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Abstract: Eileen Cunningham was born March 17, 1921 in the Illinois River Valley and is 86 years old. As the youngest of six children, she spent the first 17 years of her life on her father's farm. Her father, Charles Henry Smith, raised cattle for slaughter. Their breeds were Hereford (what Eileen called White Faces) and another breed she called yellow hammers. The cattle were sold through the St. Louis market. Eileen's father grew alfalfa, hay, and soybeans to feed the livestock. She remembers that during the Great Depression the cattle sold for only ten cents a pound. Ms. Cunningham stated that she was different from her other siblings, and always wanted to go to college. She was able to talk her parents into sending her to further her education. After four years of undergraduate work, Eileen heard of a program looking for people who would like to be trained as nurses. This program was in response to a shortage caused by WWII. Eileen needed an additional year of school to qualify for the program. She paid for this year herself. In the end, Eileen went to Cornell University in New York to learn nursing. After graduation, Eileen lived in New York City until she fell in love with a young man who called her back to the Illinois River Valley. That relationship did not work out, but she was again home. After her sister passed away, she eventually fell in love with her sister's husband (Joseph Cunningham), resulting in marriage and Eileen taking on her sister's three children as her own. Another four children were born to Eileen and her husband who was a mail carrier, but always wanted to buy a farm. In 1954 Joseph bid on an 80 acre farm and won it for $14,000. With the new farm, Joseph planted alfalfa, hay, soybeans, and corn. This farm also had minimal livestock, including chickens and a milking cow, from which Eileen sold surplus milk. Ms. Cunningham is an excellent historian, focusing on the Illinois River Valley and on limestone houses. Eileen explains some of the history of Green, Calhoun, and Jersey counties. She also tells of a story where a one room school house made of limestone was hit by a

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tornado, killing the school teacher. Eileen comments on the nut production of the valley and her favorite hobby on the farm, peafowl. Eileen explained how she had bought two peacocks when her and her husband bought the farm and these two multiplied into sixteen by the time she left the farm. She explained that in the last ten years parts of the farm have been sold off and are now becoming a vineyard.

Keywords: Illinois River Valley; Cattle; Hereford; Alfalfa; Hay; Soybeans; Livestock; Great Depression; College; Nursing; World War II; Cornell University; New York City; Mail Carrier; Corn; Chickens; Milking Cow; Limestone Houses; Green County; Calhoun County; Jersey County; Tornado; Nut Production; Peafowl; Peacocks; Vineyard

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Interview with Eileen Cunningham

#ISM_06_CunninghamEil

March 26, 2008

Interviewer: Michael Maniscalco

(set up interview to 3:44)

Maniscalco: Okay. Are we ready? Okay. Today is March 26th, 2008. It is approximately 10:00. We are sitting in Eileen Cunningham's home a little bit outside of Carrollton, Illinois. How are you doing today, Eileen?

Cunningham: I'm doing fine.

Maniscalco: Great. Well, you've been very nice and gracious in allowing us to come here and do an interview with you for the Oral History of Illinois Agriculture project with the Illinois State Museum. Let's start out with some very basic easy questions. There we go.

(irrelevant BG chatter regarding locating something)

Cunningham: You could go in back there. [My son Daniel and Debra live there. They own this five acres.] I don't know where they're all—they scatter every day.

Maniscalco: Okay. Let's start with some real easy questions. Can you tell us your age, date of birth? And you can lie, it's okay.

Cunningham: March 17th, 1921.

Maniscalco: Okay. And you were born where?

Cunningham: On a farm south of Eldred.

Maniscalco: South of Eldred.

Cunningham: Eldred. [Greene County].

Maniscalco: Okay. Can you kind of explain to us your immediate family makeup? Brothers and sisters?

Cunningham: Yes. My father was born 1882 and lived north of Eldred. And he and my mother met in Eldred. She was born in 1887, the daughter of the postmaster of Eldred. And they were married in 1908. And my oldest brother—they had a boy—they were married in '07. And he [my brother Luther] was born in 1908. And then a second boy was born in 1910 and he died. A breathing disorder. I think he must have had pneumonia. But he died in infancy. And then came five girls. And I'm the youngest of the five girls. Now do you want to hear about each one of them?

Maniscalco: Sure.

Cunningham: Okay. Jeannette was born in 1912 and she married Keith Brannan, who became one of my father's hired men and lived in a tenant house on the farm. —Oh no, wait. (series of halted phrases) They [my parents] rented. He rented then. He rented a farm south of Eldred. The Widaschek. They were from Austria, the Widaschecks.—Jeanette was born in 1911 [1912] and then a sister Norma in 1912 [1914] and a sister Doris in 1914 [1916] and a sister Marjorie in 1918 and then I was born on Saint Patrick's Day in 1921.

Maniscalco: Ohhh, on Saint Patrick's Day.

Cunningham: And because we always had hired men, and he [Dad] said I was going to be born on Saint Patrick's Day, "If this one is a boy, it'll be a holiday. We'll celebrate." (laughs) But it never was [a celebration]. It was just another day.

Maniscalco: Now what about your grandparents?

Cunningham: Well, my grandfather's name was [Charles H.] Borman, my mother's maiden name. And his father was an immigrant from Westphalia, Prussia, [John Borman]. He ran away from Prussia in 1853 to escape the draft, for one thing. They were having a [military] draft in those little kingdoms in Prussia. And also he was slated to become a [Roman] Catholic priest. Every family was expected to furnish a young man for priesthood. And he didn't want to do that. So he ran away to the United States, got on a boat and landed in [made his way to] Niagara County, Tonawanda, New York. And there he met up with some friends and they decided to come west. So they came down the Erie Canal and then they must have gone the Ohio River to Saint Louis, and they came up the Mississippi, branched into the Illinois and [landed] on Diamond Island. It's a farmable island in the Illinois River. Just straight west of here. And so they spent a [the] winter there and in the spring the three young men decided to part and Mr. Kamp went upriver and settled Kampsville. Yeah, he settled there. He renamed it. It had been called something—Farrowtown, before that. But he named it Kampsville. Mr. Child went downriver and he settled at Hardin where the settlement of Hardin was. And Charles Henry [Great grandfather John] Borman came up the Macoupin Creek, which branched into the Illinois River, and settled on a plat of land. They called it the "horseshoe." It was a big horseshoe [shape] where Macoupin Creek was very irregular, before the Corps of Engineers got hold of it. It meandered around a lot. So that's my Borman line.

And then my father Charles H. [paternal grandfather Orlando Rufus] Smith, we can only get back to Iowa, Allamakee County. The history says he left Alamakee County and crossed the river and then came down the Illinois River Valley and settled north of Eldred. [Greene County]. And one of his daughters married a Peters and then that's the tie-in with Settells in the Illinois State Library. His wife is a Peters or maybe his mother. He ties into the Peters line.

So Charles H. Smith and Beatrice Borman were married in 1907. They met in Eldred. And then he was tending bar and he saved enough money to buy a team of horses and a wagon and get married. And then they started renting this Widaschek farm, which he rented until 1917; he started buying the farm that I grew up on. We moved in—he built a new house, got a Sears—well, he started buying the land at World War I prices, $300 an acre, and he bought from at least two landowners and connected, we had [about] 400 acres. Let's see, 280—210 out in the river valley and then the rest was up into the valley and pastureland. So he [Dad] rode horseback, commuted down to the farm, until 1925. And they built a Sears—well, it really was a Montgomery Ward house, like the Sears houses, a prefab [a new] house. And that was 1925. A friend of his [Dad's] had gone into appliance business here in Carrollton and we had one of the first Frigidaire refrigerators—

Maniscalco: Oh, really.

Cunningham: —in the whole county [in] 1925. And this same man who had the business was—I call him now a genius. But he had a patent for a curving [bending] copper tubing and he ran a copper pipe above the two—we had two ice trays and we had a spigot. The refrigerator was in the

dining room. The motor was up on the top. But he put a spigot in [on the side of the] refrigerator and we had ice cold spring water from a spigot in 1925. I don't have that now. (laughs) But there was a spring. There's a creek in that valley: Cole Creek [Hollow]. And we built right along the creek. And a spring was across the creek. So they piped the water. He dug under the creek, piped the water, and we had running water. [We] had a cistern system for the kitchen and the bathroom and the toilet, were all on this cistern water. And then our spring water came. We had a faucet in the kitchen with the well [spring] water ,we called it. And then through the refrigerator [for drinking].

Maniscalco: Now you mentioned this house, this prefab house that you got to live in in 1925. Do you have any memories of that house? What was it like?

Cunningham: Oh yes, yes. One funny story [from] the older sisters. We always had lots of company, and they'd have girls [girlfriends] there, and one of my older sisters has done writing, too. And she wrote a lot about me and helped me with my writing. But she [Sister Norma] said, "We big girls would go in the bathroom and lock the door because we wanted to talk girl talk. And Eileen was always begging to come in or threatening or complaining she needed to use the bathroom." And I can remember one time I got a, took a glass of water and I just poured it so they would think I needed the bathroom. (laughs) Poured it on the door handle. (both laugh)

And we swam. We had a swimming hole up the creek. We swam every day. And the big girls, one day, decided to swim in the nude. And what did—they called me Baby Eileen, some of the family did. So what did Baby Eileen do? But I ran home and tattletaled. So Mother came up the creek, walked up there, and told those girls they had to put their suits on. (more laughs)

And of course our valley, Cole Creek Valley, is about a quarter of a mile wide, and there were children at the next home to the south. So we would meet at the top of the hill and play up on the hills. And there were outcroppings and little caves and animal runs and we just played there. That was our playground.

And everybody had a horse. We all had riding horses. And we would meet. I would meet the kids from the north and [the south] they would come. See, we were at the edge of the river valley, and then you call it the bottoms when you get out into the valley. But they [all] had horses. Well, we'd ride down past their house[s]. It was three miles to the river. And ride all the way to the river. So that was almost every day. And my horse [was great], well I could ride him up to the gate and lean over and open the swinging gate and ride through, [and then close it,] not even have to get off the horse [Old Bob].

Maniscalco: What types of games did you guys play? It sounds like you had a great playground.

Cunningham: Oh. Hide-and-seek was the favorite. Our house, the 1925 house, was a bungalow. And we could throw a ball across and we'd play Andy Over, play throw the ball over you, and then whoever caught it could run. And we played a lot of tag, various kinds of tag. Wood tag or—what else? Tree tag. And we played ball in our front yard. And we—but hide-and-seek was really the favorite because like in the spring of the year we would hide in the cornfields, and when they got up like chest high, you [we] could really hide well. And then in the fall [after the corn husking], we could still hide in the cornfields. And let's see. We played ball. Oh, one thing that was real—or a couple things. We had hoops. It was [they were] part of a wagon wheel. A steel hoop[s]. And Dad would fix us a lath with a like a cross like this with [on] a

long handle and then we'd run those—what do you call—hoop? Yeah, rolling the hoop. We'd roll the hoop all around the yard and up and down the road. And we'd try to keep it going.

And then we made guns. Let's see, Dad would have old inner tubes. The Model T Ford had an inner tube and then a tire. And he would give us the old tires [tubes] and we'd cut [around] strips of rubber and then we'd stretch a handle to hold the wire—to hold the gun together, and then you would stretch it, open up like where you pulled the trigger, and shoot each other with those rubber bands. (laughs) Because when you [we] pulled the handle, the nail was in the bottom, that would release the one that was stretched and anchored.

Maniscalco: Okay. Wow. It sounds like you had a lot of fun.

Cunningham: Oh we did. We did. And dogs. We'd play. We always had a dog. And oh my, that's a sad story. I played— We had one named Dickey Dog. And I played like we were in a dog show. I don't know how I knew about dog shows. But they [ours] never had collars. But [So] I put a[n elastic] garter around his neck and then tied a rope. And I was leading him around. And I forgot to take the garter off. And Dickey Dog got sick. He wasn't eating. And he wasn't—he was breathing hard. And the parents were always scared of [about] mad dogs. You know, some dogs would get hydrophobia and they'd run out on the road frothing at the mouth. So if there was a mad dog in the neighborhood all the women, all the mothers phoned each other. Well, my parents were worried that maybe Dickey Dog had gone mad [when he died]. And in examining him, well, I guess they went ahead, did they have him killed or killed him? And the protocol was you took the head of the animal to the veterinarian, and then he made the diagnosis if it was hydrophobia. And when the veterinarian got to Dickey Dog to examine him, he found this garter embedded all the way into his skin, the skin of his neck, and he had choked to death.

Maniscalco: Oh, what a shame.

Cunningham: And I was the villain. It broke my heart. And oh my sisters [blamed me].

Maniscalco: What other pets did you have on the farm?

Cunningham: Well, we didn't—the chickens were sort of like pets, but they were utility. We just had the horse and the dog. Oh, we had cats. Cats galore, 16 cats once [I remember] we had. And we girls helped with the milking sometimes, and I always liked to be out around the barn at milk time. And we had one cow named Lily who was real easy to milk and the kitty cats would come and stand near her, and then I would try to squirt the milk into the mouth of the kitty cat. They stayed around the barn some. Our barn and our house were fairly close. And then they'd come to the house for feeding. Mother always had a big bowl and fed them milk and leftovers. [The chickens and ducks were almost pets.]

Maniscalco: Now it sounds like you had a lot of fun on the farm, but I'm sure that you had lots of chores to do as well.

Cunningham: Yes.

Maniscalco: Can you tell me about some of the chores that you used to do?

Cunningham: Well, as I said, we helped with the milking. When we lived—we called it the old house, the house where we rented until 1925. One of the chores was to always take the milk buckets. Mother would have them all clean and turned upside down. But we girls would run the milk buckets out to the milking barn then. And we carried water. Oh, we were the water carriers.

For the men in the fields. For the wheat harvest, the shocking of the wheat and then the harvest and the corn shucking and planting. And we rode [horseback]. We took two jugs. Dad had them connected with a leather strap and we put them across the saddle. Across the horn of the saddle. But then we got a Model T Ford. Let's see. That would have been—we had it when we moved to the new farm in 1925. And then we would put the jugs in the truck, in the Model T Ford truck, and we had wells. Had a well in the west 40 for a cattle tank when he put the cattle on the corn, the field after the shucking, after the corn shucking. They were bent over, and he'd put the cattle there to start to clean up the field. And we carried water. We got the water from that west 40 well. And then we'd just drive around to where the men were working and give them a drink. And then I was always—the little one had to fill the wood box. We had a cook stove, a wood cook stove, and I was supposed to check it late afternoon, and one sister [Norma] always told me that she always had to practically drag me to get me to fill the woodbox, make sure. And then when we moved to the new house, we had a light in the woodhouse [woodshed]. We had a regular—part of it was to cure hams. What do you call that?

Maniscalco: Like a smokehouse?

Cunningham: Smokehouse. Yeah we had half of this garage, two-car garage, a smokehouse, and a woodshed. And oh, and this 1925 house had electricity. We had a Delco [Plant], and this same man who sold the Frigidaire sold us the Delco, and it was, the engine, was mounted on a block of concrete in the basement. We had a basement too, a basement with a drain and a big pressure tank for the water pressure. And Dad had a workbench on top of that. So we had electricity in the garage. He ran wire there. And then I could carry in the wood by electric light. What was that? A bird I wonder?

Maniscalco: I don't know. What did you use to fuel the Delco? Was it gasoline?

Cunningham: Yes, gasoline. And [it was] loud. Oh, it ran, we'd have to run it so much every day. Had storage batteries. We had 12 storage batteries on a frame around part of the basement, a room in the basement. And that would have to—the Delco motor would have to run. Had an exhaust that went out the basement wall. And would have to run that Delco. And oh, we had a radio. A Delco radio. And my older sisters just loved the—well, they were the soaps of the 1920s and '30s. (laughs) Helen Trent. The "Romance of Helen Trent". "My Gal Sal," and you [we] still hear about some of them.

Maniscalco: What was your favorite?

Cunningham: ["My Gal Sal."] But when the Delco had to charge it interfered with the soaps on the radio [with static]. And oh my older sisters would beg, "Dad don't run the Delco, we've got to hear the story." We called them 'the stories.' And we had an electric iron. I've had [still] some irons on the woodstove. We little girls, I had to help iron. Ironed my father's BVDs. (both laugh) Oh. I wouldn't iron my children's underwear for anything. But we ironed. And she, Mother, would fix two stations at the great big dining room table for us to iron. And then the ironing board [person] got the electric iron. We ironed sheets, everything.

Maniscalco: Wow. Now you mentioned a little bit about your friends that used to live around in the neighborhood. Can you tell us about all your friends that used to live there?

Cunningham: Well, the closest ones were a boy and a girl, Ben and Middie Lou. You see, also in the Illinois River Valley we had these—well, we called them from-the-Chicago-millionaires. L. L. Cook had a 1,000-acre, and we called it a ranch. A. L. Wilcoxon had a ranch. And Ben and Middie

Lou's father—well earlier though a friend of my father built a house almost like ours just about a quarter of a mile down in the next hollow. And that's their father, the man there, was the manager for L. L. Cook's ranch. And they were my closest friends. They had ponies. They had two ponies. And we rode horseback every day. And then up the road to the north was a friend of my mother's and her family. And they had girls. They had three girls. And they were friends with my older sisters. And then the younger one was younger than I, but I played with her some. Well, we'd just go to each other's houses and play. And sometimes oh, we'd do needlework or—4H was coming in in the '30s. And my older sisters could join. And you could be an associate member at nine. So I started in a [4H] sewing club. But then we switched to beef calves. We tended our beef calves in 4H. And, uh, we just gathered a lot and played and we'd have a ballgame.

Maniscalco: How did you contact your friends so that they knew to gather?

Cunningham: Well, [we made plans at] church, home, [by phone,] and school. School. I went to a—we had a one-room country school two miles from our house. And I went there all eight grades. My older sisters [went to]—and we had a high school in the village of Eldred from 1921—and then after finishing the eighth grade they had to get their own transportation, they either walked, they rode horseback, and then a few—sometimes somebody down the road would have a car, and they'd carpool in the car. But our friendships were made at school and then at church. We had a church in Eldred, and that was very active, and we had young people's and Sunday school. And that's when I got acquainted with some of the town kids, we called them. (both laugh)

Maniscalco: Was there a big difference between town kids and country kids?

Cunningham: Yes, yes. They didn't have horses. You know, we did horses and climbing the hills. Now they did—there's a bluff at Eldred. They did—we could go climb the hill at Eldred. But they did more team games, I guess. They played ball in the schoolyard all the time and roller skate[d]s. We had roller skates. And some of them had bicycles.

Maniscalco: You know you mentioned before 4H and how that was starting. Was that the only after school outside the church organization that was around?

Cunningham: Oh yeah, yes. [We did have Royal Neighbors of America Lodge. It had meetings and an insurance program.]

Maniscalco: And what sorts of things, I know you said something about sewing and things like that. But what other—

Cunningham: Well, the girls' sewing and cooking was entirely separate.

Maniscalco: Oh.

Cunningham: They were separate clubs. But then we had our livestock clubs, and that could be hogs, cattle, sheep [all together]. See, we didn't have horses or—no, they didn't go into that. But our leader, because my dad was a cattle feeder, and he loved cattle, and he would pick out—well, two or three farmers—Richard Best, whom I mentioned I think to one of you about being a Funks hybrid corn grower, had two boys. And he was a U of I graduate. He was our 4H leader. See, the extension was just coming in. University was just starting to reach out and organize this extension for women. Home ec, homemakers, homemakers extension. And then the 4H for the boys and girls. And Richard Best was our, the first leader. So our father got us into the calf

club. We dropped out of the girls' club. And he and Mr. Best would go to Kansas City in the fall and that's when the range cattle brought their calves into mar—their cattle and calves. And he would buy these calves for our 4H project. And he'd try to pick out what could become a show calf. So they were not purebred. Then of course some, like the Andress, at Manchester, are you familiar with that? Andress. They've been big Hereford feeders for years and years. And they had purebred bulls. But my father always said well those ranchers out west had pretty good bulls, too. They had purebred bulls. But we couldn't show as a purebred, but we could show—they called them beef calves, 4H beef calves.

Maniscalco: So what sorts of things went into, you know, raising the calves and showing the calves?

Cunningham: Well, we let our calves stay with the feeder cattle. My father would buy about three hundred cattle to feed through the winter months. They'd fatten fat. Always had fat cattle. Four months was the length of time. So we would let our 4H calves feed in the feedlot until about fair time. We'd bring them and pen them up in a little section of the barn, and feed them because we had to keep track, weigh the feed, we had to keep records. And we cleaned out the pen, throwing the manure over into the truck, or the manure spreader. And so the men did a lot of it, but we girls would try out leading them [our calves]. We had halters. We were supposed to train them to lead. And so we would try that. And to position their feet in because you had to have them just so for the livestock show. But theoretically I guess some of the 4H livestock, the calves were kept separate from the herd all the time. But we didn't. We just let 'em have the regular feed. Ground corn and silage that the fat cattle were getting.

Maniscalco: Did you name them?

Cunningham: Oh yes, yes. And well, and then the climax; we showed them. My favorite one was Scooter. He was a—didn't have horns. What do you call those? He was a—

Maniscalco: A polled?

Cunningham: Yes. And so I showed him in the county fair. We would truck them up to the fairgrounds. They have a cattle barn there. And Dad would—or our parents would never let us girls stay. We'd hire the boy next door, or one of our hired men's sons, would stay all night with them. You had to stay all night with the cattle at the fair. Or I guess maybe it was just for fun. But they didn't have any supervision. You had to furnish your own supervision. They were tied up with their halters. And we showed them at the fair. And then about November—see, that would be July or August. And in the fall, October, November, the live—now, what was that called? Producers Livestock Association, which was a coop, it was really an early coop. My dad joined it, and their representatives would come up and help him decide when to market the cattle. And then they would go to that company at East Saint Louis Stockyards. Now there were old line companies too. Some farmers had stuck with private lines for generations. But the Producers Livestock Association is what it was called. And they would have a show at East Saint Louis Stockyards specifically for 4H children. So we would go down, stay in a hotel, stay in the—what's that called? It's still—it's been a restaurant. The Stockyards Inn. We would stay at the Stockyards Inn and show the calves. And then they would bus us over to Saint Louis, the Jefferson Hotel. And we had a lavish banquet. And one of my sisters won third place one year in the Hereford class. And she got to go up in the front and get her check and a ribbon. So that was always the climax [the end of the year]. And then that was farewell. When you asked about naming the calves. And you had to, oh, we hugged them and we cried. Because then—oh, they auctioned them right there at the stockyards as we [watched]—the champion, and it

always went for a high price. And then they would auction off the rest of ours individually. So I remember one year I got a check for $46 for my calf, and see—

Maniscalco: That's not too bad.

Cunningham: Well, they were like ten cents a pound then. That was the Depression. But we at least got a little better price if we took them to the livestock show and then auctioned them off there. So that was the cycle. And then we were without a calf until spring. Dad would go buy. (laughs) Oh, I have to tell one funny story. One year—we loved those Herefords. Whitefaces is what we'd call them, the whitefaces. Or well, either they had horns or—oh oh. (phone rings)

Maniscalco: We'll just pause it for a second.

Cunningham: Can you pause?

(Cunningham takes the phone call from son Arthur and converses: 40:16-42:54)

Cunningham: But have you ever heard of the boxer Ken Norton? And then the football player. Jacksonville? Well, I worked with his mother when I taught up at Jacksonville State Hospital. And we became very good friends. And they loved the farm. And she'd bring Ken—Kenneth. She always called him Kenneth. But she died. Arthur sees the Jacksonville paper early. He works in Greenfield. And I just take the Alton paper. And then I see the Jacksonville at the library. Oh, Ruth. She was my dear friend, dear, dear friend. Oh. Okay.

Maniscalco: Okay. If we're ready to go. Okay.

Cunningham: Let's see. We finished 4H. (both laugh)We sold our calves.

Maniscalco: Yeah we were finishing up 4H.

Cunningham: At the Producers Livestock. And had our fling in Saint Louis.

Maniscalco: Yeah. Now moving from 4H, you mentioned earlier that church played a role in meeting friends and meeting up with friends. What other things went on at church?

Cunningham: Ooh, we had lots of picnics [activity]. And of course Sunday school was where we really studied the Bible and memorized and learned about the world really. Missionaries. The church was a very missionary-minded church. And we always talked about missionaries and learned about them going to India, Africa, the Far East, China. And then we had picnics. And every year, once a year in summer we would take a trip to some—the superintendent of the Sunday school was a teacher. She'd been a teacher and was just very progressive. And she would arrange for us to take a trip to usually Saint Louis. [We'd go] to the zoo or the botanical gardens or Shaw's Garden, something, some attraction in Saint Louis. And we would go in a big old truck. They'd put bales of straw all around the back, and we'd take our lunch. Mother would pack a lunch. It was a real outing. And [we] drove that truck right into Saint Louis. We didn't have buses or vans. And it'd be just filled with children.

Maniscalco: What type of church was it?

Cunningham: Baptist. American Baptist. And we swam a lot. We'd all go swimming [at the pools].

Maniscalco: Is there something else?

Cunningham: And then we also mingled. There was an association. It was called the BYPU. Well, that was for the older teenagers. Baptist Youth—BYPU. Something. Union was the last. Now this

shouldn't even go on the thing. But there was the nickname around. And we girls got in on it. Some—the boys would say button up your pants. (both laugh) We all wanted to be in the BYPU. But we got to know in a fairly wide area—you notice Greene is a square county. We have so many—Roodhouse, Whitehall, Carrollton, and then Greenfield to the east. So we got to know kids, youngsters, [young people] from those towns through the church organization. Which was, that's good for the population, to bring in some new blood.

Maniscalco: Yeah. A little earlier you were actually speaking about the counties, before we started interviewing. Greene County, Jersey County, Calhoun County. Can you tell me a little bit about what you were saying before about them?

Cunningham: Well, you can see from the map, central western Illinois where the guy at Illinois College tried to name it Forgotonia but that was a little bit farther north. But we do kind of get the—we're low population. [The population of] Greene County right now is under [about] 15,000. And most of those [of it] are settled in Whitehall, Carrollton and Roodhouse, [which] are about 3,000 population [Greenfield: 1,000]. So you can see how—and it's always been that way is that—although [earlier] we had more rural population, more rural families. But we kind of discovered [this] I guess it was kind of during the poverty program, the Johnson Era, when, you know, we started grouping the counties to get a population base that we could write grants and seek funds. So Greene, Jersey and Calhoun, well, and Macoupin always kind of stuck together. That'd to be four counties. And let's see, Greene—well, Scott, we would take in Scott sometimes. Greene. North of Greene is Scott County. But when did Illinois become a state?

Maniscalco: 1818.

Cunningham: Yeah, right. And Greene became a county in 1821 just three years later. We were one of the six counties. And at that time Greene encompassed [five]: Greene, Jersey, Macoupin, Scott and Morgan with Jacksonville. Morgan was our—Morgan-Scott was our northern boundary. And they call[ed] that the Mauvais Terre. The creek that goes right through Jacksonville is still called that. It was the Mauvais Terre district. And then east was Macoupin district, because the Macoupin starts over in Macoupin County. And Jersey's—well, I'll back up. Jacksonville, Morgan started getting [population]—you [an area] had to have 3,000 people to become a county. We sometimes say they counted a few cattle and horses. (laugh) But Morgan and Scott broke away as Morgan County in 1823. We just had them two years. And then Macoupin was growing from the south. I kept saying everything started in the south. There were settlements down in southern Macoupin. And that's when our Thomas Carlin—did you see the statue? Isn't that a handsome statue?—helped them. He was a senator at that time. And he helped Macoupin become a county in 1829. And they donated, somebody donated—Spencer Stevenson, because it was so big, they donated land to try to centrally locate the county seat [naming it] in Carlinville. But we kept Jersey till 1839. And now Jerseyville gets everything. You start a multicounty—because they get the more commuter population. So many people in Jersey. They're up to—well, 8,000 at least. If they get 10,000 they'll have to hire a fire chief. So got to say that. But there are so many suburbs, have risen up between. So that's—we still stick together on some programs. We'll have like a Greene-Jersey-Calhoun. Now the [U of I] extension in Jersey covers Calhoun. Calhoun and Jersey stick together a lot.

Maniscalco: Now you said something interesting about Calhoun and the start of Calhoun and where that land came from before. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Cunningham: Well, I wish I had that—shows the—I got one in Dr. Warren's stack over there. But I don't want to unwire again. It's called the *Evolution of Counties*. It's free

through the Secretary of State. But, well, let's see now. See we became a county in—well, Pike. That's right. Pike became a county a year or two after [the same year as] Greene, and that's what Pike was [covered]. From the tip of Calhoun County all the way north to the Wisconsin [Territory] border, including Chicago. So we just [like to] tell those Chicago people, Oh yeah, we used to own you. Gained your independence. But then when the War of 1812—that was—well, it wasn't a county yet. See, because we were still [Illinois] territory. But it was separate because of the Illinois River dividing. And then of course it was that peninsula between the Illinois and the Mississippi that meets down around Grafton. [The peninsula was set aside as bounty land for soldiers of the war of 1812. The whole area, named Pike became a county in 1821.] And now what was the question again, about when Pike became a county, and then Calhoun in [1821]. I don't even know when they broke away. Sometime I think in the eighteen—this had been [in the] bounty land, see. And there were [some] settlers there. And there was still unclaimed land, which was part of the territory [the new state].

Maniscalco: So it was bounty land for the war—

Cunningham: The soldiers of the War of 1812, yeah.

Maniscalco: Very interesting.

Cunningham: Right. And it was known then. It had been surveyed. I think Pike surveyed it when he went west. Then they knew that this was this land between the rivers. And sometimes it's called that. Land between the Rivers. But Calhoun [County], that's a southern general, wasn't it? General Calhoun was—they named it [for Vice President Calhoun]—now where did that—and it went—Pike, it and Pike, because the first county seat of Pike was Atlas, which I think is now in Calhoun [when it broke from Pike County in 1825.] . But they worked out that boundary. And then Pike took the north part. And then of course there are more counties up in the far northern Illinois.

Maniscalco: To kind of go back to some of the organizations and things we were talking about, and you had already mentioned this before, a little bit about your school, and you had gone to a one-room schoolhouse. Can you explain what it looked like and what it was like?

Cunningham: Oh we had the perfect setting. One of these little valleys, a little hollow off the bluff road. And the old—let me see, Greene became a county 1821, and they had school districts. There was a school called the Lincoln School, which served—oh, a huge area. Like from—there was a school at Eldred because—yeah, somebody had built where the creek goes through. And of course that was developing as a settlement and a village. There was the school there [of curious construction called the Stone Jug School, possibly first in Greene County]. And then the old Lincoln School served everybody. The Macoupin Creek is below the Lincoln School, and that was a big dividing line. So it served all the—they were mostly in the hills. The settlers were along the bluffs. They hadn't ventured out into the valley, the bottoms, yet. Because it was flood-prone almost annually. So that school was quite early. I would think 1870 at least, because one of my parent's relatives taught there. And he graduated from high school. Carrollton got a high school in the 1870s and he had graduated [in the first class] from high school. And then he went and taught at the old Lincoln School. Then they divided it. That's it! Lincoln District became North Lincoln, West Lincoln—because families were going out in the

bottom—and then South Lincoln stayed there right at the Macoupin Creek. So we all knew each other. We knew the kids went to South Lincoln, and we knew there were children out at West Lincoln. Then the school, the old Lincoln School, I've got it in my book on—because it was limestone. And we think my ancestors built it, because it's very much like the Clendennen House. It went with the farm. Then it was integrated into a farm. And, you know, 1927, we—we're in April now—we had a terrible tornado on April 19th, 1927, that came across from Calhoun County, across the river, and came across the bottoms. And it demolished that stone school. Now that's how powerful these tornado winds are. And so that was the old Lincoln School, was one of the landmarks. And then I was—our farm was two miles from the North Lincoln [School]. And that's where they built it, right in a little valley that starts up a the hollow. And we had one teacher, all eight grades. And oh, we had a baseball diamond [and swings]. We played ball. We played the same things, hide-and-seek, jump rope—we had a lot of tricky things with jump rope—, tag. And then we had gangs.

Maniscalco: Oh, my gosh.

Cunningham: (laughs) And, we called them gangs. Two or three of us that really liked each other, and we built a little shelter or put some sticks up, we'd call that our camp. And we actually warred sometimes. Snowballs. (both laugh) [Especially] Snowball fights. But the unique thing is [was] that one side of the school ground was [had] an outcropping of limestone. So in the winter the moisture would come over and we'd have these great huge icicles, would drop down from those outcroppings. And one of the competitive things was to see—it was always the boys did it —who could get up there and get the biggest icicle and get it back down to the school ground. I don't think the game had a name, but that was—and we took our sleds to school because it was a gradual—we had little hills, and we'd go up as far as we could to the fence and get a running jump and race each other down across the hillside. And we had a fallen tree across a ditch. This school ground had everything that they wouldn't dream of today. But we'd walk across—when you got so could walk across that log without falling, that was quite a thing.

Maniscalco: What about the teacher?

Cunningham: Oh, well, we had single women teachers. Now the early, old Lincoln School is interesting, always had a man teacher, a man. And he'd have like 70 pupils, 60 or 70 pupils. But we had usually in the 20s, pupils, and she would teach. We'd go up to recite. We had a desk and the little kids were on one side, and then the big kids would have double—a bench, it was a seat with a desk in front, and sometimes they sat two to a desk, they would share their desk part. And we'd go up to the reciting place and do our lessons. And then the big kids would help the little ones. They'd help us with words in our reading and our arithmetic. And one memory that I have, there along the river is bald eagle country. And I can remember sitting in my little desk and looking out across that—it was a field just across the road with some old trees and a fence line. And eagles were nesting right out there. I can remember seeing those eagles fly in and they must have had eaglets and they were feeding, and here I was watching that all through the school year. Every once in a while we look out and see the eagle—

Maniscalco: Oh, that's neat.

Cunningham: —that close.

Maniscalco: Well, how was the schoolhouse heated? What was the—

Cunningham: They first had—just a wood stove, and then we got a big—my father was on the school board, and I remember it was a big deal. They got a—they called it a furnace and it was a stove in the center, a wood stove—coal stove. And the teacher did the firing, too, you know. And then it had a tin outer part so we could sit close to that. We sat around the stove quite a lot, but she had to build a fire and keep it going.

Maniscalco: What kinds of chores did you have at the school?

Cunningham: Only the water bucket [and erasers]. We had to go—we had an open well on the school grounds with chain [and buckets]. Oh. And I got pneumonia when I was in the first grade, but I don't think it was from that, but somebody would have to go fill the water bucket. And we had a dipper. Or sometimes we'd bring a cup from home. We'd have a tin cup. And then, boys filled the coal bucket. But she [the teacher] swept. We didn't do any of the cleaning or the—she swept the school. [All the parents had “clean the schoolhouse day” each fall.] And then the school board—you're going to have to detach me again. I need the toilet. Up here? Could I just do this?

Maniscalco: Just leave that top one on. There you go.

Cunningham: Gosh, I wish I had something to drink or—I've got some soda.

Maniscalco: Oh, I'm fine, thank you.

Cunningham: Or, if you want to walk around or go outside.

(brief pause)

Maniscalco: Okay, so we're back in business.

Cunningham: Yeah, we finished the education.

Maniscalco: Yes, let's talk about what we're really here to talk about. And that's farming. So you grew up on a farm. Your father fed cattle from what I understand. Can you explain what his farm looked like and a little bit about his operation?

Cunningham: Well, it was in one of the widest—the Illinois River Valley has the bluff line - the outcropping all the way from in southern Illinois, it ends up around, oh, Peoria. And the farm that he [Dad] was renting, and then bought, was in one of the wider of the hollows - the valleys that led into the Illinois River Valley. And had a creek, Cole Creek, which started out here on the prairie and went all the way through to the bluff line. And then all those creeks led into the Illinois River. So there were some hills to the north and a road. A road went along the edge of our property line. Well, there was property north of the road, which would be coming east toward the prairie. And he [Dad] utilized those [it]. One patch there was always our potato patch. And then we had a peach orchard, where there was another little flat place where he planted peach trees. Then we had a road all the way—well, that was about a 40-acre field next to the road. And then it gradually narrowed. And he farmed one more field. And then there was a little stream from a spring that went out of that field into Cole Creek. So, you see, all this is connected by springs and generous waterways. And then that [the land] went up on top of the hill to the prairie level. And we had an alfalfa field up there. That was also hilly though [and eroded]. And, well, I'll inject this here. But we had CCCs. Are you including any of that? The Civilian Conservation Corps from in the '30s for the Depression boys [young men]. And we had a camp. [For Greene County,] there was a camp here in Carrollton where the high school now bought that and established the new high school. And there was a branch of it in Eldred

right in a little plot of land along the bluff. So my father signed up. You [farmers]could sign up for projects. And the CCCs planted one of those gullies—like a gully in the alfalfa field—with black locust [trees]. And they're still living today. So, but he [the men] could farm around [them]. There was enough flatland [land] that they could harvest the alfalfa and then it had to come down that hill. See, each one has a—Coal Hill. We named them hills. And [ours was] the Woodville Hill, we had to haul that hay down the hill and to our barns, which were down on the [valley] level. So that was quite a thing [job]. And this is a funny aside. I told you we had a Model T Ford pickup truck, it couldn't pull that [Woodville] hill. But it could go in reverse. So my father would turn around at the bottom of the hill and back up (both laugh) to the alfalfa field. I never did learn to do that.

Maniscalco: What kind of buildings were there on the farm?

Cunningham: Well, then let's see. After [when] he bought it in 1918, he [Dad] built this—because he had some cattle then. And then they built—oh, it was just the ultimate in a feedlot barn. Had a big hayloft, because we'd derrick the hay up, you know, then ran it on like a railroad, a little road all the way, you dump the back of the barn first. And then on three sides—no, just two sides—of this hayloft were slots [between], were boards, where the cows, the cattle, could eat hay ad lib. But we had to always push the hay out to where the cattle could get to it. Then the other side was a horse barn, and I think it was space for 12 horses. We had kind of a maternity unit at one end where the mares would have their foals, and then as the men came in from the fields, they would water the horses [at the creek], and then take them. They'd go into their designated stalls and hang the harness there. Unharness the horses. And hang the harness. And then they would be fed. They each had a feed box. And that was another chore. We helped with the feeding. I just helped. The men were responsible. But we girls would be around and would help with it. So that and then at the end of that he had a granary where he could put in—they had some kind of mixture. Wheat and corn for the horses. So we had to scoop some of that grain in a little wheelbarrow and put some of that in the horses' feed boxes. And then there was a driveway through [the shed] with corn cribs on beyond that. So the men would bring a wagonload of corn in from the field and they would either shovel it into the corn cribs or we had—oh what's the long thing? An elevator. An elevator, or they'd go [drive the horses] around to the outside of the barn and the wagons had trapdoors and they'd open the trap and run the corn up into the corn crib [with the elevator]. Then the other side of it—see, this was like a big square. You had a hayloft, horse barn, a drive-through corn cribs. And then the cattle feedlot was on the east side of that. We had a huge watering tank and had the water pumped there. Dad had some kind of an engine that they could go over [to the spring] and start the engine and turn valves and it would fill that cattle watering tank. And then he had open feed troughs and the men would open the trap [sliding] door and fill it [bushels] with this ground corn and then carry it on their shoulders to the feed trough[s].

Maniscalco: Wow. What breeds of cattle were there?

Cunningham: Herefords. Always. He [Dad] always had whiteface Herefords. Now there was another—they nicknamed them yellow hammers. They were out of Jersey cows. But sometimes he would buy a load of those [yellow hammers]. And they were a yellowish color but they got square fat like the Herefords. And that was one of the farm jokes. They'd say, Yeah you put your white faces up near the road when they were in a stalk field so everybody'll see your good white faces and hide the yeller hammers back behind the barn. (both laugh) Who cared? But I guess that was part of the [neighborhood]—

Soundman: Were yeller hammers beef cattle?

Cunningham: Yeah, and then they sold them for beef. But there was a line of Jersey [milk cow] in them some way. But they were fed as beef cattle.

Maniscalco: How many cattle did he have on the farm at a time?

Cunningham: About 300 every winter. Huge. And then there were loafing sheds on beyond these where they would get the hay. Then he had a long—had a tin roof and they could loaf there. Crowded in bad weather.

Maniscalco: You mentioned that your father had an alfalfa field. Were there other crops that he grew as well?

Cunningham: No, [yes] just corn and [redacted information] and wheat and then toward [the end]—see, he died in '59. I think he [Dad] planted soybeans a few times. Now they [farmers] were experimenting with soybeans. Now wait, let me think. They called it the pea ridge because they could plant soybeans on some of these hilly fields and this [an] uncle, who'd been a schoolteacher, farmed later, and he farmed, he was our relative, and he farmed the pea ridge because he was trying soybeans. And there are a couple of—oh, they were just mansions [west of Carrollton] when they were built. The bankers built these beautiful homes. And Stewart Pierson used to say that he built that beautiful home with his profits from soybeans. They did [planted] some soybeans out here on the prairie.

Maniscalco: You mentioned before, and you just touched on it a little bit, about experimental seeds and experimental crops and things. You have quite an experience with that.

Cunningham: Oh my. My memory going. Because see, Edward Boyle was a lawyer in Chicago. One of the three big land millionaires from Chicago we call it. But he [Mr. Boyle] bought a ranch that goes right to the ferry. [On Route] 108. And oh we get into the pecan trees later. Richard. He found Richard Best at U. of I. in agriculture and hired him to manage this ranch for him. And Richard then got to know the Funk brothers, and he finally bought out Mr. Boyle. Or well Mr. Boyle was an old man. We thought he was old when my father and Richard Best were in their height. So he [best] bought out Mr. Boyle [and named it]. So it became Columbiana Ranch then, Columbiana Farms. And Richard got to know the Funk brothers [of Bloomington], and he became an official Funk [seed corn] dealer. Yeah, and planted all these huge—because they don't have fences. They're just huge [big] fields of corn. Of hybrid seed corn. And all of our [local] youngsters then had summer work detasseling. Have you heard of detasseling? See, you know the theory? I don't need to go into all the theory of hybrid seed corn. But one, it's a sex, sexed—you have a male row. One male row could fertilize four female rows. And then, now what was the function of the detasseling? They had to detassel I guess after the pollination. That'd be after it was pollinated. They'd have to go cut these tassels off. And they dropped to the ground. And our children, my oldest daughter, did it by foot. They walked. And then finally somebody, Funks, invented a machine that could hold, I think, eight kids and they could detassel two sets of rows at a time.

Maniscalco: Wow. What do you think the wages were at that time for detasseling?

Cunningham: Oh my gosh. If they stayed all summer they got a bonus. Did they earn $1 a day? Or maybe $2? Finally I think it was called an hourly wage. [Standard wage was $0.75/hour for a 12-hour day] Gosh, my niece who worked in the office there is coming up this weekend. She'd know. She would remember all those things. But ,well, everybody wanted $1 a day, yeah, and my dad

used to write out the checks of the hired men, and I think they got $8 a week, room and board, and a hog every year, [and] milk, a gallon of milk a day. And several of our hired men bought farms later. (both laugh)

Maniscalco: Wow. What about some of the dangers to crops? What about weeds and insects and drought? Do you remember any of those?

Cunningham: Oh, [we had] grasshoppers, [the corn borer and a fear of army worms.]we had a—I can remember the dust storm. Was it '30 or '31? It started in Oklahoma and [redacted information] it really hurt our crops, but we had this new house, and we used the front porch a lot, and that dust would come in and we had screens in every—and then Mother finally screened in that front porch. And we'd have to take the broom and brush the dust that had collected, was just blowing across our valley. Well then, of course, we had some dry years. We didn't call them droughts then especially. But '33 was a real drought, wasn't it? We had a terrible dry year. And the corn just didn't mature. [We]put most of it in silage. Dad would fill the silo [every year for winter feed]. And then, let's see. Other—

Maniscalco: You mentioned grasshoppers.

Cunningham: Oh other threats. Flooding. Flooding. Now there were several floods. My parents [remembered], like 1915, when there were no levees. Somebody [a farmer] had just put up [cut wheat]—threshed, and made a big straw stack—you used to have straw stacks, and then the livestock could lounge around them. And his whole straw stack moved a couple of miles down the valley. It just floated his straw stack down [and away]. Now the ones I remember, we had this terrible flood in 1943. We had this 120 acres [field] out in the valley that came out from the bluff out into the river valley, this very fertile soil. And that year it got on in '43. I was in college. And half of that west 40—would be 20 acres—got flooded. It had already been planted [in corn] and they had to—they did replant later. But in '93—well, we had a flood in '73, but that didn't break any of the levees on the Greene County side. Calhoun had a lot of flooding in 1973. And then in '93, it [the terrible flood] filled that Illinois River valley to within 20 acres from the [our] road. And at places it crossed the road that went along the bluff. [What a sight from the bluff top!]

Maniscalco: Wow. I'm sure living in the river valley you probably had lots of floods. How did you deal with that? How was life?

Cunningham: Well not [too bad] in my lifetime. Only [the big ones]—because the levees started in '30, the late '20s. I thought I had that picture real handy. Well, that's another whole thing [story], the building of the levees. And I'm not too astute at it. But they levied the Illinois River, established drainage districts, and that was taxable. I still have some of the records of my parents paying taxes to the levee district. And then these crews came in. There was a big family of boys. And they still have—there's a lot of traces of them left. (both laugh) The Hardwick boys. This man had I think it was seven sons. One of my cousins got involved with one of them. But they had big machinery then and they dug out—they called them the borrow pits. Borrowed. [They dug land] land from inside near the river, and just kept piling it up. And that's our whole levee system now. So it didn't flood [as usual] after—see, that was the '30s. We didn't have just floods every year. But there are several backwater lakes that were left up and down the valley from floods, and we had high water at a lot of those. Well, most of them got drained though. And then the drainage system came in. They put drainage tile in that whole river valley. And our whole farm had drainage tile. And established drainage districts then. I

mean [they dug] drainage ditches. Which would feed into the Macoupin Creek and then on into the Illinois River. And they [each levee district] had a pump station.

Maniscalco: Oh, wow. Now do you remember them putting in the drainage tile and things like that?

Cunningham: Yeah, I can remember when Dad was buying tile and tiling. [It] would come in on a train to Eldred, and he'd [we'd] go pick up a load [in a wagon].

Maniscalco: And then would the hired men put that in the fields?

Cunningham: Uh huh. Yeah we did our own tiling.

Maniscalco: Wow. Okay. To move forward through time. Now, you were married and you and your husband lived on a farm.

Cunningham: Well, (cough) we married in 19[51]—

(background interruption)

Maniscalco: I was going to say you were married and you and your husband lived on a farm.

Cunningham: Well, [yes, but] not until 1954. He was a sad story. But he was such an athlete in high school and won a full scholarship to Bradley. It was College then. Bradley, now it's Bradley University in Peoria. But there was family trouble and—can you believe this? His mother called him up at school and said—this shouldn't go into it. This is just a private—Joe, you have to come home. And that child dropped everything. He didn't tell one person at college that he was leaving. He just had enough money for a bus ticket and he just packed up and left and came home and he supported the family, worked as a hired man for several farmers around here, till he got a job at the post office in '31 I think—no, I mean he graduated from high school in '34, '35 or '36 he got the job in the post office as—he worked in and then some as a letter carrier. And (clears throat) well, I guess I'll have to tell you this. He married my sister in 19—see, I was wanting to go to college. I was the youngest of this big family, and they'd all gotten married. But I got the idea I wanted to go to college. And I was quite musical. I wanted to sing. And so in 1930— yeah, they were married in '39. I was out of high school two years and just played around the farm, rode horseback. And there were two other girls in the community, and we went to movies and dances and just did teenage things until 1940. Finally my parents said okay and I went off to college to Shurtleff College in Alton, Illinois, as a music major. And then in '41, of course, Pearl Harbor happened and I liked science, I liked the science courses, and if I'd have an elective I'd take one. So '41 I stayed music, and then in '42, I decided this Cadet Nurse Corps came out as a US public health service, and they needed nurses so much that you could go through nursing school and the government would pay for it. So, I had heard of Bellevue in New York City and I'd heard of Columbia and I had one professor who said there's a Cornell University Medical Center and she had dated somebody there when she'd gone to Columbia. So I started writing to them and ended up going there in 1943. But nursing, there was a new bachelor of science nursing at that time, was just coming into education. But it was two years of college and then three years of nursing school, the regular three-year diploma curriculum. So I had to pick up on all those required courses. So I had to stay through another year in college (laughs) to get those courses in. And I got a job, because my folks wouldn't pay my tuition anymore. So I got a job at Western Cartridge Company. They started an evening shift with the IBM keypunch, was just, the IBM Company was just starting all these little machines to help factories. And I became a keypunch operator on the four-to-eleven shift or three-to-eleven. Rode a defense bus over to East Alton and did that that whole

year and then I went out to New York City in the summer of '43 and started nursing school and graduated then in '46, took three years to do that. But I got my bachelor of science because I'd had the years of college before. Then I was going to stay in New York. But all the guys were coming home and there was one persuaded me—he had gotten an engineering job at Shell and he persuaded me to come to Saint Louis. I had some girlfriends who were living in Saint Louis. And then when I got out here, left New York, and we broke up. (both laugh) So I was floating around Saint Louis wishing I were in New York. And then my sister, who was married to Joe Cunningham, got sick. And she had had a third baby. And she just couldn't get well, couldn't get well. And we got her down to Barnes and she was diagnosed carcinoma of the pancreas. And she died in 1949. Died that year. Left these three little children. So, I had gone (clears throat) with the American Red Cross in Saint Louis. I'd started with the bloodmobile, I just thought that really sounded like fun, after this big romantic breakup. And then I became director of nursing at the Saint Louis chapter of the Red Cross. But I came home and I got a car and lived in an apartment with some girls. We just really enjoyed Saint Louis. But I came home a lot of weekends. And Joe would bring the little children. He lived here in Carrollton. He and Marjorie lived in Carrollton. And he would bring the children down to the farm every weekend to see the grandparents. And they just loved—so they became very much into the Eldred society. And then, so I was still floating around Saint Louis, and just before '51 we kind of had a thing, and I realized he was interested in me, and I still wanted to get married and have children, and do all those things, even though felt like I was really getting old. [Joseph L. Cunningham and I] got married then in 1951. So I've reared the three children, three older children And then we had the four more. So we had a big family. And well, we're back to—he still worked. Then he got a rural—Joe dreamed of farming. He'd grown up on a farm, even though he had left it, and I don't know what he—he was in med, premed, he was going to be a doctor. He'd signed up in premed at Bradley. But he always—when he was working at the post office and we lived in town, and had the children there. He just always dreamed of farming. He wanted to farm. So my father gave all of us a (clears throat) sizable gift in the '50—after we were married, were having babies. And so Joe went uptown [to the courthouse] once when this farm, an 80-acre farm out southwest of town [Carrollton], was selling. And he bid on it and got it. So we moved all these children. We had six children then. I just had one out there. The six children out to that farm. And that's when we started farming. And then everything went so well. And we just did so well. And he [Joe] continued to carry rural mail. He got a rural route that was only five hours a day so he could—down here at Kane. And he could carry the mail and then came back to the farm. And we had hogs and some cattle. A few cattle. And 80 acres. We had [planted] corn and wheat. No, we didn't have wheat. We were into soybeans by then. Corn and beans. And a hayfield. We had some alfalfa too, which we baled, we didn't put it up in the barn. So then he kept thinking, Oh we need[ed] to expand. And the boys loved farming. We were in 4H, they were in 4H out in the country. And they liked the farming. So we found this man who had this farm where Joe's family had lived at one time. And his grandparents had owned the Beatty farm. So Mr. Hardwick [the owner] said [agreed] he would take our 80 acres and trade it in. We could cash it in on what, about almost 400 [acres] back in here. And that's when we started to expand then. And the kids were all in school. So we went bigger in hogs. The boys just loved hogs. So we had more hogs. And then—

Maniscalco: How many hogs?

Cunningham: Well, I think we had about six sows. Maybe 50 or 60 pigs. And we'd feed them and then sell them. We still hauled stuff [livestock] to East Saint Louis. The hog market was there and the cattle market was there.

Maniscalco: Is that where your father would also haul his to?

Cunningham: Yeah. East Saint Louis livestock. Stockyards.

Maniscalco: And what about the cattle?

Cunningham: Well, we didn't have as many cat—oh, that's right. First we got into cows—yeah. The man who lived over here, George Green, had cows and calves. Stock cows. So I think we bought his nine or ten, just nine or ten stock cows. And took them down to the barns. There was a lot of barns and plenty of sheds there. And would raise those, you just get one calf a year [each cow would raise one]. And then we'd sell those. Some of them went to lockers. There was a lot of locker meat sold then. The lockers, we had a locker here in Carrollton, they'd buy on the hoof, and then they did, they had the butchering done and packaging and selling. And then in, let's see. We moved there in '54 and the '60s, '70s, seems like the boys are saying late '60, like [in 19]'69, we built the hog confinement with two big harvest stores and we had 125 sows. Could house that many. And of course the boars and then it was all very scientific and that's when all the nature people got aware that those poor hogs never got to touch ground. (both laugh) They were all confined [in a building]. And, boy, you should read this *Animal,Vegetable, Miracle*, they really take into the—what do they call them? CAFOs? Confinement animal something, that's the whole field now. That all of our meat is CAFO meat, it's all confined. But in the book, Kingsolver was looking for places where they bred and raised their own chickens and cattle and whatever. Not confined.

Maniscalco: Now at your father's farm did you have a garden?

Cunningham: Oh yes. The women did. Mother did. And all of us kids. Oh fruit trees. We had it must have been an acre. And down the center were plums, yellow plums, purple plums, cherries. And then along the road was all apples [and] apple trees. And then we had a [purple] grape arbor. A huge grape arbor that we walked under that. And the men hung their clothes there. And it was just part of the household. And then in the garden we had another grape arbor of white—those were purple grapes. And then we had white grapes. Had a raspberry patch. Oh, and then we always picked blackberries, wild blackberries in the hills, those hillsides were just full of blackberry briars. In fact we always laughed. That's the only time my mother ever wore pants. (both laugh) She would put on Dad's overalls and we'd go pick blackberries. Buckets and buckets. And then we always had lettuce, radishes, onions, beets, cabbage. Let's see, cabbage, [spinach] oh, and corn, sweet corn. We ate some field corn, but then we'd have one patch of sweet corn. And, oh that was all the gardening. [It was a big part of our lives.]

Maniscalco: Now your farm and your husband's farm, did you have a garden there?

Cunningham: Sort of. Sort of. One of our daughters had gardening as a 4H project and we would have—see, when we were at Mount Gilead—see, I started working. I started nursing. My husband said I'd never have a working wife. But I kinda put my foot down after the second baby. I decided I was going to do some part-time work, part-time nursing. So I didn't do the garden. But Jane had a garden, a little vegetable garden. And no, we just didn't [garden much] 'cause he worked full-time and I had so much in the house and I just didn't. We didn't have a mechanical plow, garden plow, tiller, till we moved here. Then we did have a little garden here. And a few

tomato plants. But I was never a big gardener. My mother just canned and canned. Every time I'd come home at night she'd have a bushel of something in front of her. And we got a great big six-foot Deepfreeze when we moved to the first farm, and I did freeze some things in season. But I didn't do a lot of canning like my mother.

Maniscalco: Now your mother mostly canned the things from the garden? Or did she make other things with it?

Cunningham: She canned some meat. We'd butcher. She'd can ribs. They'd cut up the ribs. She'd can meat. And all the jellies, jams. And then green beans, tomatoes [when ripe]. Oh, we had a fruit cellar [also used for a storm shelter]. (both laugh) Just shelves and shelves—oh, we dug potatoes. We had a potato patch. Peaches. She canned peaches [plums and other fruits].

Maniscalco: Did she cook anything with it beyond canning? Did she make pies and stuff?

Cunningham: Oh sure, sure. Oh, we fed the hired men. We'd have three men for dinner every day. [And two stayed full time.]

Maniscalco: Ohhh. What was the average meal?

Cunningham: Cured ham [chicken, duck or some wild game]. Oh, we used to hate that ham sometimes. Oh this is funny. We packed our lunches to school and Mother would always have sliced cured ham. We'd have a ham sandwich in our lunch. Well some of the kids—like our neighbors down the road would have baloney. And we were so envious. (both laugh) They had lunch meat and we had that dumb old fried ham [on homemade bread]. So we'd have ham. And then you'd always have vegetables—potatoes. We usually had boiled potatoes and you mashed those in your plate—or she'd peel them with the skins on or cook them with the skins on sometimes and sometimes not. We'd have to peel the potatoes. And then two or three [canned] vegetables like green beans. And we ate our canned tomatoes sometimes as cold tomatoes like a salad right out of the can. Or she'd cook tomatoes. We had lots of other kinds of—butter beans, lima beans, big limas, little limas [and spinach]. And we always bought the white beans, the navy beans. We bought at the store. We had those every Monday, wash day you had navy beans. I still have that habit. I think Monday I need to wash and have some kind of beans. Of course they're yuppie food now. (both laugh)

Maniscalco: You mentioned before something about pecan trees.

Cunningham: Oh ,yeah, well let me finish though. We'd always have dessert too. She'd [Mother] baked pie or we'd have a cake [and always cookies]. Sometimes the cake would last like two days. She'd cover it. Or an angel food. We had an angel food cake cover. And we drank [skim] milk [and sold the cream]. Separated our own milk [with a separator]. We had the whole thing. Oh and then I wanted to tell you when we had a milk cow when we moved to the first farm at Mount Gilead in '54. I said oh, I'd go all the way. We got a separator. And you separate the—the children had to drink skim milk. They didn't like that too much. But they got used to it. And then we'd have cream. And I sold—we still had a creamery in Carrollton. I sold some cream and had friends who'd come out and I'd sell them like a whole half-gallon fruit jar full of that wonderful thick cream for like one dollar or seventy-five cents. So we did our own milk, too. And of course we stopped that when we got in town. The separator had to be washed. I got a dishwasher. I got one of the first dishwashers when we were out on the farm. And I could fit the parts of that separator in the corners of the dishwasher. The disks and the parts of it. So I felt like they were very—see, I was a nurse by then I wanted everything so clean. And I still

have it in the yard over at the old house, one of our separators. We finally got an electric motor. Oh, the children would have to turn that. Then we got an electric motor on it. Okay, pecans. Well, they're water-tolerant, the pecan tree. And they grow along the rivers and the streams. And we had one very productive pecan tree on the Smith farm when I was growing up and we'd always go pick up those pecans. Well, harvest black walnuts too. Wonderful black walnut trees. But oh was that a chore? And it discolored your hands. (bg laugh) But we got so we could run them through. There was a corn sheller that would do shell corn, you could put a bucket under it for—and we'd run those walnuts through the corn sheller, and that would take the hulls off. We had to let them dry for a while. Or some people got very creative, they'd put them in their driveway and run over them with the car back and forth. (both laugh) Because walnut hulls are very tough, very tough. So we were always cracking nuts. We'd have to—that was another kid chore. We'd have to crack the nuts for Mother's baking. But when Richard Best—. Now, the pecan business. Oh I wish I could get that little pamphlet. Could I just lay this off a minute?

Soundman: Sure, get you unwired.

Cunningham: Because this would be a better story if—

Soundman: Okay, now you're free.

Cunningham: Okay, let me go over here to my stack.

Soundman: We could perhaps go to lunch and then come back if there's still more after lunch.

Maniscalco: I'm about like right here.

Soundman: Okay. So we're pretty close.

Maniscalco: Yeah I only have one line on the next page. So we're getting there.

Cunningham: Yeah. Do you have much more? Because we don't want to get Lindy—

Soundman: You're doing a great job.

Maniscalco: We got this.

Cunningham: —too upset.

Maniscalco: (laughs) Especially if she's going to feed us, right?

Cunningham: She's very flexible though. Yeah that's where we're going to eat. Now this is—but see, he started—well that's just—they handed out. That was a USDA. But people could go down and pick up the pecans. See the Columbiana Seed Company. And the daughter Mary, who married Billy Boyles, ran the pecan business. They made it. Richard—well, I have to back up. Richard—

Soundman: Hold on a second. Let's get this on tape. (all laugh) You were talking about the pecan business.

Maniscalco: We're talking about the pecan business]

Cunningham: Well, Richard Best had a hobby. Made a hobby of these [wild] pecan trees. And then he got the idea. He knew about Georgia papershell pecans. See, our native pecans had thick, fairly thick [shells]. You could crack them with a nutcracker but it didn't take a hammer like the black

walnuts. (both laugh) And he [Richard] got the idea of grafting some of these [Georgia] papershell onto the [our] native pecan trees. And he developed a whole orchard, the pecan grove we called it. The pecan grove. He set out all these trees and then would graft onto those trees. And then it developed into this pecan business. This would have been like in the oh '50s, '60s, and up into the '70s. But they would always let people, let local people come and pick up, you know, what the—oh and he had a machine, a shaker, a tree shaker, (bg laugh) they fixed up a tractor and kinda gently shook the trees.

Maniscalco: Oh, cool.

Cunningham: And then there was a gleaner that could pick up the pecans and then they took them to the sorting and then Mary would crack—she had these crackers. And we could go down. Like I could take my children, we could take a family down. And pick up [redacted material] [pecans]. And then Mary would crack them. See, you'd pay [redacted material] [them] a fee to crack them in [redacted material] [their]crackers. And then I'd bring them home. And then we'd have a family thing of picking out the pecan—and most of them came out in perfect halves.

Maniscalco: Wow. Wow.

Cunningham: Yeah. Her machine could crack them so that they would hit the butt end of them and they'd come out perfect.

Maniscalco: Huh. Interesting.

Cunningham: So pecans have been such a part of the culture, the agricultural culture around here [and business in the Illinois River Valley].

Maniscalco: Yeah. Wow. Speaking of the agricultural culture, what about like town and county fairs? You mentioned—

Cunningham: Big, big, big, big. Every fair—almost every county had a county fair with a grounds with property. And then they developed buildings on it. There'd be an art hall where all the—well, they did both garden, garden produce plus all of the art type work. Gee, you know what, I am into that. [Redacted material] Last year I made what, almost $300 on entries. You can do antiques. My knitting, crocheting. And then in the livestock area there would be a cattle barn, a sheep barn, a hog barn [and horse barns], and as I told with 4H, many of the professional thoroughbred people to make a circuit, because it's planned through the state fair organization so that we [counties] don't step on each other's toes. We don't overlap. And so a lot of the professional cattle and sheep and hog people do [county fairs] a whole summer, and it helps the income greatly. Then the big thing—now Carrollton, Greene County has always been very big on racehorses. And they have the horse barns where some of the horse owners could house—they rent space year-round, they can house their horses there. And we had to have a track. So when county fair time came, my dad would even not go to the field, not farm. You [We would] go to the fair every day because there were races every afternoon. And he would rent a box, there at the big amphitheater and you could rent a box. So we'd have chairs and we could all sit and watch the horse races. And we'd either buy at a food stand or Mother would pack a lunch, and then you stayed through—the evening was the society horse show. The fancy [horse] people in riding habits and [redacted material]][drove carts]. The horses had—the gaited horses showed during the—and there were professionals at that too who brought their horses only for the horse shows, for the gaited horse shows. So we watched that all evening. And then they would let people park cars in the infield for the horse show in the evening. And

then the last thing at night my father would always buy a big bag of saltwater taffy. (laughs) Always had that with the big rotating pullers. You didn't have to pull the taffy by hand. And we'd head back home to Eldred. That would be about 12 miles. We'd go home at night eating candy and be ready to go the next day. It was a whole week.

Maniscalco: (laughs) Wow.

Cunningham: And one of the differences. Of course the country kids [girls], we were always down around the [redacted material] [livestock] barns and, you know, saw all the cute boys. We got to know boys from all over the county then. (bg laugh) But the town girls we always thought were kinda jealous. They would come out [only] for the horse races [and horse shows], maybe in the afternoon. Oh and then part of it was strolling too. You'd stroll up and down the carnival for fun and after [the horse show]—before Dad bought the candy we'd [each] get a dime and you could take two rides. The Ferris wheel and the [bump] cars and some of those were so wild. But that was part of it too. You got to go to the carnival. And the town girls always got to stay later. Of course we'd have to go home and the town girls would still be out there having fun. So.

Maniscalco: Interesting. Now you mentioned something earlier about hired hands and hired help. Now on your father's farm you had three men for hired help?

Cunningham: Well, sometimes four. We had two tenant houses that they were rent free. And my brother always had a bedroom upstairs that was the men's room. And sometimes there would be two men in the other bed. One of the families in the tenant house had grownup boys and two of them— but they slept at our house and ate. My mother was so generous. And then we'd have extra help during the summer for the harvest season. Usually a young man. So we'd have like really there'd be six working there sometimes.

Maniscalco: Wow. Wow. Where would they find the men to hire for help?

Cunningham: Local men who'd grown up and there just weren't enough farms for all of them to have them. And they would start out as a hired man and then they'd have a family, already have a family. But now one of our hired men—oh, two or three I know—had been hired men all their lives. Richard Best, whom I mentioned, wrote a book. I have it right here. *We Are What We Have to Be*. And he describes—this is one of those—Carlton Publishers. You have to do your own book. They don't write it for you. You have to pay to have it published. But he describes the hired man in this book. Their hired man's name was Wash. Wash. (both laugh) And I often talk to him [Richard] about that. There's a picture of Richard. And his wife Olga. Well, he met her. She was teaching at the Columbiana one-room country school when he came from U of I to manage Mr. Boyle's farm. And they were married then and had the children.

Maniscalco: Now did you have hired help on your husband and your farm?

Cunningham: No. No, we had children. (both laugh) That's what every farmer wanted. A big family of children. But male children. But when we bought the first farm my oldest son Eric [redacted material] [was nine years old]. [Redacted material] But he learned to drive the tractor and he did some of the—I think we still plowed the corn a little maybe. And he could do that. We got a little Fordson Tractor. And he could drive that. And he helped with the livestock. And then just as soon as my first child was born, in '52, and—see, he was in high school, I guess, when we moved to this farm down here. And he helped with everything too with the livestock

especially, the cows and calves. [When our daughter Ann could drive, she ran the pickup to the elevator and do errands in town.]

Maniscalco: Now, I'm sure you remember some of the older farming techniques compared to some of the newer ones as you got your own farm and started. Do you remember some of the changes in machinery and things like that?

Cunningham: Oh yes, yes. Now we girls, being five girls, didn't help in the fields. Some girls did where there were just girls. But we would drive the tractor [during the harvest]. We had a, a—it had the big cleats. The Fordson. Well, the Fordson we got out here was already had tires. But I think it was a Fordson also. And he would put us—we'd take turns going around those wheat fields. And we'd sit there on the tractor seat, and you watched—you have to watch the furrow and not get into the wheat. (laughs) You had to watch and drive. And then Dad would put a binder twine string around on our arm and if we did anything wrong or something went wrong, he'd pull [to stop]. (both laugh) And then the other children would be out carrying water [to the men] or they'd have the old truck out with water, and he'd do that [pull the string] too when a rabbit would run, because you'd run over rabbit holes, rabbit dens. [He'd yell] “There he goes. There he goes.” And all we children would run after the rabbit. So that was the first tractor. Now we had nothing to do with the horses at all when he had teams of horses, except just to watch them. And we knew them and knew where the stalls they belonged—we knew them at feeding time. And then of course we always had our saddle horse, had old Bob. Now other changes. So. I can't remember when he? Did he get a tractor? Yeah, we had a [Fordson] tractor [with lugs] at the Smith farm. [Then the] Farmall came in. The skinny [one, with], the big tires and the little ones in front. He [Dad] had a Farmall. And then they would—the plowing, I remember the plowing of the corn. What'd we call that? You know, you plant it and they disced—no, they didn't disc the corn. 'Cause they had to go [plow] up the rows. But the tractor made it so much faster.

Soundman: Cultivating?

Cunningham: Cultivated yeah, because [it was] the tractor cultivator. Right. The horses just had to go back and forth so slowly. But that speeded—but the tractor certainly speeded up things.

Maniscalco: Yeah. Yeah.

Cunningham: And the mower. He [Dad] had a tractor mower so when he mowed the alfalfa and, you know, he had to be very careful on those hillsides, 'cause that alfalfa field was up on top of a hill. And, oh, and one of the big things was the manure. Ooh, those men had to [redacted material] [fork] that manure into a manure spreader. And then the horses pulled it out [to a field to spread] because they used all the manure, natural manure. That's one thing the woman in the book was looking for. Nonchemical fertilizer she wanted. (both laugh) Horse fertilizer.

Maniscalco: What about fertilizers? What did you use?

Cunningham: Yeah, I can't remember when Dad—I don't think he ever bought fertilizer but [redacted material] [our farm] sure did. We always had to [have the soil tested and] figure [it out]. It seemed to me it was so scientific. They'd have to figure what kind they needed and how [much] he wanted. When we had the just two or three fields out at the Mount Gilead farm. But he fertilized. But Dad [did] spread lime. Now they did lime. Because we had a stone crusher at Eldred. You could get the lime right at Eldred.

Maniscalco: What about pesticides?

Cunningham: I just associate those with World War II. (laugh)Then when I got into birding and that—well, the DDT cause so many, you know—[we learned] in nursing they'd had, they used DDT in Europe for the troops and it was such a blessing. They could kill those lice. Because many of them [the soldiers] had had body lice and head lice. But then they started using DDT. That must have been later. Was that like the '70s? 'Cause I was birding some and we thought it just ruined the eggs. Even the eagle eggs. We got eagles down to about 100, under 100 some years. Just couldn't. Because the pesticide got into the food chain and then it affected the eggshells [of many birds, including eagles]. They couldn't hatch. They couldn't go to maturity. And in our farming they talk about Roundup. There are so many brands now. And Broadleaf [is a pest], [farmers] you want to get the Broadleaves. And there's never quite—they haven't gotten one for the grasses, the pest—what's the one that everybody hates so much? We got it in the yard, too. Some kind of grass.

Maniscalco: Crabgrass or something?

Cunningham: Crabgrass yes, yes. I think they're still searching for a [redacted material] [Johnson] grass pesticide—(both laugh) herbicide rather.

Maniscalco: Yeah. Do you remember any government programs, farming programs and things?

Cunningham: My father [as well as other farms] hated Roosevelt. (both laugh) Oh, he was such a Republican. Well that was the first [program] as I remember: trying to limit—well they cut back on acreage and then they wanted to limit the pigs, the hog production, get down to ten pigs per litter, so you killed, had to kill the other pigs. And Roosevelt kills baby pigs, oh it was terrible, they just thought that that—I don't know whether it was because he was a Democrat or because he meddled into farming, but I don't think my father ever acknowledged that Roosevelt did anything good. And then when we got to farming ,oh yeah, the ASC—ASCS or ASC office—was just a part of the culture. And Joe would have his appointment, because they helped decide what to plant, didn't they?and how much, or you were given allotments, you could plant so much in beans and corn. And let's see. Then when the hog market went bad—we did really well in hogs for, I think it, was three years. Three years. And there was all the discussion whether the government should enter that. But then the big, the big companies came in and here Hanor came over from Germany. You know, we have a [redacted material] [Hanor] confinement in the river valley now. It's up on top of a hill. And they have just taken over. And one farmer out southwest of town has hogs on the ground now. Son Eric, who's retired from Ohio University, loves to go by there. He's always saying see those are real hogs right out. One of the lakes.

Maniscalco: Now you've done some of your own research. I've heard you've done some research in looking into limestone houses and barns and—

Cunningham: Well for my writing, for my writing.

Maniscalco: Can you tell us a little bit about what you've done?

Cunningham: [It was the Bicentennial which motivated me to study our history.] Well, we have good— three real good Greene County histories. One in 1879, which was written by a college president who retired and ran our [Carrollton] paper, Mr. Clapp. And it has [redacted material] [biographies] of citizens. You had to pay $10 to get your interview. And then you got the book. And my Borman line, see, they're German, Prussian. And the family always said that Grandmother Borman, they called her close. Because my children seem to think sometimes I'm pretty—they

even use the word stingy, my being kinda conservative. But anyway Grandmother Borman would not let Grandpa pay the $10. So we're not in the 1879. (both laugh) But a lot of the other lines of my family are. Then we had an 1885 history that was written in conjunction with Jersey County, the *Greene- Jersey* [*History of*] *1885.* And [another, *Past and Present of*] a Greene County [redacted material] [of] [redacted material] [1905], which has a lot of biography. So when I started ,I really worked with those three books very much. [Some of our villages have written histories.} And, you know, our Greene County Historical Society started in 1952 but I was pregnant and having babies and so many children. And I just didn't join and didn't have my mother join. That's—I regret that. She would have loved it. And, then I mean, I didn't—wasn't a charter member. I always wanted to be a charter member. And then I discovered the Illinois State Historical Library [during the Sesquicentennial of Illinois in 1968] under the parking lot, you know the one—what is that now?

Soundman: Under the old state capitol building.

Cunningham: Yeah, at the old state capitol.

Soundman: It's now part of the presidential museum and library.

Cunningham: Yeah. Well, most of it's aboveground though but then the it, the society, well it went public, and now the old [Springfield] depot is the IH—Illinois Historic Preservation [Agency]—IHPA. And the society which I first got active in is on Sixth Street I think on the east side of the old state capitol. But they don't have —but, when we were back down below ground, they had a history of every county in the state, and just wonderful, wonderful material. Janis Paterczek(??) worked there and that's where I did a lot of my research. And I [also] went to Newberry Library in Chicago and [have] used the Saint Louis [Public] Library. Got into—there's one—what is that called? The Mercantile Library of Saint Louis is quite exclusive. But some friend got me a pass. I could go in there once. And then family histories. I just started delving into family histories and collecting. I got a whole roomful over there. And then my children in Elgin have picked out a lot of their discards that she knew I'd like, like at one time Illinois history was required in the eighth grade, and I have [collected] a lot of those textbooks [and used them].

Maniscalco: Interesting.

Cunningham: That's where I came across the one on agriculture. That was an old textbook.

Maniscalco: To kind of get back to farming and to wrap up the interview a little bit here, you've been involved through a lot of agriculture, through a good portion of the history of agriculture. How do you, like, where do you see the changes going?

Cunningham: Bigger farms, (pauses) fewer people involved, (pauses) smaller families, (pauses) bigger machinery, I don't know if there's any stopping the machine. Population. I see this theory of a megalopolis from Saint Louis to Chicago and I think there'll be more and more off-farm operations. Um. And global. It's going global.

Maniscalco: From your perspective do you see that as good, bad?

Cunningham: Well, I don't have an opinion [except to observe]. It's not my business. You know, I'm kinda sentimental and I keep saying there were poor, there were medium, there were rich (laughs), you know, farmers. But we didn't know. We were I guess very well-off. One of the criteria was whether you lost the farm in the Depression. And my father managed to hang on. And one of

his sayings was, "Pay off that interest and they'll loan you some more." And the other one, "Remember, girls, you're living on borrowed money." (bg laughter) But we lived so simply; you know our way of life was no different from the [redacted material] [entire community, except perhaps, the plumbing and the electricity].

Maniscalco: You seemed to make it through the Depression okay, though. At least your family's farm.

Cunningham: Yeah, right. I can remember Dad coming back from shipping cattle. He would always go down with them. And we'd always say What'd you get for the cattle? And I can remember him saying, "ten cents." It'd be ten cents a pound. But then he had another saying, "You can't quit farming." And , um, our life, our education went on the same. They just didn't believe, Mother and Dad didn't believe in college for girls. And, it wasn't that they—And my mother was very smart. She was (clears throat) not only capable and a wonderful person, but she was really smart. She managed all of that chickens, garden, big house, all of those men, all that cooking and plus the canning and preserving. We had to get those hams ready to smoke, the smokehouse. But there was a ten-grade high school in the village of Eldred. They had ten grades while our country schools just had eight grades. And when she [Mother] finished tenth grade we always had an aunt, had relatives here in Carrollton. And she could have stayed with Aunt Florence and finished high school. Now some of her cousins, one especially, got to finish high school. And they'd come and stay with Aunt Florence. And my Grandpa Borman was a kind of a playboy. He was obese. He looked like—was it Grover Cleveland was the big President? He would go to Saint Louis and he'd be mistaken for President Cleveland sometimes.

Maniscalco: Oh, Jeez.

Cunningham: But he [my grandfather]got the post office assignment in Eldred. [He was postmaster.] And he put my mother at age 14 in that post office. She had all the responsibility, ran that post office. And he'd go off, get on the train and take a little tour to Saint Louis or someplace.

Maniscalco: (laughs) You know. I just realized we forgot to talk about something, and that's peafowl.

Cunningham: Oh, oh.

Maniscalco: Can you tell us a little bit about when were you involved with peafowl?

Cunningham: Nothing but beauty. [For] Nothing but beauty. Oh. Well, when we decided to move to the farm—of course Joe was—well, no one around Carrollton. Everybody loved Joe. And he'd been a mail carrier and had been very active (clears throat) in the Baptist church here. Well, one of our friends was leaving the farm out north of town and moving into town, she and her husband were going to come into town. So many farmers did that, older age. And I knew that—what was her name? [We knew that] Elmer and Mrs. [Lulu]Garrison had these peafowl. Because she'd bring feathers into church sometime and we took the children out to see them [on their farm] sometime. So I had said to her—what was her name? Lily? Lily, if you ever get rid of your peafowl, could we buy them? So she let us know that they were going to move to town, and that we could buy the peafowl. And she threw in a rooster and several hens. (both laugh) At this place down here, where this big house was down there, [when] we brought them in, and we had to pen them up several weeks. And we'd just feed them and play with them and look at them. And finally we let them have the run of the place. And people would say What do you [do with them?]—I just thought they were so beautiful, so beautiful [and shrug my shoulders]. And they just had the run of the place, and people would come to see our peafowl.

They'd just walk around you [acting aloof]. The male has to reach three years before he gets the plumage, the tail plumes, and he's ready to breed. And they mate for life. So she [Lulu]gave us her pair of peafowl, two, a male and female. And then the chickens that she threw in. So they just became our, kind of our, trademark. And [my husband] Joe enjoyed them. He was the kind of farmer who would sit and watch something a while. He wasn't one of these pushers like my—the sons-in-law used to call my father "pusher," because he was just dynamic, working all the time. But the peahen would make a nest in some odd place, like on a piece of machinery. But he [Joe] would frame it off so she'd be safe, and keep an eye on her. And so we just got to having good luck with raising 'em. They'd have two or three each year, and we got up to 29. They'd just wander around the place down there. A few of them wandered off. Somebody'd call us and say One of your peacocks is over here. We'd go and we had a big net and we could [go] catch them. They can fly but they don't fly very often unless they're in danger and they need to. So we just kept them all those years. And finally we started talking about changing [retiring], and our son Daniel had gotten married, and two of them were farming. And a son-in-law knew somebody down at Otterville. Lived up Otter Creek [Jersey County, who was interested in them.]. Mrs. Cusack, a Czechoslovakian, and she was willing, she bought all of them and took them down to her farm up Otter Creek. And I've never been to see them. I've always thought I'm going to go see them, it'd be real sentimental. And then when I started writing, he was really just a printer, was publishing my first books. And he said You need a logo, Eileen, you need a logo. So I thought and thought what could I have. And so I took the peacock. So the peacock has been my logo for all these years on my writing.

Maniscalco: Very cool. Very cool. And the last question that we'll ask is—this is going to be a document for history. And one day your kids could be looking through an archive and come across this interview. And is there something you want to leave in this interview for your kids, for your grandkids, or for their grandkids, something, some kind of message or something that you would want them to have or get from this interview?

Cunningham: Mmm. Well, let's see. (pauses) I would hope that all my generations would honor and love the things that they've been taught and teach it to their children and (thoughtfully) live a life in the community that is guided by their spiritual, educational and economic principles.

Maniscalco: Great. Well, thank you very much, Eileen. This has been a very fun time.

Cunningham: Oh, my. Don't I talk. I talk so much. (all laugh)

Maniscalso: You're wonderful.

Cunningham: Oh, boy. Here it's almost twelve thirty. (all laugh) Maybe, should I call

Lindy?

Maniscalco: Just tell her we're on our way.

Soundman: We're on our way.

Cunningham: Well. If we're really on our way. Cause it is gonna take a little bit. Let me call her and see if she's still—if not, then we could eat here. I guess I could fix up a meal...

(end of tape)