

Julius Hirschberg

**THE  
HISTORY  
OF  
OPHTHALMOLOGY**

In Eleven Volumes

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OPHTHALMOLOGY**

VOLUME 11

*PART 3-C*

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**ROBERT F. HEITZ**

**THE HISTORY  
OF  
CONTACT LENSES**

*VOLUME THREE*

*Translated by*  
**Colin Mailer, FRCS (C)**  
*London/Ontario Canada*



# THE HISTORY OF CONTACT LENSES

Volume Three

FROM CORNEO-SCLERAL SHELLS  
TO  
CORNEAL CONTACT LENSES  
(1920-1970)

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*Colin Mailer, FRCS (C), London/ON Canada*

## **Preface**

This is the third volume of the *History of Contact Lenses* and it basically covers a half-century in the evolution of contact glasses and lenses, starting in 1920 with the first descriptions of glass corneo-scleral shells. It continues with the era in which polymethyl methacrylate rapidly superseded glass.. Next follow a period during which contact shells were replaced by corneal lenses. This epoch ended around 1970, with their gradual replacement by contact lenses made from other materials. There were soft or rigid and gas-permeable.

For a historian, this ambitious project has meant assembling fifty years of evolving cognitions, placing the facts in a hierarchy without short-changing, mistaking essentials or losing oneself in small detail. The historian has, in fact, to make him invisible behind the subject under study and avoid any temptation to surprise by false transcription or interpretation. He must reproduce this data for transmission, but without betraying the thoughts of the actors or the context in which the facts have been produced or reported.

Nearly 2000 original documents have been studied in order to reconstitute this half-century in the history of development of contact lenses. Essential passages have been quoted, at least, in part. If translated, the original version has been reproduced in order to allow understanding of possible nuances expressed by the authors in their mother tongue. Certain episodes have been finalized by evidence received from the actors themselves, intermediaries and surviving witnesses from the era. These meetings have been wonderful and tremendously useful to me in assembling all types of factual material consulted in libraries, archives and museums.

The reader will be able to judge if the historical reconstitution of the facts has been accurate and truthful. Such is also my sincere wish as author.

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This *History of Contact Lenses* could not have appeared in English without the hard work of my translator, *Colin Mailer*, ophthalmologist. He understood how to respect and express the subtleties of a style often filled with nuance. I thank him cordially for his loyalty and dedication.

To the publisher *Jean-Paul Wayenborgh* comes the merit of having supported a sizeable historical memoir in an area of ophthalmic science minimally explored previously. In the face of various reports and anecdotes widely disseminated by the media, *Jean-Paul* has courageously backed up my efforts to document the real historical truth. The *History of Contact Lenses* also complements his large collection of volumes published in the same series and with the same purpose.

My thanks go also to all those who have contributed evidence directly or indirectly to this volume. I also thank them for their support and encouragement: *Philippe Baronet, Timothy Bowden, Herschell Boyd, Werner Claas, Paul Cochet, Oliver Dabezies, Joseph Dallos, Maximilian Dreifus, Wulf Ehrich, Jay Enoch, Andrzej Grzybowski, István von Györffy, Pierre Jaquemin, Kiewiet De Jong, Richard Keeler, Herman Kemmetmüller, Drahoslav Lim, Christiane Maréchal-Courtois, Saiichi Mishima, Victor Much, George Nissel, Jean Nordmann, Montague Ruben, Richard Pearson, Pierre Rocher, Otto Wichterle, Wolfgang Wimmer*. I am also particularly grateful to the museum curators and members of their staff in archives and libraries for their warm welcome and their enthusiasm for the cherished treasures from the history of science conserved in prestigious locations under their jurisdiction in Berkeley (California), Jena, London, Paris, San Francisco, Strasbourg and Washington D.C.





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