

Paul D. Parkman, M.D.



Paul Douglas Parkman of Auburn, NY, formerly of Kensington, MD and Weedsport, NY, died on Tuesday, May 7, 2024, at the age of 91. Paul was born in Auburn on May 29, 1932, to Stuart Douglas and Mary Klumpp Parkman.

A 1950 graduate of Weedsport High School, Paul attended St. Lawrence University under an accelerated pre-med program and received his B.S. from St. Lawrence and M.D. from the SUNY Health Science Center in Syracuse, NY in 1957. After interning at Mary Imogene Bassett Hospital in Cooperstown, he returned to Upstate Medical Center, specializing in pediatrics and serving as chief resident. He joined the Army and in 1960, was assigned to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Maryland as a virologist. It was during this time he began studying the rubella (German measles) virus. Rubella is a contagious viral infection that causes mild to moderate illness for most, but for pregnant women it frequently manifests in a highly increased risk of miscarriages or stillbirths, and often devastating birth defects including severe mental and physical impairments.

Dr. Parkman was the first person to isolate the virus, which was the most critical step in developing the vaccine. In 1963 he joined the National Institutes of Health (NIH), where he partnered with Dr. Harry Meyer to develop the vaccine that would prevent infection and the resulting birth defects.

As a result of their work, Drs. Parkman and Meyer held two rubella patents, which would have enabled them to profit from the sale of manufacturing rights. Instead, they assigned their patents to the US Department of Health so that the vaccine could be distributed as quickly and affordably as possible, to as many people as possible. It was eventually incorporated with measles and mumps vaccines (MMR) and is now commonly administered as part of pediatric protocol.

Included among the many honors bestowed upon Dr. Parkman was a letter from US President Lyndon B. Johnson, which reads, in part:

“Few men can number themselves among those who directly and measurably advance human welfare, save precious lives, and bring new hope to the world. Through your accomplishments in developing an effective experimental vaccine against German measles, you and Dr. Harry Meyer have joined that tiny legion.”

Dr. Parkman went on to have a very long and distinguished career holding multiple positions at Walter Reed, the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration and authoring more than 90 scientific papers. He retired in 1990 from the FDA as the Director of the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, but for many years continued to consult as an expert in his field.

Among Dr. Parkman's many honors and recognitions are letters of commendation from Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson and George H.W. Bush, the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation's International Award for Distinguished Scientific Research, the American Academy of Achievement Golden Plate Award, and the Department of Health and Human Services' Meritorious Award. He received an honorary Doctor of Science degree from SUNY Health Science Center, was recognized as a Distinguished Alumnus by the Syracuse Medical Alumni Association, and as the first Graduate of Distinction by the Weedsport Central School District.

By his side throughout his lifetime was his devoted and loving wife, Elmerina Leonardi Parkman. Paul and Elmerina met in Weedsport Central School District's kindergarten classroom and married on July 2, 1955. They shared a love story for the ages and would have celebrated their 69th wedding anniversary in just a few months.

As a couple, they were interested in the American Studio Glass movement from its earliest days and became very serious collectors. They documented the movement, traveled extensively to meet various artists, and attended glass events, exhibitions and shows. The first piece of glass they acquired was in 1969 and the final piece in 2016, illustrating their commitment to the art and artists of Studio Glass across six decades. They donated large portions of their collection and records to the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Corning Museum of Glass. It is not an overstatement to say that the work Paul and Elmerina did in documenting their passion for glass will shed light on generations of Studio Glass artists and their work.

Dr. Parkman was a Fellow at the Corning Museum of Glass, Founding Member of the James Renwick Alliance, and a Commissioner of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. He and Elmerina were well known and respected for their contributions to the glass community.

Dr. Parkman will be long remembered for his outgoing personality, wonderful sense of humor, dapper appearance, and his love and devotion to his extended family and friends, especially his wife Elmerina. He was a gentleman to his very core, and those of us fortunate enough to have spent time with him will remember his authenticity and exemplary character.

Dr. Parkman was predeceased by his parents, his brother, Stuart Bruce Parkman, and his sister Phyllis Parkman Thompson.

He is survived by his wife, Elmerina Leonardi Parkman of Auburn, NY, nieces Wendy Elizabeth Thompson of East Greenbush, NY, and Mary Brooke Thompson-Mills of Canton, MA, and numerous members of the extended Leonardi family.

A memorial service will be held on Saturday, May 25th at 11 a.m. at the White Chapel Funeral Home, 2719 Erie Drive, Weedsport, NY. Interment to follow at the Weedsport Rural Cemetery, 3037 East Brutus Street Road, Weedsport, NY.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Dr. Parkman's memory may be made to: Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum, MRC 510 Box 37012, Washington, DC 20013-7012, Attn: Paul Parkman Donations, or Corning Museum of Glass, 1 Museum Way, Corning, NY 14830, Attn: Paul Parkman Donations, or to the charity of your choice.