

William Hunter of Yorkshire, UK and County Armagh, Ireland: Progenitor of the Nansemond Hunters

Hunter M. Cole, 2024, 2026

In Nansemond County, Virginia, the earliest known American history of William Hunter appears in a land patent issued to Charles Rountree in 1685. William was among seven persons whom Rountree claimed as headrights for having transported them into the colony. For each (Robert Rountree, William Hunter, Nicholas Hunter, Joan Hunter, Rebekah Hunter, John Sayer [Sawyer], and Charles himself) the Governor awarded Rountree fifty acres of vacant land, thus a total of 350 acres. Although their place of origin is not stated in the patent, all seven immigrants descended from families in or near Stokesley, a Yorkshire market town within Cleveland district of North Riding. In the present day, Stokesley is located on the A172 highway. Close by are the towns of Ingleby Greenhow, Battersby, and Hutton Rudby, where the early years of Hunters, Rountrees, and Sayers can be documented.

It can be inferred that the Hunters, the Rountrees, and Sayer arrived in Virginia together. Their close connection to one another and to the region from which they migrated serves to authenticate that William Hunter of Nansemond, a native of Ingleby Greenhow, is the immigrant weaver who became a judge in Nansemond, who sired children named Nicholas, Rebekah, Robert, Isaac, and Sarah, and who died ca. 1728. He was born on 14 November 1653 (*The Register Book of Inglebye justa Grenhow as much as is extant in the old booke for Christenings, Weddings and Burials since the year of our Lord 1539 by me John Blackburne, Curate. Canterbury: Cross & Jackman, 'The Canterbury Press,' 1889, p. 20*) and died in Virginia at about the age of 75.

The cluster of Hunters mentioned in the land patent implies that they are a family. William's parents, Nicholas Hunter of Battersby and Ellen Wood, had been married in 1637 at Ingleby Greenhow. Birthdates of their children appear in the Ingleby church register. Four miles west of Stokesley is Hutton Rudby, birthplace, in 1652, of Charles Sayer, another of the headrights. The Rountree family also has ties to Stokesley and can be dated there as early as 1593. One Robert Rountree, a name mentioned in the patent, was residing in Marske-in-Cleveland, Yorkshire, in 1654. His daughter Mary's birth is recorded in the parish register there on 10 April. This Robert may be a son of Charles Rountree and possibly is the Robert Rountree mentioned in Charles's land patent of 1685.

However, this party of immigrants did not travel to Virginia directly from Yorkshire. In fact, before settling in Virginia, they had become Anglo-Irish.

Before coming to America, Charles himself is documented as a resident in County Armagh, Ireland, one of the Protestant counties. The headright termed Joan Hunter likely is a daughter of Charles Rountree, and Robert, another headright, is her brother. Joan's husband is William Hunter, and Nicholas and Rebekah Hunter are William and Joan's children. Thus, Charles Rountree is their grandfather. This cluster of Rountrees and Hunters signals that they migrated as a family together, and that, since Charles is documented earlier in County Armagh, the Hunters, although natives of Yorkshire, like Rountree, came to Virginia from Ireland and were Anglo-

Irish. It can be speculated that Nicholas Hunter's family, including the child William, had been in the huge diaspora of English people that migrated to the northern counties of Ireland for religious and political reasons during the 1660s. *Further documentation is being researched.*

The party of seven, including two Rountrees, four Hunters, and John Sayer, likely came to America on a ship that embarked from a port at Belfast or Larne. William Hunter, born in 1653, would have been about the age of thirty when he, his wife, and their two children arrived in Virginia.

In 1684 William and Joan's second daughter Sarah was born in Nansemond. Her birth year signals that Charles Rountree's application for a land patent was pending until 1685. This daughter, William and Joan's first American-born child, would marry William Battle Jr. Her birth year is documented in *The Battle Book*, a history of the Battle family in America. William and Joan later would be parents also of Robert and Isaac, both born in Virginia.

From: Hunter McKelva Cole: Deed of John Odom to Richard Stallings (*Chowan Deed Book W, No. 1, 1699-1803*), no pagination.

". . . signed and sealed in the presence of us Will Hunter Henry Hill Robt Rountree 19 October 1700"

Note: When this deed was witnessed, William Hunter would have been 47 (b. in 1653) and a judge, a person of standing. Robert Rountree would have been 40 (if born in 1660, as some genealogists have claimed). William was 32 in 1685, the year that his name appeared on Charles Rountree's land patent. Thus, William was about 30 when he, his wife, and two children arrived in Virginia.

I (HMC) have wondered about the source of Isaac Hunter's name. My research finds that an Isaac Rountree was living in County Armagh, Ireland in the mid-1600s. Possibly he is a kinsman of Charles Rountree and is the source of Isaac Hunter's name. William Hunter's sons were Nicholas (named for his grandfather), Robert (named, I believe, for Robert Rountree), and Isaac (named for whom?) Daughter Sarah was, I believe, named for Sarah Rountree, a name that pops up in a Rountree search. Maybe she was a sister of Joan Rountree. One of Isaac Hunter's daughters was named Jean or Joan, which could derive from her grandmother Joan Rountree Hunter. As you can perceive, I am straining to make connections via the traditional family-naming pattern.

Email message from Hunter McKelva Cole to Richard Hunter 10 Feb 2026:

Inserts added by Richard Hunter for clarity.

Here are some conjectures for a Hunter timeline:

1683 - Charles Rountree's group of seven, including William Hunter, aged 30, arrives in Virginia. Charles applies for a land grant.

1684 - Sarah, daughter of William and Joan Hunter (two of the seven) is born in Nansemond. Charles would be the baby's grandfather.

1685 - The governor awards Charles Rountree a patent for 350 acres in Nansemond.

Insert: 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 William's sister], Charles Rountree, Robert Rountree, and John Sayer.*"

1692 - Robert Hunter, a son of William and Joan Hunter is born in Nansemond.

1693 - Isaac Hunter, a son of William and Joan Hunter is born in Nansemond.

1695 - William Hunter, 42, is awarded 200 acres for bringing four slaves into the colony.

1701 - William Hunter, 48 and now a judge, is awarded 250 acres for bringing William Hunter, "his wife," his daughter Alice, his son Nicholas Hunter, and Mary Cohone into the colony.

Insert: A patent in 1701 "*for 240 acres, upper Parish of Nansemond Co., for transportation of 5 persons: Wm. Hunter [son of Judge William Hunter's older brother Henry, our immigrant William's nephew], his wife [Ann], daughter Alice [Ann and William's daughter], & son Nicho Hunter [son of William and Ann], & Mary Cohone [Mary Cohone may have been Mary Hunter Cohone, wife of Samuel Cohone. She, most likely, was the sister of William and daughter of Henry Hunter].*"

1713-14 - Brothers Robert and Isaac Hunter, sons of William, aged at least 21, jointly acquire land in Chowan County, N. C. The transaction is recorded in Chowan tax records. It's unlikely that the two could hold land in their own names if they were younger than 21. Thus, I have assigned them birth years of 1692 and 1693. Note that their father, Judge William Hunter, was alive at this time but would die about fourteen years later.

I base my hypothesis about the boys' ages on the likelihood that Isaac was the youngest son, since there is no evidence that William Hunter's now lost will left him any land, although Isaac's brothers Nicholas and Robert, according to their land sales records, received bequests from William Hunter, who divided his landed property equally between them. Nicholas sold his part of the land to his two sons, Isaac of Northampton and William. In turn, they sold these tracts to their uncle Isaac Hunter. Isaac also bought Robert's half of their shared tract in Chowan. Isaac would pass these tracts, as well as others is acquired in Chowan and Bertie Counties, to his sons Elisha, Jacob, Jesse, and Isaac Jr.

Note to this history: After Nicholas, the eldest son of Judge William Hunter, relocated to Carteret County, Thomas Rountree became his attorney and managed the sale of Nicholas's inherited property. I presume to identify Thomas Rountree as a cousin of the Hunter brothers and probably a native of County Armagh, Ireland. The large number of citations for Thomas in Chowan's land and tax records signals that he was quite notable in the colony.

I believe that Elisha was the eldest of Isaac Hunter's sons. Elisha and his son-in-law served in Chowan during the runup to the Revolutionary War. They were chosen to acquire muskets (by purchase and by manufacture) for Chowan's troops. Elisha was captain of a company, although one of his former soldiers reported in his pension application that Captain Elisha proved to be too aged and infirm for the task. So he resigned. He is credited for building the first courthouse in Gates County. His only son was Col. Thomas Hunter, whose son Elisha (named of course for his grandfather) migrated west to Bute County and was there when his cousins Isaac Jr. and Jesse settled in Bute (later renamed Warren County) and married the Alston sisters, who formerly resided at their father's plantation along Bennett's Creek in Nansmond/Chowan.

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

