



George Henry Vanderbilt Cecil

February 27, 1925 - October 19, 2020

George Henry Vanderbilt Cecil, beloved husband of Nancy Owen Cecil for sixty-one years, passed away peacefully at home on Monday, October 19, 2020, surrounded by his six children and overlooking the beautiful fall splendor of the garden where he and Nancy spent so much of their joyous life together.

George, the son of the Hon. John Francis Amherst Cecil and Cornelia Stuyvesant Vanderbilt, and a grandson of both George W. Vanderbilt and of Lord William Cecil, was born on February 27, 1925 at Biltmore House. At the age of seven he and his younger brother, William, moved to Europe, living, and educated between England and Switzerland. During World War II, George served as an officer in the British Royal Navy spending most of his duty in north Africa and Gibraltar. Immediately after the war, George was transferred to London to help with the massive reconstruction efforts due to War's blitz bombings.

In late 1946, George returned to Biltmore to assume responsibilities of the estate and of Biltmore Dairy. He spent much his time in the late 1940's and early 1950's living in Biltmore House with his father, John, whose health was failing. Shortly after his father's passing, he married Nancy Owen in 1955. For the next several decades, George's passion was the development and growth of Biltmore Dairy Farms, while William focused on the restoration and development of Biltmore House. Biltmore Dairy Farms grew to become one of the south's largest full-service dairy company renowned for its quality milk, ice cream and other dairy products. The bright yellow and black dairy delivery trucks were a frequent site, and the Biltmore Dairy Bar a favorite gathering place for breakfast, lunch and memorable ice cream treats. After selling the dairy operations in 1985, Biltmore Farms morphed into a multi-faceted community development company that includes the creation of towns, master-planned communities, and hotels. To this day, the company operates with the same values of his grandfather: a deep respect for sustainability and for the citizens of the western North Carolina.

George was passionate about empowering others and he, with his wife Nancy, dedicated much time and resources to helping those less fortunate and in need. Of particular note, he was integral in the co-founding the Western North Carolina Communities organization in 1949 – one of the oldest and successful local community development associations. To

this day, WNC Communities provides much needed community development funding and scholarship resources to rural Western NC communities and individuals.

Additionally, Nancy and George were dedicated patrons to Memorial Mission Hospital. Recognizing the need for quality health care in the western North Carolina region, they supported many aspects of the hospital including the creation of the neo-natal intensive care unit and the chapel at Mission's Health SECU Cancer Center.

During his lifetime George served on numerous Boards including Carolina Power & Light, Multimedia Communications, First Union National Bank, UNC Hospitals, North Carolina Medical Care Commission and Memorial Mission Hospital. For nearly seven decades, George was proud to be a member of the Rotary Club of Asheville.

George, who spoke four languages, was known for his curiosity about the world, love for history and facts, appreciation of community and friends, humility, and recognition for the needs of others and love of family. When not in their garden, he and Nancy travelled the world together, often with their six children, and made countless return trips to England and Switzerland reuniting with family and friends.

His many cousins in England and Australia remain an integral and loving part of his extended family. George wished that his children and all future generations will carry on his tradition of spending time with relatives around the world. Planned for the summer of 2020, but postponed due to the pandemic, he had hoped for his entire family, children and grandchildren, to attend the 500th family anniversary of Burghley House in England, to honor his ancestor Lord Burghley, Treasurer to Queen Elizabeth I, and to celebrate his 95th birthday.

George is survived by his six children and their spouses: Jack and Sarah Cecil of Asheville NC, Edith Cecil and Richard Parker of Washington DC, Catherine and Gordon Taylor of Asheville NC, Margaret and John Sinnott of Asheville NC, Chris and Ruth Cecil of Charlotte NC, and Louisa Cecil Harrison and Bill Shiland of New York, NY, as well as sixteen grandchildren and one great-granddaughter and numerous nieces and nephews. Our family is most thankful and appreciative for the medical care provided by Dr. Clay Ballentine and all those at Care Partners and Hospice Home Care. Without their utter dedication our father would not have been at ease when he passed.

Due to COVID 19 restrictions and associated health precautions, a private ceremony with his children, their spouses, and grandchildren, will take place at the Cathedral of All Souls on Saturday, October 31st.

If you would like to participate in George's Celebration of Life ceremony on October 31st at 11:00 AM EST, you may do so via live stream at the following link:

<https://allsoulscathedral.org/virtual-connect/>

In lieu of flowers, George wished that donations be made to the WNC Communities, 594 Brevard Road, Asheville, NC 28806 or through their website at info.wnccommunities.org.

Previous Events

Live Stream

OCT 31. 11:00 AM.

Live Stream Website

<https://allsoulscathedral.org/virtual-connect/>

Tribute Wall



“ *Morris Funeral & Cremation Care created a Webcast in memory of George Henry Vanderbilt Cecil*



Morris Funeral Home - October 22, 2020 at 01:46 PM

GH

A life well lived and the means to make a difference in the community. Thank you Mr. Cecil for sharing your means and leadership to our community. So many things in our daily lives in the Asheville area go back to your contributions. Having grown up in Asheville I see this every day. The memories of going to the Biltmore Estate over the years (I am 73 now) , the Biltmore Dairy Bar and those great banana splits and milk shakes all hit home. May you have eternal peace and rest. You made a difference to us all.

Gerry Huntley - November 29, 2020 at 01:43 PM



“ *George Henry Vanderbilt Cecil*

October 07, 2023 at 11:15 AM

RH

“ *Remembering George from our community involvement over the years. He was such a selfless person who made one feel special when chatting with him. It was always about you and how your projects were going. He shunned the spotlight and had a genuinely sincere love for our community, and especially for those in need. His Celebration of Life was very uplifting and his spirit filled the chapel! My condolences to the entire family as I remember a true gentleman and community leader who left the world a better place.*

Richard B. Hurley - November 03, 2020 at 10:05 AM

TC

“ When it says 'share a memory', that is impossible. I have so many good and wonderful memories of George, my American cousin even though he was as English as they come in so many ways. But we Australian colonial cousins have always felt a very close affiliation with our dearly loved expatriate cousins who have done their best to repopulate America as we have Terra Australis. My earliest memories are that George and Nancy spent part of their honeymoon in my grandparents' villa in St Raphael in the South of France. My grandfather Tommy was George's father's brother. But it took his son Jim to venture to the other 'new world' to plant the flag for the Cecil family into Terra Australis. But my first really good memory was of visiting Asheville in 1962 at 20 years of age and of George showing me proudly around the estate, the lake, the mountain, the dairy, the big house. He even sent me off in a car with a kindly and bemused companion to my first drive in movie. Since then our families have been very close, both as family and as friends. George's family have visited us in Australia and they appear to have come out of that experience as 'perfectly decent' people, as George would have said. So much so that Jack and I have become lit'l bro and big bro and draw the families closer each year. George was a gentle and generous giant in my early and more so later memories. He was wise, extremely family minded and a great family patriarch. I did see him as the patriarch of our side of the family and will miss his wise counsel and intelligence; the way he paved the path for his family's future through enabling wonderful education, travel and appreciation of great family love and support was immeasurable. I speak for Rachel of course, but also my brother Jon, his James, Timothy and Romy and the grandchildren Riley, Mia, Mars and Lucien. With all our love to that big American family of ours!

Tim Cecil

Tim Cecil - October 29, 2020 at 05:38 PM

TH

“ Other than my father, no other male has had such an impact on my life. His genuine kindness, concern, and humility are the traits I seek to develop in my life. Milking Jerseys at Alta Vista and seeing him at least once a month was a blessing. He was family to me. Rev. Thomas Henderson, former sustainable and urban agriculture consultant to the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church

Thomas Henderson - October 24, 2020 at 10:03 AM

I too, have so many wonderful memories of George Cecil. I worked at the general manager of Biltmore Farms' first hotel, the Quality Inn Biltmore, from its inception in 1989 until 2000. Those were some of the most memorable and meaningful years of my life, thanks in a huge part to George, his wife Nancy and all six of their beautiful children.

George and his family touched my life in such positive ways, they are too many to mention. I will always remember George as the "quintessential" English gentleman. Kind, gentle, loving, caring, inspiring, empathetic and respectful.

He was so very persistent that I spend quality time with my young family during those years. I was an employee, but he was keen to make sure my professional life did not interfere with my time with my family. I will relate here one story that, to me, indicates all of the beautiful qualities that defined George Cecil.

The hotel opened in early October, 1989. Thanksgiving Day was to be our first really big event with a Thanksgiving Day meal that lasted all day and into the evening. My wife and two sons headed to South Georgia for the holiday with family. I decided to remain in Asheville to "oversee" our first big event at the hotel.

George and his wife, Nancy, were quite upset with me for staying behind. "You should go to be with your family on Thanksgiving," they gently admonished.

I told them that I would not enjoy being in Georgia as I would worry all day about the event at the hotel. "Then, nothing will do but for you to join our family for Thanksgiving at our home," they said. I was shocked, but honored to be invited.

I took a 2 hour break to go to the Cecils for Thanksgiving that day. My wife was thrilled for me to be able to share a meal in the home of the Cecils. She wanted me to call her to let her know all about the fancy Vanderbilt china, dining table, linens and the menu!

We had only known George and Nancy for 3 months and did not really know them well, so we had no real idea how the grandson of George Vanderbilt and his family lived.

When I arrived at George and Nancy's home, it was just like I had walked into my own parents' home. They were so very hospitable, kind, generous and VERY unpretentious. We sat at their kitchen table. Everything was so homey and comfortable. The dinner was on the stove and in the oven. We served ourselves buffet style from the kitchen counter and the stove top. George had made the stuffing for the turkey. We ate off Hallmark Thanksgiving paper plates with paper napkins. For dessert, we had apple pie from Ingles grocery and passed around a half gallon carton of Biltmore Farms vanilla ice cream to scoop out onto our pie. I have never had such a wonderful Thanksgiving meal with such beautifully sweet people ever!!

I met Jack and Edith there that holiday with Nancy and George. The other children were out of the country or unable to join the family for some reason. It was a most enjoyable time, and I learned that day that George and Nancy wanted me to treat them as equals and that we were to be on a first name basis.

I am so honored and lucky to have known George and his wife Nancy, and to have known all of their 6 children. All of the children are exactly like their parents. I could never find a more loving, caring, empathetic and positive family. George was a wonderful example to them and to all who ever met him.

He encouraged me constantly. He kept me inspired and proud to be associated with his family and his company. He helped shape my life in so many ways. I mourn his death, but celebrate the beautiful life he led.

*Thank you, George,
Don Tomlinson, October 31, 2020*

Don Tomlinson - October 31, 2020 at 12:44 PM