

# Greenlease Family

Robert Greenlease (1882-1969); Virginia Greenlease (1909-2001)  
Bobby Greenlease (1947-1953)

by Susan Jezak Ford

The Greenlease family would otherwise be known for success in business and generosity in philanthropy, except for the tragedy that struck in September 1953.

Robert C. Greenlease was one of Kansas City's earliest and most successful car dealers. Raised on a horse farm near Slater, Missouri, his family moved to Kansas City where he eventually worked for his uncle at the Weber Engine Company. At the age of 21, Greenlease began production of the Kansas City Hummer, a five-passenger vehicle that never quite succeeded. He then began an automobile repair business that blossomed into the Central Automobile and Livery Company. The car rental business was ideally suited for exploring Kansas City's newly expanded park and boulevard system. In 1908 Greenlease acquired Kansas City's first Cadillac dealership. He ultimately became a millionaire and the Midwest's largest dealer-distributor for Cadillac and General Motors.

Robert Greenlease married his second wife, Virginia Pollock, in 1939. The couple had two children, Virginia Sue and Robert, Jr. On September 28, 1953, the family's peaceful world was shattered. Bobby Greenlease was taken from Notre Dame de Sion school by a woman who claimed that his mother was very ill. Bonnie Brown Heady and her accomplice, Carl Austin Hall, turned out to be kidnappers who demanded \$600,000 for Bobby's safe return. After the money was delivered, the two were arrested in St. Louis. The nation was shocked by the confession that Bobby was killed within hours of the abduction. Heady and Hall were executed within the year.

The Greenlease parents, forever associated with the tragedy that befell them, donated much of their wealth over the years to Kansas City organizations. Robert Greenlease died in 1969 and daughter Virginia Sue Sterk died in 1984. Virginia Greenlease continued her philanthropy, even after her death in 2001. The campus of Rockhurst High School bears the Greenlease name, and a final auction of the family's heirlooms benefited Rockhurst University as a tribute to the priests that helped a mother through her greatest grief.



## Sources

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