

A HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN OPTOMETRY

Two hundred years of beating the tyranny of distance and fighting political battles to find new roles and a new place in health care

A NEW BOOK BY BARRY L COLE



Published by the Australian College of Optometry in commemoration of its 75th year anniversary.

This book tells the 200 year story of the emergence of optometry in Australia as an important primary health care profession. It has been carefully researched to tell the "what, why and who" of the story in the context of a changing society. For all this it is still an easy read and is lightened with pictures, anecdotes and asides about the quirks of history.

About the author

Barry Cole was in the thick of the making of the history of optometry in Australia for 65 years. His father was an optometrist and he followed in his father's footsteps by qualifying in optometry at the Australian College of Optometry in 1955. He became the foundation Professor of Optometry at the University of Melbourne in 1973 and is now Professor Emeritus. He was also the Director of the Australian College of Optometry from 1964 to 1998.



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The story begins in Europe and America with invention of spectacles in Italy in the late 14th century, the emergence of systematic sight testing in the 17th century and how this got its solid scientific foundations in the 18th and 19th centuries.

There were no opticians among the earliest European settlers in Australia in the late 18th century. Newspaper advertisements show that, in the early years, spectacles were bought and sold in general stores and selected by trial and error. The first advertisement for an optician was in 1831 but opticians did not advertise sight testing until much later, about 1885. They embraced new technology and by the turn of century began calling themselves optometrists. They battled the tyranny of distance at a time when the scientific advances were taking place in Europe and America. Australian optometrists kept good pace with what was happening in those countries. They engaged in political battles to win recognition and legislation to regulate their profession and improve its educational standards. There were battles glorious, some won and some lost.

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Barry L Cole

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