

PITTSBURGHIA

THE SILVERMANS' GOLDEN YEAR

By BARNETTA DAVIS LANGE

It is with deep personal pride that we bring to these pages one of Pittsburgh's most distinguished and beloved couples—a couple who are Pittsburghers by birth, education and spirit—a couple whose names are recognized by every literate person hereabouts. Yet now that they are on the threshold of their golden wedding anniversary (an event of December 16) we want to add our congratulations to the innumerable panegyrics Alexander and Elrose Silverman have so frequently and deservedly received.

If this writer sounds prejudiced in their behalf, it is because she is. But even were we to view objectively Aunt Elrose and Uncle Alec, as they are affectionately known, the inescapable fact is that Pittsburgh—and the world—would be infinitely poorer without them.

Let the record speak for a moment: Dr. Alexander Silverman, professor of chemistry, emeritus, at the University of Pittsburgh, where he headed the chemical department from 1915 until 1951, World Authority on Glass (he was introduced as "Mr. Glass of the World" at a recent conference) and a member, officer or fellow, as the case may be, of countless international organizations, both in chemistry and glass!

His interest in chemistry dates back to his boyhood, when he became intrigued with the variations of water marks on the stamps which he collected. He employed certain chemicals to bring out the water marks and certain others to restore their color. His interest in chemistry "expanded" when, as a youth he worked with a friend behind a pharmacy counter. But his initial major accomplishment in the field of chemistry occurred when as an employee of the MacBeth Evans Glass Company in Charleroi, he was able to rediscover the lost science of making alabaster glass, the use of which was responsible for the successful development of the Edison Carbon Filament Lamp.

Uncle Alec has been on the faculty of the University of Pittsburgh since 1905. His list of memberships, tri-lingual publications, honorary societies and international meetings, both chemical and in the field of glass, bespeaks a lifetime of dedicated, scholarly and purposeful study and research. But with this erudition goes an almost disproportionate sense of modesty. On one occasion when he was being awarded one of his numerous doctorates, he whispered to his wife, "I wish to God I knew half as much as they think I do."

We shall not attempt to list all of his organizations, but we should like to mention that Dr. Silverman is president of the Commission on Inorganic Nomenclature of the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry. During the war years he was Consultant on Glass for the Office of Production Research and Development of the War Production Board. The locales of his international meetings cover the map of Europe. Almost thirty years ago in Liege, Belgium, he was the U.S. delegate and delegate of the American Ceramic Society of the International Meeting of Industrial Chemistry; also delegate of National Research Council and National Academy of Sciences to the Tenth Conference of the International Union of Chemistry. Four years later saw him in Madrid. Subsequent meetings took him to Lucerne, later Rome, London,

his patents, over 30; his lectures and addresses, well over 200, the preponderant number of which have dealt with glass. His honors and awards are literally countless.

Uncle Alec is as at home in the German and French languages as he is in his own. Both in Germany and France he presents highly technical addresses to audiences in their own tongue and finds it difficult to convince his listeners that he's not a native.

Being a cosmopolitan figure, it is not astonishing then that the Silvermans number among their friends people from every corner of this planet. Nor are their friendships bound by age, color,

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origin, interest or social status. Their friendship for the penniless little students that Aunt Elrose helped through school, are no less real than was their friendship for the late Serge Koussevitzky. Uncle Alec became friendly with him on a voyage on the S. S. Normandie. The great conductor approached him to express his thanks for a lecture on glass which he had just delivered in the salon. Seeing that Mr. Koussevitzky had a scholarly interest in the subject (and this perhaps is a good place to mention that at one time in his life Uncle Alec seriously considered becoming a music teacher!) the two developed a friendship which lasted until the death of the famous conductor.

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Aunt Elrose has starred beautifully throughout the years in her role as Mrs. Glass. But she's quite a personage in her own right. For over 35 years she dedicated herself to the scholarship work of the Council of Jewish Women. She also served the Allegheny County Scholarship Association. Many of the individuals for whom she helped obtain scholarship funds are now leaders in their various fields. But to any word of praise she replies, "Oh, hush." She strongly feels that she was "just permitted to be an instrument." Having no children of her own, she "had to do something for somebody else's children." And "her children" have rewarded her in countless measure. Many of her "students" are worlds away from Pittsburgh, but they never forgot Aunt Elrose's early pleas in their behalf. One orphaned student whom she helped through

school is now a doctor in chemistry and married to a prominent physician. She recently told her children, in Aunt Elrose's presence to "take a good look at this lady. Whatever I have achieved is due to her efforts." This incident can be multiplied a hundredfold.

Uncle Alec has too enjoyed many rewarding moments—for example the success attained by Dr. Kwan Huan Sun, a young Chinese student who took his doctorate at Pitt, went on to a research position at Eastman's and now heads the Nuclear Research Division at Westinghouse! (He's recently been granted a sabbatical leave in order to teach at the University of Formosa.)

For relaxation the Silvermans enjoy bridge and music. Uncle Alec has recently retired his trusty putter for less frustrating diversions. He is also a prodigious reader—that is, when he isn't busy being an author himself.

Aunt Elrose feels that if you can benefit humanity, even an "infinitesimal amount," you've justified your existence. Uncle Alec has implicit faith. He feels that nature goes forward, and having this faith, he has confidence in mankind's future. Furthermore as to one's individual future, he cites Browning:

"Grow old along with me
The best is yet to be."

Perhaps most notable about this couple is their devotion to each other. Their lifelong partnership has been—well, that's another story. And perhaps on the threshold of their diamond anniversary we'll have the pleasure of narrating that!