Guide to the James Cunningham, Son and Company Photographs

NMAH.AC.1193
Alison Oswald
2011December
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Collection Overview

Repository: Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title: James Cunningham, Son and Company Photographs
Identifier: NMAH.AC.1193
Date: 1908-1964 (bulk 1908-1929)
Extent: 10 Cubic feet (18 boxes)
Creator: James Cunningham, Son and Company (Rochester, New York)
Language: English
Summary: The collection consists of glass plate negatives and photographic prints of the glass plate negatives depicting horse-drawn hearses (funeral wagons), carriages, and ambulances and motorized vehicles produced by James Cunningham, Son and Company from approximately 1908 to 1929. The majority of the glass plates and photographic prints depict horse-drawn hearses, but there are some motorized vehicles.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information
The collection was donated in 1973 by the Cunningham Company to the National Museum of American History, Division of Transportation.

Provenance
The collection was transferred to the Archives Center from the Division of Work and Industry (formerly the Division of Transportation) in 2009. Some of the glass plates in the collection came from the Free Library of Philadelphia. Little documentation exists about this, but the plates are in envelopes labeled "Free Library of Philadelphia."

Related Materials
Materials at the Smithsonian Institution
National Museum of American History, Division of Work & Industry
1929 Cunningham touring car. See accession #:310671.

National Air and Space Museum Archives
Cunningham-Hall Collection, 1917-1940 (bulk 1928-1930)

Smithsonian Institution Libraries, Trade Literature Collection
Trade catalogs from James Cunningham Son & Company (See SILNMAHTL_12462)
Materials in Other Organizations

Long Island Museum of American Art, History and Carriages
Includes drawings, a trade catalog, a cart, and a buggy from James Cunningham and Sons.

Detroit Public Library
Papers of the James Cunningham Company, 1902-1964 (bulk 1909-1946)
Includes notebooks of G. Carson Baker, chief designer and David Fergusson, chief engineer, patent applications, correspondence, drawings and blueprints related to Fergusson's work, parts and instruction books for early automobiles (including electric automobiles), photographs of Cunningham factories, military vehicles and motor trucks.

Rochester Museum and Science Center, Libraries and Collections Department
Local Business History vertical files hold items related to James Cunningham, Son and Company as well as books.

Processing Information
Collection processed by Alison Oswald, December 2011; revised by Alison Oswald, January 2017.

Preferred Citation

Restrictions
The collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use
Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning intellectual property rights. Archives Center cost recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Accruals
Vince Granatelli donated .15 cubic feet of material documenting James Cunningham, Son and Company in 2016. The materials were added to collection in January 2017.

Biographical / Historical
James Cunningham (1815-1886) was born in County Down, Ireland to Arthur and Ann Cunningham. He came to the United States in 1833 from Canada seeking work in the New York City area, where he had an uncle practicing architecture. In Canada, Cunningham had worked in woodwork design in a carpenter’s shop east of Toronto in Cobourg, Ontario. Cunningham returned to Canada via Rochester, New York. While in Rochester, he was introduced to George Hanford and J.H. Whitbeck, entrepreneurs who set up the first coach-making shop in Rochester in 1834.
From 1834 to 1838 Cunningham worked as an apprentice and journeyman for George Hanford and J.H. Whitbeck. He formed a partnership with two of his fellow-workers, James Kerr and Blanchard Dean. Together they bought out Hanford and Whitbeck and made cutters, known as one-horse open sleighs and buggies. In 1842 Kerr and Blanchard resigned, and James Cunningham assumed full responsibility.

Cunningham married Bridget Jennings in 1838, and they had three children: Augustine, Joseph, and Margaretta. Cunningham's son, Joseph (1842?-1914) joined his father in the company and as a result, the company reorganized in 1866 as James Cunningham and Son. Joseph Cunningham became a full partner in 1868. Rufus Dryer (1846-1937) became a partner in 1875 when he married Margareta Cunningham in the same year. There were branch offices with display rooms in Louisville, Nashville, Memphis, New Orleans, Chicago, Des Moines, Kansas City, Topeka, Denver, and San Francisco. In 1876, Cunningham carriages and a hearse won prizes at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition.

In 1882, the firm was incorporated as James Cunningham, Son and Company. It was the largest industrial enterprise in Rochester, New York, both in its plant area and in capital. 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, not for the popular market, but for the type of customer that bought its carriages. The company did not mass-produce their automobiles. 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, and the Cunningham car became outstanding for its clean, classic lines. 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 primary aim of the corporation was to build an airplane that would combine stability with speed. The first Cunningham-Hall plane designed with these requirements was a modified biplane: the lower wing was considerably larger than the upper and slotted, so that a current of air could be made to flow between its surfaces. This enabled the plane to land at low speeds. It was first tested in the small town of LeRoy, New York. Cunningham-Hall continued to make aircraft until 1938. Its X-14324, produced in 1934, was a low-wing monoplane made entirely of metal. The company also produced primary trainers, a six-place cabin plane, other passenger and cargo craft, and experimental planes for the Army and Navy. By the early 1930s the company had ceased to produce automobiles and funeral carriages/hearses.

Over the years Cunningham made a wide variety of products. During World War II, Cunningham found a temporary role in defense production. Prior to the war the company had produced a variety of odd products: safety belts for aircraft, diving helmets, even belt buckles for Boy Scout uniforms. During the Civil War the company made carriages for the Union armies, and the First World War, ambulances and automotive windlasses for observation balloons. More significant had been its experience of producing armored and tracked vehicles. 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. After World War II, the firm produced small farm and garden machines such as sickle-bar mowers, tractors, and rotary tillers. Cunningham also designed and produced a complete line of plumbing fixtures for house trailers in a constant effort to retool and redefine itself in the post-war years.
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, then president of the company, sold controlling interest to the Gleason Works, a Rochester-based manufacturer of machine tools. Under Gleason Works, the company was renamed Cunningham Corporation. In 1977, all Cunningham-related activities ended.

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**Scope and Contents**

The collection consists of glass plate negatives and photographic prints of the glass plate negatives depicting horse-drawn hearses (funeral wagons), carriages, and ambulances and motorized vehicles produced by James Cunningham, Son and Company from approximately 1908 to 1929. The majority of the glass plates and photographic prints depict horse-drawn hearses, but there are some motorized vehicles.

There are approximately 335 glass plate negatives and the same number of photographic prints. It is unknown who created the photographic prints, but some of the glass plates were originally held at the Free Library of Philadelphia.

The glass plates are in three sizes: 5" x 7" 8" x 10" and 11" x 14". The glass plates and the photographic prints are arranged by an alpha-numeric system that was presumably developed by the company. In some instances, J.L. Hill is identified as a photographer.

In some instances, the model number, style and date are provided. Most images are side views, although there are some rear and interior views. Some glass plates are unidentified or missing. Some of the descriptions include lamp number information. Many carriages had mounted lamps or lanterns that were oil or battery powered. If a carriage was built for a specific person or company, such as W. H. Graham Company, this information is listed.

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**Arrangement**

The collection is arranged into six series.

- **Series 1, Glass Plates, A1 to A55, 1908-1929 and undated**
- **Series 2, Glass Plates, B1 to B159, [1913?] and undated**
- **Series 3, Glass Plates, C1 to C50, undated**
- **Series 4, Glass Plates, D1 to D64, undated**
- **Series 5, Glass Plates, E1 to E8, undated**
- **Series 6, Photographic Prints, undated**
- **Series 7: Background Materials, 1930s-1964**
Bibliography

http://www.coachbuilt.com/bui/c/cunningham/cunningham.htm


Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:
- Ambulances
- Automobile industry and trade
- Automobiles -- Design and construction
- Carriage and wagon making
- Carriage industry
- Family-owned business enterprises
- Hearses (Vehicles)
- Horse-drawn vehicles

Types of Materials:
- Photographs -- 1900-1950
- Photographs -- Black-and-white negatives -- Glass -- 1900-1950

Geographic Names:
- Rochester (N.Y.)
Container Listing

Series 1: Glass Plates, A1 to A55, 1908-1929 and undated

Box 1
A1, Cunningham horse-drawn, undated

Box 1
A2, Cunningham electric, model #731, lamp number 107, 1908

Box 1
A3, Cunningham electric, model #731, lamp number 107, 1908

Box 1
A4, Cunningham electric, model #731, lamp number 107 (top up), 1908

Box 1
A5, Cunningham, early four cylinder, 1909

Box 1
A6, Cunningham, early four cylinder, 1909-1910

Box 1
A7, Cunningham, early four cylinder, before model H, 1909-1910

Box 1
A8, Cunningham, early four cylinder, before model H, 1909-1910

Box 1
A9, Cunningham, coupe body for Model T Ford, 1910

Box 1
A10, Cunningham, hearse, 1910

Box 1
A11, Cunningham, model #871, model H, 1911

Box 1
A12, Cunningham, style 942, model M, 1913

Box 1
A13, Cunningham, style 37A, model V-2, 1917

Box 1
A14, Cunningham, style 979, model M (hearse), 1917

Box 1
A15, Cunningham, model V-2 (personnel car), 1917

Box 1
A16, Cunningham, model V-2, 1917

Box 1
A17, Cunningham, model V-2, funeral car, 1918

Box 1
A18, Cunningham, style 71, model V-3 (De Palma Roadster), 1919

Box 1
A19, Cunningham, model v-4, style 91A, 1920

Box 1
A20, Model V-4, 1920

Box 1
A21, Model V-4, style 94A, 1920

Box 1
A22, Model V-4, style 87A, 1920

Box 1
A23, Cunningham, model v-5, style 92A, 1921
Box 1  A24, Cunningham, model V-5, style 96A, 1921
Box 1  A25, Cunningham, model V-5, style 100A, 1921
Box 1  A26, Cunningham, model V-4, style 117A, 1921
Box 1  A27, Cunningham, model V-4, style 121, 1921
Box 1  A28, Model V-4, style 121 A, 1921
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Box 1  A30, Model V-5, 1921
Box 1  A31, Cunningham, model V-6, 1923
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Box 1  A33, Cunningham, 90 degree counter balanced crankshaft, 1924
Box 1  A34, Cunningham, style 96A, model V-4, 1921
Box 1  A35, Cunningham, style 163, model V-6, 1924
Box 1  A36, Hearse style, 793 on white coach steamer, undated
Box 1  A37, Cunningham, undated
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Box 1 A51, Cunningham auto, #731, lamp number 107, 1908
Box 1 A52, Cunningham auto, undated
Box 1 A53, Cunningham auto body, number 967, undated
Box 1 A54, Cunningham, limousine interior, [1913?]
Box 1 A55, Cunningham, model V-5, 1921

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B2, Cunningham, horse-drawn (funeral carriage, left side view), partial illustration G.S.B., undated

Box 1
B3, Cunningham, horse-drawn (ambulance, left side view), number 662, lamp number 96, undated

Box 1
B4, Cunningham, horse-drawn (details of carvings on carriage), undated

Box 1
B5, Cunningham, horse-drawn (funeral carriage, left side view, no top), number 746, lamp 93, undated

Box 1
B6, Cunningham, horse-drawn (funeral carriage, left side view), number 758, lamp 80, undated

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B7, Cunningham, horse-drawn (details of carvings on carriages), undated

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B13, Cunningham, horse-drawn (funeral hearse, left side view), number 674, undated

Box 1
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Box 1
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Box 1
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Box 1
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B19, Cunningham, horse-drawn (funeral hearse, left side view), number 672, undated

Box 1

B20, Cunningham, horse-drawn (ambulance, rear open), undated

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B21, Cunningham, horse-drawn (hearse), number 728, undated

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B22, Cunningham, horse-drawn, number 683, lamp 71-E, undated

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B23, Cunningham, horse-drawn, number 698, lamp 66, undated

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B24, Cunningham, horse-drawn, number 696, lamp 101, undated

Box 1

B25, Cunningham, horse-drawn (hearse), number 727, lamp 95-F, undated

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B26, Cunningham, horse-drawn (hearse), number 707, undated

Box 1

B27, Cunningham, horse-drawn, number 662, undated

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B28, Cunningham, horse-drawn (hearse), number 672 1/2, lamp 78-O, undated

Box 2

B29, Cunningham, horse-drawn number 705 (nameplate roadstrand, J.L. Hill photo), undated

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B30, Cunningham, horse-drawn (horse drawn hearse), number 726 1/4, lamp 101, undated

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B32, Cunningham, horse-drawn (horse drawn hearse), number 704, (J.L. Hill photo), undated

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B80, Cunningham, horse-drawn (hearse), number 3545, undated

B81, Cunningham, horse-drawn (hearse), number 3533, undated

B82, Cunningham, horse-drawn (hearse), number 486 1/4, undated

B83, Cunningham, horse-drawn (hearse), number 589 1/4, lamp 101, undated

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| Box 3 | B144, Cunningham, view of lumber door, number 2858, [1913?] |
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Box 3  B150, Cunningham, horse-drawn (brougham), number 643, [1913?]

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