Brian J. Thompson succeeded W. Lewis Hyde, inheriting an Institute of Optics which had grown unbelievably in the last 15 or 20 years, from a faculty of four or five to one of about 20. A visitor’s first impression could be deceiving, however, for several units of the Institute were in other buildings.

Thompson graduated from Manchester University in 1955, taught for a while at both Manchester and Leeds, and came to this country in 1963. Since then, he has had experience both in industry and university. He taught at Northeastern University in Boston as adjunct professor and held senior scientific positions at Tech Ops Inc. and at Beckman and Whiteley. While his basic research field is physical optics, he has also done special studies in holograms, particle sizing, and hybrid opto-electronic processors.

In his unique, direct, and easy way, Thompson familiarized himself with the whole situation, including the Institute’s history and its alumni. The news sheet was to continue but under a new name: instead of I.O.N., it would be called IMAGE. In the summer 1969 issue of IMAGE, Thompson published a report of a survey of the alumni: income figures reported showed no relation between income and the level of degree. The four men with the highest incomes had only B.S. degrees. However, these people qualified early in the history of the Institute and this relationship is expected to change. Nearly all the alumni felt the importance of specializing in optics. In 1969, the demand for personnel trained in optics still, as throughout the history of the Institute, exceeded the supply.

Thompson continued the summer courses, which date back to the 1950s. Subjects varied; for several years it was always contemporary optics. Recently, two separate courses have been given either in parallel or in sequence, one on modern optics and one on optical systems design. Four or five of the faculty take part, and company visits and social occasions are included.

Thompson made a considerable number of appointments to the faculty in the course of his seven years as Director, including a number of foreign visitors. The following is a typical list of faculty in the 1970s: Professors—
B. J. Thompson, R. N. Boynton (shared with psychology), M. Parker Givens, R. E. Hopkins (part-time), R. Kingslake (part-time), K. Teegarden, A. Boettner (visiting from University of Michigan Department of Industrial Hygiene for a study using pulsed laser holography), J. M. Burch (visiting from the National Physical Laboratory, England); Associate Professors—P. W. Baumeister, M. Hercher, J. C. Heurtley, Moshe Lubin (mechanical and aerospace sciences), J. C. Peskin, D. C. Sinclair, B. B. Snavely (part-time); also, Assistant Professors—M. Creuzburg (visiting from Germany), J. M. Forsyth, G. C. Sherman, C. R. Stroud, J. M. Brady, and Research Scientist, D. B. Dutton; also, J. H. Altman and J. L. Hamilton, lecturers from Eastman Kodak Company; 23 altogether.

From 1971 to 1977, the following have been added as others resigned or a need arose: N. Balasubramanian, D. T. Moore, J. L. Brown, C. W. Gabel, P. T. Gough (New Zealand), D. L. MacAdam (part-time), and N. George. Many of these faculty are well known in their fields, and their names will immediately be recognized by the informed reader.

In 1971, the student registration was as follows: 50 doing graduate work for M.S. and Ph.D., as well as 25 in the part-time program which had been introduced recently. Twenty-two students were in the undergraduate full-time program. All the graduates were finding jobs, and some had several offers. In the same year, there were three Ph.D. theses, seven M.S. theses, 43 articles in scientific journals, three books published, and 18 papers presented at scientific meetings.

The Laboratory for Laser Energetics had very recently been established as an interdisciplinary laboratory in the College of Engineering and Applied Science, of which The Institute of Optics is a unit. The Institute is playing a major role in the establishment of this unique university research center. As time goes on, specialists in The Institute of Optics are being called in for advice and cooperation. Several of the faculty have been lost to L.L.E. Moshe Lubin directed the Laboratory, and about six or eight of the faculty have been involved. Actually the Laboratory for Laser Energetics is providing excellent research opportunities for graduate students.

The Institute received a valuable gift in 1970: a set of three high-precision optical flats made of the non-expanding Cervit glass-ceramic material was presented by Owens-Illinois, one of the industrial friends of the Institute. It was accepted with due ceremony by the President of the University, following a program of speakers from The Institute of Optics in the morning. The Institute of Optics through the years owes so much—even its very existence in the beginning—to its friends in industry who through material gifts, scholarships, and advice in some way assist the Institute from time to time. A supporting group from industry, known as the Industrial Associates, meets at least annually for two days to hear papers from the faculty and senior research students, to tour the Institute, and to talk over developments and mutual problems in relation to the Institute.

Thompson, in the early part of his administration, began to collect books for an Institute of Optics library. Recently, he became interested in the possibility of assembling a collection of ancient and valuable books which the Rush Rhees Library would add to its collection of rare books. This thought occurred in 1971 when Mrs. William P. Price donated her alumnus husband’s collection to the Institute. Mrs. Franz Urbach also donated some books.

A very fine innovation of the Thompson years has been the colloquia for the benefit of graduate students: a series of speakers through the year are invited to address the students in late afternoon. A coffee hour for socializing and scientific discussion is a pleasant beginning or ending to the meeting. Subjects of the talks are reports of most recent
developments. Speakers are traveling scientists known to be passing near Rochester, research workers from local industry, our own faculty, or a student who has something to report; there is an unlimited variety of interesting information and intimate contact with the speaker. They are well attended and planned by a faculty member who takes the responsibility for the year.

Summer-school lectures are normally given at the University, but sometimes speakers are invited to repeat a course elsewhere. In 1973 such a large number of optically interested people in Israel wished to attend the course that Professor Emanuel Marom of the University of Tel Aviv invited Thompson and Kingslake to give a two-week course in Israel; modern optics one week and optical systems design and geometrical optics the other week. About 50 attended, and the expedition was a great mutual pleasure.

Since 1950, 21 Coast Guard officers have come to Rochester, at first for training in optics only; then they took the acoustics at M.I.T. Since the establishment of the College of Engineering and Applied Science, they have taken both courses here in a three-year program, many ending with an M.S. in both optics and electrical engineering. The officers are experienced men with three to five years of active duty behind them. This additional training fits them for interesting scientific assignments in the Service.

In 1975, it became clear that Thompson had done too well, for he was appointed Dean of the College of Engineering and Applied Science, and once again The Institute of Optics had to find a new Director. However, Thompson was not quite lost to the Institute, for he remains Professor of Optics, lectures regularly, and is still publishing optical papers.

In an interview article, published in *Optics News*, summer 1979, Brian Thompson expressed his thinking with regard to The Institute of Optics:

President Sproull has often referred to the Institute as a “jewel in the crown of the University.” A university of Rochester’s size must select its areas of excellence carefully, since it cannot hope to cover all fields in depth and breadth. The international reputation of the Institute brings the College and the University to the attention of a wide spectrum of scientific, engineering, and technological workers. Perhaps the greatest impact that the Institute has had is in interdisciplinary research and the role it has played in the spawning of new ventures and programs on campus. The first of these was the Center for Visual Science, a more recent example being the Laboratory for Laser Energetics. At the present time there is a rather significant effort going on in medical optics. Faculty and students in the Institute are collaborating with faculty and students in electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, and radiation biology, in a number of projects. In the last few years the Institute has been coupled closely with a group in the chemistry department in a program researching the field of laser chemistry. I can only be delighted with the impact
that the Institute has had on both the College and the University. These interactions only come about, of course, because the Institute remains strong and in the forefront of all phases of today’s optical science and engineering.

Brian Thompson’s resignation was, of course quite unforeseen. Professor Parker Givens was appointed Acting Director and eventually served for almost two years.