

Irishman Deserves Place in City

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Capt. James Cunningham, a rugged and courageous Irishman, was one of the great men in Richland County history.

He was Richland County's first white farmer, the county's first sheriff, and the father of the first white girl baby born in Mansfield. He was a leader in the county during most of his long life.

Born in Baltimore, Md., in 1780, he went to Pennsylvania with his parents six years later and then to West Virginia as the move westward began.

In 1803, the year Ohio was admitted to the union, young Cunningham eloped to Pennsylvania with Miss Hannah Stater. They were soon forgiven by their parents and the following year the newly married couple and Mrs. Cunningham's parents came westward to the Black Hand region of Licking County Ohio.

A year later the young wife of Cunningham died after giving birth to a daughter, Elizabeth. Three years later widower Cunningham married Miss Margaret Myers.

Settlers looking for new homes in the Ohio country were beginning to stream northward along the Muskingum and Mohican Rivers. Some of them followed the Clear Fork and Black Fork into what was to become Richland County.

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Among these adventurers were Cunningham who chose a spot in the fertile valley southeast of Mansfield and built a log hut. The construction job required three days.

Cunningham was an educated man for his day and planned to be a teacher in a frontier community. When he got to what later was



CAPTAIN JAMES CUNNINGHAM

Richland County he didn't find many children to teach so he took up farming. He was the first white settler to harvest a crop of corn in the Richland area.

Restless during much of his life, the young man gave up his cabin and cornfield late in 1809 and moved to Mansfield. He occupied a part of the village's first store building which stood on the present H. L. Reed Co. site. The store had been established a short time before by Samuel Martin who sold whisky to the Indians and was asked to leave town.

Cunningham and his wife operated a boarding house for the surveyors who platted the village of Mansfield and the people who were coming west to acquire lands being offered here by the federal government.

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In August, 1809, Mrs. Cunningham gave birth to a daughter who probably was the first white child born here. There is some question about this, however. Cunningham is reported to have told friends late in his life that the daughter was born in a cabin south of Mansfield. Mansfield H.

Gilkison was the first white boy born in Mansfield. His birthplace was a cabin on the present site of the Southern Hotel. He was born in 1811.

In 1810 the Cunninghams were on the move again. They apparently didn't care for the rugged life in Mansfield and went to the Clear Fork valley near St. John's Church which was near the early Richland County village of Newville.

The next year the family moved again, this time to a farm in the valley a mile south of the Indian village of Greentown, not far from Perrysville.

At about that time there was trouble with the British and the Indians in the War of 1812. Cunningham formed a company of volunteers to protect the settlers from possible Indian attacks. He brought his men to Mansfield where they camped for a brief period in Central Park. When it appeared that the trouble might be over here the little army marched to Detroit to help defeat the British.

After the war Cunningham considered moving his family to Missouri, but someone, possibly his wife who may have been tired of moving, convinced him he should stay here.

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Cunningham, who had become a captain in the army, decided to settle in Worthington Township. He acquired land there and built a log home. He lived in the same community the rest of his life.

Timbers from one of the Cunningham cabins were brought to Mansfield to restore the Blockhouse which was used in the city's centennial celebration in 1908. The structure stood on the courthouse lawn for a while

and then was moved to South Park where it is one of the city's prime attractions for visitors today.

One of the log homes built by Capt. Cunningham on the Leedy farm near Mansfield until recently.

At about the time of 1812 was another feat of bravery and that was long remembered in the Mansfield area.

Three soldiers stationed at a camp in northern Wayne County and immediately charged the British deserters. They complained they had been in the Detroit area until the British were defeated and on duty in the Detroit area for a Col. Root.

The colonel was 100 miles away at the time and it was necessary to reach him to learn the truth. Three soldiers were sent to find the truth.

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There had been heavy rains and Elm Creek flooding large areas between the camp and the soldiers were held at Root's headquarters. They went out for volunteers to make the trip. Six men tried to swim across the stream but were unable to give up. They couldn't be done.

The rugged Captain Cunningham believed in his own strength. He plunged into the waters, reached the shore and traveled ten miles through dense woods to reach Col. Root. He was able to prove that the soldiers being held were innocent and they were

Besides his duties

Deserves Place in City History

The Mansfield That Was

By VIRGIL A. STANFIELD



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One of the log homes built by Capt. Cunningham stood on the Leedy farm near Butler until recently.

At about the time the War of 1812 was ending Capt. Cunningham performed a feat of bravery and stamina that was long remembered in the Mansfield area.

Three soldiers showed up at a camp in northern Delaware County and were immediately charged as possible deserters. The men explained they had been in the Detroit area until the British were defeated and were on duty in the Delaware area for a Col. Root.

The colonel was nine miles away at Berkshire and it was necessary to reach him to learn if the three soldiers were telling the truth.

There had been heavy rains and Elm Creek was flooding large areas between the camp where the soldiers were held and Col. Root's headquarters. A call went out for volunteers to make the trip. Six or eight men tried to swim the raging stream but were forced to give up. They said it couldn't be done.

The rugged Capt. Cunningham believed it could. He plunged into the flood waters, reached the other shore and traveled the nine miles through dense forest to reach Col. Root. He was able to prove that the three soldiers being held were innocent and they were freed.

Besides his duties as the

county's first acting sheriff, Capt. Cunningham was involved in a number of community affairs until failing health forced him to retire to his Worthington Township farm. He was blind and a semi-invalid during the final years of his life.

He died Aug. 20, 1870, at his home at the age of 90. His death rated only a short story in the Mansfield papers.

Capt. Cunningham organized the Methodist congregation at Little Washington. He is buried in the cemetery in that community.

One of the Cunningham daughters, Elizabeth, married Jacob Baughman. A son of the Baughmans, Abraham, and a daughter, Sade, published the Mansfield Morning Call for a time. Both also were employed in government service for several years.

Abraham, or "A.J." as he was known, was a newsman in Mansfield at various times for many years. His history of the county, published in 1908, is one of the reliable sources of information about the county area. Baughman died in 1913 and is buried in the Mansfield Cemetery.

He was the founder of the Richland County Historical Society and was a leader in planning the Mansfield centennial celebration.

Baughman and his ancestors served in three wars. He was a veteran of the Civil War. His grandfather, Capt. Cunningham, served in the War of 1812, and his great-grandfather was a Revolutionary War soldier.

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