

Hiawatha, KS

Longtime Hiawatha Businessman William Eugene “Bill” French, went to be with Jesus, December 16, 2014, at his home. He was 87. Bill owned and operated the Hiawatha Greenhouses before retiring in 2009.

Bill, the oldest of three children born, was born March 31, 1927, in Sparks in Doniphan County to Edgar Eugene “Dutch” and Blanche Ione Jenkins French. He grew up near Sparks, attended Willow Springs country school before attending Highland High School, later graduating from Highland Junior College.

Bill worked his whole life at the greenhouse, starting work at the age of 14. He rode the bus from Highland to Hiawatha, stayed with Harry & Bernice Kissinger during the week, returning to Highland by bus to spend the weekends. He purchased the business in 1975 and was joined by his wife Betty, who worked tirelessly by his side. Throughout the years they employed many people, and gave several their first job. Their children, Beverly and Tony, helped during busy times. Their 6 granddaughters also helped with cleaning and delivery. Bill loved his work and the joy that his flower arrangements brought to others. He worked at this one job and one location for 67 years.

His faith and dedication to serving his Lord was a very big part of his life. He was a founding member of the Christian Center in Hiawatha in 1972 and served as an elder for 42 years. Bill was also dedicated to his community, serving on the board for Hiawatha USD #415 during the county consolidation and construction of the high school. Bill also liked to have fun: he loved to drive fast cars, hunt pheasants and deer, and to fish. He had countless stories to share about duck hunting on the Missouri River, or fish stories with his brothers in law. In later years, he was happy to have his own personal deer guide, Zon Middendorf. One of his favorite things to do was to trout fish in Montana, a tradition that started with Harry Kissinger, continued on with his family, and his grand-daughters and their families.

He married Betty Lou Colley, April 30, 1949, at Highland Christian Church. They have lived all of their married life in Doniphan and Brown counties. They believed they were to serve others which has given them what is now a very large extended family, included opening their home to a gospel group, to foster children, or to anyone that just needed to get their head on straight.

Survivors include his wife Betty of the home; two children: Beverly and Jay Brock of Hiawatha, Tony and Lanna French of Highland; his sister Mary Lou Colley of Highland; sister in law Lillie Marie Blevins of Hiawatha; six granddaughters: MaLynda Brock, Mandy and Keith Graham, Erin and Aaron Pietrzak, Kelly French, Kaitlin French, and Emily French; and four great-grandchildren: Brock and Gabriel Graham, Ava and Micah Pietrzak; many nieces, nephews, and cousins. And a host of “adopted” kids.

He was also preceded in death by a sister KayLynn Stahl, brothers in law William Everett “Bud” Colley, Leonard Blevins; brother & sister in law Geneva & Albert Wagner, and “adopted” son, Tim Petersen.

A Celebration of Bill’s life is planned for 10 a.m. Saturday, December 20, at the Christian

Center of Hiawatha. Tony French and Jim Brown will officiate. Interment will follow at Highland Cemetery.

Friends may call at Chapel Oaks Funeral Home in Hiawatha after 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. Friday. The family will meet from 6-7:30 that evening at the Christian Center.

Memorial contributions are suggested to the Christian Center which may be sent in care of the funeral home, 124 S 7th St., Hiawatha 66434.

A special message may be sent to the family at www.chapeloaksfuneralhome.com