
Book Review

Michael Aitken, L.O. Sc.
Honorary Archivist, Kett Museum and Archive
Australian College of Optometry, Melbourne, Victoria
aitkenmr@melbpc.org.au

**A HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN
OPTOMETRY: TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF
BEATING THE TYRANNY OF DISTANCE
AND FIGHTING POLITICAL BATTLES TO
FIND NEW ROLES AND A NEW PLACE IN
HEALTH CARE.**

By Barry L. Cole
Melbourne: Australian College of
Optometry; 2015. 320 pages.

Emeritus Professor Barry Cole launched his long-awaited *History of Australian Optometry* on October 24, 2015.

Professor Cole has been closely associated with optometry all his life. In the first place he was the son of an optometrist, then in turn he became a student, teacher, researcher and professor of optometry. He headed the Australian College of Optometry for 40 years and now in retirement he has continued as a very keen archivist in the Kett Optometry Museum in Melbourne. He can reasonably be regarded as the father of modern Australian optometry and there is no one better qualified to write our history.

The book takes a broad view. The first chapter deals with the foundation of optometry. The invention of spectacles in Northern Italy in the late-thirteenth century was the first major step. Another milestone was the work of the Spanish friar, Daza de Valdes (1591–1634) in determining a means of testing acuity and giving sage advice on deciding the power of spectacles. Famous scientists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such as Galileo, Newton and Kepler contributed to the knowledge of optics. Early English opticians like Benjamin Martin, George Adams and James Ayscough made small advances in the understanding of spectacles. The more famous names of Thomas Young, Hermann von Helmholtz and Franciscus Donders made greater progress in the wider ophthalmic field.

The second chapter succinctly summarizes the development of optometry in the United Kingdom, the USA and Canada. The purpose of this summary is to allow the reader to compare what happened in Australia to events elsewhere in the world. Despite its small population and isolation from the rest of the world, optometry developed in Australia in the nineteenth century in a way not far behind what was happening in the



United Kingdom and the United States in defiance of what is called Australia's tyranny of distance. The author's account of our history in that period will be especially fascinating to ophthalmic buffs.

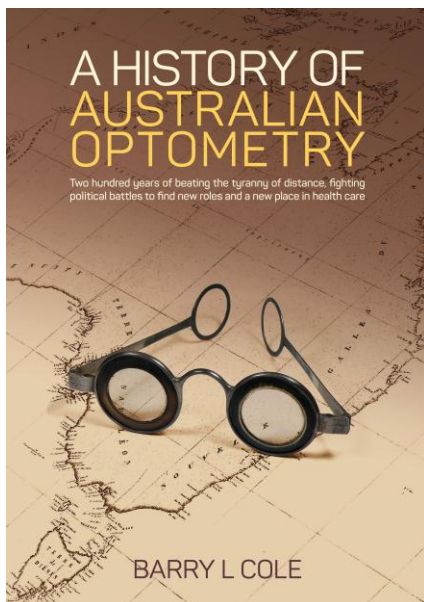
As we moved into the early decades of the twentieth century Australian optometry gathered momentum. The British colonies that had been established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became self-governing states and in 1901 they federated to form the nation of Australia. Optometrists in each of the States established professional associations, the first in 1904, and then set up courses of study. Australia was early in adopting the term optometrist although we were still often known as opticians fifty years ago.

The next chapter recounts the stories in securing legislation to regulate optometry in each of the states. There is considerable frank discussion on the opposition optometry received from the medical profession in the twentieth century. The establishment and development of the various colleges is treated in great detail in the chapter on optometric education. In the early days some optometrists were self-taught or learned from an employer or private tutor. A few travelled to London to obtain the Fellowship of the British Optical Association while some did correspondence courses with American colleges.

Over time optometry courses were established in most of the states. The Australian College of Optometry offered a four-year course from 1940, part of which was taught in the University of Melbourne. Barry Cole was appointed as the first full-time lecturer in 1959 and he remained at the helm until his retirement in 1999. In his time a remarkable number of his students have gone on to become leaders throughout the world in optometry, especially in the United States.

There are further chapters on optometry's ever-expanding role in clinical practice and research. In the second half of the twentieth century optometry has become increasingly part of the overall health scene and its wider role in eye-care is now understood by governments and the general public.

At the end of each chapter the author has very usefully listed key dates for the significant advances made in the various topics discussed. Throughout the book there are entertaining descriptions of the many personalities who have contributed to our rich history. This great book of 320 pages is superbly produced with the added bonus of a profusion of fine illustrations in color and monochrome. The deluxe hard cover edition is an especially attractive presentation and well worth the additional cost.



The History of Australian Optometry is available in deluxe hardback at AUD\$160 (US\$113) and softback at AUD\$75 (US\$53) from the Australian College of Optometry. ISBN 978-0-646-93792-2. More details and an order form are available at <http://www.aco.org.au/75th-anniversary/history-book>.