

CUNNINGHAM-HIGHT TENANT FARMSTEAD  
55.5' west of the intersection of  
Vincent and Currey Roads  
Waxahachie Vicinity  
Ellis County  
Texas

HABS No. TX-3379

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY**  
**Southwest System Support Office**  
**National Park Service**  
**P.O. Box 728**  
**Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504**

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY**

**CUNNINGHAM-HIGHT TENANT FARMSTEAD**

**HABS NO. TX-3379**

For more information about other structures at the Cunningham-Hight Tenant Farm, see:

- HABS No. TX-3379-A** Cunningham-Hight Tenant Farm, Main House
- HABS No. TX-3379-B** Cunningham-Hight Tenant Farm, Garage
- HABS No. TX-3379-C** Cunningham-Hight Tenant Farm, Barn
- HABS No. TX-3379-D** Cunningham-Hight Tenant Farm, Pole Barn
- HABS No. TX-3379-G** Cunningham-Hight Tenant Farm, Shed
- HABS No. TX-3379-F** Cunningham-hight Tenant Farm, Tenant House

**Location:** 55.5' west of the intersection of Vincent and Currey Roads  
Waxahachie vicinity, Ellis County, Texas

USGS Boz, Texas Quadrangle, Universal  
Transverse Mercator Coordinates  
14.697330.3576650

**Present Owner:** Texas National Research Laboratory Commission  
(TNRLC)  
1801 N. Hampton Road, Suite 400  
DeSoto, Texas 75115

**Present Occupant:** None

**Present Use:** Vacant

**Statement of**

**Significance:** The Cunningham-Hight Tenant farmstead includes a complex of buildings associated with early to mid twentieth-century tenant farming in western Ellis County, Texas. The property encompasses land owned by George H. Cunningham, an early pioneer in the area, and his descendants. Cunningham was one of the county's wealthiest land owners and owned extensive amounts of land in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He acquired the land where the complex now stands in 1855. As a landlord, he participated in the emerging tenant-farm system of the nineteenth century, and the extant barn dates to his period of ownership. Descendants of Cunningham, including granddaughter Leta Mae Hight and her husband G. Howell Hight, continued the practice of tenant farming through

the early and mid twentieth century. The Hights oversaw the construction of most of the other surviving buildings in the complex. The farmstead is indicative of the type of tenant farm that produced most of the cotton grown in Ellis County during the early twentieth century.

## **PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

### **A. Physical History**

**1. Date of Erection: 1925**

**2. Architect: None**

**3. Original and Subsequent Owners:**

**George H. Cunningham (1855-1915)**  
**Estate of B.C. Cunningham (1915-1933)**  
**Leta Mae Cunningham (1933-1967)**  
**Roger and Roxana Hight (1967-1984)**  
**Delta Properties (1984 -1990)**  
**Texas National Research Laboratory Commission (1990-present)**

**4. Builders, Contractors and Suppliers: Unknown**

**5. Original Plans and Construction: No original architectural plans or drawings were located during research investigations. Such drawings probably never existed for the vernacular buildings on the property.**

**6. Alterations and Additions: A porch was enclosed to form a foyer and bathroom (ca. 1940).**

### **B. Historical Context:**

Cotton was central to Ellis County's history and development of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Profits from its sale brought unprecedented prosperity to many local residents who enjoyed a relatively high standard of living compared to those who lived in other rural areas of the state. Although family-owned and -run farms grew large amounts of cotton during this era, most cotton came from sharecroppers or tenant farmers who compensated the landowner with portions of their yields. This farmstead dates to the early twentieth century and is associated with George H. Cunningham and his descendants. It

also illustrates the important role tenant farms played in Ellis County's cotton boom.

Permanent Euro-American settlement came to western Ellis County in the late 1840s and 1850s. Most of the pioneers originally hailed from Tennessee where the tradition of small, family-run farms prevailed. After their arrival in Ellis County, these early settlers established an agrarian society. Most began growing wheat, corn and other crops for self-consumption as soon as they cleared the land. A few others supplemented their farming activities by raising livestock on the abundant grasslands in the prairies that extended through the area. Cotton was grown, but in insignificant quantities, and few of those who settled in Ellis County during the middle of the nineteenth century could have foretold of its importance in later years.

One of the earliest pioneers in western Ellis County was George H. Cunningham, who came to Texas in 1849 from Tennessee. He listed his occupation as farmer, but he also worked extensively as a land surveyor. He studied the profession as a young man soon after arriving in Texas and in the early 1850s was elected District Surveyor for the Robertson Land District, which embraced Ellis and surrounding counties [1]. The skills he learned as a surveyor helped him immensely later in life because he assisted a number of people desiring to locate and establish claims to their land, often receiving land rather than money as compensation for his services. He eventually amassed a large amount of land throughout the region.

Cunningham acquired the rights to the John Davenport Survey, which includes the Cunningham-Hight Farmstead, from the State of Texas on February 15, 1855 [2]. The property adjoins a 106.66-acre parcel he obtained that same year in the J.J. Mallard Survey, where he is believed to have established his homestead [3]. On September 16, 1859 he married Tennessee Sims, who was a daughter of John D. Sims, another pioneer to the area, and resided in Texas for the remainder of his life [4].

During the 1850s and 1860s, Ellis County remained sparsely populated, and its economy relied firmly on family-owned and -operated farms. The arrival of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad, the first rail to extend into Ellis County, ushered in an era of rapid change and development. The county's population doubled between 1870 and 1880, and most new residents took up farming. By that time, the initial wave of pioneers, who had

arrived in the 1850s and 1860s, already claimed most property in the county. Only a few of the new settlers could afford to purchase land and start their own farms. More typically, they became tenant farmers and leased farmland, agreeing to provide landlords a percentage (usually one-third of the grains and one-quarter of the cotton) of all agricultural goods produced from the land. The tenant farm system gained considerable popularity in the region after the Civil War because it provided ample opportunities for employment and remained important for the next six decades [5].

At the dawn of the tenant farm era, Ellis County farmers began to tap into the soil's rich potential and planted more cotton in the fertile Blackland Prairies. In 1870 Ellis County was forty-fifth in the state in cotton production, but a decade later its ranking had risen to seventh [6]. Widespread adoption of the tenant-farm system, which was well suited to cotton cultivation, made much of this increase possible. Cotton could be grown profitably only if sufficient manpower was available to pick it. The mass migration of new residents, most of whom came from the Upland and Lowland South during the final quarter of the nineteenth century, supplied sufficient labor to make large-scale cotton production worthwhile [7]. By 1890 Ellis County became the largest cotton supplier in the state [8]. Thus, the local cotton boom was well underway and the prosperity it brought enabled Ellis County to become one of the wealthiest counties in the state.

A number of factors contributed to the explosion of the local cotton trade, but one of the most important was the success of the tenant-farm system. By 1900 tenant farmers operated almost 80 percent of the farms in Ellis County. The state average, in contrast, was about 50 percent [9]. George H. Cunningham, who owned about 3,000 acres in Ellis County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, participated in the tenant-farm system [10]. No information is known to exist to document how many tenants worked for him, but some of the extant buildings at the Cunningham-Hight Farmstead date to his tenure as owner and landlord.

When Cunningham died in 1915, Ellis County remained a leading cotton producer in the state and nation, and tenant farmers endured as the primary source of cotton in the county [11]. The children of Cunningham partitioned his vast landholdings, and the estate of B.C. Cunningham, presumably that of Brazillin Cunningham, assumed control of property that includes the Cunningham-Hight Farmstead [12]. Tenants continued to farm the

land through the 1910s and 1920s, and cotton remained the primary and most significant agricultural good on this and other farms in the area [13].

By the late 1920s and 1930s the cotton boom, which fueled much of the growth in Ellis County since the 1870s, began to wane. Soil depletion due to the lack of crop rotation and a nationwide economic depression contributed to a dramatic decline in the local cotton trade. Ellis County remained a leading supplier of cotton, but profits from its cultivation dwindled. The number of tenant farms also declined [14]. Area farmers, including both landowners and tenants, returned to more diversified crop cultivation practices [15].

About 1933, Leta Mae Cunningham, who later married G. Howell Hight, assumed control of land that includes the Cunningham-Hight Farmstead, and she kept the property until 1967 [16]. During this period, cotton was abandoned altogether, although a succession of tenants continued to operate the farm and grew a variety of grain crops. In 1967 Leta Mae and G. Howell transferred the title of the property to their children Roger and Roxanna Hight. In 1984 Delta Properties of Dade County, Florida, acquired the property. The Texas National Research Laboratory Commission purchased the land in 1991 [17].

## **PART II. ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT:**

### **A. General Statement:**

- 1. Architectural Character:** Located in the vicinity of Waxahachie, in the historic but no longer extant community of Boz is an intact farmstead which features buildings which were occupied from the early to late twentieth century. The site includes a one-story, double-pile bungalow with an enclosed porch and rear addition. (See photographic documentation HABS No. TX-3379-A-1 through HABS No. TX-3379-7). The house survives with a two-story barn, a one-story pole barn, garage, and shed, a two-room tenant house, and a trough and cistern.
- 2. Condition of the Fabric:** The house and barns are in fair condition. The other outbuildings are in poor condition.

**B. Site:**

- 1. General Setting:** The house faces southeast, is oriented perpendicular to Vincent Road and located 55.5' north of the intersection with Curry Road. The site is open pasture land which slopes gently to the southwest, is interrupted by a hedgerow and some mature trees, and is approached from the road by a gravel drive.
- 2. Buildings:** The site includes a one-story garage, HABS No. TX-3379-B; a two-story barn, HABS No. TX-3379-C; a pole barn, HABS No. TX-3379-D; a shed, HABS No. TX-3379-E; a one-story, single-pile, double-pen tenant house, HABS No. TX-3379-F; and a cistern and a trough, HABS Nos. TX-3379-G and HABS No. TX-3379-H.
- 3. Landscaping, Enclosures:** The site is sparsely landscaped and features a hedgerow, planted in a north-south direction from the house, and east-west, along Curry Road. Ornamentals introduced during the early twentieth century include Day Lilies and Crepe Myrtles, which are located on the east and south sides of the house, respectively. Mimosa and Japanese Ligustrum are also found on the south edge of the property. A single Pecan and Red Oak are located within the pasture.

**PART III: ENDNOTES**

- 1. A Memorial and Biographical History of Ellis County, Texas (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1892), 335.**
- 2. Ellis County, Texas, Deed Record B:125.**
- 3. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Historic American Buildings Survey, Measured Drawings of the Old G.H. Cunningham Farmstead, Ellis County, Waxahachie, Texas, (Library of Congress, TX-3379).**
- 4. A Memorial and Biographical History of Ellis County, Texas 335-336.**
- 5. Killis P. Almond, Jr., and Randall W. Moir, "Historic Structures Management Plan, submitted to TNRLC on behalf of the U.S. Department of Energy in Support of the Superconducting Super Collider," 1992.**

6. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census- Volume III: The Statistics of the Wealth and Industry of the United States, by Francis A. Walker, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872); U.S., Department of the Interior, Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883).
7. Almond and Moir, "Historic Structures Management Plan."
8. U.S. Department of the Interior, Report on the Statistics of Agriculture in the United States at the Eleventh Census, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895).
9. Almond and Moir, "Historic Structures Management Plan."
10. A Memorial and Biographical History of Ellis County, Texas, 336.
11. Ellis County, Texas, Probate Records; Almond and Moir, "Historic Structures Management Plan."
12. Ellis County, Texas, Tax Abstracts of Lands.
13. Almond and Moir, "Historic Structures Management Plan,".
14. Ibid.
15. Stanley Murdock and Yula Glenn Murdock, Interview by Terri Myers, written notes, Waxahachie, Texas, 12 June 1992.
16. Ellis County, Texas, Tax Abstracts of Lands.
17. Ellis County, Texas, Deed Record 515:632; Ibid, 703:552; Ibid, 851:872.

#### **PART IV: SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: No original plans or drawings are know to exist.
- B. Early Views: No early photographs have been located.
- C. Interviews:

McGregor, Frances Dunaway. Interviews by Terri Myers. Written notes. Waxahachie, Texas. 20 May 1992 and 12 June 1992.

**Murdock, Stanley, and Murdock, Yula Glenn. Interview by Terri Myers. Written notes. Waxahachie, Texas. 12 June 1992.**

**D. Bibliography:**

**1. Primary and unpublished sources**

**Ellis County, Texas. Office of the County Clerk. Deed Records.**

**Ellis County, Texas. Office of the County Tax Assessor/Collector. Tax Abstracts of Lands.**

**Texas. State Comptrollers Office. Ad Valorem Tax Rolls for Ellis County. On file at the Genealogical Collection at the Texas State Library.**

**U.S. Department of the Interior. Agriculture of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Eighth Census, by Joseph C. Kennedy. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864.**

**U.S. Department of the Interior. Report on the Statistics of Agriculture in the United States at the Eleventh Census, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895.**

**U.S. Department of the Interior. Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883.**

**U.S. Bureau of the Census. Ninth Census- Volume III: The Statistics of the Wealth and Industry of the United States, by Francis A. Walker. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872.**

**U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: Ellis County, Texas." 1860.**

**U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: Ellis County, Texas." 1870.**

**U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: Ellis County, Texas." 1880.**

U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: Ellis County, Texas." 1900.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: Ellis County, Texas." 1910.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Products of Agriculture." 1860.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Products of Agriculture." 1870.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Products of Agriculture." 1880.

2. Secondary and published sources

A. Memorial and Biographical History of Ellis County, Texas. Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1892; reprint ed., Ellis County Historical Museum and Art Gallery, Inc., Fort Worth: Historical Publishers, 1972.

Almond, Killis P., Jr., and Moir Randall W. "Historic Structures Management Plan, submitted to TNRLC on behalf of the U.S. Department of Energy in Support of the Superconducting Super Collider." 1992.

Ellis County Genealogical Society. Searchers and Researchers. Volume XV. Waxahachie, Texas: Ellis County Genealogical Society, 1992.

Ellis County Genealogical Society Record, Volume III. Waxahachie, Texas: Ellis County Genealogical Society.

Hardy, Daniel, and Moore, David. "Historic Resources Survey of Ellis County: An Inventory for the U.S. Department of Energy." 1990.

Hawkins, Edna Davis, Ruth Stone, Ida M. Brookshire and Lillie Tolleson. History of Ellis County Texas. Waco: Texian Press, 1972.

U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. Historic American Buildings Survey. Measured Drawings of Old G.H. Cunningham Farmstead, Ellis County, Waxahachie, Texas (Library of Congress, TX-3379).

**PART V. PROJECT INFORMATION**

This Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) recording project was undertaken by the Texas National Research Laboratory Commission (TNRLC) in conjunction with the Superconducting Super Collider Project in Ellis County. The project was conducted in accordance with TNRLC's Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Energy, The Texas Historical Commission and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The MOA stipulates that a record be created of buildings to be demolished in the project area. The field work and measured drawings were prepared by ArchiTexas of Dallas. The recording team consisted of Bruce Fowler, Gary Garmon, Gilbert Hickox, Larry Irsik, Craig King, Richard Martratt, Craig Melde, Jeanie O'Brien, Ernesto Robles, Edward Sergeant, Gary Skotnicki, Stan Solamillo, and Diane Van Buren. Historical Research was conducted under the supervision of David Moore of Hardy, Heck, Moore of Austin. Architectural analysis and descriptions were prepared by Stan Solamillo of Dallas. Archival photography was by Brendan Dunnigan and Doug Hankins of Arlington.