

Title Page & Abstract

Part of the Illinois State Museum's and Abraham Lincoln Presidential
Library's *Oral History of Agriculture in Illinois*
Interview # AIS-V-L-2008-017

Eileen Cunningham, a lifelong farmer in Illinois, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the IL State Museum's and Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Agriculture in Illinois* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: March 26, 2008

Location: Carrolton IL

Interview Format: Digital video

Interviewer: Michael Maniscalco, IL State Museum Oral Historian

Technical Support: Robert Warren and Doug Carr, recording engineers

Transcription by: Tape Transcription Center, Boston, MA

Edited by: Michael Maniscalco and Ashley Abruzzo

Video indexed by: James Oliver

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The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Eileen Cunningham, *Oral History of IL Agriculture*, AIS-V-L-2008-017

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Eileen Smith was born in the Illinois River Valley on March 17, 1921. Being the youngest of six children, she spent the first seventeen years of her life on her father's (Charles Henry Smith) farm. Her father raised cattle for slaughter. The cattle were sold through the St. Louis market and Eileen's father would always accompany the cattle to the market to make sure they would get a fair price. Charles also grew alfalfa, hay, and in his last years soy beans as well. Eileen also explained that they had all types of pets on the farm, her favorite being a dog named Dickie.

Eileen's chores included milking, hauling water to the men in the field, ironing, and bringing wood to the smoke house where her father would smoke meats. Her mother had an acre size garden with all kinds of fruits and vegetables. All of these would be canned and stored in the basement which was turned into a cellar. Ms. Cunningham always wanted to go to college, and after years of persuasion, she was able to talk her parents into sending her to further her education. After four years of undergraduate work Eileen trained to become a nurse in response to a nursing shortage caused by WWII.

Following the untimely death of her sister, Eileen eventually fell in love with her sister's husband (Joseph Cunningham) resulting in marriage, with Eileen taking on her sister's three children as her own. Eileen eventually added four more children to the family. In 1954 Joseph bid on an 80 acre farm and purchased it for \$14, 000. Joseph planted alfalfa, hay, soybeans, and corn, and raised a small number of livestock.

Ms. Cunningham is an excellent historian and published author, focusing primarily on the Illinois River Valley and specifically on limestone homes. Eileen explains some of the history of Green, Calhoun, and Jersey counties, including stories of rural schools and one room school houses. Eileen also raised peafowl as a hobby. She purchased a peacock and a peahen when she and her husband bought the farm, and these two multiplied into sixteen when she left the farm. Only in the late 1990s and 2000s has she sold off parts of the farm, with parcels now becoming a vineyard.

Topics Covered: Eileen Cunningham; Illinois River Valley; Hereford; yellow hammer; St. Louis market; Great Depression; alfalfa; hay; soy beans; chores; milking; hauling water; ironing; carrying wood; garden; WWII; nursing; Cornell University; NY City; Joseph Cunningham; corn; milking cow; chickens; limestone homes; Green County; Calhoun County; Jersey counties; tornado; room school house made of limestone;. Peacocks; vineyard

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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