



THE URBANA FREE LIBRARY

210 West Green Street, Urbana, IL 61801 • 217-367-4057 • urbanafreelibrary.org

J.O. Cunningham
Journals, 1853-1915

Collection 380

Champaign County Historical Archives

Compiled by: Paul Blobaum, Antonia Pecoraro, and Sara Bennett, March 2025

Creator/Corporate Name: J.O. Cunningham

Inclusive Dates: 1853-1915

Physical Description: 1 box, (.25 linear ft.)

Language: English

Provenance:

The J.O. Cunningham Journals were donated to the Champaign County Historical Archives in 2014 by the Board of Cunningham Children's Home. The journals were given to Cunningham Children's Home by David Rogers, from Little Rock, Arkansas. He found the journals in his mother's collection, who had been an antique appraiser, dealer, and ran estate sales in Oklahoma and Texas.

Access:

These records are accessible to the public within applicable copyright restrictions and limited to use at the Champaign County Historical Archives of The Urbana Free Library.

Biographical Note:

Joseph Oscar (J.O.) Cunningham was born on December 12, 1830 and died on April 30, 1917. He married Mary M. McConnoughey on October 13, 1853; they had no children. They moved to Urbana in 1853 from Eugene, Indiana after purchasing the *Urbana Union* newspaper, the only newspaper in Champaign County at the time. In 1905 he authored *The History of Champaign County*. He was a lawyer and elected county judge in 1861, and appointed to the Board of Trustees of the Illinois Industrial College (now named the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) in 1867. Joseph and Mary donated their home to the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which would later become the Cunningham Children's Home.

Scope and Content Note:

This collection contains two journals written by Cunningham. The first journal was started in 1853 and the last entry was dated 1903. The second journal was started in 1891 and the last entry was dated 1915.

The majority of the first journal was written in 1853, when Cunningham first moved to Urbana at the age of 23. It describes his career as a teacher in Eugene, Indiana after his graduation from Union Law School in Cleveland, Ohio, and ends shortly after his move to Urbana at the recommendation of his half-brother. Of interest is his commitment to the temperance movement organization the Sons of Temperance. Cunningham describes writing opinion letters to the *Eugene Register* in favor of outlawing the sale of alcohol, and the journal contains some clippings of these pieces in its later half. Other clippings note Cunningham's take-over of the *Urbana Union* and describe Abraham Lincoln's political career in Illinois.



THE URBANA FREE LIBRARY

210 West Green Street, Urbana, IL 61801 • 217-367-4057 • urbanafreelibrary.org

J.O. Cunningham
Journals, 1853-1915

Collection 380

The second journal was written many years later between 1891 and 1915. In this journal, Cunningham describes attending the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Another passage details Cunningham and his wife Mary's donation of their home to the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which would later become the Cunningham Children's Home.

Arrangement:

The two journals are arranged in one quarter sized box.

Related Material:

"Cunningham Family" File

"Cunningham, J.O." File

Digital images of the diaries are preserved on the Archives' preservation server.

The History of Champaign County by J.O. Cunningham

A History of the Early Settlement of Champaign County, Ill by J.O. Cunningham

Subject Terms:

Diaries

Journals

Judges

Sons of Temperance

Urbana Union (Urbana, Ill.)

Women's Home Missionary Society

Name Terms:

Cunningham, J.O.

Cunningham, Joseph Oscar

Cunningham, Mary M.

McConnoughey, Mary M.

Container List

Box #1

Folder 1: Journal #1, 1853-1903

Folder 2: Journal #2, 1891-1915