

# Through the Looking Glass

A history of eyewear fashion in Minnesota.

Photos by Steve Wewerka | Eyeglasses courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society



This pair of grey-and-black plastic-frame glasses with bifocal lenses was worn by Hubert H. Humphrey, Jr., while serving as the 38th vice president of the United States. They date from the early 1960s.

Two stories below ground level at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul are rooms filled with thousands of artifacts from the daily lives of Minnesotans dating from 1,000 years ago to the present. Among them are a collection of spectacles, most of which were worn by people remembered only by their descendants. From delicate-but-plain wire readers to fancy pince-nez and lorgnettes, the spectacles provide a glimpse into the individuals who wore them and the eras in which they lived.

With the help of curator Matt Anderson, we selected a few from the collection that we felt reflect the changing styles and technologies that have kept Minnesotans seeing clearly for the last 200 years.

—the editors



- A. Brown plastic frames with round lenses worn in the 1920s
- B. Pince-nez with silver frames and 17-inch silver chain attached to a handle, circa 1900
- C. Plastic-rimmed glasses with clip-on sunglasses from the 1990s
- D. Sunglasses from the 1950s



Sunglasses used by explorer Ann Bancroft during the 2000-01 Bancroft-Arnesen expedition to Antarctica.



These oval plastic lenses mounted in plastic frames belonged to Tiger Jack, who owned the Tiger Jack "Shack" shop at 369 Dale Street North in St. Paul.



G



H



E



I



F

- E. Lorgnette with blue enamel case from the 1870s. The glasses fold in half and fit into the frame.
- F. Shooting glasses likely worn by a hunter or recreational shooter between 1885 and 1900. The translucent amber of the outer lenses reduces glare and visual distraction, while the transparent circles at the center allow for concentrated focus on a target.
- G. Aviator-style glasses with tinted lenses and bifocals. This pair was worn by Ken Davis of jazz and barbecue fame in the 1980s.
- H. Trifocals with red plastic frames from the 1940s. A stamp in their accompanying case shows they came from Roddy-Kuhl-Ackerman Master Opticians in St. Paul.
- I. Metal-framed spectacles with extension bows worn between 1800 and the 1840s