

# William Lewis Henning, 1900–1981: A Brief Biography

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William Lewis Henning was born on a livestock farm in Defiance County, Ohio, on January 4, 1900, the son of Mr. and Mrs. George F. Henning. The George F. Hennings produced Percheron horses, Shorthorn and Holstein cattle, Shropshire sheep, Chester White hogs, and certified seed and hybrid seed corn. It was on this livestock farm that William began his long and brilliant career in agriculture. He graduated from Hicksville (Ohio) High School in 1917 and received his B.S. degree in Agriculture in 1921 from Ohio State University. Between 1917 and 1921, William Henning was a volunteer in the U.S. Navy and participated in the engineering school associated with that service in Hoboken, New Jersey. In the spring and summer of 1919, he was one of two student members of the National Geographic Society's Alaskan Expedition to the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes.

In 1923, William Henning earned his M.S. degree in Animal Husbandry from The Pennsylvania State

University. While working on that degree, William Henning was welcomed to the faculty as an animal breeder in charge of sheep and thus began his long and distinguished career with that species of livestock.

In 1924, William Henning was elected Secretary-Treasurer of the American Southdown Breeders Association. He served in that position for 51 years.

In 1929, William Henning accompanied Professor Charles S. Plumb of The Ohio State University on a trip to Europe. They studied livestock breeding, production and shows in France and Scotland. One of the results of that trip was Henning's first USDA bulletin, "The Organization and Work of the Sheep Registry Associations in the British Isles."

In 1937, he was awarded the Ph.D. degree in Animal Genetics from the University of Wisconsin, where he worked with Drs. G. Bohstedt and H. H. Cole. While at Wisconsin, he taught a sheep production course.

Dr. Henning served on the faculty of The Pennsylvania State University for 43 years, teaching and conducting research in sheep and animal genetics. In 1953, he became Head of the Department of Animal Husbandry, a post he held until 1955. During his tenure on the faculty, Dr. Henning taught animal breeding, sheep production, horse production, the history of the breeds of livestock, and other basic animal husbandry courses. Thousands of students came to know him as a dedicated teacher and agriculturist.

Dr. Henning was a member of the graduate faculty of The Pennsylvania State University and chaired the graduate program in Animal Industry for many years. He had a keen interest in helping students to develop their potential and actively participated in their extra-curricular activities and as coach of many successful livestock and wool judging teams. During 20 years of coaching, Dr. Henning's livestock and wool judging teams won more championships than any other university in the East. Dr. Henning served as adviser to the student Block and Bridle Club and was elected to the position of Vice President of the National Block and Bridle Club. In 1954, the students at The Pennsylvania State University dedicated the Little International Livestock Exposition to him for his outstanding service to students.

Dr. Henning carried out extensive original work on the genetics of sheep, the heritability of wool fiber characteristics, and on systematic plans for cross-breeding, particularly for hot-house lamb production. Between 1927 and 1952, Dr. Henning, either individually or with coworkers, published 19 scientific articles

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dealing with sheep genetics and production. For his interest and accomplishments with sheep, Dr. Henning was cited by the Southdown Sheep Society of London when he was elected Honorary Vice President, the only American so recognized.

In 1946, the Legislature of Pennsylvania appropriated \$100,000 to the University for "the improvement of the livestock. . . to be used in the purchase of livestock. . ." This legislation was largely the result of Dr. Henning's interest in improvement of livestock in Pennsylvania. The use of these funds, under his guidance, was the foundation for the development of the superior herds and flocks at The Pennsylvania State University.

Dr. Henning was an active supporter of the Northeast Section, American Society of Animal Science. He served as Section President from 1947 through 1950, a period of service not exceeded by another Northeast Section member. He received the Distinguished Service Award from the Northeast Section in 1972.

In 1956, Dr. Henning received the annual award of the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of Agriculture for "meritorious service in the field of agriculture." The Future Farmers of America awarded Dr. Henning the honorary degree of Keystone Farmer in 1959, and in 1963 the Pennsylvania Young Farmers Association awarded him honorary membership. He was made an honorary member of the Pennsylvania Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association in 1962, and the following year he received a gold watch from the New Holland Machine Company for his contributions to agriculture.

In January 1955, Dr. Henning was appointed Secretary of Agriculture for Pennsylvania and he served in that capacity until January of 1963. During this time, he served as President of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture; chair of the State Farm Show Commission; member of the National Advisory Committee, Soil Conservation Service; and was elected national chair of the State Secretaries of Agriculture.

While he was Secretary of Agriculture of Pennsylvania, Dr. Henning initiated the State Livestock Grading Service and with the Pennsylvania Livestock Association was instrumental in the founding and development of the Keystone International Livestock Exposition. This annual livestock show has served as a stimulus to Pennsylvania breeders in locating sources of superior seed stock. Also during this time the All-American Dairy Show was initiated. Dr. Henning strengthened the Commonwealth's Meat Inspection Program and initiated civil service status for regulatory personnel. Dr. Henning was instrumental in updating the food laws of the Commonwealth and activated a program which emphasized the improvement of food quality and safety. He modernized the Pennsylvania animal health laws, the feed

regulatory program, and developed a strong marketing program in the Department of Agriculture. As a fitting climax to his career as Secretary of Agriculture, in May of 1965, Dr. Henning helped to dedicate the new \$2.9 million State Agriculture Building in Harrisburg. The laboratories and offices in the new structure were at that time among the finest in the nation, and for the first time in 70 years, all segments of the Department of Agriculture were housed in one building.

As Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture, Dr. Henning was responsible for the establishment of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Meat Animal Evaluation Center. This Center, located on the University Park Campus, provides facilities and educational programs to Pennsylvania livestock producers. The operations focus on progeny-testing beef cattle, swine and sheep.

Dr. Henning's career spanned numerous scientific advances in agriculture, and as professor and Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture he continuously stressed the importance of research to improve the quality and quantity of Pennsylvania's farm products. A vigorous supporter of scientific advances in the techniques of agricultural production, Dr. Henning was constantly concerned about the small independent farm. He never ceased working to make all Pennsylvanians aware of the opportunities for the improvement and expansion of agriculture in the Commonwealth.

On April 28, 1967, in recognition of 43 years of outstanding service to agriculture and society, 173 former students, colleagues and members of agricultural organizations exhibited their appreciation by presenting the Department of Animal Industry with a life-size portrait of Dr. Henning, painted by Agnes Allen.

As the Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture, Dr. Henning served on the Board of Trustees of The Pennsylvania State University for eight years and worked actively to help the University develop new facilities and programs. While he was a member of the Board of Trustees, funds were allocated by the Commonwealth for construction of the Swine Center, Meats Laboratory, Beef-Sheep Center and the Animal Industries Building.

In recognition of his contributions to the University, the Board of Trustees voted to dedicate the Animal Industries Building to Dr. Henning. On April 29, 1983, that building became the "William L. Henning Building," which was most appropriate since that building stands on the location of the former sheep barn where Dr. Henning taught many classes and carried out much of his research. The William L. Henning Building was completed in January 1969 and houses the Departments of Dairy and Animal Science, Poultry Science, and Veterinary Science. This building supports programs in extension, research, and resident education in the College of Agriculture.

Dr. Henning was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American

Society of Animal Science. He was a member of the American Genetic Association, the Soil Conservation Society of America, Alpha Zeta, Acacia, Gamma Sigma Delta, Phi Sigma, Phi Kappa Phi and Sigma Xi. He served as faculty adviser to Alpha Zeta. He was an active member of Gamma Sigma Delta, The Honor Society of Agriculture, and served as Secretary-Treasurer and Historian of that organization.

Dr. Henning returned to the College of Agriculture and served as Chair of the Graduate Program in the Department of Animal Industry from 1963 until he retired with the rank of Professor Emeritus on July 1, 1965.

Dr. Henning was married to Dr. Harriet M. Harry, a practicing physician in State College, Pennsylvania. They have two sons, William L. Henning, Jr. (Ph.D., Agricultural Economics, The Ohio State University) and George F. Henning III (D.V.M., The University of Pennsylvania and M.D., Temple University). For years the Hennings operated Nittany Farms near Boalsburg, Pennsylvania, as a family enterprise and they maintained outstanding herds and flocks of Aberdeen-Angus cattle, Southdown and Hampshire sheep, and Hampshire hogs.

Dr. Henning died on April 30, 1981, at the age of 81.