

Juniata County Historical Society

ORGANIZED 1931

MUSEUM AT ACADEMIA

November 10, 1976

*Aunt Mabel
died ~~Sept. 28,~~
March 1, 1992*

I, Mabel Cunningham Graham, am 82 yrs. old - having been born in 1894. I often think of things I would like to ask older people, but there are no older people. So in case some of you would like to know about your ancestors, I will try to write some things I remember.

First, my mother, Esther Jane Farley Cunningham. Her parents were Rebecca Dunlap and Morris Farley. They had seven sons and one daughter (my mother). The brothers were Albert, Smith, Jesse, Alexander, James, Fredrick and Stephen. Rebecca Dunlap Farley died in 1875 when mother was 7 yrs old. Fredrick was 5 and Stephen was 3 yrs. old. The other boys were older. Morris Farley took Stephen and went to Minnesota where he married again and reared another family, which I don't know too much about.

Albert and Smith, the two oldest, looked after the other children who were "put out" among neighbors and friends. No two to the same family. Morris' brother, Mortimer took Fred - he fared the best. Jesse worked on the railroad and was killed there when he was quite young. All the others were married. Albert lived in McKean County. He had one daughter. Smith moved to Bakersfield, California. He had one daughter, Pearle, who was a music teacher. Alexander lived in St. Marys. I think he had four children. James lived in DuBois, PA. He had two sons, Herman and John. Stephen always lived in Minnesota and we didn't know too much about him. *Fred lived in Pittsburgh - 2 sons - Van + Al.*

My mother, Esther Jane, married my father when she was 17 yrs. old. He was 28. My father was born October 1, 1857 and mother March 26, 1868. Mother was born in Rockton, PA, Clearfield County. My father, Ezra James Cunningham, was born in Milford Township, Juniata County. His mother was Jane McCrum and his father John Hamilton Cunningham, 1st. Jane's father was Joseph McCrum. My father had one brother, Ephriam and one sister, Rebecca. When my father was two weeks old his mother burned to death. They were heating wash water in an iron kettle over an open fire outside. Her flannel dress caught fire and she was so badly burned that she died. My grandfathers maiden Aunt Mary Lytle came to live with him. Ephriam was 6 yrs. old and Rebecca was 3. She said she could care for the two older children but thought she could not manage a new baby.

My grandmother's sister, Mary McCrum, was married to David Dressler. They had no children and wanted the baby. They lived in Home Camp, Clearfield County. My grandfather would not let them adopt him but he allowed them to take him home with them to Clearfield County where they reared him as their own son. He paid them so much a year for keeping him. (I don't know how much)

When my father was 14 yrs. old his father went and got him and brought him back to their farm in Milford Township. I believe it is the farm where Blair Lauver now lives (1976). He was big enough to work then. But it was not home to my father. His home was in Clearfield County and the Dresslers were his parents, the only parents he ever knew. They loved him and he loved them. Well, he stayed one year, and then ran off and went back to his Aunt Mary and Uncle David Dressler. He jumped a freight train at Mifflin. (That was often done in those days, about 1871). There was no railroad nearer than Clearfield, the County seat, at that time, so he hopped a lumber wagon from Clearfield to Home Camp. He said there never were three happier people than 15 yr. old James Cunningham and his Aunt Mary and Uncle David Dressler. My grandfather never tried to bring him home again. But he did stop paying them. I have always been glad he was not adopted. For then we all would have been Dresslers instead of Cunninghams.

I can remember a few things my father used to tell us. All that region around Union Township, Clearfield County was covered with a dense pine forest. The trees were so tall and so dense you could drive along the roads, which were not much more than trails, and you could not see sunlight because the branches were so thick and reached together over head. There was a great lumber business. There were so many trees, too many, they thought, and they didn't know anything about conservation in those days. Folks were so anxious to clear the land, they cut down trees - hauled them on piles and burned them! The work was all done by axes, hand saws and horses and men. No electric saws or trucks. They had cross cut saws, long saws with two men. They had what they called "log rollings". All the neighbors helped and they rolled the logs on piles and burn them. All that beautiful pine lumber! It makes one weep to think of it. It reminds me of how they killed the buffalo farther west.

The Dresslers were first settlers there having moved from Juniata County. Their first house was a log house. Later they built a frame house where all we Cunninghams were born. Both houses were still standing when I visited there in 1966

My father and mother took care of the Dresslers in their old age. Uncle David Dressler was ill in bed nine months before he died and mother took care of him. She was only 27 yrs. old and had four little children. She had a "hired girl" which they paid \$1.50 per week. He was incontinent and they kept two straw mattresses which they changed repeatedly. My father had a straw cutter that cut the straw fine. There were no conveniences in those days. Now with all our conveniences - people have to go to nursing homes. There was no other way one hundred years ago.

My father inherited all the Dresslers had, which was not much. Through the years the fields were cleared and planted in oats, potatoes, corn, buckwheat and grass. And we had nice fruit orchard, apples, cherries pears, plums and a grape arbor of concord grapes. The fruit didn't need spraying then. My father pruned the trees. In the winter our big cellar was full of potatoes and apples and canned fruit. We always raised a lot of potatoes and all who were big enough helped. I hated that job. Planting them in the spring and picking them in the fall. Mother always stayed in the house and she would have extra nice dinners when we were in the potato fields.

Next to lumbering in Clearfield County were the mines. The seat of the mining industry was DuBois, PA. Many Italians and Poles, etc. came to work in the mines. My father would take a load of potatoes or apples and sell them to the miners. They were good customers.

My father never worked in the mines but almost every winter he would haul logs. He always had a fine team of horses which he tended with great care.

In our family there were eight children:

John Hamilton, 2nd	1886 - 1937	wife Estella Smeal
Nellie Mae	1888 - 1982	husband James Kauffman
James Russell	1892 - 1965	wife Anna Marie Ruhlin
Mabel Ella	1894 - 1992	husband William M. Graham
Lottie Rebecca	1897 - 1944	husband Ernest Armstrong
Norman Arthur	1898 -	wife Evelyn Bashore
Virginia	1902 -	not married
Harry Blair	1907 -	wife Mary Margaret Diefendorf (Peg)

Ezra James Cunningham (father) 87 yrs. October 1, 1857 - June 16, 1945.
Esther Jane Farley Cunningham (mother) 94 yrs. March 26, 1868 -
August 2, 1962. Father was always called "Jim" or "EJ". Mother was
always called "Jennie". We were a very close family. We were poor

by todays standards but had as much as our neighbors and more than some. We always had plenty to eat and enough to keep warm. We burned coal in our kitchen range and in our "room heater" which was a large stove with isinglass windows. My father could buy a large wagon load of very good soft coal for \$1.00 per load. In summer we burned wood in the kitchen range.

We all liked music and some of my fondest memories are how we all stood around the organ and sang while Nellie played. Later years we had a piano and Virginia played. Even as we got older and left home, whenever we came home on visits or holidays my father would say "Now before you leave, sing for us" and we did. My brothers especially were good singers.

My mother was a very good seamstress. She made all the clothing for the girls and for the boys when they were young. She knit woolen stockings for all of us. And made wonderful quilts and rugs. She was never idle. In the evenings when we would sit around the kitchen table and do our home work or play games, mother would sew and my father would read.

Neither of my parents had much education but they were smart. They learned in the school of hard work and hard knocks. I have great love and respect in my memory of them. They tried to bring us up right.

My grandfather, John Hamilton Cunningham 1st, moved to Mifflin in his later years. Aunt Rebecca never married and she kept house for him. They lived in Mifflin near the river bridge. They owned several houses there and my grandfather was once County Commissioner.

Uncle Ephriam moved to Wayne, Nebraska. He married Jennie Horton and had two children, Mae and Don. After Jennie Horton died he married Rose Kraemer. They had two children Bill and Florence. Bill lives in Salt Lake City, Utah and Florence in Idaho (1976)

When I was 16 yrs. old (1911) we moved from Clearfield County to Walker Township in Juniata County. My father sold our home there for \$3,500 and Aunt Rebecca bought the James Adams farm for \$12,000. She had inherited most of grandfathers money. She wanted us to move to Juniata County and she would live with us. Which she did.

The farm is now owned and operated by John Henry Cunningham, Russell's son. Russell's widow, Anna, also lives there. (1976)

Russell had lived in South Dakota but when John died in 1937 Russell moved home and took over the farm in 1938.