

IMAGES

... then and now

From The Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge
1861

A Glimpse Back at Albert James Cunningham



The Cunningham name can be traced to Scotland, where in 1043 Prince Malcolm (son of murdered Duncan) conferred the thanedom of Cunynghame to one of his protectors. Cunninghams arrived in America as early as 1635 – when William appeared on the list of passengers transported from London to the Colony of Virginia. Others settled in the Boston and Philadelphia areas. Over the years, members of the family moved west to the Ohio Country.

Albert James Cunningham, son of John, was born in 1833 in Camp Dennison, Ohio. Historical records list his mother as either Sara Bell or Catherine Peckingpaugh. John, a farmer, supplied his family with food and sold or traded any surplus. He may have made farm implements, clothing, or barrels which could be sold or bartered at one of the local mills on the Little Miami River. Albert attended local schools, including French's Academy in Milford, where he prepared for college. He was one of the earliest matriculating students at Antioch College, which was founded in 1853 – the first institution in the nation to admit women candidates on the same footing as men. After graduating from college in Yellow Springs, he taught school for several years, and studied law. He earned a degree from Cincinnati Law School in 1860 and with Lewis French formed a partnership which lasted for a decade. A single man, Albert lived on the south side of current day Cunningham Road, and his brother William resided on the north side. The siblings most likely inherited the property when their father died in 1848. No record exists of Albert's service in the Civil War, but he was married near the end of the conflict (November 1864) to Priscilla Catherine Losh, daughter of Lot Losh, whose Indian Hill acreage was situated on the east side of Drake Road, from Varner to Indian Hill Road. The couple's eight children were Helen, Lillian, Alasanna, Alma, Albert James, Jr., Edna, Emma, and Eldon. They resided at 3157 Harvey Avenue in Avondale and were practicing Methodists. The attorney was a member of the Knights Templar, the IOOF, and the Masons.

A highlight of Albert's career was his service in the Ohio General Assembly from 1869-1871. A well respected man, he was chosen to be Speaker of the House. When the 15th Amendment of the US Constitution came up for consideration, there were "many days of bitter debate." The 13th Amendment abolished slavery; the 14th gave African Americans citizenship, and the 15th stated: "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged...on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude". After lengthy discussion, Speaker Cunningham put the question up for vote. Each side had the same number of votes. As presiding officer, he cast the verbal deciding ballot in favor of the amendment, ratifying it for Ohio. Other legislation that was passed under Cunningham's tenure included the charters for Ohio State University and the University of Cincinnati.

When he returned to Hamilton County, Cunningham continued the practice of law. His oldest son became a partner in the law firm in 1895. His wife died in 1910, and his lifelong friend, Albert Buckingham, passed away in 1912. A few days after a trip to Camp Dennison to console Buckingham's relatives, Cunningham became ill and died of a cerebral hemorrhage on March 25, 1912, at his son's house. He was buried at Spring Grove Cemetery.

Albert James Cunningham was praised in local obituaries as "one of the most prominent Cincinnati lawyers." His role as a public servant and his support of enfranchisement for all citizens were distinguished contributions to his native state.