



657 East Avenue
Rochester NY, 14607
rmsc.org

Guide to the James Cunningham, Son & Company Records Acc.# 1999.03

Processed by Grace Caternolo
Undergraduate Intern, Nazareth College
June 2019

Schuyler C. Townson Library
RMSC Museum & Science Center
657 East Avenue
Rochester NY 14607
585.697.1947

Table of Contents

Collection Summary	2
Administrative Information	3
Restrictions	4
Administrative History	5
Scope & Content	7
Arrangement	8
Related Materials	8
Subject Headings	9
Bibliography	9
Container List	9
Appendix A: 35 Photograph Captions	11

Collection Summary

- Title:** James Cunningham, Son & Company records
- Creator:** Cunningham, James, 1815-1886; James Cunningham, Son & Company
- Dates:** 1838-1969
- Extent:** 3.0 cubic feet (2 record cartons, 2 document boxes)
- Language:** English
- Rules:** Describing Archives: A Content Standard
- Abstract:** This collection consists of the records of the James Cunningham, Sons and Company, a Rochester, New York based manufacturer. The materials date from 1838 to 1969. The records consist of photographs, correspondence, blueprints, newspaper clippings, negatives, booklets, drawings, magazines, poems, and scrapbooks.

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition:

This collection was donated to the RMSC Museum & Science Center by Peter F. Cunningham in January 1999, accession #1999.03.

Preferred Citation:

James Cunningham, Sons & Co. records, [box#:folder#]. RMSC Museum & Science Center, Rochester, NY.

Restrictions

Conditions Governing Use:

Copyright is held by the RMSC Museum & Science Center but may also be held by the authors, or their heirs or assigns. Researchers must obtain written permission of the copyright holder and the RMSC Museum & Science Center before transmission, reproduction, publication, or presentation (public display, performance, internet presentation, etc.) for images from the collection. Quotations used must be cited as above.

Conditions Governing Access:

Limited access available for the scrapbooks due to condition. Ask the Archivist for information on access to scrapbooks and collection.

Administrative History

James Cunningham (1815–1886) was born in County Down, Ireland. He came to the United States in 1834 from Canada. In Canada, Cunningham worked in woodwork design in a carpenter's shop east of Toronto in Coburg, Ontario. While traveling from New York City, back to Canada via Rochester, New York, Cunningham was introduced to George Hanford and J.H. Whitbeck, entrepreneurs who set up the first coach-making shop in Rochester in 1834. Cunningham worked as an apprentice and journeyman for Hanford and Whitbeck from 1834 to 1838.

In 1838 he formed a partnership with two of his fellow-workers, James Kerr and Blanchard Dean (Kerr, Cunningham & Co.). Together they bought out Hanford and Whitbeck and made open sleighs and buggies. In 1842, the company was on the verge of bankruptcy. Kerr and Blanchard resigned and James Cunningham assumed full responsibility. Cunningham continued his sole-proprietorship at 71 State Street until a fire in 1848 forced Cunningham to rebuild on Canal Street.

Cunningham married Bridget Jennings in 1838 and they had three children: Augustine, Joseph, and Margaretta. Cunningham's son, Joseph (1842–1914) joined his father and the company reorganized as James Cunningham and Son in 1866. Joseph Cunningham became a full partner in 1868. Rufus Dryer (1846–1937) became a partner in 1875 when he married Margaretta Cunningham in the same year. Cunningham, Son & Company had branch offices in Louisville, Nashville, Memphis, New Orleans, Chicago, Des Moines, Kansas City, Topeka, Denver, and San Francisco.

In 1882, the firm was incorporated as James Cunningham, Son and Company. It was the largest industrial enterprise in Rochester, New York. The firm continued to make carriages until 1915. Joseph Cunningham and Rufus Dryer retired in 1909 and the company, which had become a partnership, was reincorporated. Augustine Cunningham, son of Joseph Cunningham, was President, James Dryer (son of Rufus Dryer) Vice-President, and Francis Cunningham (son of Joseph Cunningham) was Secretary and General Manager.

In 1908, the company began automobile production. Initially, it made only automobile bodies and assembled the rest of the car from engines, transmissions, axles, and radiators made by proprietary companies. By 1910 it produced the entire automobile. In 1916, Cunningham produced a V-8 engine. It was the first car to not have running boards, using instead steps of brass framed aluminum.

In the late 1920s, Cunningham entered the aviation business and created a subsidiary, the Cunningham-Hall Aircraft Corporation. The first Cunningham-Hall plane designed was a modified bi-plane. Cunningham-Hall continued to make aircraft until 1938. By the early 1930s, the company had ceased production on automobiles and funeral carriages/hearses.

Over the years Cunningham made a wide variety of products. During the Civil War, the company made carriages for the Union Armies, and during the first World War, ambulances and automotive windlasses for observation balloons. In March 1928, Cunningham's first tank was tested at Aberdeen, Maryland. Equipped with a revolving turret and armed with a 37 millimeter cannon and a .30 caliber machine gun, it traveled twenty miles an hour, faster than any tank produced up to that time. In 1933, Cunningham developed a tank track, with light-weight rubber-block treads that allowed for even greater speeds. Cunningham also developed experimental half-tracks, cargo carriers, armored cars, and a weapons carrier for a 75 millimeter Howitzer.

In 1940 James Dryer retired. The corporation was dissolved in 1941 and replaced by a partnership, with Augustine and Francis Cunningham as co-partners. World War II military contracts increased growth of the partnership exponentially. In 1942 Cunningham employed 360 people and in one year that number grew to 800. Cunningham and Cunningham-Hall produced aircraft canopies, gunners' turrets, gear boxes, and block and cylinder assemblies for larger aircraft manufacturers. In 1948, after all military contracts from World War II were fulfilled, Cunningham-Hall was dissolved. The Cunningham brothers stayed in business and produced small farm and garden machines such as sickle-bar mowers, tractors, and rotary tillers.

By 1952, the firm met Andrew W. Vincent, an electrical engineer with Stromberg-Carlson in Rochester. Vincent devoted himself to perfecting a small dial telephone system. The heart of this system was the crossbar switch. The company acquired Vincent's initial designs and patent applications and hired him as a consultant. The company restricted its production to creating prototypes of switching devices. The Cunningham crossbar was versatile. It had the ability to switch electrical information from low-level DC signals to 100 megacycles, reliably and at high speeds.

In 1968, Peter F. Cunningham sold controlling interest to the Gleason Works. Under Gleason Works, the company was renamed Cunningham Corporation. In 1977, all Cunningham related activities ended.¹

¹ Oswald, Alison, "James Cunningham, Son and Company Photographs online finding aid," National Museum of American History, 2017, <https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/sova-nmah-ac-1193>.

Scope & Content

This collection consists of the records of the James Cunningham, Sons & Company, a Rochester, New York based manufacturer that produced carriages, automobiles, machinery, and aircraft. The materials date from 1838 to 1969 with the bulk of the collection between 1893 and 1930. The records consist of photographs, blueprints, correspondence, newspaper clippings, negatives, booklets, drawings, magazines, poems, and scrapbooks.

The photographs in the collection consist of manufacturing facilities, company employees, motor parts, vehicles, tanks, airplanes, and carriages. Some photographs depict the vehicle type in both carriage and automobile form, such as hearses and ambulances. A list of 35 of the photographs that contain identified people can be found in Appendix A. The blueprints are of Cunningham automobiles, carriages, and airplanes. They are held in the oversized drawers in the paper vault. The records also contain drawings and sketches of Cunningham carriages and an art journal.

The company records pertain to corporate history and refer to business matters such as military production, customers, patents, reports, and product designs. There are some brochures and magazines that include Cunningham products. The patent records focus are between 1922 and 1943. The company records contain correspondence, reports, instructions, blueprints, testing, and reports from the manufacture of aircraft. The records also include early business records from about 1885 to 1890, correspondence, and memorandums.

Cunningham race cars and luxury automobiles are also represented in this collection, as are more obscure products like the Cunningham Balloon Windlass in photographic and blueprint format.

The six scrapbooks contain various clippings and photographs associated with the company and are in fragile condition. Scrapbook 1 is a bound volume that holds ten hand drawn images of carriages. Scrapbook 2 contains newspaper clippings and references to the Cunningham Company. Included in with the scrapbooks is a trade catalog from 1880 for Keeler & Nichols Parisian Designs of carriages and sleds. The three remaining scrapbooks contain photographs and blueprints of carriages and hearses.

The records consist of four oversized scrapbooks. The black scrapbook contains newspaper articles, company fliers, Christmas cards, correspondence, and product fliers dated 1949 to 1959. The scrapbook with the maroon cover contains newspaper clippings, company records, blue ribbons from the Columbian Exposition, and correspondence from 1880 to 1959. The volume with the green binding and gold decorations contains hand-colored plates of French carriages. The last scrapbook is an automobile scrapbook from 1917 to 1923.

Arrangement

This collection consists of a total of four boxes, organized alphabetically, and one oversized drawer.

Related Materials

William H. Morris Collection on James Cunningham, Son & Co. housed at the RMSC Museum & Science Center.

Operating and Maintenance Manual with Parts Catalog - Cunningham Model EB Engine, c. 1947.

Cunningham Power Lawn Mower Model PL-21 Parts Book and Instruction Manual, c. 1949.

2014.02.3 housed at the RMSC Museum & Science Center, Rochester, NY.

Subject Headings

- Rochester (N.Y)—History—19th century
- Rochester (N.Y)—History—20th century
- Automobiles
- Antique and classic cars
- Automobile industry and trade
- Ambulances
- Automobiles—Design and construction
- Carriage and wagon making
- Carriage industry
- Family-owned business enterprises
- Hearses (vehicles)
- Horse-drawn vehicles

Bibliography

Oswald, Alison. "James Cunningham, Son and Company Photographs online finding aid," National Museum of American History, 2017, <https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/sova-nmah-ac-1193>.

Theobald, Mark. "Jas Cunningham, Son & Co." Coach Built, 2014, <http://www.coachbuilt.com/bui/c/cunningham/cunningham.htm>.

Container List

Box	Folder	Title, Dates
1	1	Airplanes and airplane parts, 1950
1	2	Airplane test reports, 1929-1930
1	3	Airplane test reports, 1930
1	4	Ambulances, undated
1	5	Carriage ambulances, undated
1	6	Ambulance automobiles, 1910-1935
1	7	Antique automobile brochure, 1969
1	8-9	Automotive hearses, 1910-1936
1	10	Automobile parts, 1910-1925
1	11	[Blueprints, Cunningham Automobile] Cunningham automobile blueprints, 1937-1960
1	12	[Blueprints, Carriages] Carriages blueprints, undated
1	13	Business records, 1885-1890
1	14	Carriages, 1838-1893
1	15	Carriages, undated
1	16	Carriages, 1880-1934
1	17	Carriages & hearse lanterns, 1916-1917
1	18	Catalogs, 1924-1957
1	19	Confidential memorandum reports, 1936
1	20	Correspondence, 1929-1963
1	21-23	Factory photographs, undated
1	24-31	Hearses, undated
1	32-33	Instructional booklets, undated
1	34	<i>LIFE</i> magazine, 1914
1	35-37	Luxury automobile, 1910-1936

1	38	Newspaper articles/clippings, 1884-1952
1	39	Patent records, 1922-1943
1	40	Various photographs, undated
1	41	Photo negatives, undated
1	42	Photographs of parts and vehicles, undated
1	43	Police vehicle, 1914
1	44	Race car, 1921
2	45	Reports, 1933-1935
2	46	Tanks, 1932
2	47	Tractor, undated
2	48	[Truck - ½ Chevy] Chevy ½ truck, undated
2	49	Vehicles, 1910-1934
2	50	Vehicles with people, 1910-1956
3	1-4	Scrapbooks # 1-4
4	1-2	Scrapbooks # 5-6, undated
4	3	Cunningham Company records, undated
OS drawer 814:l	1	Blueprint, undated
OS drawer 814:l	2	Photographs, undated
OS drawer 814:l	3	Drawings, undated
OS drawer 814:l	4	Business records, undated

Appendix A: 35 Photograph Captions

1. A. J. Cunningham, Pres.
2. L to R at desks: John W. Fulreader, Campbell A. Baird; Standing: Fred Jensen [Jansen].
3. Fred Jensen
4. L to R: R. Morgan, W. Cain, Fred Jansen, F. Carberry, D. O'Connor, G. Sisson –Troy
5. Ed Porter, Ray Morgan
6. Seated: Charles W. Sawens
7. With cap: Foreman Schmitt
8. With dark coat: Foreman Frank Schoenege
9. With vest: Body Shop Supt. Geo. Jennings
10. Extreme R[ight]: Frank Schoenege
11. Center with vest: Geo. Jennings
12. Center and R: Ed Doyle, Dennis O'Brien
13. With vest: Geo. Jennings
14. Center: Tom Coughlin
15. Extreme R: L. Schaefer
16. With shop coat: Foreman G. Sable
17. With coat and tie, back of car: Jack Mackin
18. With vest by window: Paint Foreman, Geo. Munger
19. Left: Arthur Young; Right: his son, Archie Young
20. Directly below light: Foreman, Guy Johnson
21. Foreground: Henry Rausch and Foreman David Becker
22. With dark shirt and cap: Foreman John Zabel
23. With dark shirt: Foreman Joseph Freundschue
24. Second and third from L: J. Zable, Tom Hayes; Extreme R: Gus Frank
25. With white shirt: Guy Johnson
26. Second from L: Harry Bonehill; Extreme R: Gus Frank
27. L to R: Foreman F. Shenkel, David Yawman
28. L to R: Foreman Fred Frank, Frank Shanahan
29. Center: Fred Frank; Extreme R: Geo. (Honey) Eismann
30. Extreme R: Fred Frank
31. With white shirt and apron: Frank Shanahan; Extreme R: Henry Renaud
32. With vest: Gene Munger
33. With vest: Gene Munger
34. Foreground: Herman Frenzel
35. Second and third from L: Mort Davis, George Wendell