

PROFILE

Bertram Nathan FIO FSMC

Key figure in the history of optometric education

Clin Exp Optom 2009; 92: 6: 511–518

DOI:10.1111/j.1444-0938.2009.00352.x

Barry L Cole PhD LOSc FAAO

Victorian College of Optometry and
Department of Optometry and Vision
Sciences, The University of Melbourne,
Australia

E-mail: bcole@optometry.unimelb.edu.au

Charles Wright's *History of Australian Optometry*¹ reports the names of hundreds of optometrists who gave their time and energy to the advancement of the profession of optometry and who were key players in forging the present day scope and standing of the profession. Most of these names are no longer known to optometrists and even if they were, their achievements might not seem so remarkable from the perspective of the present day. We tend to take for granted the things we enjoy yet the battles they fought were intense, often fought over many years, and the goals they reached were vital steps forward.

One such person is Bertram Nathan (Figure 1), although his name is mentioned but once in Wright's history, and then only in passing, noting that he was the Chairman of the Opticians Registration Board in 1944 when his son, John, was one of the first students to complete the new four-year course in optometry of the Australian College of Optometry.^a

a. The Australian College of Optometry changed its name to the Victorian College of Optometry in 1960.



Figure 1. Bertram Nathan (1891–1977). Oil painting by his son, John Nathan. Victorian College of Optometry.

John Nathan was later to be Director of Studies of the college and its President from 1970 to 1978 but his story has already been told,² while Bertram Nathan's has not.

Bertram Nathan was born in 1891 in Port Melbourne and lived an itinerant life as a child because his father was a

publican whose business interests kept him on the move. His final years of schooling were at Wellington College in New Zealand and at Wesley College in Melbourne. On leaving school, he was employed in sales by a wholesale jewellery firm. This may have provided him with his first encounter with optometry, as in the early years of the 20th Century a number of jewellers were also opticians.

The soldier becomes an optometrist

His life took a different direction in August 1914 when Britain declared war with Germany, which meant that Australia, as part of the British Empire, was automatically a participant in the First World War. Bertram Nathan, now aged 24, enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force in 1915. He served in Egypt before being transferred, with the rank of Staff Sergeant, to AIF headquarters in London. There he met and married Florence Clements, a young woman from Brighton, England.

As the war moved toward its close, the young couple gave thought to the future. Florence encouraged Bertram to study geometry and algebra in public libraries so he could enrol in the abridged optometry course offered by the Worshipful

Company of Spectacle Makers.^b He sat his final examinations on Armistice Day, 11 November 1918, while Londoners joyously celebrated the end of the war in the streets outside the examination hall. He obtained his Fellowship of the Spectacle Makers Company (FSMC) and also a Fellowship of the Institute of Ophthalmic Opticians⁴ and returned to Melbourne at the age of 28, after 1,172 days abroad on military duty.⁵

He established a practice in Collins Street, Melbourne, but did not seem to be especially active in professional affairs. The Victorian Optical Association (VOA) had been founded in 1911 and was busy; it had set up its course in optometry leading to Fellowship of the Association (FVOA) and it was active in establishing a federal body, the Australasian Optometrical Association, on which the state associations had agreed in 1918. The VOA was also pressing the Victorian Government for legislation to provide for the registration of optometrists but the records do not show that Bertram Nathan was involved in any of this before 1935.

The optometrist builds networks

He was otherwise engaged; he had a busy practice and a family of two sons and a daughter. He was a keen golfer and became a member of the Eastern Golf

Club soon after it was founded in 1924. In 1928, he became a member of Melbourne Legacy.⁵ Although he had a secular view of life, he was a founding member of the first reform Jewish congregation in Victoria, the Temple Beth Israel in St Kilda, which was established in 1930.

He was not just a joiner: he was also a doer. He was Captain of the Eastern Golf Club and very active in Melbourne Legacy, which records that he served on the Medical Committee advising war widows and their families on vision and hearing problems; he organised activities for Legacy children and because of his jovial nature he was appointed to the Comradeship Committee and took his turn as chairman of that committee. He also served a term as Vice-President and helped Legacy deal with some very important and complicated property matters.⁵

This information is not reported simply to show that Bertram Nathan was a well-rounded family man with diverse social interests. It has other importance to the unfolding story. Bertram Nathan knew a lot of people from all walks and stations in life. He was well regarded as a man of amiable disposition who was willing to take on tasks and get them done. He accumulated experience working with people in organisations like Legacy, his golf club and his temple, which would serve him well for what he did in his profession. Even one of his adversaries, an ophthalmologist member of the Registration Board of which he was Chairman, dubbed him 'Nathan the wise'.⁶

Achieving registration of optometrists

In the early years of the 20th Century, there was no legislation in Australia restricting the practice of optometry to persons with appropriate qualifications. One of the first goals of the state optometric associations was to have such legislation enacted. In Victoria, the first proposal for an optometrists' Registration Act was made in 1910, a year before the Victorian Optical Association was formed. Numerous subsequent attempts were made over the next 20 years, all without success because of medical opposition. Victoria

was falling behind: the first registration act for optometrists had been passed in the United States in 1901 and half of the states of the USA had followed suit by 1925. Tasmania passed an optometrists' Act in 1913, Queensland in 1917, South Australia in 1920 and NSW in 1930.¹ In Victoria, the Government was sympathetic to optometrists' arguments but the bill was controversial because of ophthalmologic objections. The government said it would not pass unless optometry and ophthalmology resolved their differences.

Bertram Nathan's first appearance in this matter was in 1935, when he was one of a delegation of optometrists to a meeting with ophthalmologists intended to find a compromise that would allow passage of the optometrists' bill through the Victorian Parliament. The meeting was in the rooms of Sir James Barrett, who took the chair. Sir James was an ophthalmologist and also at the time the Chancellor of The University of Melbourne.⁷ Formidable opposition. The meeting made no progress despite the conciliatory approach of the optometrists. Dr Leonard Mitchell, who was honorary ophthalmologist at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, asked Bertram Nathan for his opinion. He recalls he replied 'the whole proceedings remind me of a dog chasing its tail around the room. It is perfectly obvious that ophthalmologists will give us every assistance to obtain legislation to become spectacle makers but will strongly oppose any efforts on our part for legislation for (eye) examinations... let us face the facts and take the gloves off. We on our part will demand legislation and you, we know, will use every possible means to stop it'.⁸

Immediately following that meeting, in July 1935, a committee was formed consisting of representatives of the Master Opticians Association, the Victorian Optical Association and optical wholesalers.⁹

Bertram Nathan was the chairman of the committee.^c Furious activity followed: John Nathan¹⁰ remembers frequent

c. The members of the committee were Bertram Nathan, Roy Werner, Cecil Dobbie, Howard S Bell and wholesale representative, AB Colechin.

b. Formal training in optometry was relatively new in 1918. Two bodies provided optometry courses in the UK but had been doing so for only 20 or so years. The Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers was one of them. It was an ancient London Guild that got its charter as 'The Master, Wardens and Fellowship of Spectacle Makers of London' in 1629 but did not introduce its Fellowship examinations for optometrists until 1897. A rival association, the British Optical Association, founded in 1895, also offered Fellowship examinations. In Australia formal training of optometrists was rudimentary in the first decades of the 20th Century: the Victorian Optical Association started its Fellowship course in 1912, Queensland offered a course and examinations from 1922 and New South Wales conducted a course for the Fellowship of the Institute of Opticians from 1926. Many Australian optometrists travelled to London to complete the UK Fellowship courses and examinations as Gartner recounts.³ In fact, the very first optometrist to obtain the FSMC diploma from the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers in 1898 was an Australian, Carl Werner.

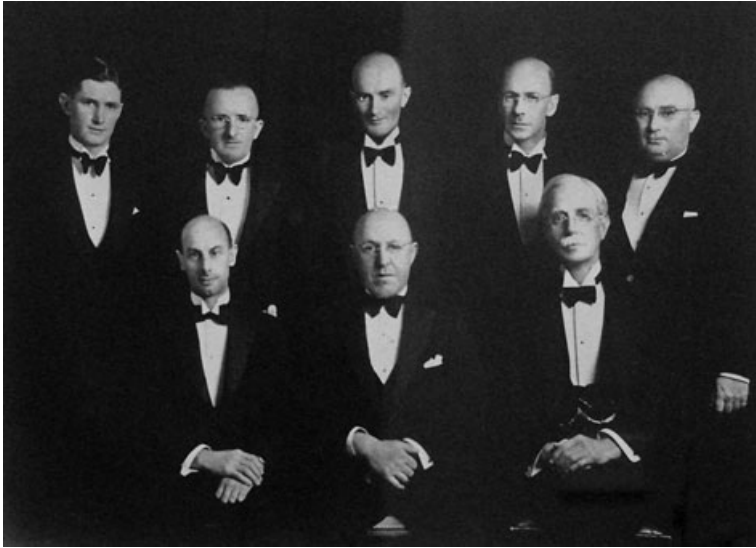


Figure 2. The first Opticians Registration Board of Victoria 1936–1937. (L-R standing): Mr HL Gordon (registrar), Mr HE Coles, Dr T A'B Travers, Mr HSS Bell, Mr SM Raphael; (Sitting): Mr LRC Werner, Mr B Nathan (Chairman), Dr EL Gault. Victorian College of Optometry Archives Catalogue No 111.

meetings of dark-suited men in the family home, optometrists and optical wholesalers contributed to a fighting fund, members of parliament were lobbied and meetings were held to negotiate compromise amendments that would enable passage of the bill. It was passed in early December 1935, just four months after Bertram Nathan took the helm of the fighting committee.

First chairman of the Registration Board

The Opticians Registration Board met for the first time in 1936 (Figure 2). Bertram Nathan was appointed to it by the Governor-in-Council on the nomination of the Victorian Optical Association, along with two other VOA nominees, Howard S Bell and Leslie R Werner. Two ophthalmologists, Drs EL Gault and T A'Beckett Travers, and two further optometrists, SM Raphael and HE Coles were appointed by the Governor-in-Council. Bertram Nathan was elected Chairman of the Board, a challenging position that would keep him very busy for the next nine years.

The new board had two main tasks: to register optometrists for the first time and to prescribe the courses of study and training in optometry.

The first task was daunting as 489 persons applied for registration in 1935,¹¹ of whom less than one quarter had formal qualifications in optometry.⁴ The balance of the applicants claimed the right to registration under a provision in the act that recognised prior practice of optometry. Those who had been engaged continuously in the bona fide practice of optometry in Australia or New Zealand for three years as a principal or five years as an employee before the act were entitled to registration. The board evaluated the applications expeditiously: by the end of 1936, 286 had been registered and by 17

d. Seventeen per cent held the Fellowship of the Victorian Optical Association; four per cent a UK Fellowship in optometry such as the FIO, FSMC or FBOA; one per cent (seven) claimed a doctorate or fellowship in optics from a USA optical college; and two per cent had had coaching from a private tutor such as Henri Van Heems.

May the following year another 52 had been added to the register.¹² It seems board members did the job well, as there is no evidence of dispute over the board's decisions, even though 30 per cent of the applications were rejected.

Defining a curriculum for optometric education

The second task was more demanding. The prescribing of the curriculum for optometric education would set the standards and the standing of the profession for years to come. The optometric course in Victoria at the time was the Fellowship course of the Victorian Optical Association. This course had begun in 1912 as a two-year part-time course with no standard of education for entry. In 1919, the Merit certificate (Year 9) was required and this was raised to the Intermediate certificate (Year 10) in 1928 and the course was expanded to three years part-time.^{9,13}

This course was modelled on the Fellowship courses of the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers and the British Optical Association but full-time courses in optometry were emerging in British Technical Colleges. The Northampton Institute in London, later to become the City University, started a course in optometry in 1927. In the USA, several private optometric colleges offered a doctor of optometry degree and university optometric courses had been established at Columbia University in New York in 1910, at Ohio State University in 1914 and at the University of California in 1923.¹⁴ In Australia, Queensland had established a college of optometry in 1922, offering a three-year course, some subjects of which were studied at the Brisbane Technical College. In New South Wales a four-year part-time associate diploma course was established at the Sydney Technical College in 1932.¹

What path should Victoria follow? Should the course be at the university, aspiring to what was happening in the USA, at a Technical College as in the UK and in NSW, or in a stand-alone college of optometry? What educational standard should be required for entry and how long should the course be?

The path to deciding on a course of training for optometrists was a minefield. The board exploded a few mines as it traversed it and Bertram Nathan took a few direct hits. It was a minefield because some optometrists aspired to a course in optometry at university standard taught by The University of Melbourne, while others were fearful that too high a standard of education would deprive the profession of new entrants. Commercially-minded optometrists feared that employee optometrists would become too costly. The medical profession, ophthalmology in particular, did not want optometrists to have training beyond optics and refraction taught at a technical school.

In 1937, the Registration Board appointed four of its members to a committee to develop a curriculum for the training of optometrists. They were Howard S Bell, then the chairman of the VOA Education Committee that ran the FVOA course, Leslie Roy Werner, Bertram Nathan and ophthalmologist, Dr Edward Gault. They proposed a four-year full-time course of study that required leaving certificate for entry.^e This was approved by the board on 15 November 1937 and sent to The University of Melbourne for its advice.

The university disapproves of the new curriculum

The board was required by Section 26(2) of the act to obtain the opinion of The University of Melbourne before making any regulations for the course of training for optometrists. I do not know how this clause found its way into the act: was it inserted at the behest of the optometrists who aspired to university level training, was it there to enable the medical profession another route to exercise control of the training of optometrists, or was it simply that The University of Melbourne, as the only university in Victoria at the time, was the most authoritative source of educational advice?

The university referred the proposal to the Faculties of Medicine and Science,

e. At the time, Leaving certificate (Year 11) was the entry level to university.

which formed a joint committee of representatives from the two faculties to consider it. The joint committee reported on 30 March 1938¹⁵ and savaged the proposal: it reported the course included a 'portion which has little or nothing to do with the training of an optician but would give a smattering of theoretical medicine' that would 'encourage opticians to give opinions on and treat diseases'. This it said would be disastrous for the public. It recommended a two-year course 'on the physical basis of their work with elementary instruction in the anatomy and physiology of the eye.' It concluded that 'the University in our opinion should offer every assistance in training men to become better opticians but resolutely oppose the training of men to become inferior or half-trained ophthalmic practitioners.' This suggests the heavy hand of medicine at work as indeed it was: Sir James Barrett was Chancellor of the university and an ophthalmologist. The Vice Chancellor's report on this matter to the university Council acknowledged advice he had received from Dr J Ringland Anderson and Dr T A'Beckett Travers, both prominent ophthalmologists, and from the Ophthalmological Association.¹⁶

The university's formal advice to the Registration Board in April 1938¹⁷ was that the course should be two years and omit instruction in general pathology and medicine. The board convened a meeting with the university in the board's offices in Collins Street a few weeks later, on 17 June 1938, to debate this unacceptable advice. The university was represented by the Chancellor, Sir James Barrett and Dr J Ringland Anderson, both ophthalmologists, and a Professor Osborne.^f The board's representatives were Bertram Nathan, who chaired the meeting, Howard Bell and Roy Werner and one of the ophthalmologist members of the board, Dr Gault. Despite the imbalance of vested interest, the university shifted its

f. This is probably Professor William Alexander Osborne, professor of physiology from 1904 to 1938 and Dean of Medicine from 1929. He was a brilliant medical scientist and a man of broad cultural tastes and talents with a reputation for bucking the establishment.

ground and agreed to the board's proposed four-year course provided optometrists were prohibited from giving medical or surgical treatment.¹⁸

This compromise was suggested by Sir James Barrett but quickly agreed to by the board representatives as it meant the university had agreed that the course was appropriate. The condition of prohibiting optometrists from giving medical treatment was a matter for government: the course could be prescribed by the board, while government debated the merits of the prohibition, which it never did.

It was also agreed that it would be desirable for the university to take responsibility for the course but the university said it could neither provide any teaching in 1939 nor commit itself in the future.

This was good progress but left the board in a bind. It had to provide the course but without help from the university. The board had discussions with the Melbourne Technical College about the possibility of the course being run with its support. It finally asked the Victorian Optical Association to continue to run its Fellowship course at least for 1939 but in accordance with a syllabus prescribed by the board. The VOA agreed and the board adopted a Regulation in October 1939¹⁹ prescribing a less ambitious interim course than planned with the Intermediate rather than the Leaving Certificate as the entry standard. This enabled the FVOA course to continue with much the same educational standard as had prevailed since 1928, although the course was now four years in duration.

At the insistence of the medical members of the board, the regulations for this interim course limited the scope of the subject 'Principles and practice of orthoptics' by adding the words 'as it pertains to the accommodative-convergence relationship and latent extrinsic muscular imbalance'.^{19,20}

A college of optometry is established

In March 1938, Howard Bell resigned from the VOA Education Committee, of which he was Chairman, to be replaced by Ernest Jabara. Jabara (1897–1981)



Figure 3. Ernest Jabara FSMC FIO (1897–1981). First Chairman of the Council of the Australian College of Optometry. Photo: Victorian College of Optometry Archives Catalogue No 374.

practised optometry in Collins Street, Melbourne, and had trained in London, obtaining the FSMC and FIO Fellowships. He was a man of imposing bearing with a bold and clear vision for his profession: for him the course in optometry had to be taught at university level and require matriculation for entry.²¹ He urged the profession to follow the educational model of dentistry, which had established its Dental College in 1897 and affiliated with the university in 1904 to provide a university course in dentistry. The professor of Dentistry, Arthur (later Sir Arthur) Amies, was a patient of Ernest Jabara.¹⁰

Ernest Jabara (Figure 3) took Bertram Nathan to task for daring to contemplate that the course might be run by the Melbourne Technical College and for prescribing Intermediate certificate as the standard of education,²¹ even though this was obviously only an interim measure.

However, his Education Committee threw a life-line by proposing that a college of optometry be established to provide a course prescribed by the board. This was agreed by the VOA, which put the proposal to the Registration Board in

September 1938 with a draft constitution and an offer to transfer to the new college the equipment and assets it had acquired over the years for its Fellowship course. The board accepted that proposal.

The board continued its negotiations with the University in 1939. It put pressure on the university by asking the Chief Secretary of the Victorian Government to intervene, on the grounds that the tardiness of the university in responding was frustrating the will of parliament expressed in the Opticians Registration Act.²⁰ The board asked the university to provide the course from 1940 but in November 1939, the university said it was unable to do so. The Second World War had begun in September 1939, so there was a constraint on human resources in the university.

In the meantime the idea of an independent College of Optometry progressed and the Memorandum and Articles of the College were signed on 29 December 1939 by Ernest Jabara and five other optometrists. The college was incorporated on 5 February 1940. Ernest Jabara was elected First-Vice President and the Chairman of the college's council. Judge Leonard Stretton agreed to be the President, although this was a titular post: Ernest Jabara, as Chairman of Council, was the man in charge.

Dispute within the profession

Jabara was a man of vision and a florid orator, as evidenced by his report to the first annual meeting of the College in April 1941²¹ and by the remarks that precede it in the college's Minute book: 'It was obvious that the College . . . has captured the interest and imagination of the profession, for the Chairman's survey and report, which delivery occupied an hour and five minutes, was followed with not only most flattering interest but drew forth a loud and spontaneous outburst of applause.'

It was a grandiloquent address but not a tactful one. It provoked a storm of protest in letters to the *Australian Journal of Optometry* because of his disparaging remarks about the 'unimaginative and incomplete curricula of the English courses of optom-

etry' and his belittling of greats such as Lionel Laurence, whose text books on visual optics were highly regarded. One letter redolent with irony describes Jabara's annual report as 'a modest little document (that) seems to adroitly magnify Mr Jabara and belittle Lionel Laurence and the generation he trained'.²² The Head of the optometry course at Northampton Polytechnic in London, and renowned author of *Visual Optics*, HH Emsley, advised Mr Jabara to glean the views of those in America and elsewhere who were capable of sound judgement on problems associated with vision so he might be better able to distinguish ideas of real merit from propaganda and salesmanship.²³

Jabara might have been a man of vision and of words but was not a master of tact. It seems he was also neither a man of action nor inclined to confer with others. He failed to communicate and work well with the board or his own college council. There was tension between him and the board about who was responsible for setting the curriculum: the board had statutory authority for the curriculum and the college was simply the provider but Jabara saw himself as the authority on what should be taught.

The board lost confidence in Ernest Jabara because things did not seem to be getting done. He was meeting with the university without the knowledge of the board and without adequate reporting of what transpired. The board asked that all future meetings with the university have a board member present but this did not occur. The board had to meet with professors of the university to find out what was happening, even though it had two representatives on the college council.⁸

Progress was made none the less. In April 1940, the board prescribed Leaving certificate and qualification to matriculate as the entry standard to the optometry course²⁴ in anticipation of the first cohort of students starting the new course in the new college in 1941. In September 1941, the board prescribed a new curriculum for a four-year course with a structure that was to underpin the optometry course for the next 60 years.²⁵ This included first year

Bachelor of Science subjects of Chemistry, Physics and Zoology and second year BSc Physiology and Biochemistry, as well as Ocular Anatomy taught by the university. Noticeably absent from the prescribed curriculum were general and ocular pathology. Diseases of the eye were to be taught under the cover of two subjects 'External examination of the eye' and 'Ophthalmoscopy: recognition of departure from normal in fundus, iris and the eye media'.

While the course was settled, arrangements for teaching the second year of the course in 1942 were not and the first cohort of students was already in first year. The uncommunicative Ernest Jabara was causing concern.

The night of the long knives

It was really the long night of the gas heaters. It was the night of 14 April 1942. Ernest Jabara reported that he had authorised the installation of gas heaters at a cost of 94 pounds and 16 shillings (\$207) instead of the electric radiators that council had approved. The council rejected his unauthorised action and did so again at a special meeting of council on 21 April called to reconsider the matter. Council was unmoved: it re-affirmed its original decision and rejected an amendment to vary it. Ernest Jabara resigned as Chairman in protest and resigned from council a few weeks later.

Needless to say this was not a dispute about gas heaters but the council asserting its authority to a Chairman inclined to take matters into his own hands. It was also a vote reflecting a loss of confidence of council in its chairman because of his failure to inform his council, the difficulties working with the Registration Board and the lack of progress in organising the new course. In his speech to country optometrists in Ballarat in 1945, Bertram Nathan said 'Victorian optometry was faced with the choice of a dictatorship of the College or democratic control by majority vote of the Council.'⁸ It chose the latter.

Ernest Jabara's going was strangely prolonged. He was invited to fill the casual vacancy on council caused by his own res-

ignation after a preferred appointee declined. He rejoined council but to his chagrin was not re-elected as First Vice President and chairman. He sulked, not attending the next four council meetings without tendering an apology. Council considered declaring his position as councillor vacant on grounds of non-attendance but wrote an obliquely worded warning letter instead. He resumed attendance but the minutes show that he was a vexatious participant in council business. He sought re-election to the college council at the AGM held in April 1943 but was not elected.

Life was not meant to be easy. Jabara took with him several able and active optometrists who were loyal to him and formed the Optometric Education Reform Society. It met regularly and organised academic seminars but also perpetuated a bitter division. The society contested elections to the Registration Board but without success. The election letters and brochures sent by the society and articles in the *Australian Journal of Optometry* could be politely described as full-bodied.²⁶ Bertram Nathan described them as neither ethical nor gentlemanly.⁸

This bitter division in the profession was important at the time and caused hurt and ill feeling but was not really important in historical hindsight. Suffice to say that Ernest Jabara had a bold vision of a college of optometry teaching at university standard, a vision that was realised, even though he almost scuttled his own dreams. That the dreams became reality was due in large part to Bertram Nathan intrepidly traversing the minefield of university conservatism, implacable medical opposition, government inertia and intra-professional dispute.

Teaching diseases of the eye

Sir James Barrett was no longer Chancellor of the university. The Vice-Chancellor (Sir) John Medley had plotted successfully to have him replaced in 1939 because Sir James was interventionist and deeply unpopular with the professors of the university.^{7,27} Ernest Jabara was no longer involved in the college. As a consequence, swift progress was made in organising

the new course, as the new Chairman of council, Cyril Kett, was able to report to the April 1943 AGM of the college,²⁸ although Ernest Jabara could not resist a rebuttal to this report.²⁹ The professors of the university were co-operative, especially the Dean of Dentistry, Professor Arthur Amies; the Professor of Physiology, Roy (Pansy) Wright; the Professor of Anatomy, Sidney Sunderland and the Professor of Pathology, Peter McCallum. Even courses in bacteriology and ocular pathology were arranged with the university.

In September 1943, Bertram Nathan was able to announce that optometry students would attend the Eye and Ear Hospital and that an ophthalmologist would be made available to lecture in diseases of the eye.³⁰ This was no mean feat in the face of trenchant ophthalmologic opposition.

The Registration Board had asked the Ophthalmological Society of Australia in March 1943 to provide an ophthalmologist to give lectures and demonstrations at an eye clinic of a public hospital. This was done on the advice of the university, especially that of Professor (later Sir) Peter McCallum. This was because the university had said that while it was willing to teach general pathology, it did not have the clinical material to teach ocular pathology.

The Ophthalmological Society did not want to provide that teaching and had to find an excuse, which it decided would be that it could not teach while the Registration Act allowed advertising by optometrists.³¹ Bertram Nathan wrote to the Chief Secretary of the Government of Victoria seeking his intervention because only Parliament could alter the act to meet the Ophthalmological Society's precondition. He did not expect the Government to amend the act but he hoped government intervention might embarrass ophthalmology sufficiently for a lecturer to be provided.

The Chief Secretary convened a meeting chaired by the Under Secretary at which the Ophthalmological Society representatives were Sir James Barrett, Dr Edward Gault and Dr Thomas A'Beckett Travers. Sir James Barrett was no longer Chancellor of the University but, like the

Scarlet Pimpernel, kept reappearing: he was now the President of the Ophthalmological Society.

The verbatim transcript of that meeting³² is a delight to read as the Under Secretary, with Bertram Nathan providing the openings, forensically dismantles the ophthalmological pretext. He asked Dr Travers to confirm that his society agreed that teaching diseases of the eye to optometrists was desirable, because it was willing to teach it if advertising was controlled. Dr Travers was reduced to incoherence: he would not confirm that it was desirable and fell back to saying the society had only agreed that it would consider it. Sir James, uncharacteristically, had very little to say. The Under Secretary recalled the long history of ophthalmological opposition to the act and lectured the ophthalmologists that their refusal to teach called into question the authority of Parliament and penalised the public. An ophthalmological lecturer was provided,³⁰ although it has to be said that this was not done with any spirit of goodwill and the arrangement did not last long. It would be more than 50 years before ophthalmologists freely engaged in teaching optometrists.

Saving the college from insolvency

Bertram Nathan stepped down as Chairman of the Registration Board in 1945 having seen the first cohort of students of the new course, which included his son, receive their diplomas, however, he was too good to be put to pasture. He was elected to the council of the Australian College of Optometry the next year, serving for three years before stepping down when his son joined the council.

The optometrists who completed the new university level course began to assume control of the college from 1955 but these were difficult times. The college's main sources of income were a grant from the Registration Board, student fees and income from the clinic. Student numbers were small despite strenuous efforts to publicise the course. The audited accounts in the 1954 Annual Report show the college was insolvent: its liabilities exceeded its assets by 30 per cent

of its annual income. Bertram Nathan rejoined the council late in 1955 and became Treasurer of the College in 1956. He immediately secured an annual grant from the Government of Victoria of \$6,000 (about \$75,000 in current values), which doubled the college's income.

How did Bertram Nathan find government support so quickly? Of course he knew his way around town from his various community activities and he had experience dealing with government during his nine years as Chairman of the Registration Board. It probably helped that he regularly played solo with a group that included John Cain senior, who was Premier of Victoria, and the Attorney-General, William Slater, who was a good friend of Bertram Nathan.³³ William Slater's brother-in-law was Hugh Gordon, a solicitor, who was the Registrar of the Optometrists Registration Board when Bertram Nathan was its Chairman. The names Slater and Gordon still identify the well-known legal firm that they founded in 1935. As the saying goes: it is not what you know but who you know, but when you had to deal with the likes of John Cain senior and Bill Slater, you had to be a good guy and have a good story.

Building the future

With the government grant arriving each year, the college soon reversed its deficit and began to build an accumulated surplus. The college could now plan ahead and no blade of grass was allowed to grow: a full-time lectureship was created and the college set out to acquire its own premises. A site in Cardigan Street, Carlton, near The University of Melbourne, was found by the College Chairman, Geoff Henry, and was bought by Bertram Nathan in June 1956. The next month he and Geoff Henry made the first approach to the Victorian Health Department for a capital grant to enable the college to build on the site just purchased.³⁴ They met the Minister in October 1957 and a grant was approved in 1958. It is worth noting that the representations made by Bertram Nathan were to the Liberal Bolte government: the John Cain Labor government had fallen in

April 1955 so fresh connections had to be made. The new building was completed in 1960. In the same year the optometry course became a degree course in The University of Melbourne and the following year the college was affiliated to the University.

The transformation of optometric education in Victoria from a three-year part-time Fellowship to a four-year university degree was complete, a transformation that owes much to Bertram Nathan. Although overlooked in Charles Wright's *History of Australian Optometry*, he was acknowledged by his colleagues. He was made an honorary life member of the association in 1951 and an honorary life member of the college in 1960. The college's library is named in honour of Bertram and John Nathan.

REFERENCES

1. Wright C. History of Australian Optometry. Carlton; Australian Optometric Association: 1988.
2. Cockburn D. Jonathan Nathan DSc, Educator, clinician and research leader. *Clin Exp Optom* 2001; 84: 91–99.
3. Gartner WF. The Werner Family *Clin Exp Optom* 2008; 91: 412–414.
4. Certificate of Fellowship of the Institute of Ophthalmic Opticians issued to Bertram Nathan certifying he has passed a qualifying examination in the general knowledge of sight testing and visual optics and been duly approved. Certificate No 823. Dated June 1919. Victorian College of Optometry Archive Catalogue No 142.
5. Vale: Legatee Bertram Nathan. Died 28-12-1977. *Melbourne Legacy Bulletin*. Jan 17 1978.
6. Nathan J. (Biographical notes on) Bertram Nathan. 2004. Material held in the Archive of the Victorian College of Optometry. Archive Catalogue No 982.
7. Barrett, Sir James William (1862–1945). Australian Dictionary of Biography. Online edition. Canberra; Australian National University. URL <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A070193b.htm>.
8. Nathan B. Summary of address in Ballarat March 3 1945. Victorian College of Optometry Archive Catalogue No 890. This collection of papers also includes a report of the meeting by an unknown hand.
9. Gray WJ. The history of optometric education in Victoria. *Aust J Optom* 1940; 42: 291–299.
10. J Nathan. Personal communication 2008.

11. ORB First 489 Applic(ations) for Regis(tration). Document of the Opticians Registration Board Victoria (undated). Victorian College of Optometry Archive Cat No 889.
12. Copy of Certified Opticians Register corrected to the 31st December 1936 published pursuant to the Opticians Registration Act 1935. Victoria Government Gazette No 22 dated 27 January 1937 and Supplementary List of Certified Opticians to 17th May 1937.
13. Latimer HS. Letter and attachment to Ms Jean Colledge, Secretary of the Victorian College of Optometry giving details of FVOA course. July 7 1965. Victorian College of Optometry Archive Catalogue No 965.
14. Goss DA. History of optometry. Lecture handout. 2003. URL: <http://www.opt.indiana.edu/people/faculty/graphics/goss/opthx.pdf>
15. Report of the Joint Committee of Faculties of Medicine and Science on the Syllabus of work prescribed by the Opticians Registration Board. 30 March 1938. Victorian College of Optometry Archive Catalogue No 915.
16. Medley JDG. Curriculum proposed by the Opticians Registration Board. Report of Committee to council. 30 August 1938. Victorian College of Optometry Archive Catalogue No 915.
17. Memorandum of opinion of the University regarding the syllabus of work proposed to be prescribed by the Opticians registration Board. 26 April 1938. Victorian College of Optometry Archive Catalogue No 915.
18. Report of joint meeting of representatives of Opticians Registration Board and The University of Melbourne June 17 1938. Victorian College of Optometry Archive Catalogue No 915.
19. Opticians Registration Board. Regulations. Adopted by the Board September 19 1938 and approved by the Governor-in-Council October 17 1938.
20. History of the educational curriculum. Summary of events from November 1937 to February 5 1940. In: Collected papers of Bertram Nathan. Victorian College of Optometry Archive Catalogue No 915.
21. Chairman's address. The First General Meeting of the Australian College of Optometry. *Aust J Optom* 1941; 24: 219–236.
22. Anon. Letter to the editor. *Aust J Optom* 1942; 25: 329.
23. Emsley HH. The Australian College of Optometry. English comment on first report. *Aust J Optom* 1942; 25: 330.
24. Opticians Registration Board. Amendment of Regulation 42. Approved by Governor-in-Council, April 1 1940.
25. Opticians Registration Board. Amendment of Regulation 42. Approved by Governor-in-Council, September 15 1941.
26. Collection of papers relating to the dispute between the Optometric Educational Reform Society and the Australian College of Optometry generated by the Optometric Education Reform Society, the College and Opticians Registration Board, including electioneering in three elections to membership of the Opticians Registration Board in 1938, 1940 and 1943. Victorian College of Optometry Archive Catalogue No 552.
27. Medley, Sir John Dudley Gibbs (1891–1962). Australian Dictionary of Biography. Online edition. Canberra; Australian National University. URL: <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A150406b.htm?hilite=medley>.
28. Kett CW. Report of the chairman of the Council of the Australian College of Optometry 1942–1943. *Aust J Optom* 1943; 26: 277–283.
29. Jabara EH. Australian College of Optometry Report. (Letter) *Aust J Optom* 1943; 26: 378–381.
30. Nathan B. Position of optometrical education in Victoria. Official statement. *Aust J Optom* 1943; 26: 426–427.
31. Travers TA'B. Letter to the Opticians Registration Board. December 7 1942. In: Collection of papers of Bertram Nathan labelled Ophthalmological Society. Victorian College of Optometry Archive Catalogue No 914.
32. Transcript of a meeting of representatives of the Ophthalmology Society of Australia and the Opticians Registration Board with the Under Secretary. 1943. Victorian College of Optometry Archive Catalogue No 916.
33. Nathan J. Personal communication by e-mail 2008. Victorian College of Optometry Archives Catalogue No 799.
34. Notes in Bertram Nathan's papers dated 12 February 1958 listing 14 dated events and letters related to obtaining a capital grant from the Government of Victoria for the construction of a building for the Australian College of Optometry, with a section at the end headed 'Additional Information given verbally to the Minister by the Treasurer on October 4th 1957'. Victorian College of Optometry Archive Catalogue No. 967.