

A Biographical Look at William Hunter of Ingleby Greenhow in Yorkshire and Nansemond County in Virginia

By Hunter McKelva Cole 2024

From the 1620s through the early eighteenth century the steady growth of Virginia's population was due mainly to the allure of free land. Virginia's headright system granted free tracts to sponsors who could prove they had transported themselves or immigrants into the colony. A large populace of early Virginia was composed of these indentured newcomers, who were termed headrights. The worth of each was fifty acres of land that the governor granted freely to the sponsor. Often of the lower class or in trade, a headright was indentured for about five years. Coming from outside the colony, this was a man or a woman for whom a sponsor could offer proof of having paid the cost of transportation to Virginia. Some sponsors brought only one or two immigrants into the colony. Others brought greater numbers, even shiploads. The more headrights a sponsor proved he had transported, the larger the land grant the grantee received. A grant could range from fifty acres to thousands.

In the 1680s a sponsor named Charles Rountree arrived in Nansemond County with six headrights. One of these was a Yorkshireman named William Hunter. In 1685, after proving the facts of his application for free land, Rountree was granted 350 acres for transporting seven persons. These were himself, a kinsman Robert Rountree, William Hunter, Joan Hunter, Rebekah Hunter, Nicholas Hunter, and John Sayer.^[1] This septet was not a miscellaneous group of strangers but were known to one another. Most, if not all of them, had been natives of an enclave of villages situated in the Cleveland district of Yorkshire. During multiple generations the Rountree family had been recorded in the parish registers of Stokesley, Ingleby Greenhow, and Hutton Rudby, although the names Charles and Robert are not included in the birth and marriage records of these villages. They were residents elsewhere in Britain. They may have been Recusants who fled to Ireland to escape persecution in Yorkshire, yet the district of Cleveland, in Yorkshire, was their native home. William Hunter hailed from Ingleby Greenhow and John Sayer from Hutton Rudgy, villages in Cleveland only a few miles apart. Sayer, "sonn of Lenard Sayer [was] baptized the 9th of November 1652" in the church at Hutton Rudby. William Hunter, born in Ingleby Greenhow, was a year younger, a son of Nicholas Hunter of Battersby.

It is evident to conclude from their common place of origin that the seven headrights arrived in Virginia together, probably on the same ship. Possibly, too, there were family ties or friendships that united them. In English church registers of Cleveland, William Hunter, Rebekah Hunter, John Sayer, and multiple Rountrees can be documented as having been born in a cluster of Yorkshire villages nestled around the market town of Stokesley. In Yorkshire their birthplaces are mapped within the North Riding in the Cleveland district and are pinpointed variously in the adjacent villages. We can determine that they arrived in the Virginia colony when William Hunter was about thirty.^[2] Possibly the headright Joan Hunter was his wife. It is

certain, upon their arrival in the 1680s, that William was a weaver,^[3] and, as a family land sale in 1739 proves, the headright Nicholas was William's young son^[4]. Rebekah possibly was William's spinster sister. The birth rosters of Ingleby Greenhow, in fact, attest that William and his older sister named "Rebecca" were born there.^[5] It is possible that as an adult she may have been, like him, in the business of weaving but in the distaff branch of spinning.

The Nansemond colony was plentiful in raw wool and native flax, and in Virginia a weaver was by no means of the servile class. The governor in fact urged new Virginians not to be lured away from their appreciated trades and into the profits of planting. In fact, "all of the early Governors received instructions to promote the welfare of those engaged in the various mechanical pursuits [such as weaving] and to restrain any disposition on their part to abandon these pursuits with a view to produce tobacco."^[6]

Weavers were indispensable for the manufacture of clothing and home goods, and a weaver, classified as a "mechanic," was essential in the colonial economy, as were blacksmiths, metal workers, and carpenters who produced fundamental products that no longer had to be transported at great expense from England.^[7] Most Virginian patricians lacked the skills of manufacturing locks, hinges, timepieces, and the textiles needed for the napkins, tablecloths, shirts, trousers, skirts, frocks, and coats that would be created by household slaves. These mechanics, as they were called, saved the day. William's precise duties as Rountree's headright are unknown, although it is doubtful that a professional weaver would waste his skills in tobacco fields and not use them at his loom.

"Virginia extended the prospect of an improved condition of life and they [immigrants] readily assented to proposals to try their fortunes there, first as handicraftsmen bound to service by indentures, and after the expiration of their terms, as planters and handicraftsmen combined"^[8]. This historical fact about immigrants' hope for enhanced occupational resources indeed pertains to craftsmen like William Hunter.

About 1690, after completing his term of indenture with Rountree, William was gainfully on his own. It can be assumed that in 1695 he had accrued sufficient money at aged forty-two to purchase four slaves. He was granted two hundred acres for having transported them into Virginia. Their names were Alla, Shambo, Harry, and Ned, supposedly one female and three males.^[9] It can be imagined that William had contracted with a slaver to bring the transported blacks into the colony.

Four years later, in 1699, William, aged forty-six, had risen in status. He had become one of the four county clerks of the Nansemond court.^[10] In 1701, at the age of forty-eight he had sufficient wealth to transport a kinsman with family members into Nansemond as his headrights.^[11] The name of one of them was also William Hunter. Without convincing proof, some Hunter family researchers assume that he was the weaver's son. This is questionable, for why would the young parents William and Joan, aged about thirty, bring their little son Nicholas to Virginia yet leave a baby boy in England for sixteen years? This second William, rather, could be a nephew, the son of the weaver's elder brother Henry. If so, there must have been transatlantic communications for arranging the expense of a sea voyage for William, his wife, his son Nicholas, and his daughter Alice. The father of the weaver-clerk of

Nansemond and of Henry of Ingleby Greenhow was named Nicholas, and both the weaver-clerk and young William had sons also named Nicholas, a name that would be carried forward in at least three generations.

In 1702 William, aged forty-nine, again having risen in status, was ranked as one of Nansemond County's twelve court justices.^[12] His title was Justice of the Quorum. The county at the time comprised 130,500 acres and 1,030 persons who were enumerated as tithables, that is, persons (predominantly male) who paid an annual tax.^[13] William would remain a judge for twenty-six years, until his death in 1728. This is the same year that a new survey of the boundary between Virginia and North Carolina was made. It was a blow to Virginia, which lost territory as the line was moved northward some thirty miles. As a result, plantations such as William Hunter's no longer were Virginian but were North Carolinian and within St. Paul's Parish of Chowan Precinct. The change affected many family identities, taxation, and loyalties.

Besides his eldest son Nicholas, who was born in England (or Ireland), William Hunter had three children who were born in Virginia: Robert, Isaac (both likely born in the 1690s), and Sarah. She would marry William Battle Jr.^[14] Since she was born in 1684, a year before the Rountree patent was recorded, the Hunters can be documented in Virginia at least a year before their names appeared in Rountree's patent in 1685.

In Nansemond and Chowan, young William and his wife Ann would be parents of two sons and five daughters, but the exact kinship of the judge and young William remains muddled. There remains hope that this relationship of the two Williams one day may be made clear in an English record not yet discovered, yet the two distinct William Hunters living simultaneously in Nansemond are documented in American records. Their properties were only a few miles apart. The judge's acreage was situated along Bennett's Creek, young William's at Orapeak, in the Great Dismal Swamp and northeast of the judge's plantation.^[15] Further evidence on paper notes that the two families were close. In 1732, four years after the judge's death (he died in the year of the new boundary), the younger William's will, filed in Chowan precinct, includes the signatures of the judge's sons Isaac and Robert, who served as witnesses.^[16] Likely they were at their kinsman's bedside.

From 1653, when William Hunter was born, almost nothing about his life is known until he immigrated to Virginia in the 1680s. About his parents, Nicholas Hunter and Elinor Wood (a daughter of Christopher Wood), we learn from their church's register that Ann, their first child, was born a month before their marriage. About the weaver's father, we have one embarrassing reference in Yorkshire^[17]. A court record states that he was fined for selling ale illegally.

William's story as we have it begins with his birth as the youngest of seven children, but the church register of Ingleby Greenhow lists only the parents' marriage and the children's baptisms but not the children's marriages and deaths, nor does any other register in the vicinity mention these Hunters. The absence of their names implies that they migrated elsewhere.

We have lingering queries. Where, for instance, did William learn his skills? At some time was he an apprentice? Where and when did he marry and become the father of his English son Nicholas? The slim record tells that William was an immigrant

and headright, that he was indentured, and that his firstborn American child was the daughter Sarah. But there are very few sources for discovering more about him. One intriguing report, cited below, depicts him in the courtroom. In 1699, William Hunter was one of the five justices of the county quorum. In 1702 and 1714 he was one of nine men serving as justices of the peace.^[18] Most public records of Nansemond County were destroyed in courthouse fires. Others were duplicated, sent to England, and are preserved in the Public Records Office in London. In a few of these William Hunter is documented. One other rare report of Judge William Hunter surfaces in the *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*.^[19] It states: *May ye 26th 1702. . . . Mary Williams of Nansimon [sic] County Complaining to this Board ye William Hunter of ye Lower Parish [Note: William Hunter's property was situated in the Upper Parish] of Nansimond did on ye 16 Instant send a Constable to her house and take away her Child and Contrary to Law bound him for twenty one years and praying redress therein. Ordered ye said Petition be referred to ye Justices of Nansimond County to Examine into ye Matter therein represented and report ye same to ye Council.*

In summary, what we can conclude about William Hunter is that by birth he was a Yorkshireman who became a husband and father, an immigrant to Virginia at the age of thirty, a headright, an indentured weaver, then a freeholder of 440 acres, a clerk of the Nansemond court and then, as Judge William Hunter, a justice of the quorum. William Hunter lived in Virginia for forty-five years. He died at about the age of seventy-five in 1728.

Where is he buried?

William's far-flung descendants newly discovered the Hunter family's burying grounds and in 2019 commemorated the site with a memorial stele. This graveyard in remembrance of William Hunter and his progeny claims a small rectangle within this English immigrant's former land granted to him in 1695 and 1701. In the present day, all sides of the cemetery are bordered by a pond, acres of flourishing farmland, and green pastures where cattle graze. Originally in Nansemond County, it was next within territory assigned to Chowan County, North Carolina, in 1728. In 1779 this northern segment of Chowan was divided to create Gates County. Thus, within a hundred years this honored plot of ground was claimed respectively by three different counties—Nansemond, Chowan, and Gates.

North Carolina's law on burials, established in the year 1715, would have regulated the burial of William Hunter and others in his family. It states, as follows, that *Every planter, owner, attorney, or overseer of every settled plantation in this government, or that hereafter shall be settled, shall set apart a burial place and fence the same, for the interring of all such Christian persons, whether bond or free, that shall die on their plantation; and that before the interring there shall be called at least three or four of the neighbors to view the corpse, and if it appears to them that the person came to his or her death by any violence or unlawful means, notice thereof shall be given forthwith to the coroner of the precinct, so that proceedings may be had thereon according to law; and in case of any of the person so called shall refuse to come and view, he or she so refusing shall forfeit and pay the sum of five shillings, to be levied by warrant from the next justice of the peace, and paid to the church wardens for the use of the poor of the said parish.*^[20]

Accordingly, a sizable tract on a corner of William Hunter's land became the family burying ground in his day and in subsequent generations. It is presumed that this is where he and a good number of his descendants lie buried. Although his grave, as well as theirs, is no longer marked, there once must have been a noteworthy tombstone for this man of prominence.

In 2018, Richard Hunter, Trustee of the Jacob Hunter Trust, discovered the location of the original William Hunter Cemetery. Dr. Hunter had searched old Virginia maps and tax deeds to establish the general area. Then, after receiving the hand-drawn "Meara map" of Sunbury, Hunter had the information needed to pinpoint the cemetery (*First Hunter Cemetery in America Discovered: William Hunter (our immigrant) Homestead and Family Cemetery*, Jacob Hunter Trust Newsletter, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2019. pp 1-3).

The graveyard, now on private land, is within William Hunter's former property of 440 acres. The project of recognition and restoration was headed by Richard Hunter and Raymond Hunter, who are two descendants of William's son Nicholas, with assistance of the Hunter Research Group. On October 19, 2019, thirty-seven family devotees and other dignitaries representing North Carolina, Virginia, Texas, Oklahoma, Florida, Illinois, and Mississippi were present for the placing of the memorial stone to honor William Hunter and his family members buried there (*Monument Installed at William Hunter Cemetery*, Jacob Hunter Trust Newsletter, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2020. pp 1-2).

Some 120 graves are estimated to be within the rusted iron fence that demarcates the site. The vintage fencing, placed in the nineteenth century, was constructed by Stewart Iron Works of Erlanger, KY and is of the pattern called "Bow and Picket." Another 98 graves are in an adjacent plot outside the fenced area. Even without the shade of trees, the honored place is serene and isolated from the bustle of traffic. On the surface the fenced plot is empty except for a thriving camellia that over time has become the size of a small tree. All gravestones, except one placed in 1909 in the adjacent plot, are missing. They may survive elsewhere as doorsteps, as curios, or as foundations of buildings. One wonders where William's stone was taken and who took it.

The maintenance of the William Hunter Cemetery is funded by donations to the Jacob Hunter Trust (www.JacobHunterTrust.org).

[1] *Virginia Patent Book Seven*, p. 487

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Virginia Patent Book Eight*, p. 431.

[4] In Chowan, when Nicholas's two sons Isaac and William sold two parcels of their late father's land to their uncle Isaac on 2 May 1739, Nicholas was identified in the transaction as a son of William Hunter, from whom Nicholas had inherited the land (*Chowan County Deed Book C2*, pp. 45-47).

[5] *The Register Booke of Inglebye Juxta Grenhow . . . Since the Yeare of our Lord 1539*. Canterbury: The Canterbury Press, 1889, pp. 26, 29.

[6] Philip Alexander Bruce, *Economic History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), p. 410.

- [7] Bruce, p, 468.
- [8] Bruce, p. 400
- [9] *Virginia Patent Book Eight*, p. 431.
- [10] Louis des Cognets, Jr, "List of County Offices 8th June 1799," *English Duplicates of Lost Virginia Records* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1981), p.8.
- [11] *Virginia Patent Book Nine*, p. 309.
- [12] Des Cognets, p. 15.
- [13] Ibid.
- [14] Herbert Bemerton Battle, *The Battle Book: A Genealogy of the Battle Family in America* (Montgomery, Ala., The Paragon Press, 1930), p. 4.
- [15] Footnote. To be determined.
- [16] "North Carolina Wills," [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)
- [17] This tiny fact comes from exclusive papers owned by a presiding family of the Cleveland district. Permission to state more has not been granted.
- [18] *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, April 1894, p. 369.
- [19] Volume Two, page 245.
- [20] *A Manual of the Laws of North Carolina* by John Haywood, Esq. Raleigh: J. Gales, 1819, p. 84.

Addendum

From Hunter McKelva Cole's 2024 Research

Identifying the Hunters in the 1685 and 1701 Land Patents based on Hunter Cole's Research 2024

1685 Patent

A patent dated 1685 to Charles Rountree for 350 acres, in the upper parish of Nansemond County: "*for transportation of 7 persons Willm. Hunter [our immigrant], Nicho. Hunter [our immigrant William's son], Joane Hunter [our immigrant William's wife, believed to be Charles Rountree's daughter], Rebecca Hunter [our immigrant Williams sister], Charles Rountree, Robert Rountree, and John Sayer.*"

1701 Patent

A patent in 1701 "*for 240 acres, upper Parish of Nansemond Co., for transportation of 5 persons: Wm. Hunter [son of our immigrant William Hunter's older brother Henry, our immigrant William's nephew], his wife [Ann], daughter Alice [Ann and William's daughter], & son Nicho Hunter [Ann and William's son], & Mary Cohone.*"

From Hunter McKelva Cole's correspondence on 5/28/2025:
But who is Mary Cahone?

In John Bennett Boddie's Historical *Southern Families*. Vol. V (Baltimore: Clearfield Company, 1993, 1994), Hugh Buckner Johnston's article "The Calhoun-Cohoon-Cahoon Family of Massachusetts, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina" shows that in the 1690s a Samuel Cohoon was in Isle of Wight Co., Va. "It has been conjectured," Johnston writes, "that Samuel Cahoon married a daughter of William Hunter who used Mary Cohone as a headright for his 1701 land grant." It seems to me unlikely that William Hunter of Nansemond could be bringing his "daughter" into Nansemond from adjacent Isle of Wight County.

For me, it is more feasible that Mary is (1) a widow of a Cahoon of County Armagh, Ulster, and (2) a sister of William Hunter 2nd. William 2nd and Mary could be children of Judge Hunter's brother Henry.

Chart of our immigrant William Hunter's Family
 Representing Hunter Cole's research as of Oct 2024 and integrating hypotheses of Raymond and Richard Hunter

