

Lucto et emergo –

The Story of the CAO and Optometry in Canada



The long-awaited history book project was launched at the 2011 Biennial Congress in Winnipeg. Entitled *Lucto et Emergo: The Story of the CAO and Optometry in Canada*. The book is the first of its kind to be published in Canada.

Editors to the extensive project include previous CAO Presidents, **Dr. Len Koltun** and **Dr. Jack Huber** and current CAO Executive Director **Glenn Campbell**. The book was researched and written by journalist **Susan Swedberg-Kohli**.

Orders may be made by emailing the CAO national office at reception@opto.ca, \$35 plus shipping.

The following is an excerpt from the chapter on recognition.

The voyage from pedlar to practitioner to professional was charted by one common quest; the search for recognition. For always, thrumming like the beat of a mighty ship's engine was the pursuit to have optometry recognized as a specialized task, a calling worthy of the respect granted others who

place patient care above all. The hunt could be heard in the legislation to regulate optometric practice and sounded in the search for educational standards. It was hearkened as employees evolved to professionals engaged in service to others and paid, not by the clock, but by fee. And though there were many

attempts to drown the sound of optometry's progress, it ultimately emerged from its perilous journey with the golden fleece of recognition.

Modern Optometry may be said to begin with the passage of the world's first optometric legislation in the state of Minnesota in 1901. It's believed that Charles Landolt first proposed the term "optometrist" in 1886 and its use was soon encouraged throughout North America.

Canada's first optometric legislation was enacted in 1909 and by 1924, all provinces had laws distinguishing those licensed to provide eye care from those who were not. Practitioners were now compelled to prove their clinical ability through oral and written examinations, although "grandfather" clauses permitted certain exemptions. Educational standards were also featured in the early legislation as were regulations to govern the behaviour of its members.

Optometric education in Canada evolved from a simple week or two of training in the late 1800's to a one year course in 1921 to a two year program in 1925 and steadily progressed to its current standard of seven years of post-secondary education; four years in an optometry school preceded by three years in a recognized university.

“The search for recognition: smooth seas do not make skillful sailors.”

— African proverb



Inside spread depicting students at work in the 1940's-1950's.

Underpinning optometric education was the need to provide courses that were both specialized and standardized. Sub-standard practice would not be tolerated, now as then. For when encountering the shoddy work of an unworthy member of the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers, founded in 1629, the Master and his Wardens escorted him to the London Stone where he was publically disgraced with the smashing of his defective spectacles on the famous Stone, considered the centre point from which the Romans measured all distances throughout Britain. Retribution is less dramatic today but no less forceful. In 2005, an optometrist charged in contravention of Prince Edward

Island's Optometry Act was heard by the nation's highest judicial body, the Supreme Court of Canada. The Court ruled the Prince Edward Island College of Optometrists was correct in denying the appellant's license until he completed the continuing education requirements demanded by the province's 1994 optometric legislation.

Optometric progress coincided with emergence of ophthalmology as a specialized branch of medicine although its practitioners were called by other names throughout the 20th century, including oculist, eye, ear, nose and throat specialist and ophthalmologist. General practitioners or family physicians also became more involved in conducting eye

examinations and prescribing eye wear although their services did not as often extend to post-delivery spectacle satisfaction as it did with optometrists. The subsequent collision between the two disciplines ought not to have been unexpected; there is often jealousy and hostility towards any new group trying to penetrate professional boundaries. Indeed, it's a reaction evidenced in current professions, including nurse practitioners expanding into realms once limited to physicians while closing their own ranks to the lesser-trained licensed practical nurses. Optometrists too are moving more into medicine while opticians increasingly claim practices once the sole domain of optometry.