

William G. Pannill



William G. (Bill) Pannill of Palm Beach, Florida passed away on 10 June 2014 after a lengthy battle with cancer. He was 87.

Bill was born and raised in Martinsville, Virginia. He attended Fishburne Military School and the Virginia Military Institution. He spent three years in the US Army in Germany just after World War II and later resumed his studies at the University of Virginia.

His family name was synonymous with the Martinsville textile industry, and after a year at the North Carolina State School of Textiles he joined the family business in 1959. He headed Pannill Knitting Inc. from 1966 until 1988.

He served on many educational, business, cultural and social Boards, including those of Mary Baldwin College, the American Daffodil Society, the American Horticulture Society, the National Wildflower Research Center, Callaway Gardens, the Lewis Ginter

Botanical Garden and the Hospice Foundation of Palm Beach County. He was Elder and Trustee of the Forest Hills Presbyterian Church in Martinsville; he was an honorary member of the Garden Club of Virginia, the Garden Club of Palm Beach, and the Martinsville Garden Club.

He leaves behind his wife, Kit, two children, a sister and a brother-in-law and many grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

Bill's first attempt at exhibiting daffodils came at a small spring flower show in Martinsville in 1960. His introduction to daffodils had been through a collection of bulbs given to him by his sister, who was active in the Garden Club of Virginia. He soon met Harry Tuggle, who became his friend and mentor, sharing the increase of his wonderful bulbs with Bill, and taking him to American Daffodil Society (ADS) meetings (it was just getting started), and introduced him to Guy Wilson and Nel and Lionel Richardson. Bill joined the ADS in 1960 and the same year made 'about four or five crosses'. Later he met Murray Evans at a daffodil show in Santa Barbara, and when Murray agreed to plant and grow his seeds in Oregon, Bill 'became a whole hive of bees'. He went to Oregon every April for 24 years to select seedlings, and every July or August for 22 years to go fishing with Murray. Bill made most of his crosses in Virginia but some were made in Oregon; most of the seed was sown in Oregon; all of the blooms that he exhibited were grown in Virginia.

Bill has registered about 200 cultivars, beginning in 1970 and going on till 2012. Most hybridizers tend to specialise or to limit their activities to certain types of daffodils, but the Pannill registrations cover almost the complete range of types. It is difficult to think of a division or a color combination that is not graced by beautiful daffodils resulting from Bill's imaginative crosses. The exceptions would be division 10 for bulbocodium hybrids, and division 11, the split-corona daffodils for which Bill eloquently and humorously claimed an intense distaste!

Many of his cultivars have found their way to the Netherlands, where they are being grown on to supply gardens worldwide. At the World Convention in 2008 in the Netherlands, there were great fields of 'Chromacolor', 'Toto' and others.

Bill was an enthusiastic exhibitor, and in 1972 (remember, he made his first crosses in 1960) he won the coveted Gold Quinn Medal for a collection consisting entirely of his own seedlings, the first person to do so. His list of trophies and medals won at shows would fill several pages, and most all were won with Pannill-raised flowers.

When asked which of the daffodils he bred was his favourite, he replied that it seemed to change annually, 'but I suppose my favorite is 'River Queen'. . . My favourite show daffodil is 'Homestead', and I almost didn't select it. The cultivar which I hybridized of which I am most proud is 'Intrigue'. I think it has dual value for show and garden.'

In 1966 he became president of the American Daffodil Society, and served on the Board of Directors in many capacities over the years. The major awards in the daffodil world came his way, including the ADS Silver Medal in 1976, the ADS Gold Medal in 1984, and the RHS Peter Barr Memorial Cup in 2000. In 1997, the ADS established the William G. Pannill Award in his honour, to be given annually to an American hybridizer to recognise a named standard daffodil that has demonstrated winning show qualities for a minimum of five years following registration.

He had a sense of humour and an easy turn of phrase, which made him a popular speaker at daffodil events. Attendees at daffodil conventions know he always left his audience laughing.

Bill was a stalwart early on in the ADS, one of those who lifted the Society to a prominent position in the daffodil world. His passing leaves a great void, and his guiding presence will be sorely missed.

Mary Lou Gripshover