

CUNNINGHAM, G. C.

INTERVIEW #8587

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for OklahomaField Worker's name John F. Daugherty.This report made on (date) September 22, 1937. 19371. Name G. C. Cunningham.2. Post Office Address Mill Creek, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month May Day 18 Year 1861.5. Place of birth Tennessee.6. Name of Father Jack Cunningham Place of birth Tennessee.Other information about father Rowed barge on rivers-Hauled lumber.7. Name of Mother Betty Barnes. Place of birth Kentucky.

Other information about mother _____

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 5.

John Daugherty,
Field Worker.

An Interview With G. C. Cunningham,
Mill Creek, Oklahoma.

My parents were Jack and Betty Barnes Cunningham.

Father was born in Tennessee, mother in Kentucky.

(The dates are unknown).

Father went up and down the rivers on barges and carried timber to saw mills. There were five children in our family.

I was born in Tennessee May 18, 1861.

I came to Indian Territory in 1880, on a horse, and worked on a farm for Henry Gatewood near Berwyn for several years. I was plowing on this man's farm north of Berwyn when the rails were laid on the Santa Fe Railroad in 1886.

In those days homes were far apart, and there was no means of communication except on horses. Sometimes after an election, it would be two months before we heard who the governor was.

There was no law except the gun. Everybody carried guns, and it didn't take long to start a shooting fray if a quarrel occurred. The desperadoes dodging the law from

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other states were good hearted fellows. As long as one minded his own business they were friends with him. If one borrowed money from one of them he must promise to pay it back on a certain date, and when the day came it must be paid, or an explanation made. If this was not done, the borrower was liable to be found hanging in the woods to a tree or lying around his place pierced with bullet holes. One who refused to pay was called a rascal, and his neighbors all knew him as such. When one became a rascal in the minds of his neighbors it was time for him to move or they moved him anyway..

The Indians were very slow to make friends with a white man. They wouldn't talk unless they were acquainted with him. After they had confidence in him they were real friends, and were loyal and truthful.

They wouldn't live in a house where an Indian had died. If they had an old person living with them, they built a "death house" in their yard, for this old person to sleep in, so that when death came he would be in his

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little hut, and they wouldn't have to move. Many times they would tear down or burn the "death house" after the person who had occupied it was dead. Occasionally they buried their dead in the house, and moved off and left them.

I stayed in a home one night near Berwyn. When bed time came they took me to a log room with a dirt floor. I noticed three mounds in this room, and inquired what they were. I was told that they were graves of three Indians. I couldn't sleep in that room. I told them I would move the house. They thought nothing about the graves in their house. Houses were scarce and that was the only one they could find.

There were no farms at that time. Ten acres was a large farm. The largest one I knew of was a forty acre one near Mill Creek. It was considered very large.

I married Ella Marshal in Texas on February 20, 1885, and we located on a farm near Berwyn. The first year I was on this place I paid a grazing permit of forty dollars to a permit collector. That night he got in a poker game with a neighbor and the next day I saw the

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forty dollars in my neighbors hands. I reported the incident to authorities at Tishomingo and that was the last time that collector came.

I went to the Comanche Drawing in 1901 or 1902, but I didn't get any land. A friend and I went together and we agreed that we would be partners if either drew a claim. He got a claim, but a squatter got on it. He paid forty dollars each to start proceedings to get him off. After seeing the land where the squatter had plowed, we both decided it wasn't worth our time and money, so we let the squatter have it.

Land produced well in those days. Corn was raised in large quantities on a very small acreage. In the fall, this corn was ricked on the ground, and put in troughs and chopped with a hatchet to feed the cattle through the winter.

There were no roads to travel. When we wanted to go anywhere we just traveled across the prairie making our own trail, or followed Indian trails. Indians always rode single file, no matter how many in a bunch. The women rode sideways.

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INTERVIEW.

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I have been in Mill Creek for seventeen years.

We are the parents of ten children.