

A LOOK INTO OPTOMETRY'S FIRST FEMALE PRACTITIONER: GERTRUDE STANTON

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A look into optometry's first female practitioner:
Gertrude Stanton

History

Gertrude Stanton was the **first ever woman** to receive her license to practice optometry in the United States in 1901. She began her early career as a teacher and with her dedication to helping others, then decided to pursue the practice of optometry.

After taking some courses, she began travelling around Minnesota, placing advertisements in local newspapers for free eye examinations from an **Expert Refractionist**. She initially began working as an optometrist at a department store. During this time, she also became involved in the Minnesota State Association of Optometrists and even became a founding member, and eventually the vice-president, of the Northwestern Optical Association.

She was successful.

Stanton was also involved in an abundance of charity work. She provided services for the examination of applicants of the United States Army Medical Corps and for the training camps. Eventually, she opened up her own optometry practice and employed a team **entirely composed of women**, including her daughter who also pursued a career in optometry. Stanton was even elected as the fourth **vice-president** of our very own **AOA**.

SHE WINS SUCCESS AS AN OPTICIAN
Dr. Stanton of Minneapolis Is the Only Woman Practicing Her Profession in the Twin Cities.

Gertrude Stanton's Business Prowess:

Gertrude Ayer, M.O. - Expert Refractionist.
This is your opportunity to correct your visual defects and preserve your eyes.

Madam Ayer is not a spectacle peddler, but a finished and competent optician.

In order to avoid any of the above deviations, lay aside your false pride and have your visual defects properly corrected by a competent optician.

Quotes taken directly from a few of Gertrude Stanton's many advertisements.

REFERENCES

1. Davis V, Vogl L. Gertrude Stanton (1863-1931): The First Woman Licensed to Practice Optometry in the United States. *Hindsight: Journal of Optometry History*. 2020;51(1):5-10.



Stanton was **fiercely independent, successful,** and a **powerful** businesswoman. She had immense popularity with her patients, as well as the public, despite living what was considered an unconventional lifestyle for a woman during this time period.

Aside from her involvement in the optometry field, Stanton was also active in various other community organizations, including the Automobile Club and the Minneapolis Women's Rotary, which was the first all-female Rotary club in the country.



Female Empowerment

Throughout her entire career, Stanton was very vocal about the opportunities that optometry could provide for women.

"Women have entered such extraordinary pursuits that seemingly there is no field where men succeed that a woman may not achieve success also."

"It is the young woman who has a fondness for tools and who can readily repair a sewing machine or typewriter when it gets somewhat out of gear, who will take up optometry and acquire with ease the basic knowledge of the profession."

"Optometry needs women, and women, in my opinion, who can make themselves successful in it, will find a substantial and satisfying profession to follow."

"If a woman has these qualities, and also a ready good humor and a naturally cordial manner, she is eminently fitted for success, always providing she has had the proper training for her work. The one big stumbling-block in her pathway, probably, is the lack of confidence which people generally have in a woman in any line of work that requires brains, skill and experience. A woman is obliged to build up confidence often, whereas a man finds it given him readily."

Gertrude Stanton was a figure to look up to by all women.

Celebrate Women's History Month by celebrating Gertrude Stanton and all of the other wonderful female optometrists who have brought us to where we are today.