

Ella May Cunningham's Photos of Life in Detroit, Florida in 1911



Kodak Brownie Camera, 1911

**Compiled by Sheldon Cunningham
October 2018**

PREFACE

I selected, scanned and edited 34 prints from the 49 photos that my grandmother, Ella May (Banning) Cunningham, saved from her family's visit to Detroit, Florida (now Florida City). Her husband Arthur had purchased land in Florida for farming tomatoes. They arrived in Florida in early 1911 from Michigan with sons Cameron and Donald, who later became my father, and stayed several months. We are indebted to Ella May for these photos. She wrote on the backs of 14 photos. For example, with the photo of her laundry shown at the left below, her notes on the reverse are at the right.



*My first wash in
Detroit Florida.*

⁵
Notice no cloth pins. Black headed pins.

Comments are provided for each photo in this book. For the 14 photos with Ella May's notes, the notes lead the paragraph, in italics and inside quotation marks: *"My first wash in Detroit Florida..."*

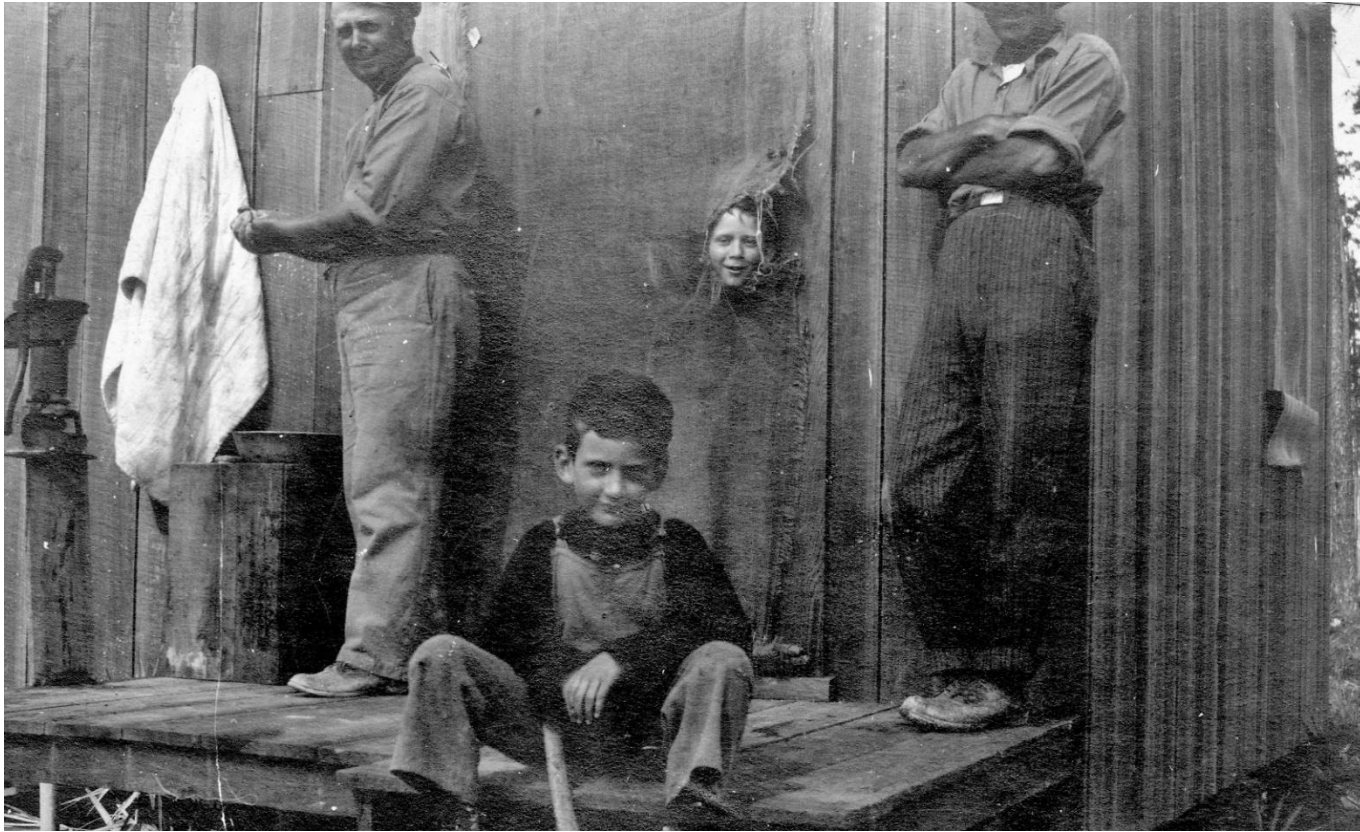
I wish to express my gratitude to Jeff Blakley, historian of Homestead, Florida, for his invaluable support and suggestions, and for providing helpful background information and ideas on Ella May's photos based on his knowledge of the history of Florida City and South Florida. Thanks, Jeff, your input added credibility and relevance to the story that the photos portray.

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THE CUNNINGHAM FAMILY



Don with His Hatchet

"One day at noon. I guess I did not want Jack in it," by Ella May Cunningham. At the left, Arthur Cunningham is washing his hands by the pump, with sons Don seated with his hatchet and Cam behind the screen-door. Cam is peeking out through a hole in the canvas or burlap covering the opening. Jack Kay might be the man at the right.



Cunningham Family Riding in a Wagon

The Arthur Cunningham family is riding in a wagon pulled by a team of mules. Art is driving, and Ella May is behind him with Cam and Don. They likely are on a Sunday outing since Art and the boys are wearing ties. In fact, they may have been going to the school in Redland, see photo below.

Ella May

Ella May Cunningham is holding her hat as she stands in the side yard of their house in Detroit. The ox-cart road is visible behind her, and a large building parallel to the railroad tracks is in the distance. The white horizontal line is the roadbed of the Florida East Coast Railroad.





Ella May Holding a Gun

Ella May Cunningham is wearing gloves while she poses with a gun. Her family had a .22 caliber rifle and a 10-gauge shotgun with them in Florida. Ella May is wearing a hat in this photo, and also in many other of her photos from Florida. She seemed to enjoy wearing hats. In the 1920's Ella May opened a millinery shop in Detroit, Michigan.

Smiling Brothers

"Taken in front of our house," by Ella May. Sons Cam, on the left, and Don are standing in their "front yard" with a distinctive long building in the background. This packing-house is also visible in another photo taken from the East Glade looking west. Years later Don recalled using a sling made from a shoe tongue and shoe laces to hurl stones at the roof of the building. The white line to the left of Cam is the roadbed of the Florida East Coast Railroad.





Wagon Trip to Redland School

"Schoolhouse at Redland," by Ella May. Arthur and sons Cam and Don are seated on a bench, and Ella May is standing. The other couple is probably Claude and Elanor Shields Robinson. Redland was about seven miles from Detroit. It is doubtful that the boys attended this school since there apparently were schools closer to home in both Detroit and Homestead. Note the wagon at the lower right.

BUILDINGS IN DETROIT, FLORIDA



A Typical House in Early Detroit

Note the porch, pump, water trough, cups, pitcher, pails, washtub, and most likely a hitching post. The building appears to be about eight feet wide, with floor timbers supported by log posts. The house was not fancy, but it kept the mosquitoes at bay and provided shelter from the elements.



Completed Chicken Coop Project

"Cunningham chicken coop that Art and Jack built," by Ella May. From the left are Don, Cam, Arthur, and most likely Jack Kay. The coop is built of logs, rather than boards. Next step, just add some free-range chickens.

Palm Avenue Scene

This is a Palm Avenue photo looking west from the Detroit railroad platform. The long building shown in other photographs is out of the picture to the right. Jeff Blakley observed: "A great view of the virgin pine forest that was ruthlessly destroyed." Note the woman and child standing, right center.





Buildings Along the Railroad in Detroit, Florida

This photo of Detroit was taken from southeast of the rail crossing on Palm Avenue. The long building at the right appears in other photos by Ella May. It was located on the west side of the railroad tracks north of the Palm Avenue crossing. Note the telephone poles. Since there is no evidence of the Florida City canal in the photo, this photo dates to before 1912.



Houses of the Shields Brothers

These two houses are most likely the Shields' houses. The one on the right with the white siding is definitely that of Dr. Samuel S. and Dorcas Shields, and the one on the left without a roof is likely that of his brother, Dr. Thomas W. and Clarissa Shields. Both families were from Detroit, Michigan.



An Example of Larger House in Detroit

This dwelling is much larger than the Cunningham's house. Note the hammock on the left side of the porch, and the front yard that appears to be mostly rocks. The outhouse at the far right is only a few steps away.



The Sharp's House

"Back of Mrs. Sharp's house with her detached kitchen," by Ella May. The Charles E. Sharp house appears to be a relatively large two-story structure, and the detached kitchen is under a tent. C. E. Sharp is on a 1912 list of customers of Dade County Telephone Co. His telephone call was "two short rings" on the 13-party Detroit Local line. Apparently, it was the only phone line in town.

METHODS OF TRANSPORTATION



A Wagon Pulled by a Team of Mules

Here is a wagon full of Detroiters, including Ella May Cunningham behind the driver wearing her hat and holding a bouquet. Don is next to her, son Cam in front, and James Rogers is sitting on the back seat. The wagon driver is wearing a derby and smoking a cigar.



Boarding the Florida East Coast Railroad in Detroit

This is a railroad scene at Palm Avenue in Detroit. The name "FLORIDA EAST COAST" is painted on the rail car above the windows. The passengers waiting to board the train are nicely dressed.

Two Boys Riding a Mule

Cam Cunningham is riding behind a friend on a mule. The photo probably was taken in front of the house with a rocky front yard and outhouse that was shown previously.





A Florida Ox Cart

That most likely is Art Cunningham holding the collar rope to guide the ox. The man with Art may be one of the Shields brothers. The long building in this photo also is in an earlier picture of Cam and Don standing together. This picture was taken on the east side of the Cunningham house, and the ox-cart trail ran parallel to the long building.



Sailboats at Anchor

"This Is the bay at Miami," by Ella May. She photographed these two-masted sailboats resting at anchor in Biscayne Bay.

ELLA MAY AND HER FRIENDS



Enjoying the Harvest

A smiling Ella May, on the right, is holding what appear to be either small grapefruit, or oranges, and her friend has five grapefruit. Note the lady's hat between them that apparently was removed for the photo.



Posing with the Wagon at Samuel Shields' House

"Up at Mr. & Mrs. S. S. Shields, Miss Hunter, Mrs. SSS, Elanor, Mary, Octavia, Dr. SSS, Dr. T. W. S.," by Ella May. Miss Lillian Hunter was the daughter of William Hunter who arrived in Detroit in 1908. Mrs. Elanor Robinson was the daughter of S. S. Shields, and Mary's surname is not known. Octavia was the daughter of Edward Stiling, Detroit land promoter.



Ella May at Samuel Shields' House

Ladies are sitting on the wagon, with Ella May Cunningham on the right. Dr. Samuel S. Shields and Dr. Thomas W. Shields, left to right, are in front of the wagon wheel. Women, from the left, are Lillian Hunter, Dorcas Shields, her daughter Elanor Shields Robinson, and Mary (surname unknown). Most likely, Octavia Stiling took this photo.



Posing at the Railroad Crossing in Detroit

A group of friends pose at the railroad crossing in Detroit. The woman on the left appears to be Dorcas Shields. Next is a young woman who is shown sitting in a wheelbarrow in a later photo, then Clarissa Shields, a man, and Mary (surname unknown). The woman at the far right is thought to be Elanor Shields Robinson. The crossing sign reads: "LOOK OUT FOR THE CARS."



Having a Visit on Clarissa Shields' Front Porch

"Dr. T. W. Shields' house," by Ella May. Don Cunningham is sitting on the edge of the porch. Clarissa Shields is in the rocker at the right. The house is supported by log posts. In 1910 the office of Dr. T. W. Shields in Detroit, Michigan, was at 1287 Grand River Avenue; nearby was Arthur R. Cunningham's drugstore at 1300 Grand River.



Gathering at Ella May's House

Ladies are posing on the porch of the Cunningham's house in Detroit. On the back row are Ella May, far left and Clarissa Shields second from the right. On the front row, second from the left is Mary (surname unknown), and Dorcas Shields is at the far right.



A Meeting of the Ladies of Detroit

"The club of ladies; we haven't named it yet," by Ella May. From another photograph, it appears that from the left in the front row, are Elanor Shields Robinson, her mother Dorcas Shields, and Mary (surname unknown). The young woman next to Mary is in several pictures with Mary. The fourth woman from the right on the back row is Clarissa Shields.

Ella May and Don

Ella May is on the right, with son Don and Claude Robinson, son-in-law of Samuel Shields. They are in front of a grapefruit tree, and a man appears to be standing on the left behind the tree.





Among the Grapefruit Branches

Ella May is on the left with Don looking down and Cam grinning. Kneeling are a man in derby and James Rogers, with other friends around the grapefruit tree. In most of these photos which include Ella May and son Don, they are sitting or standing next to each other.

A SELECTION OF OTHER PHOTOS



Ella May's Clothes Dryer

"My first wash in Detroit, Florida, notice no clothespins, black headed pins," by Ella May. She must have done the wash in wash tub similar to one shown next to a house in a previous photo. This snapshot fits the saying, "a picture that is worth a thousand words." Jeff Blakley observed that this is a great view of the pine trees and the rock-land understory, which is all gone now.



Art and His Sons on the Farm

"I took this in the field. Art, Helper, Don, Cam," by Ella May. This photo was taken in the East Glade. The group is standing in mixed vegetation of grasses and various plants.



Mr. Rogers by His Tent

"Mr. Rogers in working clothes," by Ella May. This is James Rogers, born in South Carolina in 1865. He was married to Nancy according to the 1920 Florida City census.



Farnsworth Land

"Picture of Farnsworth property," by Ella May. This land probably was owned by Charles E. Farnsworth, a real estate investor in Florida. It is in the East Glade. Note the drainage ditch and the plank path to the right of the ditch. The planks were to walk on as the marl soil was subject to seasonal flooding. In the distance are areas too wet to clear of their willows and ferns.



Farmers Taking a Break

From the left are James Rogers, Claude Robinson, Don, Cam and Arthur Cunningham. The boys are wearing high-top boots. Note oranges or grapefruit on the porch behind Cam. The posture of the men and boys suggests that they may be resting after working in the fields.



Posing with a Wheelbarrow

This picture probably was taken at either a sawmill or a building site. Elbert H. Ring owned a sawmill in the area. The two younger women in front are together in several previous photos, and the first name of the girl in the dark dress is Mary. It is thought that the man and two women in front of him possibly might be Stephen Green and his daughters Flossie, left, and Clara, and that Mary might be the girls' cousin, Mary Burnette. All were related to the Ring family.



Field of Pineapples

"Pineapples at Homestead," by Ella May. Jeff Blakley's comment: "This is the first photographic proof that I know of that shows pineapples being grown circa 1911 in the Homestead, Florida area."

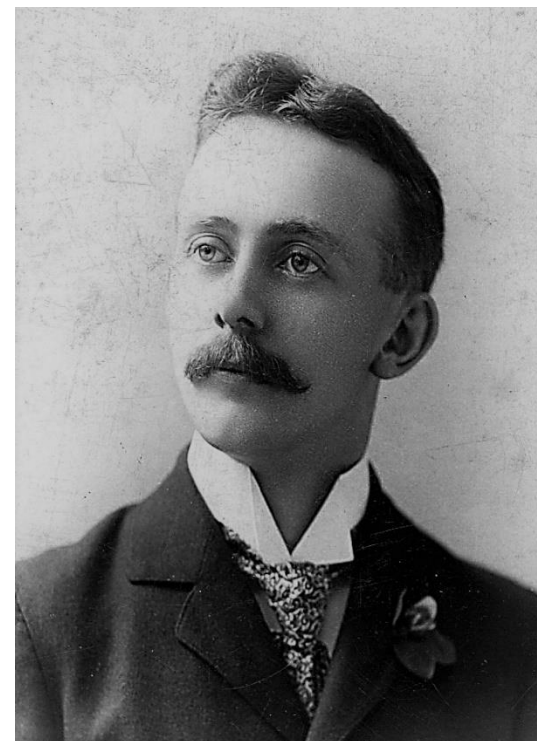
STUDIO PHOTOS OF MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY



Ella May



Cam and Don



Arthur