

A horizontal photograph showing the spines of several old, thick books with worn, yellowed pages, resting on a surface.

OBITUARY

Donald Hayward Cunningham

MAY 21, 1935 - AUGUST 8, 2026

IN THE CARE OF

Memorial Funeral Home, Crematory & Memorial Park
Cemetery/Columbia

*Donald H. Cunningham died on 8 August 2026
in Columbia, MO.*

Don, the son of Hartley H. and Ethel Frances (Crane Cunningham McKee), was born in Columbia, Missouri, on 21 May 1935. His great-, great -, great- grandfather, Ira P. Nash (1786-1844), a land surveyor for the Spanish Government, was one of the earliest settlers in what was to become Boone County, and he founded the village of Nashville south of Columbia on the Missouri River. Don is survived by his son Mark. His wife Patsy Ann Dickson Cunningham died 19 July 2020.

Don grew up in Columbia and was involved in many public school activities: captain of the Ridgeway Elementary School Boy Patrol (precursor of today's Street Crossing Guards), co-captain of the Jefferson Junior High School Cyclones basketball team, and captain of the Hickman High School track and field team.

After graduating from high school, Don joined the US Navy, serving as recruit commander of Company 249, which was the "Meatball Company" (highest scoring company) in 14 weeks of boot camp at San Diego. He served three years sea duty at various times on the USS Eversole (DD789), a destroyer with the United Nations Combined Fleet in Japan and Korea, and the USS Kishwaukee (AOG 9) and the USS Natchaug (AOG 54) with the Seventh Fleet in the Formosa (now Taiwan) Straits and French Indo-China (now Viet Nam). His last assignment was shore duty at Camp Elliot, the US Navy and Marine Corps Retraining Command in San Diego. He was awarded the National Defense, Navy Good Conduct, and China Service (Extended) medals.

After being honorably discharged in 1957, he enrolled at the University of Missouri where he earned his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in English. As an upper-classman, he was a grader for Professor Donovan Rhynsbarger, Director of Theatre (Introduction to Theatre) and Professor Willoughby Johnson, Director of Composition, (History of Motion Pictures). As a graduate instructor, he taught Freshman Composition, Advanced Composition, American Literature, British Literature 1 and 2, Introduction to Fiction and Drama, and Introduction to Poetry.

His first position as a tenure-track faculty member was at Southern Illinois University—Carbondale. In 1972, he moved to Morehead State University as an associate professor. Later he served as tenured professor of English and Director of Writing Programs. He also served as Director of the MSU Writers Workshop and as Acting Head of the Department of Languages and Literature. In 1983, he accepted the position of tenured professor and Director of Technical Writing at Texas Tech University. He later was hired as tenured professor and Coordinator of Technical and Professional Communication at Auburn University. He retired from Auburn as Professor Emeritus of English in 2005.

Initially attracted to the study of literature (his major area in graduate studies was 19th Century British Literature), Don's interests turned to rhetoric, technical and professional communication, and writing program administration. He contributed much to advance the development of technical and professional communication as an academic and scholarly discipline.

In addition to 40 refereed articles and 25 solicited book reviews, Don was the author or editor of a dozen textbooks and trade books with various other authors. His academic service was not restricted to publications. He also served for several years as the Chair of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Committee on Technical and Scientific Communication, as President of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, and as the founding editor of the organization's journal and anthology series.

Among his most honored achievements were receiving the Society for Technical Communication's Jay R. Gould Award for Excellence in Teaching Communication, the Texas Tech College of Arts & Science Outstanding New Faculty Award, and the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication Honorary Distinguished Service Award. In 2002, he was elected a Fellow of the Society for Technical Communication and of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing.

Don remained active professionally after retirement from Auburn, serving one semester as a visiting faculty member at the University of Missouri at Rolla (now Missouri University of Science and Technology) and a seven-year term as a member of the Board of Trustees of Cottey College. His most recent publication was as co-author of *Technical Editing: An Introduction to Editing in the Workplace*, published in 2019 by Oxford University Press.

For more information on Don, see Daniel Maddux, "A Conversation with Don Cunningham: An 'Idiosyncratic' and 'Unpredictable' Career " in "Legends of Technical Communication " *Intercom* 64, no.6 (June 17, 2017): 10-13.

Please consider donating to your favorite charity or to the endowed faculty Award at Cottey College (Nevada, Missouri), named the Donald H. Cunningham Faculty Development Fund to Support Cottey Faculty Members for Original Research or Work that May Lead to Publication or Public Presentation. Contact advancement@cottey.edu for more information.

Services

No services are scheduled at this time. Receive a notification when services are updated.

GET REMINDERS

In Memory Of

Donald Hayward Cunningham



1

*Click to light a candle*

ADD A MEMORY

Debbie (Huddleston) Berendzen
Family

08/12/2026

My thoughts and prayers to Mark and family. Don and my mom Geneva were cousins, the last time I seen your dad was when my mom passed away in 2016. Alice was my grandmother, sister to your grandmother Ethel and sister of Mattie. Not sure if you remember me we didn't see much of your family since you didn't live close. Always thought your dad looked like Kenny Rogers (very handsome).



0



SHARE

[ADD A COMMENT](#)

Every Detail Remembered™

Dignity®
MEMORIAL

© 2026 SCI SHARED RESOURCES, LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Do Not Sell or Share My Personal Information

This site is provided as a service of SCI Shared Resources, LLC. The Dignity Memorial brand name is used to identify a network of licensed funeral, cremation and cemetery providers that include affiliates of Service Corporation International, 1929 Allen Parkway, Houston, Texas. With over 1,900 locations, Dignity Memorial providers proudly serve over 375,000 families a year.