Henry Buckland Peters, OD, MA, FAAO (1916–2000)

Henry B. “Hank” Peters died in Eureka, California, on January 31, 2000. He was 83. He was a native Californian, husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather who dedicated his life to optometry and education.

Henry was born November 2, 1916, to Thomas H. and Eleanor (née Hough) Peters in Oakland, California. He earned a Bachelor of Arts/Doctor of Optometry degree from the University of California at Berkeley in 1938 and his Master of Public Health degree from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln in 1939. He served in the U.S. Naval Reserve during World War II, including duty as an Advanced Radar Officer on destroyers in the South Pacific. He returned to Oakland to practice optometry with his father in 1946.

While in private practice, Henry was active in education and research, serving as Assistant Clinical Professor at the School of Optometry at the University of California at Berkeley from 1947 until his full-time appointment as Assistant Dean and Associate Professor at the school in 1962. He also held the position of Associate Professor in the University’s School of Public Health from 1962 until 1969. While still in private practice, he helped change the classroom through his work in early childhood vision screening. His primary research effort, commonly known as The Orinda Study (1959), paved the way for school-based vision screening and is still discussed in colleges and universities today. In 1969, he was appointed the founding dean of the School of Optometry at the Medical Center of the University of Alabama at Birmingham, the first school of optometry to be directly associated with a medical center. The program rapidly grew to national prominence. At UAB, he also served as Professor of Public Health, Senior Scholar for several departments, and as founding Executive Director of the UAB Research Foundation.

At UAB, he was able to advance further his commitment to interprofessional relations, making great strides in the cooperation between optometry and other disciplines. He worked extensively with the Veteran’s Administration to enhance the role of optometry in health care. As a Navy veteran, he knew the needs for eye and vision care among our nation’s veterans; as an educator, he also knew profession’s need to have educational opportunities for students and residents within the VA’s national and interdisciplinary hospital system. In 1977, he was the chair of a national optometric committee that established standards in the VA for recruitment of qualified staff, clinical privileges, and academic affiliations. He served on the Board of Directors of the National Health Council from 1969 to 1983 and, in 1978, he was the first optometrist to be elected president of the organization.

He became a Fellow of the American Academy of Optometry in 1946 and remained active in the Academy throughout his career, serving as chair of several committees and as President from 1972 to 1974. The Academy selected Henry as the first recipient of the Carel C. Koch Medal for Interprofessional Relations in 1974.

During his career, Dr. Peters published nearly 100 professional research articles, papers, and editorials. He was a much-sought-after advisor, consultant, and speaker who contributed greatly to health care policy, the role of optometry in health care, and optometric practice and education. He was acknowledged for his contributions through numerous awards, citations, and honorary degrees. In 1994, the University of Alabama at Birmingham named the Henry B. Peters Building at the School of Optometry in his honor.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, he was an avid clam digger, fisherman, beachcomber, and sailor. He frequented both the Northern California and Gulf coasts. In addition to numerous loving friends, he is survived by his wife Anne (née Ledin) and their daughter Elizabeth; his daughter Lynn and sons Thomas (and wife Barbara), James (and wife Kathy), and Christopher and their mother Carol (née Woodhams); two sisters, Leanore Mott (and husband Dorr) and Marilyn “Molly” Bates; his brother Richard (and wife Ramona); five grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren. The family requests that memorial contributions be made to the Henry B. Peters Symposium on Interprofessional Relations, School of Optometry, University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Dr. Henry B. Peters will be remembered as having a profound influence upon the optometric profession in the 20th century. He was truly a man of vision and leadership who saw optometrists as primary health care providers. A grateful profession will sorely miss his intellect, humor, and wisdom.

Arol R. Augsburger
Birmingham, Alabama
Robert D. Newcomb
Columbus, Ohio