



PROFILES IN HISTORY

An Interview with Dr. Fred Nuttall



Dr. and Mrs. (Isobel) Nuttall

CJO: What circumstances or people influenced your decision to become an optometrist?

FN: I decided to become an optometrist because of the influence of a friend, E.J. Anderson, who was a science teacher in Calgary. He had taken over optometry as his career. He told about half a dozen of us that he felt when the Optometry Act, then under consideration, was passed, optometry would assume a very different status and would become a career with a great future. He then offered to give us each a six-month course, covering basic Optics, Anatomy of the Eye, Defects in Vision and their Correction, Subjective and Objective Refraction, etc. We took this course so that when the Act was passed by Parliament, we could take the first examination. I took that exam (I was 21 years old when I made this decision) and became a member of the Alberta Optometric Association in 1922. It was actually the first examination ever set by the government at the University of Alberta and, as a result of passing it, I was able to apply to the Registrar of the Alberta Optometric Association for a licence to practice in the Province.

However, I realized that I needed much more education in optometry before starting into practice and, for the next three years, obtained all the learning that I could from writings and lectures by such men as Dr. C. Sheard, Mr. Maybee of Toronto,

Ivan Nott, etc. In addition, I received considerable information from the American Optical Company, which was prepared by the American Academy, from M. Augustine and, later, A.M. Peckham, Dr. Skeffington, as well as from courses at the University of Saskatchewan. I also received a good deal of help and advice from A.M. Anderson, the optometrist engaged at the jewelry store where I was a watchmaker.

The Alberta Optometry Act was passed in 1921, and some of its provisions included restriction of the licence to practice optometry to members of the Alberta Optometric Association, the licence to be issued by the Association; membership in the Association to be obtained by passing an examination set by a Board of Examiners appointed jointly by the A.O.A. and the University of Alberta. Members who had been in practice for one year prior to the passing of the Act were exempted from the examination.

CJO: Where did you set up your practice after you received your licence?

FN: Well, my first practice was in Calgary. At that time, costs were not high. I had my own practice until 1934, when I went into partnership with F.H. Wilkins in Lethbridge.

CJO: Do you recall anything of the circumstances which brought about a decision on your part to become involved in optometry at a political level?

FN: Right after I opened my practice in Calgary, I became Registrar of the Association, and I held a variety of offices for the next 15 years. Elections were held regularly at the optometric conventions/annual meetings and, at various times, I served as Secretary-Treasurer, President, etc. In those days, optometry was very commercial by nature and, as a member of the Executive, I was very anxious to see it become a lot more professional.

CJO: Who would you identify as the leaders of the profession in Alberta at that time?

FN: The first President of the A.O.A., H.J. Snell; A.J. Harrison, Herbert Akitt, Julius Erlanger, F.H. Wilkins and A.R. Carter are a few that come to mind. They were all very professional men at a time when, for a large percentage of the practitioners, the emphasis was on the sale of eye glasses. Examinations and professional services were free. In fact, probably the most important activity that the

Association was involved in at this time was the elimination of commercialism in an effort to get optometry changed to the status of a profession. Before this could be accomplished, it was necessary to eliminate price and display advertising, and to change the emphasis from selling eye glasses to one of stressing the professional skills of the practitioner in testing and refraction. Over a period of years, this was achieved.

CJO: Can you tell us something about the evolution of the Association itself in the Province of Alberta?

FN: For many years, there was very little change. The Association did manage to have advertising written into the "penalty" by-laws, but no new legislation was passed in the Alberta legislature which directly affected the profession. In terms of continuing education, the only post-graduate courses to be offered in my time were offered by the University of Saskatchewan. None were held in Alberta.

CJO: Well, then, what about the state of the art — the practice of optometry itself?

FN: In the early days, most optometrists had their own laboratories for edging, drilling and mounting, but as supply houses opened up branches in more and more smaller centres, most optometrists gave up their individual labs. One reason was their inability to get trained technicians after this happened. There was also never any set fee structure when I was practicing. A suggested scale of fees had been offered by the provincial Association, but there was certainly no compulsion to follow it. There wasn't a lot of change, really, in the actual services being offered by optometrists in those years.

CJO: Are you aware of any change (i.e. acceptance or no) in the attitude of medicine, G.P.'s or specialists, towards optometry as an independent health care profession?

FN: I have seen a definite decrease in the hostility of medical practitioners towards the practice of optometry — G.P.'s and specialists alike. At one time, for example, ophthalmologists were barred by their own profession from speaking at optometric conventions. Now, it seems that we are working more and more together. I would say that, today, we are accepted by the medical profession. As another example, a few years ago, dentists, nurses, teachers, etc. always referred anyone with eye problems to a medical doctor. All that has changed and today, referrals to optometry are coming from many sources.

CJO: What do you recall of some of the specific areas in which you chose to concentrate your practice?

FN: In my early days, I did considerable work in visual training but discontinued it as my other work got to be too demanding. At one time as well, I was doing a lot of work in progressive myopia, which was very time-consuming. Although I didn't do a lot of low vision work, I did practise a considerable amount of pediatric optometry and enjoyed it greatly.

CJO: Do you feel that the present Association leadership is as active and dedicated as the founders and early leaders were?

FN: Yes, I do. I do not believe, as some do, that the financial rewards of the profession today have led to a decreased awareness of the need for ongoing political activity. This profession will act, quickly and effectively, when action is necessary. I think that the professional spirit, the esprit de corps, if you like, is as good now as it was in the past as well.

CJO: In your own sphere of political activity on behalf of the profession, what were the most important projects in which you were involved?

FN: When I was President, the federal charter of the Canadian Association of Optometrists was approved by an Act of Parliament, thus recognizing formally C.A.O. as a national entity. I have always considered myself privileged to have played a part in the formation of our national Association. I had been elected to represent Alberta and British Columbia, at the suggestion of H.J. McClung of Regina, Saskatchewan and to join him, D. McGuire of Manitoba, Ed Bind of Ontario, A. Mignot of Quebec and Eli Boyaner of New Brunswick at a meeting in Ottawa in 1941. It was at this meeting that we agreed to form a nationwide Association. We even decided on the name — The Canadian Association of Optometrists. We elected H. McClung as our first President and Ed Bind as Secretary-Treasurer. We discussed aims, objectives and, of course, finances. After setting the date for a future meeting, and reporting to our respective Associations, we again met in Ottawa and, this time, were joined by Willson Knowlton of British Columbia, John Mulroney of Nova Scotia and G. Hutcheson of Prince Edward Island, making the provincial representation (at that time) complete. The rest is largely a matter of record and my only regret is that I am now the only one of the original six left to see the successful fulfillment of Mr. McClung's dream.

CJO: Looking back, what do you consider to have been the most important changes in the professional practice as it is carried on now, compared to what it was when you started out?

FN: The transition from commercial to professional status is, I feel, the single most important change to have taken place. In addition, the better equipment available today has unquestionably improved the

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Calendar

1984

August 19-24

5th International Contact Lens Congress
Contact Lens Society of Australia/New Zealand Contact Lens Society
Chevron Paradise Hotel — Surfers Paradise — Queensland
Information: Kenneth W. Bell, Secretary,
The Contact Lens Society of Australia
818 Australia Square
264 George Street
Sydney, 2000
Australia

October, 1984

Alberta Optometric Association — Continuing Education
Annual Interdisciplinary Symposium
— Sports Vision —
Information: Gordon Hensel, O.D.
Chairman, Professional Services Enhancement Committee
c/o A.O.A.
The Professional Centre
#2 - 9333 - 50th Street
Edmonton, Alberta
(403) 468-1203

October 6-7

6th International Symposium on Contact Lenses
(l'Association des Optométristes du Québec)
Le Centre Sheraton Hotel, Montréal
Information: l'Association des Optométristes du Québec
465 St-Jean
Bureau 1003
Montréal, Québec
H2Y 2R6
(514) 849-8051

****See also the advertisement in this issue of the CJO****

October 17-20

Insight in Sight

Canadian Conference on the Visually Impaired Child
(Program includes Dr. A.P. Cullen, School of Optometry,
University of Waterloo)
Information: CNIB
350 East 36th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C.
V5W 1C6

October 19-21

7th Latin American Congress of Optometry and Optics
Lima, Peru
(Program includes a visit to the historic Macchu-Picchu ruins)
Information: Dr. E.J. Fisher
c/o School of Optometry
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario
N2L 3G1

November 8-11

European Society of Optometry
18th Scientific Congress
Jerusalem Hilton, Israel
Information: Dr. Harvey Rosenwasser, O.D., F.A.A.O.
1518 Walnut Street
Merlin Tower, Suite 1401
Philadelphia, PA
19102, U.S.A.

1985

March 31 - April 8

5th Asian Pacific Optometric Congress
Rasa Sayang Hotel/Batu Ferringi Beach
Penang, Malaysia
Information: Dr. Damien P. Smith
Secretary-General
International Federation of Asian and Pacific Associations of Optometrists
7 Cookson Street
Camberwell 3124
Australia

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level of service provided by the profession. Contact lens work has added another skill to optometry and I think you will agree that the profession has come to mean much more than just selling glasses.

CJO: In recent years, there has been some consideration given to Lethbridge as a potential site for a third Canadian School of Optometry . . .

FN: I think Lethbridge is a good location for a School of Optometry. It has the population — over 58,000 — and has many social, artistic and industrial advantages that are enjoyed by other, much larger centres. It has been my experience that people actually prefer living and working in a smaller centre. In addition, we also have a university that is ranked very highly here in the West.

We are very fortunate in our profession. I would never presume to attempt to single out any one

individual as contributing more than anyone else — the honour roll speaks for itself, and it is growing every year. Most recently, of course, there are the three educators which this Journal, and the profession, honoured with a special issue (*Editor's note: "Honouring 126 Years of Service and Dedication" — a tribute to Drs. Bobier, Fisher and Lyle. CJO Vol. 44, No. 3, September, 1982*). And I would say that each Provincial Association would have no trouble identifying its own leaders and distinguished contributors. Where we have been particularly fortunate is that such matters have never been handled by just one person, but rather by many; and it is this teamwork which has ensured our present position in the Canadian health care field, and will continue to ensure our success as a profession.