

Remembering Past President

The Angus breed celebrates the life of former American Angus Association president Bill Conley.

William (Bill) C. Conley, a pioneer in the Angus business and veteran of World War II, Groton, Mass., passed away Oct. 24, 2019. He was raised in Enfield, Conn., by his parents, the late Herbert and Helen (Denham) Conley. He was married to Norma (Smyth) Conley for nearly 60 years.



Like Norma, Bill's family also raised tobacco in the Connecticut River valley after immigrating to the United States in the mid-1800s. After working on farms picking tobacco leaves as a child and graduating high school in Enfield in 1942, Bill enlisted in the U.S. Navy in early 1943. He was then selected to attend highly specialized industrial gases training at the Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Mich. One of his fondest memories was of meeting Henry Ford himself, the forefather of the modern auto industry and 80 years old at the time, who shook Bill's hand as thanks for donating blood to the war effort.

Upon completion of training at Ford, Bill was among a select group of graduates chosen to continue their advanced training that would eventually lead to an assignment crucial to advancing the Pacific fleet on their long journey towards Japan and the end of the World War.

Initially assigned to a unit in the Solomon Islands, he was part of a mission that included supporting the repair of aircraft carriers and other ships damaged in the attack at Pearl Harbor as well as the Navy Cruiser U.S.S. Boise, which shortly thereafter carried General Douglas

MacArthur on his return mission to the Philippines in 1944.

When the war ended, he

was transferred to the Charlestown Navy Yard in Boston, then on to Brooklyn, N.Y., where he was discharged in 1946. Bill was awarded several medals recognizing his service

during the war effort.

Shortly after his discharge, Bill returned to Enfield and soon enrolled at the University of Connecticut, where he majored in animal science. It was during this time at Storrs in 1948 that he married Norma Smyth, his school classmate for several years and member of Enfield's Smyth Farm dairy and tobacco family.

As Bill excelled in his studies and approached graduation, Mrs. Marion D. Campbell, a descendant of the founder of International Harvester, approached him about assuming the leadership of a new black Angus cattle operation she had founded at Gibbet Hill Farm in Groton, Mass. This was the genesis of Bill's long and illustrious career in the beef cattle industry starting in 1950.

During his career, Bill was instrumental in leading efforts to improve how farmers raised animals. He brought this knowledge to farmers around the globe by visiting the Soviet Union in 1965 as well as Scotland, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and dozens of other countries.

Under his leadership, Gibbet Hill Farm became the gold standard in the Angus business, selling progeny in 47 states and in many foreign countries.

Descendants of the cattle Bill raised in Groton are heavily sought after to this day.

The overwhelming support he received from colleagues in the industry led to his election as president of the American Angus Association in 1983. One of Bill's proudest achievements while part of the leadership in the Angus business, was his participation in the creation of the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB) program in the late 1970s.

As he began his journey in leading the Association, Bill purchased farmland near Saint Joseph, Mo., which is now the home of Conley Angus Farm, where sons Bill and Timothy Conley currently reside and raise purebred Angus cattle.

Later in life as the Gibbet Hill Farm operation wound down following the death of Mrs. Campbell, Bill led efforts to preserve the farm for future generations to enjoy. He was instrumental in working with local residents and town government to put the farmland into a public trust and avoid commercial development of one of the largest and oldest farm operations in the Northeast.

Upon his retirement in 2003 and his wife's death in 2008, Bill continued to serve as an advisor to his sons, grandchildren and others in the cattle business.

Bill is survived by his daughter Barbara (Carl) Beyer; sons William (Donna) Conley, Timothy P. (Tammie) Conley, and Richard Conley; and his sister Jean Morrison. He is also survived by eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. **AJ**