High Fashion Spectacles and Fishing Tackle
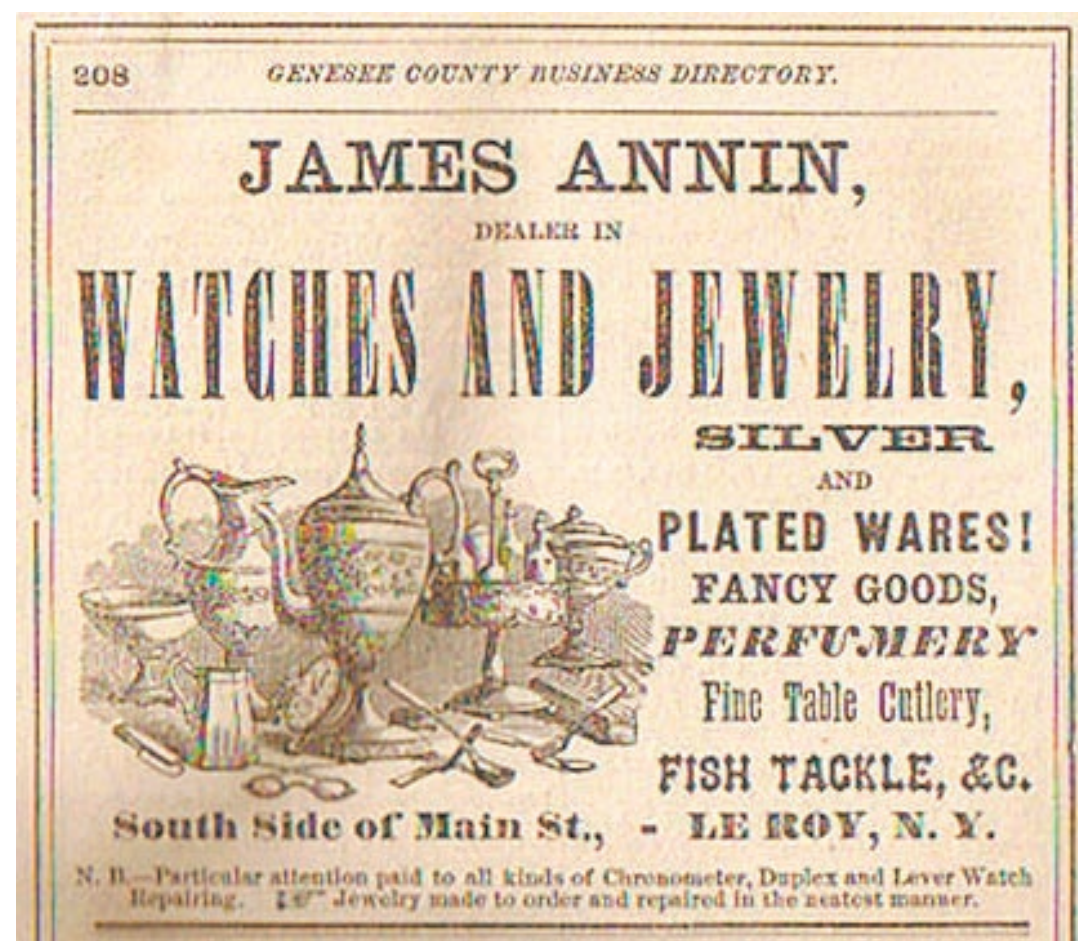
by Lynne Belluscio

I thought I would write this article yesterday, but my vision was still blurry from the eye drops at Dr. Lapple's office. The computer screen didn't come into focus until late in the afternoon. Yesterday morning as I sat in the chair and tried to figure out which set of letters were clearer, I had a chance to talk with Bill about the history of his profession which in this area is quite interesting.

Two years ago, I vowed to write an article but then never finished putting it all together. Dr. Lapple is a great source of information and is genuinely interested in the history of optometry. He is the past president of the New York State Optometric Association, which was founded in 1895. New York was the second state to license optometrists. He also is the past president of the Rochester Optometric Society and therein lies a very interesting story.

Although corrective lenses have been available for centuries – even our portrait of Herman LeRoy from the 1820s shows him with a pair of spectacles perched on his forehead – the manufacture of glasses was centered in Rochester.

John Jacob Bausch, an immigrant, founded a small optics company in 1853. Initially he imported eyeglasses from his brother in Germany, but then he started to grind lenses from imported optical glass. His claim to fame was the introduction of hard rubber (vulcanite) frames. He needed money for his venture, so he borrowed $60 from a cabinetmaker friend, Henry Lomb. In addition to their own innovations in the optics field, they also negotiated the US manufacturing rights from the German optical firm of Karl Zeiss. By the end of the century, Bausch and Lomb was manufacturing in addition to eye glasses, binoculars, microscopes and telescopes and they made lenses for Eastman Kodak. With the advent of World War I, Bausch and Lomb was the first American firm to produce optical glass, reducing the nation's dependence on foreign imports.

In 1929, the Army Air Corps

GENESEE COUNTY BUSINESS DIRECTORY.

208

JAMES ANNIN,
DEALER IN

WATCHES AND JEWELRY,

SILVER AND

PLATED WARES!
FANCY GOODS,
PERFUMERY
Fine Table Cutlery,

FISH TACKLE, &C.

South Side of Main St., - LE ROY, N. Y.

N. B.—Particular attention paid to all kinds of Chronometer, Duplex and Lever Watch Repairing. Jewelry made to order and repaired in the neatest manner.

Notice the spectacles in the foreground.

contracted Bausch and Lomb to produce lenses that would reduce sun glare for pilots – thus the introduction of Ray Ban sunglasses in 1936. The company also manufactured range finders, gun sights, periscopes and aerial cameras.

In 1971, Bausch and Lomb introduced the soft contact lens and as Bill Lapple pointed out, of the four companies that make soft lenses in the world, two of those companies are now located in the Rochester area – Bausch and Lomb and Cooper Vision in Scottsville.

So after this quick history of optics, I was curious to see about the early optometrists in LeRoy. Dr. Lapple's business started in Caledonia in the 1930s. In LeRoy, there have been a number of optometrists. Our files list R.L. Wood; M.N. Gorton; John D. Murdock, Harry Vogel and Marvin Budgar. John Murdock was born in 1876 and died in 1958. He owned a jewelry store and for a while was listed as an optometrist but was known locally as an antique dealer. In our collection of eyeglasses and

eyeglass cases we have some marked with M.N. Gorton and Joseph Annin.

In the 1897-98 Western New York Directory there are 20 opticians listed in Buffalo and 3 in Lockport. In the 1917 Genesee County Director there is only one optician listed: Miss Louise Morse in Batavia. If you needed glasses in LeRoy in the 1800s, you could stop by Annin's Jewelry Store. The majority of eyeglasses in our collection are

marked Joseph Annin, although it does not seem that he ever listed himself as an optician or an optometrist. In the lower front of his ad in the 1869-1870 LeRoy Directory are a small pair of spectacles. Notice that his ad includes watches, jewelry, perfumes fine table cutlery and fishing tackle! Wonder if Bill Lapple will ever consider selling fishing tackle along with his high fashion frames and sunglasses?