

Our Ancestor William Hunter Lived During Perilous Times

By Hunter Cole

[This article first published in *The Jacob Hunter Trust Newsletter*, Vol. 24, No. 1, January, 2015]

In Volume One of *The Colonial and State Records of North Carolina*, the correspondence of Governor Thomas Pollock (North Carolina) and Governor Alexander Spotswood (Virginia) provides history that is stimulating reading for genealogical researchers wanting to understand the time and place of their early ancestors.

The Hunters came to southern Virginia in a period when conditions were primitive and sometimes dangerous. North Carolina was at war with native tribes, and the governor continued to plead with his Virginia colleague for assistance. The Virginia colony, in which the Hunters settled ca. 1685 and 1702, prided itself on being more civilized than rustic North Carolina. The tone of Governor Spotswood's replies to Governor Pollock appears patrician and lofty, as though Virginia preferred to avoid the backwardness and distressful struggles of the neighboring colony.

In the early 1700s, North Carolina consisted only of the Albemarle precincts of Currituck, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Chowan, and Bath. The colony's ports along the Albemarle Sound were too shallow to accommodate heavy merchant vessels. Its tobacco was superior to Virginia's, but to ship it to Europe, North Carolina had to pay high tariffs to Virginia. The two colonies' dividing boundary would be redrawn in 1728. In moving it a few degrees north, the survey gave North Carolina access to the deep waters of the Nansemond River.

Dry records fail to detail personal feelings and attitudes, and it is unknown how the Hunters of Virginia regarded having their Virginia land in Nansemond County re-sectioned as a part of Chowan Precinct in North Carolina. In the Upper Parish of Nansemond (the southern district of the county), the new map relocated many farms, plantations, and mills along Bennett's Creek and near Meherrin Swamp. In this vicinity were the former Nansemond families of Hunter, Riddick, Walton, Perry, Parker, Sumner, Rountree, Lassiter, Benton, Alston, Blanchard, Spivey, Speights, Stallings, Gorden, Costen, Hinton, Hardy, and others. Several of these were interrelated by marriages. For a number of years after 1728, the North Carolina quitrents of these former Virginians of Chowan and Bertie Precincts remained uncollected. A surviving tax roll reports that they were demanded retroactively (CSR, XXII, 240).

The correspondence of Pollock and Spotswood and the minutes of the North Carolina Governor's Council focus on two overwhelming difficulties North Carolina faced in 1713: (1) The predominance of Quakers in the colony and (2) the continuing warfare with native Tuscarawan tribes. Quakers, being pacifists, did not serve in the militia and did not aid the populace in the continuing warfare, yet, although the Church of England was the official state church, Quakers won most elections and outnumbered Anglicans in the religious life of the community.

Governor Hyde of North Carolina had died in the Indian war, and Pollock was his successor. As the war raged with the Tuscarawas (an alliance of New York tribes and the local Chowanac and Meherrin), North Carolina's militia killed many Indians or captured them in such numbers that the jails were insufficient for housing the

prisoners. An Indian leader called King Blount emerged, possibly a mixed-blood. His people had little interest in treaties or concessions, and as raids of the colonists' farms continued, Governor Pollock repeated his appeals for Virginia's help. He received mainly bland replies.

Virginia, too, came under attack. At this time William Hunter, a resident of Nansemond County, was serving as a captain and as a magistrate of the court. His tracts along Bennett's Creek, then in Virginia, were adjacent to lands subject to Chowanac encroachments. Eight of his Virginia neighbors petitioned for the Crown's protection. They were Benjamin Blanchard, John Campbell, Thomas Spivey, Francis Rountree, Robert Lasiter, George Lasiter, and Nicholas Stallings. Their plea to Virginia authorities is documented in *Records of the Executive Council, 1664-1724*, p. 389, as follows:

In all humility [they] complaineth, Whereas every of your Honors petitioners hath a lawful right in and to considerable tracts lying and being in this Province and bounded upon Bennett's Creyke and a Cryke now known by the name of Garet's Creyke as by your Honour's petitioners patents under the Seale of this Province and other grants and conveyances more at large doth and may appear. And for as much as the Chowan Indians having their hunting quarters Upon Some of your petitioners land aforesaid therefore doe pretend the said lands to be theirs notwithstanding the patents and grants aforesaid menacing and threatening your Honours petitioners by destroying their Stocks, burning their houses and other hostilities under pretense they are under your Honour's protection. And no Englishman ought to Seate Within four miles of their Towne, the which your Honour's petitioners well knowing that by an order of the Honourable Council no Seament ought to be made within the Space of four miles aforesaid any wise to the prejudice of said Indians neither your Honourur's petitioners hath offered to purchase their right (if any) to the land held as aforesaid by your Honour's petitioners which they refuse and denyth any Seament to be made thereon for prevention whereof and that your Honour's petitioners may have a peaceable enjoyment of their lands. . . .

Although William Hunter's name does not appear with the petitioners' names, a number of their patents and transfers of deeds document him either as a witness to their transactions or as their adjacent freeholder. Like them, he lived in sometimes uncivil and perilous times.