



History of Cunningham

Cunningham is a small town, half way between Kingman and Pratt on Highway 54. According to the assessor's 1983 record, there were 601 people, who call Cunningham their home town.

The town developed first south of the railroad tracks. In 1880, before there were railroad tracks, it was called "Ninnescah." It was on the Cannonball Route Stagecoach Line, from Kingman to Greensburg. By 1885, Ninnescah had a hotel, church, two stores, land office building, and many homes.

In 1887, the Kingman, Pratt, & Western Railroad Company built a railroad, bordering Ninnescah on the north. The Santa Fe Railroad bought this railroad in 1898 and still operates it. On March 24, 1887, tragedy struck the little town of Ninnescah, when a tornado practically demolished the town. Some people were injured, but no lives were lost. The buildings were a total wreck. That is when the people decided to rebuild the town, north of the railroad track. Colonel James D. Cunningham, a director and surveyor for the railroad, offered to give and sell lots to the settlers. Many Ninnescah residents built north of the tracks, and the new town was named Cunningham. The Ninnescah Post Office became the Cunningham Post Office in 1887. On May 17, 1898 another tornado destroyed the southeast corner of Cunningham.

In 1903, Cunningham had a school, Methodist and Christian churches, stores, two hotels, creamery "skimming station," lumber yard, livery stable, station house, elevator, and depot.

In 1905, Dr. Silas Nossaman had the first Car in Cunningham. It was a 3-cylinder Cadillac.

In 1908, a two-story frame school building served as grade and high school. This building was on the site of the present lunch room. Three students were graduated from high school in 1911. In 1917, a high school was built with an indoor gymnasium. In 1949, a fine new brick grade school replaced the 1908 outdated building. In 1956, a new auditorium/gymnasium was added to the system, east of the high school.

In 1965, the Cunningham schools became a part of Unified School District No. 332. This newly created district covered the western one-third of Kingman County and included five grade schools and two high schools. In 1984, there are 78 enrolled in Cunningham High School and 133 in grade school. The office of the Superintendent of Unified District No. 332 was built in Cunningham. Milton E. Brooks was the first Superintendent, succeeded by Richard Turner in 1970. Melvin R. Ormiston became the present Superintendent in 1981.

Cunningham also houses a part of the South Central Special Education Cooperative, which meets in the former Sacred Heart Parish school building.

Cunningham has had a newspaper since 1886, beginning as the "Ninnescah Herald." It became the "Cunningham Clipper" in 1902.

In 1984, Cunningham's three churches include: the United Methodist Church, in continuous operation since 1886; the Christian Church, with services since 1897; and the Catholic Church, Sacred Heart Parish, organized in 1908.

Discovery of oil north of Cunningham led to the development of "Skellyville," three miles north of town, which at one time had twenty-five houses. From 1943-1946, there was a helium plant west of Cunningham. At the present time, the Northern Natural Gas Company has a huge gas storage facility northwest of Cunningham.

Cunningham has been and is the home of small manufacturing plants. In the 1940's, Cecil Sheldon manufactured a gasoline pump, known as the Sheldon Tractor Filler. At the present time the Kingman Manufacturing Co., owned and operated by Bill DeWeese, manufactures cattle equipment at the east edge of Cunningham. Dr. D.E. Thompson, a former Cunningham dentist, maintains the Great Plains Dental Products. Dan Cusenbary, east of Cunningham, manufactures a specially designed all-purpose table, as a part of the Walnut Hill Industries & Fish Farm.

In 1984, public buildings also include: a public library, cityhall, post office, lodge hall, community building, swimming pool, and two city parks. The city is governed by a mayor and council system. Ivan Cain is the mayor. Hilltop Manor, modern nursing home, serves some seventy residents. A reliable bank, three filling stations, and three restaurants serve tourists on Highway 54 and the local community. There are two wheat storage elevators.

Flourishing organizations are: the 4-H Club; American Legion and Ladies Auxiliary; Eastern Star and Masons; Modern Homemakers E.H.U.; Lions Club; Y.W.C.A.; and Cub Scouts.

Cunningham owes much of its prosperity to the rich surrounding farmland, cattle production, oil wells, and Highway 54. The residents enjoy dependable utility services, good streets, friendly neighbors, and a progressive community spirit.

Submitted by Rubie Cusenbary.

Much information from History of Cunningham, by Bob Witt, 1969

Adapted from:

Kingman County, Kansas, And Its People.

(Kingman: Kingman County Historical Society. 1984)

Used by permission

Explore [Cunningham](#) & [Kingman County](#)

[Kansas: Colleges](#) · [Counties](#) · [Genealogy](#) · [History](#) · [Libraries](#) · [Museums](#) · [Poetry](#) · [Towns](#)

September 25, 2001 / John & Susan Howell / [Wichita, Kansas](#) / howell@kotn.org



Visit the Home Page for Kansas
A service of the Kansas State Library

© Copyright 2001
John & Susan Howell

