
Editor's Note: This tribute was submitted by Gary P. Tancy of Alcoa.

There are a few superlatives that describe Warren Haupin's stature as a scientist, such as world class and renowned. Alcoa recognized Warren and named him the winner of its very first Francis C. Frary Award in 1984 for individual technical excellence. TMS also recognized Warren by awarding him the very first Light Metals award in 1985 for individual excellence of a paper presented at the TMS annual meeting and the first TMS Light Metals Technology Award in 1996. Warren also won the 2002 Light Metals Division JOM Best Paper Award and lectured at the TMS short course on Industrial Aluminum Electrolysis, where his lectures on the history of the aluminum smelting process were greatly admired.

In a scientific world replete with people possessing masters and Ph.D. degrees, how did a man with only a B.S. degree to his name rise to the top of his field? A few things stand out: a spirit of cooperation with other aluminum researchers at both Alcoa locations and outside of Alcoa, a willingness to share knowledge and ideas with others and an openness to learn from those interactions, an astounding ability to generate new ideas, and an attitude of eternal optimism that prevented him from giving up on ideas until they were thoroughly tested and evaluated—and then only reluctantly.

Although Warren held a fondness in his heart for the “old days,” he applauded the work being carried out in today’s research laboratories. “We’re much deeper into real science and better at understanding fundamentals today than in the past,” Warren said in an article published in Alcoa’s newsletter, The LabLog, when he retired in 1985. “Much research in the old days was Edisonian research. That was not necessarily bad, because we often discovered things we wouldn’t have found through fundamental research. On the other hand, trying everything and hoping something works is a much less efficient process.”

Warren’s accomplishments—many of which are enumerated in the more than 135 technical reports, 20 addresses and seminars, and 24 publications he prepared and in the 20 patents he received—had their most profound impact in the smelting area. And in that regard, he shared a kinship with the person who developed the process that founded the company, Charles Martin Hall. “I think if Charles Martin Hall were here today he would be proud that his patent pretty much still describes the process today.”

Although his technical accomplishments will continue to be felt throughout the aluminum industry for years to come, Warren always believed his biggest contributions were made as both a formal and informal teacher of engineers. “By sharing my understanding of the fundamentals of smelting, it enabled others to understand the fundamentals and apply them to the process, and thereby do better work.”

“I always considered the projects that I worked on to be ones that had high probabilities of success, even though they probably had low probabilities of success in other people’s minds,” he chuckled. “Fortunately, I was able to prove myself correct on a few occasions.” Although we are all going to miss Warren, we will never forget the contributions he made to the aluminum smelting industry.