

Oswald Carson coined the 'Wellsworth' term

Earlier this week I received an invitation to the 66th annual banquet of the Wellsworth Athletic Association of the American Optical Co. I accepted and will be present — as I was at the first dinner in 1918.

The name Wellsworth brings back memories of the old days at the American Optical Company, the period around the first world war when a man by the name of Oswald Carson, advertising manager coined the name of Wellsworth as a trademark for A.O. Company products.

It means that company made fine quality optical products and was known all over the world. New additions that came into existence at the time bore the name Wellsworth. The monthly newspaper became known as the Wellsworth Life, the new athletic field became Wellsworth Field, the athletic teams bore the name Wellsworth on their uniforms and, of course, the Wellsworth Athletic Association. All these names have disappeared as time went on so today the Wellsworth Athletic Association is the only group who bears that appellation.

The old American Optical Company of 75 years ago had many divisions. You oldtimers must remember the old carpenter shop, the print shop, the box and envelope shop, also there was a laundry located in a small back building near the Lensdale dam. Here it was that the three Wells families had their family wash done. There existed a fine esprit-de-corps — life was of a different nature.

I remember A.B Wells who worked for a period in the Lens department and who kept a shotgun in his office. At certain times he would get Walter Hager, a fellow worker, and say, "Come on, Walter, get your gun. You and I are going out hunting down by the sewer beds for birds." A look back into those days might be of interest to our present generation.

Recently in *The News* there was an ad of the McGrath Insurance Company and showed a picture of Albert McGrath, the founder. The picture that would have made history in the optical industry would have been one of the

whole McGrath family.

The grandfather, Tom McGrath, and his brothers were present when the first optical lenses were ground and polished at the American Optical Company. Besides Tom, there were brothers Pat and Ed, Walter and Albert, sons of Tom, and Charlie, a son of Ed. There might have been one or two others.

The point I wish to make about the American Optical Company is that members of whole families worked there. They became skilled artisans in their special jobs and had a pride in their work. It was purely optical products that the company was engaged in and George Wells, the founder, was determined to make the best optical products in the country.

Another family that I remember who were represented

Seaver Rice



nearly 100 percent at the AO Company was the Brodeur family. There was Joseph, the father, sons Hector, Alphonse and Joe, daughters, Delia and Adrienne. There were many others also and, in fact, the media referred to AO employees by the name the happy Wellsworth family.

The Balkan people were just trickling into Southbridge at the turn of the century and only the males arrived first and later the fair sex and their progeny became among the best educated and successful men and women in our town.

Some of the oldtime foremen and superintendents of the company as I remember were Jim Page, Joe White, Arthur Dorners, John Volpini, Eddie Kanie, Carl Roth, Al Rowse, Ed Worth, Ray Wheeler, Walter Buckley, Harry Hill, Dave Patterson, Harry Haynes, Tom Troy, Mike Troy, Bill Canney, Mike Maloney, Warren Wells, Max Laabs, Russell Cole, Ed Baker, Larry Foote, John Rawson, Arthur LaFortune. These people mentioned were all Lensdale workers, but 65 years have dulled the cells of memory.

It is a sad fact that old New England industries built by old time natives are fast disappearing from original ownership. Places like the American Optical, Draper Company of Hopedale and many others are now owned by new industrialists. The old cliché comes to mind, "Time and tide waits for no man."

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