HINDSIGHT

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

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1997 OHS Board members and officers:

Listed below are the 1997 OHS Executive Board members and officers, and the year of each member's term expiration.

President	Walter Chase (1998)
Vice President	David Goss (1997)
Secretary-Treasurer	Bridget Kowalczyk (2000)
Trustees	Patricia Carlson (1999)
	Chuck Haine (2000)
	Morris McKee (1998)
	Alfred Rosenbloom (1997)

Call for nominations:

It is time for you to send in your nominations for the two positions on the OHS Executive Board which will expire at the end of this year. The members whose terms will expire are Alfred Rosenbloom and David Goss. The OHS members who receive at least three nominations and agree to serve on the Board will have their names placed on an election ballot to be mailed later this year with a copy of *Hindsight*. Please send nominations to the OHS Secretary-Treasurer by June 25, 1997: Bridget Kowalczyk, ILAMO, 243 N. Lindbergh Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63141 USA.

Early American optometric history:

The History of Optometry in America: Information Waiting to Be Found

Douglas K. Penisten

Presented at the Annual OHS Meeting
December 8, 1990 • Nashville, Tennessee, USA

During the 1890s and the early portion of this century, optometry in America experienced phenomenal changes. The profession had become recognized and regulated through state licensing boards. Optometrists had professional organizations in which they could belong, and with these organizations came the spokesmen and professional leaders to represent them. Optometry had truly become an organized professional force. It is not surprising then that today many optometrists believe that optometry was "born" at the turn of the century. If being "born" means becoming regulated and organized and if it also refers to the creation and adoption of the word *optometry*, then, yes, optometry was "born"

approximately 100 years ago. But, if by saying that optometry was "born" at the turn of the century one means that the professional practice of optometry (that is, the manufacturing of eyewear, the dispensing of eyewear, and sight testing) did not exist prior to the 1890s, then this is quite simply not true.

Over the past several years I have developed a keen interest in the history of the practice of optometry in American before it was called optometry. In particular, I am interested in how colonial and postcolonial Americans went about obtaining their visual aids. This includes any information on such aspects as the social sentiments regarding eyeglasses, where average citizens obtained their eyeglasses, and who were the people making and dispensing the eyewear. Thanks to several histories of the profession of optometry, we do know portions of the story of optometry in early America but, indeed, not all of the story.

In the course of several years of perusing library and bookstore material, I have developed what might be referred to as an optometric magnet. By that I mean, I have sensitized myself to be on the lookout for any reference, no matter how small, to the profession of optometry. This so-called sensitization did not actually occur from a predetermined desire to find this history, rather it came with time. I began realizing that the occasional accidental run-ins I was having with these tidbits of information were, when accumulated, amounting to a significant story. Just as important was the realization that these pieces of history were, in most cases, buried in the books, diaries, and manuscripts which the searcher for optometric history would never have dreamed of consulting.

It is with this background that I would like tonight to relate and read to you several of these references which I find particularly interesting.

Determining what individuals living long ago felt about the small things in life, like eyeglasses, is not an easy task. Although *we* know vision and eyeglasses are not small, unimportant aspects of life, I am referring to the fact that you will not find words such as *eyeglasses*, *spectacles*, *vision*, or *optical* in even the most complete index of the largest texts on American social history.

William Maclay of Pennsylvania served as a senator in the first U.S. Congress from 1789-1791. This Congress met behind closed doors and Maclay's journal provides the best historic information on this Congress. The following excerpt from his journal of 1789 describes the senators traveling to President Washington's residence to present him with the Senate's reply to President Washington's recent inaugural address. It reveals very rarely found insights concerning social manners and eyeglasses.

> Monday 18th. Senate met. The Address (to the President) was read over, and we proceeded in carriages to the president's to present it. Having no part to act but that of a mute, I had nothing to embarrass me. We were received in an antechamber. Had some little difficulty about seats, as there were several wanting; from whence may be inferred that the President's *major domo* is not the most provident, as our numbers were well enough known. We had not been seated more than three minutes, when it was signified to us to wait on the President in his levee room. Our President [the president of the Senate, Vice President John Adams] went foremost, and the Senators followed, without any particular order. We made our bows as we entered; and our President [Adams], having made a bow, began to read an address. He was much confused. The paper trembled in his hand, though he had the aid of both by resting it on his hat, which he held in his left hand. He read very badly all that was on the front pages. The turning of the page seemed to restore him, and he read the rest with more proprietary. This agitation was the more remarkable as there were but twenty-two persons present, and none of them strangers.
>
> The President took his reply out of his pocket. He had his spectacles in his jacket pocket; having his hat in his left hand and the paper in his right. He had too many objects in his hands. He shifted his hat between his forearm and the left side of his breast. But taking his spectacles from his case embarrassed him. He got rid of his small distress by laying the spectacle case on the chimney-piece. Colonel Humphreys stood on his right, Mr. Lear on his left. Having adjusted

> his spectacles, which was not very easy, considering the engagements on his hands, he read the reply with tolerable exactness, and without much emotion.
>
> I thought he should have received us with his spectacles on, which would have saved the making of some uncouth motions. Yet, on the whole, he did nearly as well as anybody else could have done the same motions. Could the laws of etiquette have permitted him to have been disencumbered of his hat, it would have relieved him much.[1]

It is obvious from his writings that Maclay was not impressed by the pomp and trappings of the young republic's office holders.

Samuel Goodrich, the one-time famous author of children's books, grew up at the beginning of the nineteenth century in a small Connecticut town. His memoirs paint a full picture of a self-sufficing household and the social texture of a New England town circa 1800. In the following 1856 quote, Goodrich provides a short, but fascinating glimpse of "how good things used to be."

> The amusements were then much the same as at the present, though some striking differences may be noted. Books and newspapers, which are now diffused even among the country towns, so as to be in the hands of all, young and old, were then scarce and were read respectfully and as if they were grave matters, demanding thought and attention. They were not toys and pastimes, taken up every day, and by everybody, in the short intervals of labor, and then hastily dismissed, like waste paper. The aged sat down when they read, and drew forth their spectacles, and put them deliberately and reverently upon the nose. These instruments were not, as now, little tortoise-shell hoops attached to a ribbon and put off and on with a jerk; but they were of silver or steel, substantially made and calculated to hold on with a firm and steady grasp, showing the gravity of the uses to which they were devoted. Even the young approached a book with reverence and a newspaper with awe. How the world has changed![2]

In today's world if you want to know what a specific job or profession entails, you merely consult one of the many available occupational guides. If only they had published such guides in the last century, what information they would give. —They <u>were</u> published a century ago!

In 1837 American author Edward Hazan wrote a 320-page book entitled *The Panorama of Professions and Trades*. This detailed guide of 70 trades and professions was written primarily to assist the reader, and in particular the parent, in properly choosing the appropriate calling for a young person. Each of the occupational descriptions included several pages of detailed text and also an engraved picture depicting a person performing the job. The occupational titles included: the miller, the baker, the hunter, the merchant, the tavern-keeper, the physician, the silversmith, the glass-blower, the dentist, and, yes, the optician.

The engraving accompanying "The Optician" chapter illustrated a very busy shop. At the center was a large counter where a seated woman and standing child, both with their backs to the viewer, were being attended to by a gentleman who surely was the optician. He had laid upon the counter several pairs of spectacles, one of which his was presently holding up and inspecting towards the window to the viewer's left. Further to the left, and immediately adjacent to the strong light of the window sat an assistant, or perhaps apprentice, optician hunched over a bench and busily working on a grinding wheel. A second employee stood to the right, tightening the metal brace which held the optical tube of a refracting telescope to its tripod-based pier stand. In the background were numerous shelves full of instruments including: a survey transit, a magic lantern, and a camera obscura. The six-page optician chapter was composed of 39 sequentially numbered paragraphs. These numbers were referred to in the back of the book where one found a series of questions for the reader to answer. The first paragraph defined the occupation of opticianry, the next eight detailed basic optical principles, the following ten discussed optics as it related to the eye (including the refractive errors of "myopy" and "presbyopy"),

the next six paragraphs described various optical instruments, and the last fourteen paragraphs highlighted episodes in the history of optics.

It is enlightening and fascinating to note that in the early 1800s in America, opticianry was clearly considered to include: an appreciation of history, the physics of light and lenses, the anatomy and optics of the eye, spectacle making and dispensing, and a thorough knowledge of optical instrumentation.

The following quotes are paragraphs 1, 14, and 18.

> 1. The word optician is applicable to persons who are particularly skilled in the science of vision; but especially to those who devote their attention to the manufacture of optical instruments; such as—the spectacles, the camera obscura, the magic lantern, the telescope, the microscope, and the quadrant.
>
> 14. Optical instruments. The art of constructing optical instruments is founded upon the anatomical structure, and physiological action of the eye, and on the laws of light. They are designed to increase the powers of the eye, or to remedy some defect in its structure. In the cursory view which we may give of a few of the many optical instruments which have been invented, we will begin with the spectacles; since they are best known, and withal the most simple.
>
> 18. The opticians have their spectacles numbered to suit different periods of life; but as the short-sighted and long-sighted conditions exist in a thousand different degrees, each person should select for himself such as will enable him to read without effort at the usual distance.[13]

There are, no doubt, buried in the recesses of archives, stored in the attics of homes, or even lying in an unsuspecting magazine or book, pieces of the story that is optometry's history. The primary purpose of the quarterly newsletter of the Optometric Historical Society [*Hindsight*] is to collect, for everyone's reference, these assorted facts and details. As managing editor of the newsletter, I would encourage you to keep an eye out for any reference on the history of optometry, no matter how small, and jot it down on a piece of paper and mail it off to me or my co-editor Dr. Henry Hofstetter. In that way we can continue adding to the growing pile of information. Believe me, for the future writer or historian of the profession of optometry, every little bit will be valuable.

It is perhaps appropriate that I conclude by mentioning a man, and a genius, that is so closely associated to the history of optometry—Benjamin Franklin. The following anecdote was printed in the 1805 English book entitled *Encyclopedia of Wit*.

> When he was in England, Doctor Franklin was walking in the London streets with his spectacles on his nose. One of his friends asked why he did not take them off. "O," said the philosopher, "they often help me see." A moment later, they met a porter and Franklin bumped against him. The porter, taking three steps back, cursed: "The devil take your spectacles!" And Franklin said to his friend: "You see? I told you my spectacles helped me. Without them, he would have damned my eyes."[4]

References

1. Maclay, William. Sketches of Debate in the First Senate of the United States, in 1789-90-91. Edited by George W. Harris, quoted in Griffin, Bulkley. Offbeat History. The World Publishing Co., 1967, p. 4-5.
2. Goodrich, Samuel G. Recollections of a Lifetime. Quoted in Commager HS, Nevins A (eds.). The Heritage of America. Little, Brown, and Company, Boston, 1939, p. 359.
3. Hazen, Edward. The Panorama of Professions and Trades. Uriah Hunt, Philadelphia, 1837. Reprinted as The encyclopedia of Early American Trades. Century House, Watkins Glen, NY, 1970.

4. Zall, PM. Ben Franklin Laughing, Anecdotes from Original Sources by and about Benjamin Franklin. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980, p. 129.

An optometrist as soldier:

A very large share of the optometrists serving in World War II did so in completely nonoptometric roles. One such instance is that of our famous William M. Lyle, O.D., Ph.D., the long-time editor of optometry's most distinguished journal, *Optometry and Vision Science*, and Professor Emeritus of Optometry at the University of Waterloo, Canada.

Born and reared in Canada, he included some cadet training in the high school from which he graduated in 1932. Surviving a few years of the depression by doing farm work he later enrolled in the College of Optometry of Ontario, completing the course with honors in 1938. He entered and completed a two-year residency program in Winnipeg and continued to practice there. Aware of Canada's increasing involvement in WWII he simultaneously enrolled in the Canadian Officer's Training Course (COTC) at the University of Manitoba. Upon completion of the COTC he joined the reserve battalion of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles as a second lieutenant. Almost immediately he was offered the optometry post at the Christie Street Military Hospital in Toronto with the rank of sergeant-major, which he turned down because it was beneath his already earned military status. Within a few months his battalion was called to active duty.

Continuing his military training into 1943 he was next sent overseas for further training in England into 1944, then sent fighting in France, Belgium, and Holland into 1945, and occupying Germany in 1946. From his copious notes and phenomenal memory of these six years of military participation, Dr. Lyle assembled a 160-page volume of anecdotes, comments, photographs, and maps which he had entitled "As I Remember." None of it pertains in any way to optometry. It is a chapter completely set aside from his optometric career, to which he returned in 1946 in Winnipeg.

He does not even include the fact that a few years later he reentered academia to earn a Ph.D. degree in physiological optics. Subsequently he accepted a professorship in optometry at the University of Waterloo, and finally assumed the role of editor.

He and his family underwrote the cost of only a hundred printed and bound copies of the book to distribute to a few friends, relatives, and archival libraries, including the ILAMO. It was felt that otherwise a fine, intelligent, understandable documentary of the war would be lost forever. It is a fascinating and revealing contribution by an optometrist outside of his field of publicly renowned accomplishment.

H.W H.

History of the trade:

In 1994 the Optical Laboratories Association (OLA) celebrated its centennial anniversary, identifying its origin with one of its predecessors, the American Association of Wholesale Opticians (AAWO) organized in 1894. There followed a sequence of competing and ultimately merging organizations, the Independent Optical Wholesalers Association (IOWA), the American Optical Wholesalers Association (AOWA), the Optical Wholesalers National Association (OWNA), the Association of Independent Optical Wholesalers (AIOW), and the Optical Wholesalers Association (OWA). Highlighting the celebration was the commissioning of Joseph L. Bruneni to write a history of the ophthalmic industry as it evolved in America. The result was a beautiful hardcover 28x22 cm volume of 232 pages of illustrations and text entitled "Looking Back," a publication of the OLA in 1994 at $68.00.

It is indeed an unusual document. The author's own career has long been in the employ of the optical industry as an eyewear information authority. In addition, his father was a 1916 optometry school graduate. The advantageous result was his personal oral history familiarity with numerous events and personnel of the twentieth century as well as acquaintance with many memorable details of the late nineteenth century. He had direct access also to a wealth of documentary material that had been collected earlier by Lionel Topaz (1895-1942) of the Professional Press in hopes of writing the history of the optical industry.

The text is very anecdotal in style and supplemented by nearly 400 illustrations from a variety of archival sources, easy to read by anyone. It starts with a synopsis of the general history of optics and brief coverage of optometry, ophthalmology, and opticianry as the professions being served by the industry. The next four chapters are biographical accounts of three optical pioneers, the growth of three major manufacturers around the turn of the century, brief reviews of the many early laboratories that thrived before being absorbed by major manufacturers, and the evolvement of optical trade associations emerging as the OLA. The numerous subsequent chapters cover the history of lenses, frames, machinery, contacts, and incidentals, and the evolving roles of the various more recent manufacturers of specialty items. Noteworthy are the factual descriptions of federal and legal involvement relating to the laboratory network, retail price controls, and rebating. Joseph Zentmayer is credited with being the first optician to limit his business to fitting spectacles from ophthalmologists' prescriptions.

A review of this book by my co-editor David Goss appeared in the July 1995 issue of the *Journal of the American Optometric Association*, vol. 66, pp. 449-450. He noted that one of his favorite chapters consisted of the verbatim remembrances of 19th-century optometrist Thomas M. Heard. Heard at the age of 20 was discharged from the Grand Army of the Republic in 1865. With a copy of Donders' book as his bible he emerged as a leading optometric author and lecturer. Goss points out also that much of the whole book has historical significance for optometry because spectacle fabrication and vision care were still dichotomizing slowly during much of the current century. I recall well that in my own early years in the '30s local

optometric society monthly educational meetings were quite routinely attended by one or more optical company representatives.

Altogether the book is replete with such bits of information as otherwise defy location in the ophthalmic literature. It is interesting, authoritative, documentary, and informative.

H.W H.

A note from Ray Myers:

I had the opportunity to read your tribute to Maria Dablemont in the October 1995 *Hindsight*, which I thought to be quite illustrative of a life of tremendous accomplishment in behalf of the AOA and optometric history.

I had contacted Sandy Smith and Helen Stahle to convey the news on the death of Maria's son Edward on April 13, 1996. He died of an apparent heart attack at about age 46, having known of his heart ailment for approximately two years. His three children and Maria's grandchildren are in Rio d'Janiero (not the Sao Paulo area) with Maria's sister Avany, a situation that is likely to be permanent. Edward had been divorced from his wife for more than two years.

Maria had provided for Edward and his children an estate and trust which I have been administering. The funds will revert to Avany who will utilize it for the children to include their eventual advanced education.

I have passed the tribute along to Avany as well as her good friends Dr. Rodrigo and Aparacida Spinola, who were both responsible for the adoption of our son and were good friends with Edward.

Compatibility and purposes:

Our past president J.J. Abrams recently emerged as past president of the "other" OHS, the Ocular Heritage Society, a truly unique accomplishment, at least until now. We are reminded that in both organizations the suggestion of merger has been made, but apparently not really pursued or even argued. Several persons, perhaps a half dozen, belong to and participate in both. In *Hindsight*, for example, we routinely call attention to activities of the "Heritage" group as a matter of optometric historical interest.

A somewhat similar interrelationship includes the London-based Ophthalmic Antiques International Collectors' Club with several members belonging to all three societies. None of the three has membership restrictions or qualification requirements of any kind other than the payment of nominal annual dues to cover postage and the like.

In spite of the apparent similarities attributable to the common role of history there have been differences of emphasis and subject matter. Our OHS has dwelt purposefully on the origins and evolvements of optometry and visual science. The

other OHS is more clearly identified with the broad ophthalmological care of the eye, as conveyed by the term "ocular." The O.A.I.C.C. emphasis is clearly on the collection of ophthalmic antiques.

None of these points of emphasis excludes those of the other two. What else is to be said? Anyone who reads this is most welcome to express his or her views for inclusion herein.

H.W H.

In Central America:

On page 10 of the Spring 1993 issue of *Interoptics*, no. 100, under the caption of "Honduran History" is a report by J.P. Handel, O.D., President of the Honduran Optometry Association, to the International Optometric and Optical League. According to the report there was no eye refraction in Honduras prior to 1925, a very small population and extremely primitive conditions. In 1925 two medical physicians, Dr. T.C. Pounds from the U.S.A. and Dr. G. Lovo from Nicaragua, arrived and practiced both optometry and medicine in two different cities in Honduras. Pounds died in 1949 and Lovo some years later. Today Honduras has more than 40 ophthalmologists and about 20 optometrists.

H.W H.

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