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The Generations of Corning: The Life and Times of a Global Corporation.

By Davis Dyer and Daniel Gross. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
Pp. xx+507. \$25.

This intriguing history reconstructs the intersecting patterns of continuity and change at Corning, one the world's oldest and most successful manufacturing enterprises. A remark in the firm's 1971 annual report captures these seemingly contradictory themes: "This company must continue to probe, to take chances, to pursue the high potential of this extraordinary material [glass] with which we're dealing. Historically that has been our path to success, and we are convinced it will be so in the foreseeable future" (p. 309). At the core of *The Generations of Corning* is the firm's remarkable ability to continuously reinvent itself.

This is one of three works commissioned by Corning to celebrate its 150th anniversary. The authors, Davis Dyer and Daniel Gross, are associated with The Winthrop Group. Bernard Carlson served as an academic adviser, and Oxford University Press subjected the manuscript to an outside review process.

Corning's story involves numerous topics of interest to historians of business and technology, including family ownership and management, welfare capitalism and labor relations, industrial research and development, mechanization and technology transfer, strategy and organizational structure, government-business interaction, wartime production, and international expansion. The challenge of surveying such a wide range of topics over such a long period must have been daunting, but the authors have succeeded in providing a fluid and insightful company history.

The Generations of Corning is a chronological narrative organized in six parts (six distinct "generations" of leadership). The first eighty years are traced rather quickly in three chapters. Corning was founded by Amory Houghton, and he and his descendants dominated the firm through 1996. The treatment of Corning's early development, including its Massachusetts origins (1851) and subsequent relocation to Brooklyn (1864) and then to Corning, New York (1868), effectively portrays the fortunes of America's dynamic, and often perilous, glass industry. Unfortunately, short shrift is given to Amory's earlier career, which symbolized the crucial nexus between artisans, merchants, and America's industrial development. (Similarly, one learns comparatively little of the glass industry in the twentieth century.)

Between the Civil War and World War I, Houghton's sons and grandsons transformed Corning into a highly profitable, mid-sized firm that focused on specialized glass products, and none were more important than the com-

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pany's electric lightbulb casings. The nine decades after World War I witnessed Corning's growing commitment to research and development. Among the fruits harvested from this strategy were the revolutionary ribbon machine, Pyrex, Celcor (ceramic substrates for catalytic converters), cathode ray tubes, and fiber optics. The book also chronicles Corning's post-World War II international expansion via mergers and acquisitions and joint ventures (Pittsburgh-Corning, Dow-Corning, Owens-Corning, Siecor GmbH, and so on).

The overall scope of this book is most impressive and the narrative is generally coherent, but it sometimes suffers from repetitive phrases (the next "big hit" appears all too frequently) and poor syntax. There are typographical errors, including an embarrassing misspelling of Amory (p. x). More disturbing are occasional factual errors. For example, the authors wrongly place Amory Houghton's initial investment in the glass industry at Somerville, Massachusetts, when local histories and incorporation and tax records indicate that it actually occurred in Cambridge, home of the Bay State Glass Company. Brothers Arthur and Alanson Houghton are misidentified as cousins (p. 5). The authors incorrectly state that Alanson and George Santayana were "lifelong" chums (p. 63), whereas there is no record of meaningful contact between them during the last forty years of Alanson's life. The claim that the company did not experience labor problems between 1891 and 1957 is also erroneous: there was a strike at Corning in 1911 and a major lockout that same year.

On the whole, such problems are infrequent and the book's strengths far exceed its weaknesses. *The Generations of Corning* stands as a valuable secondary source for business historians who can use it as a starting point for in-depth investigations. The company's fascinating story will even appeal to a broader audience, but historians of technology are most likely to be interested in a companion book, *Corning and the Craft of Innovation* (2001), which provides more detailed analyses of technological achievements.

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Nylon: The Story of a Fashion Revolution.

By Susannah Handley. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
Pp. 192. \$29.95.

For those who assume nylon's greatest contribution to the sartorial world to have been the introduction of synthetic stockings to eager North American female consumers in 1938, *Nylon* offers a far more elaborate account of the manmade fiber's relation to fashion, from ready-made to couture