



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Jack Cunningham papers**

1922-1939

\*T-Mss 1942-003

## Summary

**Creator:** Cunningham, Jack, 1882-1941

**Title:** Jack Cunningham papers

**Date:** 1922-1939

**Size:** .1 linear feet (1 portfolio)

**Source:** found in cage file, 1942

**Abstract:** Jack Cunningham (1882-1941) was a Hollywood screenwriter and producer who worked primarily for Paramount Pictures, and developed material for many prominent stars, including Douglas Fairbanks, Barbara Stanwyck, W.C. Fields and Harold Lloyd. Cunningham began his career as a screenwriter in 1913, and had written over seventy screenplays before his epic Western *THE COVERED WAGON*, one of the biggest box office successes of the silent film era, brought him acclaim in 1923. In the years that followed he specialized in Westerns, and also wrote a number of swashbucklers for Douglas Fairbanks, such as *THE BLACK PIRATE* (1926) and *THE IRON MASK* (1929). In the mid-1930s Cunningham turned to comedy, writing several films for W.C. Fields including *IT'S A GIFT* and *THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY* (both 1934), *MISSISSIPPI* (1935), and *POPPY* (1936). Cunningham also wrote *PROFESSOR BEWARE* for Harold Lloyd in 1938 before returning to Westerns with the Cecil B. DeMille production *UNION PACIFIC* in 1939. Jack Cunningham died in Santa Monica, Calif, on Oct. 4, 1941, at the age of 59. The Jack Cunningham papers consist primarily of correspondence pertaining to Cunningham's screenwriting career, especially two of his biggest successes, the epic Westerns *THE COVERED WAGON* (1923) and *UNION PACIFIC* (1939). Although there are several letters documenting a variety of Jack Cunningham's professional activities in the early to mid-1930s, the bulk of the collection is devoted to his work on these two films. In the case of *THE COVERED WAGON* the crew went on location to Utah in the autumn of 1922 while Cunningham remained in Los Angeles, reviewing the footage they sent back and writing detailed letters about it to director James Cruze. For *UNION PACIFIC* Cunningham travelled to Nebraska and Wyoming in the spring of 1938 to engage in preliminary research, and corresponded primarily with producer/director Cecil B. DeMille and his assistant William Pine, who remained in California. Cunningham also corresponded with local historians and with a number of elderly residents who participated in the construction of the Union Pacific railroad in the 1860s.

**Preferred citation:** Jack Cunningham papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public

## Creator History

Jack Cunningham (1882-1941) was a Hollywood screenwriter and producer who worked primarily for Paramount Pictures, and developed material for many prominent stars, including Douglas Fairbanks, Barbara Stanwyck, W.C. Fields and Harold Lloyd. Cunningham began his career as a screenwriter in 1913, and had written over seventy screenplays before his epic Western *THE COVERED WAGON*, one of the biggest box office successes of the silent film era, brought him acclaim in 1923. In the years that followed he specialized in Westerns, and also wrote a number of swashbucklers for Douglas Fairbanks, such as *THE BLACK PIRATE* (1926) and *THE IRON MASK* (1929). In the mid-1930s Cunningham turned to comedy, writing several films for W.C. Fields including *IT'S A GIFT* and *THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY* (both 1934), *MISSISSIPPI* (1935), and *POPPY* (1936). Cunningham also wrote *PROFESSOR BEWARE* for Harold Lloyd in 1938 before returning to Westerns with the Cecil B. DeMille production *UNION PACIFIC* in 1939. Jack Cunningham died in Santa Monica, Calif, on Oct. 4, 1941, at the age of 59.

## Scope and Content Note

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## Key Terms

### Genre/Physical Characteristic

Correspondence

### Subjects

Motion picture industry -- California -- Los Angeles

Motion picture producers and directors

Railroad construction workers -- United States -- History -- 19th century

Railroads -- United States -- History -- 19th century

### Titles

The covered wagon (Motion picture)

Union Pacific (Motion picture)

### Names

Cunningham, Jack, 1882-1941  
Cruze, James, 1884-1942  
DeMille, Cecil B. (Cecil Blount), 1881-1959