt, Strijpsestraat 190, 5616GW Eindhoven, The Netherlands. It consists of a greatly reduced photographic reproduction of a 19th century hand-colored game-board made in the vicinity of Epinal, France. The original is in the Aangenendt optometric collection because a pair of spectacles appears to be an integral part of the game. All of the identifying and instructional legend on the board is in both German and French, some of which is a bit illegible in this miniaturized version.

Centered on the board is an ornate wreath within which is painted Father Time in full regalia with his left hand on an engraved stone saying (in German), "Everything depends on time and luck whose gradations extend to the grave." Above the wreath is the title of the game (in French and German), "The four seasons, a new family dice and coin game."

Arranged at the periphery of the board are twelve colorful illustrations, three along each edge, like the numerals on a rectangular clock dial, and correspondingly numbered except for the top center one for which the apparently intended "12" may have been obliterated. Presumably the upper three relate to winter, numbers 2-4 to spring, 5-7 to summer, and 8-10 to autumn.

The twelve illustrations and their translated French and German legends, where legible, are as follows:

1. A pair of dice showing two sixes. "Every player pays 6 Marks."
2. A one-legged beggar. "A beggarman pleads for 1 Mark from each (player)."
3. A young lady strolling in the garden. "The virgin in springtime wins 3 Marks."
4. A young lad behind bars in a jail cell. "Remain here until released and pay 6 Marks."
5. A couple embraced in dance. "With someone in high society."
6. A young man standing at the edge of a field of grain. "Youth in summer, win 6 Marks."
7. A pub entrance. "Drink a toast and pay 4 Marks."
8. A public building. "The pawnshop lends a pound."
9. A hiker with knapsack and cane. "The man in autumn wins 4 Marks."
10. A pair of spectacles suspended on a hook. "Wear the glasses until another (player) takes them."
11. A windmill. "Start again and pay 1 Mark."
12. A boy sitting near a bonfire warming his hands. "The grass in winter wins all."

Keeping in mind that the phraseology, even if accurately translated, may well incorporate contemporary idioms and dialect, one may not resolve the precise nature of the game, but it is apparent that dice and coins were involved. Why it was named The Four Seasons is not obvious unless it was intended for year around amusement. The role of the spectacles is also not obvious, but perhaps the game was played by the household presbyopes and there was only one pair of plus spheres in the family!

<u>For your reference list</u>:

OHS member Charles Letocha, M.D., 444 Rathton Road, York, PA 17403, kindly prepared a list of his catalogues and books that concern the history of spectacles. He explains that many are out of print, but if you contact him he would be happy to try to recall where he found some of them. The list follows:

1. Corson R. Fashions in Eyeglasses. London, England: Peter Owen Ltd.; 1980.

2. Mann HH. Augenglas und Perspektiv. Studien zur Ikonographie zweier Bildmotive. Berlin, Germany: Gebr. Mann; 1992. [in German; deals with representations of spectacles in art]

3. Rathschuler F: La Lente. Genova, Italy: Comune di Genova; 1988. [catalogue of the Fritz Rathschuler collection on display at the Civic Museum]

4. Marly P. Spectacles and Spyglasses. Paris, France: Hoebeke. 1988. [available from the author]

5. Kuisle A. Brillen. Munchen, Germany: Deutsches Museum. 1985.

6. Rossi F. Brillen. Vom Leseglas zum modischen Accessoire. Munchen, Germany: Georg Callwey; 1989.

7. Schmitz EH. Die Sehhilfe im Wandel der Jahrhunderte. Stuttgart, Germany: Suddeutsche Optikerzeitung; 1961.

8. anon. Occhiali da vedere. Firenze, Italy: Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza; 1985. [catalogue of the Zeiss exhibit in Florence in 1985]

9. anon. A Spectacle of Spectacles. Leipsig, Germany: Carl Zeiss Stiftung; 1988. [catalogue of the similar Zeiss exhibit in England in 1988]

10. Borja JM. Historia Grafica de la Optica. Barcelona, Spain: Editorial Jims; 1990.

11. Poulet W. Atlas on the History of Spectacles. Bonn, Germany: Wayenborgh; 1978.

12. anon. Il Museo dell'Occhiale. Pieve di Cadore, Italy: Museo dell'Occhiale; 1990.

13. Kortland K. Het Oog Wil Ook Wat. Rotterdam, Netherlands: I.G.S.; 1990.

14. Orr H. Illustrated History of Early Antique Spectacles. Luton, England: Greenford Press; 1985.

15. Levene J. Clinical Refraction and Visual Science. London, England: Butterworths; 1977.

Punktal lenses:

"Eighty years of ophthalmic optics and medical optics at Zeiss—80 years of Punktal spectacle lenses" is the title of a bipartite article in the bipartitely titled Zeiss Information with Jena Review, No. 1, 1992, pp. 28-31, published by the combined

Zeiss firms at Jena and Oberkochen following the reuniting of former East and West Germanies after 45 years of partition. The two predeceasing periodicals were Zeiss Information (1953-1992) and Jena Review (1956-1991). The "80 Years" interval identifies with the April 1, 1912, establishment of two departments at Carl Zeiss, Jena, one for "opto-medical instruments" and the other for "spectacle lenses and frames." The former is dealt with very briefly, with most of the article relating to the latter, namely, Punktal lenses and their subsequent offshoots.

Johannes Kepler in 1611 had described the merits of meniscus-shape lenses. Almost two centuries later W.H. Wollaston again described their merits, calling them "periscopic." Almost another century went by with some mathematical contributions by H. Coddington, F. Ostwald, M. Tscherning, and Gullstrand. In 1908 the Zeiss board of directors commissioned von Rohr to do a thorough mathematical analysis leading to a design to minimize aberrations. The resulting Punktal lens was patented in 1909.

Between 1911 and 1913 von Rohr gave training courses to ophthalmologists and ophthalmic opticians to explain the value of the lens. Subsequently Otto Henker organized training courses for ophthalmic opticians. Emerging from these efforts was the chartering of the optometry school at Jena in 1917.

Following this introduction, similar mathematical designs led to the Supral, Tangal, and Duopal bifocals, the Umbral smoke-gray tint, the Uro-Punktal bluish-green tint, and the Katral cataract lenses.

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