



William R Pinckles

WILLIAM R. PRINDLE

1926–2016

Elected in 1990

“For outstanding leadership and innovation in the direction of industrial research and development in modern glass and ceramics technology.”

BY DAVID L. MORSE

WILLIAM ROSCOE PRINDLE, former division vice president and associate director of technology at Corning Incorporated, passed away December 29, 2016, at his home in Santa Barbara. He was 90 years old.

He was born in San Francisco on December 19, 1926, to Drs. Harriette Nickerson and Vivian Arthur Prindle, both dentists, and grew up in Oakland. During World War II he was in the V-12 Navy program and was sent to the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned his BS and MS in physical metallurgy. He then moved east to get his ScD in ceramic engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

When Bill arrived at MIT in 1950 he was assigned the task of overseeing several starting graduate students in what was then the Ceramics Division (one of the students, John R. Hutchins III, rose to become director of research at Corning). The project was one of three sponsored by the Hazel-Atlas Glass Company (which later became part of the Continental Can Company, CCC) as part of a multi-institutional study to understand the strength of glass (the other two were studies of strength at Penn State University and Mellon Institute in

This tribute is adapted from the obituary written by Bill Prindle’s son, William A. Prindle (1952–2019).

Pittsburgh). Hazel-Atlas was a very small container manufacturer, but it had a director of research, Francis Flint, who had a passion for fundamental research. Bill probably inherited from him both his passion for research and his technique of personnel management.

Bill's ScD thesis was titled "The Electron Microscopy of Glass Surfaces." At the time the application of electron microscopy to materials was in its infancy. The ceramics group at MIT had obtained an early version of a microscope designed and built by the biology department, where the use of electron microscopy on biological systems was actively studied. Nothing had yet been published on the application of the technique to glasses. Bill's research was at a very fundamental level and aimed at trying to apply this new tool to the study of the character of glass surfaces.

Bill started a program of basic research in glass and also embarked in management, an area that was ultimately to be his career. His management work did not get headlines, but it was clearly important to both industry and government—and satisfying to Bill.

He had an illustrious career in the fields of glass, ceramics, and materials research and development, working at CCC's Hazel-Atlas Glass Division, American Optical Company, Ferro Corporation, the National Materials Advisory Board (a unit of the National Research Council), and Corning. At the American Optical Company, he oversaw the development of glass lasers, and later at Corning he helped in the commercialization of silica lightguide fibers.

At Corning he was highly regarded by his colleagues. He was Corporate Fellow George Beall's supervisor at one point. "I found Bill interested and very accommodating to my research ideas and ideas in general," George said. "He was a true gentleman and a pleasure to work with."

Former Corning director of technical services Gus Filbert shared a similar sentiment. "I reported to Bill from 1980 until his retirement from Corning in 1992, and remember him as a competent scientist, able leader, and a gentleman," he said. "It

was easy to have a conversation with Bill—he knew his science and rarely raised his voice.”

Tom Seward also reported to Bill during his research career at Corning. “He brought an element of dignity or class to any activity he was involved with and was always willing to take time to share his prior experience in research management and counsel me as needed,” Tom said. “Bill was very well liked, respected, and well known throughout the international glass community. And on one occasion, he turned over to me an invitation he had to speak at an international glass manufacturers meeting, which provided me with an opportunity to promote Corning.”

L. David Pye, dean emeritus of Alfred University and past president and Distinguished Life Member of the American Ceramic Society (ACerS), remembers Bill as “one of a kind” as well as “a gentleman, scientist, scholar, mentor, and friend to many.” “He represented all that is best in the worldwide field of glass science and engineering and could inspire cooperation and friendship among disparate groups across the globe in a variety of venues where all others might fail,” David said. “The service of Bill as president of the International Commission on Glass and the American Ceramic Society set the example for all who would follow him.”

Bill held leadership positions in professional societies and was recognized for his dedication and accomplishments. In addition to his NAE membership, he was a Distinguished Life Member, fellow, and president (1980–81) of ACerS. In 1983 he received the Phoenix Award from the International Commission on Glass (ICG), which he subsequently served as president (1985–88).

After retiring from Corning in 1992, Bill settled in Santa Barbara. He was an avid reader, was interested in family genealogy, and loved to travel.

His stepdaughter Abbie wrote that

Bill enjoyed visits from family and friends, engaging in long discussions about science, travel, politics, and the arts. His

thirst for learning and knowledge sustained his avid reading and personal interests throughout his retirement. When asked what the greatest contribution was he accomplished during his career, Bill humbly noted that his research teams at Corning were responsible for commercializing fiber optics technology—a contribution that has changed the world and is featured at the Smithsonian as a great American innovation. Bill's legacy as a loving father, great scientist, and man who always listened and cared will live forever in our hearts and minds.

There's a wonderful quote from an old Jimmy Stewart movie called *Harvey*: "In this world, Elwood, you must be oh so smart or oh so pleasant. Well, for years I was smart. I recommend pleasant." That quote is a reminder of Bill, except Bill never had to choose between the two: He was oh so smart and oh so pleasant, every moment you knew him.

Knowing Bill Prindle was one of the great privileges of our lives. Family was lucky enough to spend many mornings talking with him—about books, about life—and those conversations are treasures [that] will be carried with us forever. He was the type of person we can all hope to be: generous, loyal, facing his illness with a kind, wry sense of humor. If the measure of a man is whether he left the world a better place than he found it, then Bill was not only deeply good, but also truly great.

Bill was a man of wide-ranging interests and vision for fundamental research, development, and production, and especially a man with compassion for and understanding of his fellow workers.

His first wife, June Anderson, predeceased him. He was survived by his wife Jeanne, son Will (a glassmaker), daughter Carol, son-in-law Ahmad, grandson Sam, and stepchildren Jane, William, and Abbie and their children.

