



## Editorial

Jack D. Gaskill, Editor

### To Change, or Not to Change; That is the Question

The fact that I occasionally receive responses to my editorials in *Optical Engineering* provides mysterious, but indisputable, evidence that there are individuals who actually read these literary masterpieces. I recently received such a response from Dennis Hall, who commented on my November 1989 editorial entitled "Is Wall Street's Coma an Optical Aberration?" In that editorial, I had noted an apparent correlation between the temporal proximity of the annual meeting of the Optical Society of America and the occurrence of record-setting plunges of the Dow Jones industrial average during two of the past three years.

While Dennis refrained from either supporting or disputing the existence of this apparent correlation, he did offer a hypothesis of his own: that the California earthquake of October 1989 was nature's response to the proposal of the Board of Directors of the Optical Society of America to change the name of that society to the Optics and Photonics Society. Following Dennis's lead, it is only fair that I neither support nor dispute his hypothesis; however, I will comment on the subject of societal names in general. I do not hesitate to do so because, over the past many years, I have taken part in numerous formal and informal discussions regarding possible name changes for two societies of which I am a member—the Optical Society of America and SPIE.

Using various available dictionaries, I was able to determine the meaning of the existing and proposed names of the Optical Society of America:

**Optical Society of America (OSA):** An organized American group that works together or meets periodically because of common interests, beliefs, or professional activities of or relating to the science that deals with the genesis and propagation of electromagnetic radiation in the wavelength range including infrared, visible, ultraviolet, and x-rays and traveling in vacuum with a speed of about 300 million meters per second, the changes that it undergoes, and other phenomena closely associated with it.

**Optics and Photonics Society (OPS):** An organized group that works together or meets periodically because of common interests, beliefs, or professional activities in the science that deals with the genesis and propagation of electromagnetic radiation in the wavelength range including infrared, visible, ultraviolet, and x-rays and traveling in vacuum with a speed of about 300 million meters per second, the changes that it undergoes, and other phenomena closely associated with it, and the technology of generating and harnessing electromagnetic radiation in the wavelength range including infrared, visible, ultraviolet, and x-rays and traveling in vacuum with a speed of about 300 million meters per second and other forms of energy traveling as a wave motion, whose quantum unit is the photon, including the emission, transmission, deflection, amplification, and detection of electromagnetic radiation in the wavelength range including infrared, visible, ultraviolet, and x-rays and traveling in vacuum with a speed of about 300 million meters per second by components and instruments of or relating to the science that deals with the genesis and propagation of electromagnetic radiation in the wavelength range including infrared, visible, ultraviolet, and x-rays and traveling in vacuum with a speed of about 300 million

meters per second, the changes that it undergoes, and other phenomena closely associated with it, devices that utilize the natural oscillations of atoms or molecules between energy levels for generating coherent electromagnetic radiation in the ultraviolet, visible, or infrared regions of the spectrum and other sources, the technique of the use of a very thin transparent homogeneous fiber of glass or plastic that is enclosed by material of lower refractive index and transmits throughout its length by internal reflections, instrumentation of or relating to the branch of physics that deals with the effects of an electric field on electromagnetic radiation in the wavelength range including infrared, visible, ultraviolet, and x-rays and traveling in vacuum with a speed of about 300 million meters per second, utilization of devices constructed or working by methods or principles of the branch of physics that deals with the emission, behavior, and effects of the constituent elementary atomic particle consisting of a charge of negative electricity, associated hardware, and sophisticated systems.

This second description is not only somewhat repetitive, it is a bit redundant as well. Consequently, I am having trouble understanding why the proposed name is better than the present name. At any rate, some of my colleagues are in favor of changing the name and some are against it—and I agree with my colleagues. I also predict that the society will thrive with or without the name change.

When I started writing this editorial, I had fully intended to investigate the meaning of the name Society of Photo-Optical Instrumentation Engineers (SPIE); however, after completing the two descriptions above, my head was spinning so much I just couldn't face another. In fact, I was so confused and disoriented that I wasn't even certain who I was for a while. This annoying experience is happening to me more and more, and some days I even think I'm Jim Wyant.

Finally, I would like to leave with you some valuable information I gleaned from my dictionaries while doing research for this editorial: OSA denotes the Order of St. Augustine; Ops was the Roman goddess of fertility and plenty, and the wife of Saturn; and, spie is an obsolete variation of the word "spy". Happy April Fool's Day!

[*Managing Editor's note:* Our venerable and sagacious Editor's tendency toward frivolity, periodically surfacing in monthly editorials (which he lives to write), occasionally lapses into arcane humor. For the benefit of those readers who don't know Jack Gaskill personally or who may be new readers of this column, we feel compelled to explain the reference to one Jim Wyant in the next to last paragraph of this editorial. Jim Wyant and our Editor have been colleagues on the faculty of the Optical Sciences Center, University of Arizona, for many years. Each has served SPIE as a volunteer in many capacities. On top of their common technical interests and employment experience, they look remarkably alike and are frequently taken for brothers, even mistaken for each other.]

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