MCPL’s Woodneath Press Publishes ‘The First Beverly Hillbilly’

Memoir Tells the Story of Local Writer Paul Henning, Creator of ‘The Beverly Hillbillies’

Greater Kansas City, MO – Mid-Continent Public Library, in conjunction with the Jackson County Historical Society, is proud to announce the upcoming release of The First Beverly Hillbilly, a memoir that tells the little-known story of one of the most influential players in TV history—Independence, Mo., native Paul Henning.

Written by Paul’s wife, Ruth Henning, prior to her death in 2002, The First Beverly Hillbilly traces the couple’s journey from the heartland to the heart of Hollywood. An accomplished producer and screenwriter, Paul Henning was responsible for the creation of such major hits as The Beverly Hillbillies, Petticoat Junction, and Green Acres and has often been credited with igniting the rural TV comedy movement in America during the era.

“The First Beverly Hillbilly not only offers a behind-the-scenes look for fans of Paul’s work,” said MCPL director and CEO Steven V. Potter. “It also illuminates a chapter of our local history. A public library’s purpose should include the collection of stories, especially stories from that community. We’re very proud to publish this work, so that everyone can enjoy the Hennings’ story.”

Paul initially explored a career as a lawyer at the suggestion of the future President Harry S Truman, whom he met while serving sodas at his hometown drugstore, but he later went to work for local radio station KMBC (now KMBZ) to pursue his longtime passion for singing. It was there that he discovered his talent for writing shows and met the woman who would later become his wife, Ruth. The couple eventually moved to Hollywood to chase their dreams, and Paul developed his beloved sitcoms, which were based in part on Ruth’s childhood stories about her family in Eldon, Mo., near the Ozarks.

“They were both Missouri people,” said Linda Henning, one of Ruth and Paul’s three children and who also starred in Petticoat Junction. “That was their home. That’s where they met. And it always meant a lot to them.”

The manuscript of The First Beverly Hillbilly was discovered among a collection of papers belonging to the longtime Independence Examiner reporter Sue Gentry. The Jackson County Historical Society enlisted Mid-Continent Public Library’s publishing arm, Woodneath Press, to bring the story to the public.
“This is an exciting opportunity to share part of our local history and shows why we collect a wide range of materials about our region’s rich historical heritage,” said Steve Noll, executive director of the Jackson County Historical Society. “Few people may recognize the name of Paul Henning, but most will recognize what he created and brought to the national television audience.”

The first edition of the book is available now for **advance purchase** through the Jackson County Historical Society and will be available for purchase through Rainy Day Books and Amazon on September 26—the 55th anniversary of the premiere of *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Learn more at [mymcpl.org/hillbilly](http://mymcpl.org/hillbilly).

Learn more about Mid-Continent Public Library’s Woodneath Press.

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**About the Jackson County Historical Society**
The Jackson County Historical Society is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to preserving the written, oral, and physical legacy of this county. We do this by maintaining physical collections and promoting the study, appreciation, and interpretation of local and regional history. More information about the history group is at [www.jchs.org](http://www.jchs.org). More information about Paul Henning, including additional photographs, oral interviews, and links to order the book, is available at [www.beverlyhillbilly.org](http://www.beverlyhillbilly.org).