



Where It All Began

BACK IN 1912 a young optician trekked down to Southbridge for a training class in refracting. Albert Wells of American Optical was teaching eye exam techniques as part of the arrangement when you bought an American Optical trial case. Said trainee was then known as a trial case optician in the language of the time, meaning he could examine clients for eyeglasses — no medical problems please!

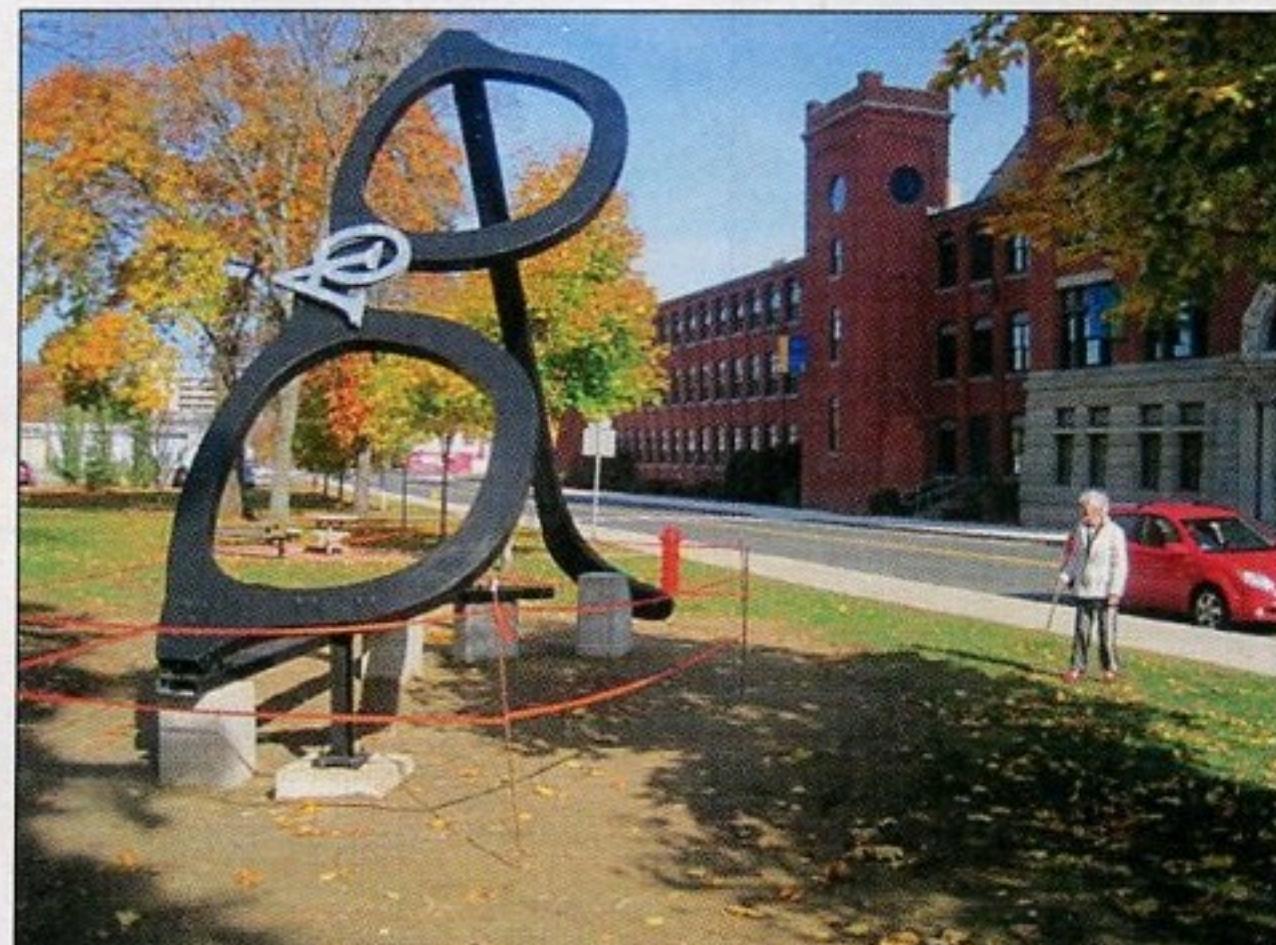
The young fellow went back to Worcester with his trial case, and a workbench soon to be delivered, along with a room full of surfacing equipment.

The young fellow; of course, was my grandfather — James O. Magay.

These thoughts were rolling through my mind as I drove the same route my grandfather's Stanley Steamer would have taken nearly 99 years ago.

AO is now but a fond memory in today's world. A hotel and museum reminding one where our occupation started in the USA (in a philosophical sense), with so many amazing optical inventions and technological advances coming out of this park like campus near the river in Southbridge.

Things like the first steel spectacles made in America in 1843, toric lenses in 1893, kryptok bifocals in 1910, 2.5 million lenses produced for the military in WW1, progressive lens patent issued to AO in 1924 (and you thought it was a new idea!), in 1925 the Tillyer (named for its inventor Dr. Edgar Tillyer) lens revolutionizes the industry by correcting astigmatism and power, flattop fused bifocals were introduced in 1931, 18.5 million pairs of lenses for WW2, skipping ahead to 1950 saw the introduction of the Tempress safety heat treating process for



The "Spectacular AO" sculpture in Southbridge, MA is a tribute to the town's pioneering American Optical Company.

glass lenses, and concurrently a myriad spectrum of optical, coating, and instrumentation advances as AO went forward to meet the future.

It seems fitting then that over 275 opticians were heading to American Optical, or at least the beautiful Southbridge Hotel and Conference Center on the site of this famous company for the 2010 OAM conference (Optician's Association of Massachusetts).

Diane Matuck and Dick Whitney put the event together. For her tireless efforts on this event (and a career of many great accomplishments), Diane was named Optician of the Year. Dick, of course, is a former AO lens designer and now Director of the American Optical Museum (www.dickwhitney.net), Blair Wong our OAM Executive Director — along with outgoing OAM president Tom Merrill, gave Dick a well deserved special Presidential Award.

In other news Denise Cook — former "everything" in OAM received a Lifetime Achievement Award, while Kirsten Morrissey succeeded Tom Merrill as President of OAM. Our corporate sponsors seemed delighted with the turnout as well. The event took place over two days and couldn't have been more successful with all attendees hoping the venue could become one of our regular meeting places in the future. Was everything perfect? Well Diane and Dick could have asked the New England Patriots to delay the start of their game on Sunday — I noticed a few people (but only a few) slipping out after lunch to make the Kickoff. ■

Jim (still got my AO workbench) Magay