

Charles Prentice: Hail to the 'Father of Optometry'

Charles Prentice's pioneering studies in optics earned him the praise of prominent ophthalmologists at home and abroad. But his status as a leading refracting optician also inspired contempt among medical doctors who regarded Mr. Prentice's trade as a threat to medicine.

Like him or not, turn-of-the-century eye doctors could hardly deny Mr. Prentice's monumental impact on vision care. The man AOA dubbed the "Father of Optometry" is the subject of this month's "Visionaries," a yearlong series on influential people in optometry's past.

Trained as a mechanical engineer in Germany, Mr. Prentice applied his knowledge of math and physics to the field of optics. In 1890, his papers on the "Law of Decentration" and "A Metric System of Numbering and Measuring Prisms" won him a worldwide reputation as a brilliant innovator.

In addition to his scientific endeavors, Mr. Prentice spearheaded efforts to organize, regulate, and educate O.D.s in the profession's nascence.

Mr. Prentice and a handful of others formed the Optical Society of the State of New York in 1895, in part to counter M.D.s who accused refracting opticians of violating medical practice laws.

In 1896, Mr. Prentice drafted and lobbied for a bill that eventually became New York State's optometry law. Mr. Prentice successfully argued that fitting glasses constituted the treatment of light, not disease, and so did not infringe upon medicine's purview.

In 1910, Mr. Prentice persuaded Columbia University to establish an optometry program. He devised the curriculum, chose instructors, and lectured frequently.

A 1929 editorial in *The Optometric Weekly* noted, "It is the achievements of men like Charles Prentice that have made present day optometry possible." An editorial in today's press might say the same.

Visionaries

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