

Optical Engineering

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Breaking with the Past

Michael T. Eismann



Breaking with the Past

Like many people, I have a clutter problem. Over the years, I have accumulated many belongings, most with more of a sentimental than financial value, and I have difficulty parting with them. While I convince myself that these belongings may find some usefulness to me in the future, or perhaps they might become valued heirlooms to pass down to my two daughters, I suspect the reality is that many just represent a part of my past with which I have difficulty leaving behind. It is as if part of my past would disappear with them.

I had a similar experience with *Optical Engineering*. When I began my career, I received my monthly journal issues in the mail, perused the papers that I found most interesting and relevant to my research, and then nicely placed them on my bookshelf for future reference. When the bookshelf overflowed, I began a stack on the floor in the corner of my office, and ultimately accumulated quite a repository. At some point, I realized that this habit really made no sense whatsoever. I infrequently looked back at old volumes. When I did need to review the literature on some research topic, I would usually visit the technical library to search for relevant papers as it was much better organized. Ultimately, SPIE began its online Digital Library, making my practice of maintaining old journal volumes even more unnecessary. Even so, it was difficult to finally place the collection into the recycle bin. It felt like saying farewell to old friends.

It is time again to bid farewell to an old friend as SPIE has decided to discontinue print journals at the end of this calendar year. The December 2019 issue of *Optical Engineering*

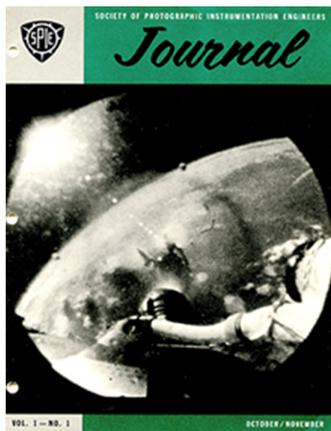
will be the last one in print. The reason for this decision is certainly obvious to all of you: the demand for printed versions of *Optical Engineering* has declined to such a miniscule level that it is cost prohibitive and provides an exceedingly niche value as online versions have provided readers with numerous advantages, such as ease of search and access, full color, multimedia, and direct linking to references. In today's digital age, it has simply become a relic of the past.

But what an admirable past it has been. The first issue was published in October/November 1962 under the title *Society of Photographic Instrumentation Engineers Journal*. It contained four papers on topics ranging from infrared emulsions to photographic lens evaluation. The front cover of this issue is depicted in Fig. 1 along with a number of others up to our October 2019 edition. By comparison, the 2019 volume is averaging just over 50 papers per issue across the full scope of our current journal.

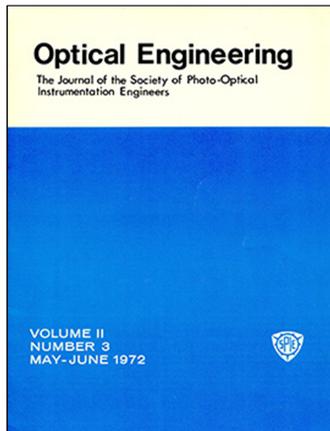
Subscriptions to the print version of *Optical Engineering* reached a high point in 1991 with an average of 12,895 mailed subscriptions per volume. Since then, it has dwindled to roughly 100 per issue by a series of events: the launch of other topical journals by SPIE starting with the *Journal of Electronic Imaging* in 1992, the first CD-ROM version in 1996, online access to individual subscribers in 1998, online access to libraries and institutions in 1999, the release of the first version of the SPIE Digital Library in 2003, and an additional cost to SPIE members choosing to receive print versions instituted in 2005.

While the rationale is clear, I must admit that I am a bit melancholy about the end of the print journal. Recent years have seen a large expansion in new online scientific journals, and I have always considered the legacy of *Optical Engineering* as a longstanding print journal for the Society to be a distinguishing characteristic relative to these less-rooted alternatives for scientific publication. In reality, this legacy remains even as the hard copies go by the wayside. It is not really a break from the past, just a continual improvement in response to the needs of our authors and readers as we continue to move into the future. That is a mindset that can be applied to a number of different issues, including my personal clutter problem.

Michael T. Eismann
Editor-in-Chief



(a) October/November 1962



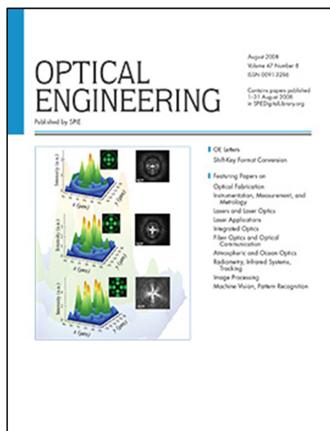
(b) May/June 1972



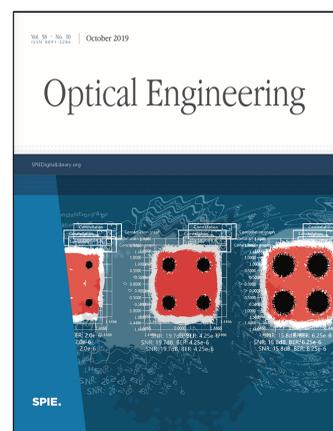
(c) February 1982



(d) November 1998



(e) August 2008



(f) October 2019

Fig. 1 Front covers for a number of *Optical Engineering* issues over the past 57 years. (a) October/November 1962, (b) May/June 1972, (c) February 1982, (d) November 1998, (e) August 2008, and (f) October 2019.