

AO Museum Background/ Present Status & Future plans (March 2010) – Dick Whitney

Background

- AO Museum opened in 1983 for the AO's 150th Anniversary
- One of the largest collections of Spectacle Frames and other Ophthalmic Optical items in the world; over 3000 spectacles make up part of the Museum collection.
- Located from 1983 to 2000 in AO Main Plant
- Restricted access/ static display limited visitor traffic of Museum in later years during that time period.
- Non profit 501 3 (c) status since 1987; named Optical Heritage Museum (OHM)
- With demolition / construction of Southbridge Hotel in 2000, collection put in Storage on "AO complex"
- Dick Whitney appointed Curator in 1999; John Young original curator
- Board re-established in 2004
- In 2006, moved collection offsite in Southbridge (Crane St/ 368 Main St buildings)

Presently numerous documents, slides, museum items now being restored, preserved and itemized thanks to a new and dedicated team:

Dick Whitney (Curator)
Donna Silverberg (Assistant Curator)
Diane Matuck (MA Optician Group, author of new AO history document)
Dick Baker (Overlook resident)
Dr. David Fleishman (World Expert on Antique Spectacles)

Progress / actions since ~2000

Growing the collection

- Significantly expanded collection by Donations of items during the past 10 years!
- Storage area greatly expanded, working on improved organization and cataloging.
- Working area, storage now occupies ~40x60 (2400 square feet)!
- Closure of Lens Plant Building in 2005/ AO items collected and preserved

Publicizing the collection

- Websites created to promote and share AO's Heritage and the Museum collection
 - 1.) AO history on www.dickwhitney.net (since 1999)
 - 2.) <http://www.opticalheritagemuseum.org>
 - 3.) Industry history links on Museum website started 2 years ago to promote Industry interest

4.) <http://www.antiquestacles.com>

5.) Carl Zeiss Vision Worldwide Intranet now links to OHMuseum site.
(new for 2010)! Target audience of 11,000!

- Eye care Business Magazine (2004)
- Vision Care Products magazine (2009/2010 photos – Looking back series)
- AO Features published Worldwide by Carl Zeiss Vision on company intranet (My employer, formerly AO lens co)
- Jan 2010 Newsletter feature of OAICC (worldwide Ophthalmic Antiques Collectors group – published in UK)
- New publications: Southbridge News, Worcester Telegram, Our Town, Chamber Newsletter
- AO Reunions held every 6 months in Southbridge (Formerly Roms, now 12 Crane St) with regular updates on Museum progress

- **Talks given to numerous local and national Groups**
 - NYC/ Las Vegas at Vision Council Forum in 2008 and 2009; planned update of AO Museum scheduled in NYC on March 18th
 - Southbridge & Sturbridge Rotary, Lions Club, Last Green Valley Annual Meeting, Hospital Auxiliary
 - Ocular Heritage Society Annual Meeting at Southbridge Hotel (National group founded after 1st visit to AO Museum in 1980s)

- **Past and Present AO Displays:**
 - ✓ Morin Jewelers (2004 Display)
 - ✓ Flat Iron – items on display since 2005 (George W. Wells Eyeglass lens collection)
 - ✓ Crane ST (AO room features original Stoopes AO paintings, other items now on display)
 - ✓ Jacob Edwards Library (now on display at back entrance)
 - ✓ Southbridge Hotel and Conference Center (May 2009) for Transitions Optical Meetings with ~500 people attending
 - ✓ Future Of Southbridge Windows Project (AO Windows in old Robbins Building/Memorial Hall now on display) ; photos around town courtesy of the Optical Heritage Museum / Downtown Partnership donated \$

- **Planned Displays:**
 - ✓ New Downtown Southbridge Windows Project displays
 - ✓ Groundbreaking ceremony of “Swiacki AO Optical Sculpture” ; contraction of this 20 foot eyeglass frame on Town Common (across from “AO Main Plant entrance” to begin this Spring!!!
 - ✓ Mass Opticians Annual Meeting at Southbridge Hotel (Nov 2010)
 - ✓ April 2011 Boston./ Southbridge/OSV tour & meeting of optical group

- ✓ Permanent Home (Southbridge) still the goal, contingent on viable business plan – sustainability key factor; need sources(s) of added revenue.
- ✓ Multiple business plans drafted and aspects can be used for next phase
- ✓ Sharing displays with other Museums also being considered
- ✓ Book(s) on AO history in planning stages to benefit the Museum
- ✓ Grant proposals under consideration as plans evolve and private, public and corporate revenue sources being explored.