

A Biography of



**John Wright Hunt**

The Interesting Life Of a  
North Carolina Native

Written by

Jeffrey J. Houser

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## Introduction

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### *It all started with a slip of paper...*

Many of those interested in genealogy can attest to getting started on a simple research endeavor but ended up becoming a very involved project. What may have begun as looking for a few newspaper articles soon turned into something that required a great deal of research and an equal amount of time being consumed to find answers about the life of a person. So is the case with this biography of John W. Hunt.

In the year 2015, I was serving on the Board of Directors for the Olde Mecklenburg Genealogical Society in Charlotte, North Carolina. At the conclusion of our monthly meeting in August, a colleague also serving on the Board, Dr. Ted Lucas, Jr., got my attention and literally slid a piece of paper with a name scratched on it across the table to me and asked if I could “just see what I might be able to find out about him,” the ‘him’ being John W. Hunt. Ted had been doing his own family genealogy research for many, many years and this particular member of his family, often referred to as “Uncle John”, had become a bit of an enigma when he tried to locate definitive information about Hunt. Ted knew that I was regularly engaged in historical and genealogical research around the Charlotte area and felt that maybe I could come across something that he hadn’t stumbled upon yet.

My initial research took place over the course of six weeks, after which I was able to present Ted with a booklet consisting of about fifteen pages that mainly contained newspaper articles and some other details I was able to find using online resources about Hunt. Ted was very appreciative of my efforts and he looked through the report with great interest after I had handed it to him. However, something about John Hunt kept tugging at me. I had found some very intriguing aspects of his life and, because I am naturally inquisitive, I wanted to know more.

What started out with a slip of paper grew into a full-blown research project that strung itself out for more than seven months. It seemed that almost every time I discovered something else about John Hunt’s story, it led to new pieces of information or required more in-depth research about certain topics. A myriad of phone calls, letters and e-mails were sent to numerous organizations to request information about Hunt that they may have been holding in their archives.

This biography is a culmination of that research. While several aspects of Hunt’s life were very hard to ascertain, his general life story is captivating and is likely to keep the reader of this work looking forward to turning to the next page to find out “what John did next”. It is my hope that his story will be of interest to the cities and families that he was connected to and that they may hold this work in their historic files for future generations to refer to and be able to become familiar with the interesting life of John W. Hunt.



## **Acknowledgements**

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The following people were extremely helpful in assisting me in collecting the hundreds of pieces of information that were needed to help complete this biography of John W. Hunt. Without their knowledge and willingness to literally dig in to old files and books, many of the important aspects of Hunt's life would be missing and I am very grateful for their assistance.

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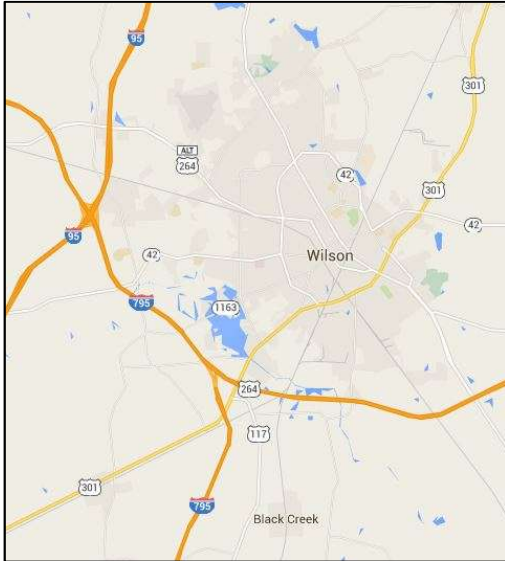




## Early Life

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John Wright Hunt was born on 4 April 1840<sup>1</sup> in an area of Wayne County, North Carolina called the “Black Creek District”, its namesake derived from a small creek that ran just south of what would later become the town. In the early to mid-1800s, the railroad that stretched from Wilmington to Weldon created growth in the small settlements of what were to become the towns of Black Creek, Wilson and Elm City.<sup>2</sup> The residents there wanted to have a more centralized government as the closest county seats were in Goldsboro (Wayne County), Nashville (Nash County), Smithfield (Johnston County) and Tarboro (Edgecombe County).



*Black Creek, North Carolina, in relation to Wilson.*

It was decided by the North Carolina government to create a new county that would be roughly in the geographic center of the existing county seats and be comprised of small pieces of the surrounding counties. On 14 February 1855, the new county and its seat was formed and named after Louis Dicken Wilson, an influential gentleman of Edgecombe County that died in the Mexican-American War. Black Creek District, which was part of Wayne County before that date, became part of Wilson County.

This area of North Carolina comprised mostly of farmland and therefore most of the people who lived there were farmers of one kind or another. John listed his father as “David Hunt” on legal documents he filled out later on in his life<sup>3</sup> but little other information is known about him. His mother was a woman named Mary “Polly” Harrison who was born around 1805,<sup>4</sup> most likely in the area of Black Creek.

Between 1840 and 1850, Hunt’s father had apparently died as there was no “David Hunt” shown on the 1850 Federal Census. Sometime in that decade, Polly had remarried to a man named Henry Lucas, a widower who also had a son from his earlier marriage, named Riley.<sup>5</sup> The union between Henry and Polly would be the start of a large family with many descendants, all of them who would be half-brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces to John Hunt.

Henry and Polly had two sons; Henry Daniel, born in 1848 and Bunyan, born in 1849. All seemed to be taking a turn for the better for the newly combined family members but sadly it did not last long. Henry Lucas died in 1856 and Polly was once again a widow. Henry left his entire estate which included farmland, tools and numerous animals to Polly.<sup>6</sup> Hunt, being a teenager at that point in time, was obviously a big support to his mother and was even shown as a “farm laborer” of the household in the 1860 Federal Census.<sup>7</sup> Polly lived in Black Creek until she moved to Valdosta, Georgia in 1893 to be closer to her son, Bunyan Lucas,<sup>8</sup> and died about a year later on 14 October 1894.<sup>9</sup> She is buried in Sunset Hill Cemetery in Valdosta.

## Civil War Service

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Hunt enlisted in the Confederate Army on 29 April 1862 in Wilson, North Carolina. He was placed with the 55<sup>th</sup> North Carolina Infantry, Company A, which comprised of Wilson County residents, and he was listed as a 4<sup>th</sup> Sergeant when the regiment mustered out from Camp Mangum, near Raleigh, North Carolina, on 30 May 1862.<sup>10</sup>

The regiment initially held encampments around Kinston and Trenton, North Carolina and first saw action in August 1862 when a Federal gunboat attempted to navigate up the Neuse River from the Pamlico Sound near New Bern, North Carolina.<sup>11</sup> The 55<sup>th</sup> Infantry was sent to the mouth of the river to prevent the gunboat from advancing toward Kinston. The regiment and gunboat exchanged some shots and the gunboat turned away without attempting any further actions.<sup>12</sup>



*Battle of Gettysburg  
1-3 July 1863*

The regiment was also involved in some skirmishes in Washington, North Carolina and Suffolk, Virginia.<sup>13</sup> Their first major battle occurred at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in July 1863. During the first day of the battle, Hunt was slightly wounded in the neck and captured by Union troops.<sup>14</sup>

Many of the Confederate soldiers who were taken prisoner at Gettysburg were sent to Fort Delaware, a POW camp near Wilmington, Delaware. Despite being imprisoned, Hunt was promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Sergeant between the date of his capture and September 1864, although no record was found that specified exactly when or why the promotion took place.<sup>15</sup> He remained at Fort Delaware until he was released from the camp in May 1865.<sup>16</sup> From there, Hunt would have taken a long route back to Wilson County, probably in the company of other soldiers in his regiment. John seemed to fall back into the regular life of farming in Black Creek, as indicated by the 1870 Federal Census where he was listed as the head of the household and occupied as a farmer. He would not remain a farmer for very long however, and the building of his great wealth was soon to begin.

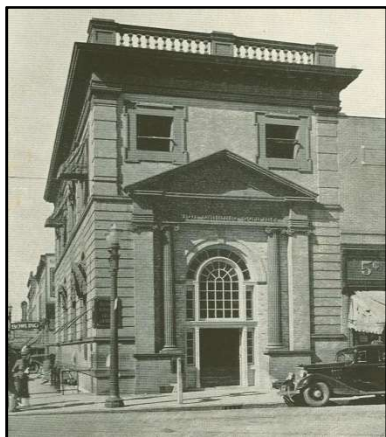


*Fort Delaware Main Fortification*

## The Turpentine Business

Another Wilson County resident who joined the Confederate Army shortly after John Hunt was a young man named Thomas J. Hadley IV. He was born into a prominent family of the area and enlisted with the 55<sup>th</sup> North Carolina Infantry after graduating from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.<sup>17</sup> He steadily rose to the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant and was involved in the Battle of Globe Tavern in Petersburg, Virginia, where he was captured by Union forces. He too was brought to Fort Delaware for imprisonment but was kept in separate barracks than where John Hunt was being held.<sup>18</sup> He was released in June 1865 and returned to his hometown of Wilson.<sup>19</sup>

In 1872, Hadley partnered with a man named Alpheus Branch to start a bank in Wilson called “Branch and Hadley”. The bank’s primary purpose was to loan money to local farmers to help them reestablish their farms after the Civil War had ended.<sup>20</sup> Hadley held an interest in the bank until he sold his shares to Branch in 1887.<sup>21</sup> Branch continued to develop the bank which eventually became known as BB&T (Branch Banking & Trust), now headquartered in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.<sup>22</sup>



*Branch Banking & Trust  
Wilson, N.C., ca. 1932.*

In the latter part of 1872, Hunt borrowed \$1,500 from Thomas Hadley<sup>23</sup>, presumably from Hadley’s bank, and he began to invest in the turpentine business. “Turpentine” involved the extraction of resins from live trees, usually pines, and then distilling the resin to create the liquid commonly known as turpentine. Hunt had recognized the value of this product and its use in the maritime industry and he likely saw how profitable this business could be. Shortly after borrowing the money from Hadley, he relocated to Dubois, Georgia,<sup>24</sup> an area where some North Carolinians had already been engaged in the turpentine business for a number of years.

His first partnership was with Arthur T. Wiggs, who was originally from Goldsboro, North Carolina.<sup>25</sup> After a few years of being involved with Wiggs, John became partners with Peter L. Peacock who, like Hunt, had hailed from Wayne County, North Carolina but had been living in Georgia for a number of years before Hunt’s arrival in that state.<sup>26</sup> In 1879 they started a new naval stores business in Savannah, Georgia called “Peacock, Hunt & Company”.<sup>27</sup> Their business was very successful and they were regularly included in reports that discussed the different companies who were producing large yields of turpentine. The business was initially located on West Bay Street near the Customs House but moved to different storage facilities along the waterfront as their business grew.

<b>P. L. PEACOCK,</b> <b>J. W. HUNT,</b>	<b>W. N. HOLT,</b> <b>C. S. ELLIS.</b>
<b>PEACOCK, HUNT &amp; CO.</b>	
<b>Factors and Commission Merchants,</b>	
<b>SAVANNAH, GA.,</b>	
Will be pleased to correspond with parties in North Carolina who propose to engage in the Turpentine Business in Georgia. <span style="float: right;">sept 18 d1w w3t</span>	

*Peacock, Hunt & Co. Advertisement  
The Wilmington Morning Star, September 1879*

Although the business that Peacock and Hunt had started was quite prosperous in Savannah, it did not stay contained within Georgia state lines. On 3 May 1901, a massive fire broke out in Jacksonville, Florida, which burned over twenty city blocks and destroyed most of the business district along the waterfront by the St. John’s River.<sup>28</sup> Many turpentine companies in that section of the city went up in flames and perhaps Peacock and Hunt saw an opportunity to expand their business literally from the ground up.

The city of Jacksonville began to rebuild immediately after the flames of the great fire had subsided. One of the largest structures to be erected during that time was the “West Building”, built by Peacock and Hunt’s new partner, John W. West, whose primary business was in lumber. In July 1901 on the corner of West Bay and South Laura Street, the foundation for a 5-story brick building was poured and by 1902, the “Peacock, Hunt & West Company” naval stores commissary was in full operation.<sup>29</sup> This building remained in use as an office building for various tenants until July 1972.<sup>30</sup>

Hunt held his interest in the naval stores business he helped create until November 1904 when both he and Peacock sold the entity of “Peacock, Hunt & West Company” to John West and William Kelly, another partner in the naval stores commissary.<sup>31</sup> This business went on to become the “West-Flynn-Harris Company” with West as President, Kelly, Daniel M. Flynn, and John E. Harris as Vice-Presidents.<sup>32</sup> Hunt remained a stockholder in the company for the rest of his life.

Although Hunt did not have any particular banking experience, his adept abilities in the business world made him a good candidate to serve on the Board of Directors for the “Citizens Bank of Savannah”, which he joined in November 1893.<sup>33</sup> His attendance at board meetings was sporadic due to his frequent business travels but he joined every one that he could and it was said that he served on the Board dutifully and always had the bank’s interest in mind. The “Citizens Bank of Savannah” merged with “The Southern Bank of Georgia” in February 1906. This merger created the “Citizens and Southern Bank of Georgia”<sup>34</sup> It is unknown how long John continued to serve on the bank’s Board but he held stock in the bank up until his death.<sup>35</sup>

John lived in Savannah through the 1880s and part of the 1890s. It appears as though he never had a permanent residence there however, as city directories during those years showed that he regularly stayed at various hotels in the city. One of the hotels, the Pavilion Hotel, was located only a few blocks away from the naval stores commissary.<sup>36</sup> One reason that he may have never bought a home there was that he traveled frequently for business and even went to Europe in 1883<sup>37</sup> and again in 1889.<sup>38</sup> Whenever he would return to Savannah, he would settle back in at whatever hotel he had been staying at before and go about his business there.

It was said that John suffered from rheumatoid arthritis and the humidity in Savannah apparently became bothersome to this affliction as he grew older. So in the mid-1890s, he began to look for a more temperate climate to live in. John chose Charlotte, North Carolina to become his new home but it is not entirely clear as to why. It is possible that because of his frequent travels he had stopped in Charlotte before and became attracted to city and its growing business sector. Although Charlotte isn’t very far from Savannah, the weather may have been comfortable enough that he was less affected by his arthritis. In any case, in early 1895 he chose to relocate the Queen City.

## The Move to Charlotte

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In October 1894, John and his wife, Marie, began to frequent Charlotte, staying at various hotels in the growing town.<sup>39</sup> In January 1895, John bought three adjoining property lots on the southwest corner of South Tryon and West Morehead Streets that totaled approximately one acre.<sup>40</sup> As Charlotte was to be his new place of residence, he had a house built on this lot. It was completed in the fall of 1896 and John moved into the home in November of that year.<sup>41</sup> Residents and visitors alike admired it regularly for its elegant style, magnificent woodwork and neatly manicured lawns.

John quickly began investing in other properties in Charlotte in addition to his home. In May 1895, he purchased the “Owen’s Corner” at the northwest corner of North Tryon and West Fifth Streets.<sup>42</sup> However, it wasn’t until a year later that any new construction started at this site. There was some speculation that he might build an opera house on the lot but in May 1896, he announced that he would erect a mercantile building that would have over twelve rooms for businesses or shops.<sup>43,44</sup> The existing buildings on the property were razed to get the lot cleared for construction. A house that had to be taken down was a log structure called the “Owen’s Building”, supposedly built in the 1770s by J. Owens, who was a master carpenter in Charlotte during its early years. Therefore, it was said that this building was about 120 years old. It was so well crafted that it took quite an effort to get it removed from the lot.<sup>45</sup>



*The Hunt Building  
Charlotte, N.C., Summer 1986*

In June 1896, the mercantile building began to take shape and city newspapers frequently ran articles about its design as it neared completion. Tenants started to occupy the partitioned rooms of what was known as the “Hunt Building” by that fall and included businesses such as an undertaker, doctors, tailors, and insurance agencies. The Singer Sewing Machine Company set up an office on the first floor of the new mercantile building<sup>46</sup> and the renowned architect Charles C. Hook moved his office there from a Trade Street location.<sup>47</sup> The “Hunt Building” was highly lauded by citizens and business leaders of the day and it was often noted that it usually had a low vacancy rate as it was located in the central business hub of the city.

The lot that the mercantile building sat on actually extended along West Fifth Street to the intersection of North Church Street and Hunt proceeded to build a livery stable on that corner in February 1897.<sup>48</sup> He abandoned this project shortly after it got started however, and he leased it Charles A. Black, a local dairyman.<sup>49</sup> About the same time that Black took possession of the building, the “North Carolina Women’s Exposition” was to be held in Charlotte and a location was needed to house all the exhibits.<sup>50</sup> The unfinished stable, which measured 140 feet along West Fifth Street and 60 feet along North Church Street, was considered to be the perfect venue for the event to be held, which took place from 11 May to 12 June of that year.<sup>51,52</sup> A small electric plant was installed at the location that provided lights and electric power for various pieces of machinery that were to be on display at the expo.<sup>53</sup> Numerous booths held displays of ceramics, sewing machines and home goods. An art gallery was even set up among all the other attractions and entertainments were provided every day.<sup>54</sup>

Black finished the interior of the building after the exposition was over and he had a livery stable there until November 1902.<sup>55</sup> The Model Steam Laundry Company, which had been operating across from the stables on West Fifth Street, moved into the structure and occupied the building from March 1903 to February 1913.<sup>56,57</sup> Not long after the laundry moved from the site, the property was purchased by The Mutual Trust Company, who went on to build the Clayton Hotel there. The hotel opened its doors to guests on 5 February 1914 as a “bachelor’s hotel” and



catered primarily to single men or traveling salesmen. As years went on, the hotel became more run-down but remained in operation until it was condemned by the city and closed in February 1970.<sup>58,59</sup>

Another real estate purchase that Hunt made was the John K. Wolfe farm in November 1896. The farm was located southeast of the city limits on the Lawyers Road (now Central Avenue) and totaled 180 acres.<sup>60</sup> He built a farmhouse on this property which was designed by local architect Charles C. Hook. The house was close to the road and people traveling by it would take notice its exquisite design and the deep, red paint that covered the entire house and barn.<sup>61</sup> The farm was purchased as an investment property, as Hunt already had a grand residence on South Tryon Street. It would turn out that the building of the farmhouse would benefit the Lucas family who had been living in Black Creek since Hunt had left that town for Georgia twenty years earlier.

## **The Lucas Family Moves to Charlotte**

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Henry D. Lucas, one of Hunt's half-brothers, became a physician and had a practice in Black Creek. In September 1880, he married a woman from the same area named Monticello "Montie" Boyette. They had seven children and for a period of time, a successful, happy family began to grow. Sadly however, Dr. Lucas passed away unexpectedly in October 1893<sup>62</sup> and Montie was left to raise their children on her own. This was surely a struggle for the young widow and something that Hunt would have been sympathetic towards, as he knew of the challenges his own mother had to face when his father died.

In an apparent act of goodwill, John brought Montie and her children to Charlotte in January 1896 so that he could help support Montie in her sad situation. In addition, he also had a half-nephew he was close with, Robert L. Lucas, come stay with Montie at the Central Hotel at the corner of Trade and Tryon Streets. Hunt eventually moved them into the farmhouse that he had built on the old Wolfe farm.<sup>63</sup>

The years of 1896 and 1897 were busy times for Hunt as he seemingly began to settle in Charlotte. In the eighteen months since his arrival, he had built a popular mercantile building, an elegant home in the city and a farmhouse just outside of town. He also served on the Board of Directors for the Charlotte National Bank from 1897 until 1901.<sup>64,65</sup> He frequently traveled to Savannah to attend to his turpentine business there and also made numerous trips to New York City. John was well-liked among the townspeople and he was admired for his business savvy and congenial personality.

Although it looked as if Hunt had found a new city to call home, he began to have an interest in expanding his business investments in Los Angeles, California. In August 1897, he announced that he would be leaving Charlotte, at least temporarily, to explore this endeavor.<sup>66</sup> His departure was met with surprise but he indicated that his decision to leave had nothing to do with how he felt about the future of Charlotte. In fact, he commented that the city was one of the finest places in the Southeast.<sup>67</sup> His reason for leaving, he said, was simply due to new business developments that were located in other parts of the country.

Hunt's absences from Charlotte became more frequent over the next few years but he maintained his ownership of his properties in the city. He left his half-nephew, Robert L. Lucas, in charge of his affairs when he was away.<sup>68</sup> He rented out his large home on South Tryon Street<sup>69</sup> and Robert collected the rents from his mercantile building. Robert had engaged himself in the hotel business during this time, having purchased an interest in the proprietorship of the Central Hotel.<sup>70</sup> He held on to this interest until September 1900 when he sold it to Charles E. Hooper.<sup>71</sup> At that point, Hunt's hotel in Los Angeles was nearing completion by then and he invited Robert to come there and help manage it.<sup>72</sup> This was a lucrative offer for Robert and it helped him become financially well-off later in his life.



*Dr. Henry D. Lucas  
ca. 1891*



Shortly before Hunt made his offer to Robert to come to Los Angeles, he sold both his home on South Tryon Street and his mercantile building in a block sale to John G. Hood in February 1900<sup>73</sup>. In March 1902, he sold his farm on the Lawyers Road to Paul Chatham<sup>74</sup> and this effectively ended John Hunt's presence in the Queen City. However, the Lucas family stayed in Charlotte after his departure and a contingent of that family continues to live there today.



*Montie Lucas and children, ca. 1939*  
*Seated, l-r: Robert, Montie, Rosamond, Lois, Marion*  
*Standing, l-r: Henry, John, Joseph*

It could be said that Hunt's offer to move Montie, her seven children and Robert Lucas to the farmhouse in Charlotte was the catalyst for the family to flourish. Anyone who has lived in a rural area would probably agree that opportunities in that kind of an environment are limited. It is not to say that the Lucas' would not have been a successful family story if they had stayed in Black Creek but being in a growing city such as Charlotte would certainly have its advantages.

A number of Montie's children went on to lead fruitful lives after arriving in Charlotte. Henry Gaillard Lucas was a prominent farmer in Texas and also owned what was at one time the largest pecan growing orchard in the United States. He was also involved in many associations concerning the pecan industry.<sup>75</sup> John Paul Lucas worked in the newspaper industry as an assistant editor for the *Charlotte Observer* and also the managing editor for *The Evening Chronicle* newspapers. He owned two farms in Mecklenburg County and became more involved in agriculture, promoting modern techniques to farming in the Southeast.<sup>76</sup> He was elected president of the North Carolina State Farmer's Convention in August 1916.<sup>77</sup> Robert T. Lucas, father of the previously mentioned Ted Lucas, became a pediatric physician in Shreveport, Louisiana. Ted Lucas, Jr., also practiced pediatrics in Charlotte until retiring in 1996.<sup>78</sup> Robert Lucas, Hunt's half-nephew, began working as a clerk at the Central Hotel after first arriving there, which led him into positions of hotel management and ownership.<sup>79</sup>

Monite and a few of her children continued to live in Charlotte for the rest of their lives. They are buried in local cemeteries of the city, including historic Elmwood Cemetery and Sharon Memorial Park.

In addition to the Lucas family, Hunt's legacy also lived on with the properties he had owned while he was in Charlotte. His impressive home that was built on South Tryon Street was sold to a local dentist, Dr. Charles L. Alexander, in July 1900<sup>80</sup> and Dr. Alexander lived in the house until the late 1920s when he lost it in a bankruptcy case.<sup>81</sup> The house was rented out and even used as a boarding home for a short period of time until it was sold in March 1937 to Isabelle T. Wade and Cammie R. Robinson.<sup>82</sup> The two women then leased the property to the American Oil Company (AMOCO),<sup>83</sup> in which the lease agreement was to allow AMOCO to build a filling and service station on the site of the old John Hunt residence. The grand home, which has been commented on and greatly admired when it was first constructed in 1896, was torn down during the spring of 1937. The building that AMOCO built in its place still exists on the site today, with some slight modifications being made to it over the last seven decades.

The farmhouse on the Lawyers Road that Hunt erected in 1897 stood for almost ninety years. After Paul Chatham bought the Hunt farm in the spring of 1902, he later went on to develop a suburb of Charlotte that would compete with Edward D. Latta's "Dilworth" neighborhood.<sup>84</sup> Called "Chatham Estates", it was primarily centered along a road that would later be known as "The Plaza", with looping roads that bordered curved property lots.<sup>85</sup> This area eventually became known as the "Plaza-Midwood" neighborhood. A popular Chinese restaurant, "The Ho-Toy",

was built in front of the house in the early 1950s by Mr. Junior Wong and his family.<sup>86</sup> In May 1983, the new owner of the “Ho-Toy”, Mr. Johnny Tom, decided to expand the restaurant space and tear down the old Hunt farmhouse, which had been vacant and in a state of disrepair for some time preceding the decision to raze it.<sup>87</sup>

Hunt’s mercantile building, purchased by John G. Hood in 1900, was sold to the Southern Real Estate, Loan and Trust Company in January 1901.<sup>88</sup> This company held the property until February 1906 when it was sold to Hector T. McKinnon<sup>89</sup>, a wealthy cotton dealer from Scotchville, Georgia.<sup>90</sup> McKinnon’s son-in-law, Frank O. Hawley, Jr., ran a pharmacy in one of the lower rooms of the Hunt Building and he likely influenced McKinnon to buy the building due to its profitable tenancy. The mercantile building and its rental income was left to McKinnon’s daughter, Margaret Hawley, when he died in 1915.<sup>91</sup> Mrs. Hawley’s ownership of the property was to be short-lived however, as she succumbed the influenza pandemic that came through Charlotte in the fall and winter of 1918.<sup>92</sup> She left her entire estate, including the mercantile building (then known as the McKinnon Building) to her husband.<sup>93</sup> After Frank Hawley died in October 1939, the property was owned for over thirty years by Charles A. Cannon,<sup>94</sup> a well-known Charlotte businessman.

The building was sold to different parties through November 1983, when the New York investment group BINACO International bought it.<sup>95</sup> In 1995, NationsBank (now Bank of America) began an ambitious project to revitalize areas of North Tryon Street which had been in a state of decline for many years. Part of this project would be the construction of a 30-story office tower on the 200 block of North Tryon Street where John Hunt’s old mercantile building was located, as well as a number of other buildings that had been there since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>96</sup> While the Dunhill Hotel and a number of other older buildings were to remain as part of the NationsBank plan, the old mercantile building would demolished. Because of its seemingly inconspicuous stature in the history of Charlotte, the building appears to have been torn down without much attention drawn to its demise. A photograph from the NationsBank building in November 1995 show the buildings on the block intact<sup>97</sup>, and a subsequent photo from the bank in May 1996 depicts the block practically cleared of most of the buildings and the foundation of the new office tower being poured.<sup>98</sup> The Hunt Building, the last vestige of John Hunt’s contributions to the city of Charlotte, was now bits of rubble and dust.

In March 1997, “The Capital Grille”, a high-end steakhouse, signed a lease for the space at the corner of North Tryon and West Fifth Streets and continues to operate in that space today although it sits back slightly from where the large plate glass windows of the old mercantile building looked out on a growing New South city.

## The Angelus Hotel

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In early May 1900, an announcement was made in both Los Angeles and Charlotte newspapers that Hunt would build a large hotel on a lot at the southwest corner of Spring and Fourth Streets in Los Angeles.<sup>99,100</sup> It was called the “Angelus Hotel” and was seven stories high with an impressive main entrance of marble floors and oak paneling on the walls. A large parlor occupied the corner of the ground floor and had multiple Persian rugs laid out that were said to have cost a total of \$20,000. It had 230 private rooms, a dining room that could seat three hundred people and a dancing and banquet hall on the second floor. On the upper floors, there were three exquisite bridal suites, each ornately decorated and had their own private hallway and entrance. It was staffed by approximately one hundred-fifty people.<sup>101</sup>

The hotel was initially leased to Gustavus S. Holmes, who managed it for over three years. In June 1904, Holmes sold the lease to Charles C. and Harry C. Loomis, who had recently been managing the Van Nuys Hotel in that city.<sup>102</sup> The Loomis Brothers had discussed enlarging the hotel with Hunt but they were also reluctant to do so because of the short period of the lease. The Loomis’ agreed to a twenty-year lease in May 1907<sup>103</sup> but that lease was sold twelve years later to Paul Paris, a hotelier from Seattle, Washington, in October 1919.<sup>104</sup> This lease was again sold to Harry J. Tremain from Minneapolis, Minnesota in September 1921.<sup>105</sup>

The hotel had remained in the estate of Hunt after his death in 1910 and it was subsequently managed by a board of trustees. It is not clear exactly when the property was sold by the trustees, however. It appears that the Title Insurance and Trust Company of Los Angeles either owned or managed the hotel by 1929<sup>106</sup> but further research done at the Los Angeles County Clerk’s office did not reveal anything conclusive as to when the company may have sold it to another party. In addition, several loans and mortgages were placed against Hunt’s estate in the same time period, complicating the process of tracking down the individual persons or entities that may have had an interest in the hotel. Numerous listings in the real estate indices were found that could have been promising leads but would have also required a great deal of time to follow up on each entry. Therefore, the chain of title for the Angelus Hotel was not able to be thoroughly followed during the writing of this document.

In May 1956, the Angelus Hotel was sold and demolished to make room for a “modern parking facility and small retail stores”.<sup>107</sup> The site that the hotel sat on is currently a surface parking lot and no evidence of any stores that may have existed on the property can be seen, nor any commemorative or historical markers noting the long-time presence of the stately hotel.

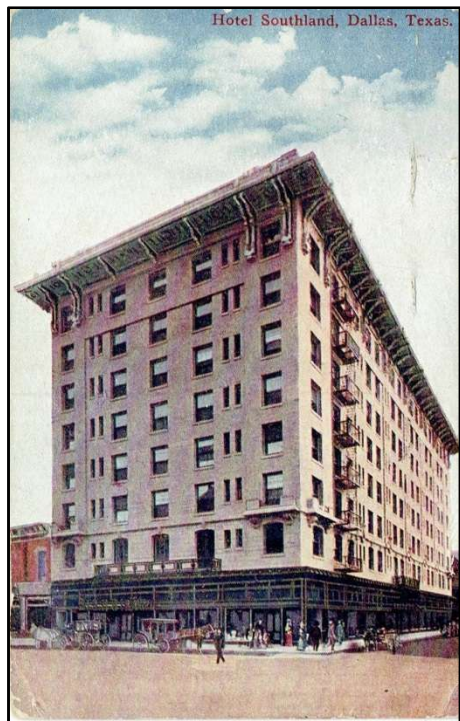


*Angelus Hotel, Los Angeles, California  
ca. 1900*

## The Southland Hotel

The success with the Angelus Hotel seemed to have spurred Hunt to build another hotel a few years after the Angelus was in operation. In November 1905, Hunt and John W. West, his partner in the naval stores business, made an equal investment in a vacant lot on the corner of Main and Murphy Streets in Dallas, Texas.<sup>108</sup> Coincidentally, another hotel called the “St. James Hotel” had actually been located at that site for about 30 years until its wooden framework collapsed due to its age in June 1902.<sup>109</sup> The owner of the property, Edwin M. Reardon, sold the lot to the American Exchange National Bank in April 1900<sup>110</sup> and the bank had planned to raze the St. James Hotel to build a large, six-story bank in its place.<sup>111</sup> This plan did not go through however and the bank sold the property to Hunt and West instead.

In May 1906, the *Dallas Morning News* reported that a large hotel would be built at the corner of Main and Murphy Streets<sup>112</sup> and it would be one of the finest hotels that Dallas had ever seen, with its projected cost being



*The Southland Hotel, Dallas, Texas  
ca. 1911*

approximately \$500,000. Named the “Southland Hotel”, it was eight-stories high and designed by Parkinson & Bergstrom of Los Angeles, the same architectural firm that designed the Angelus Hotel.<sup>113</sup> It would have 225 guest rooms, 100 private bathrooms with running hot and cold water, and telephone connections in each room. It also hosted a convention hall, multiple ballrooms and dining halls, a laundromat and even its own electric plant to power the entire hotel. An artesian well was drilled to a depth of 766 feet and could provide the hotel with 110,000 gallons of fresh water every day.<sup>114</sup>

The Southland was opened in December 1907<sup>115</sup> and it became a popular place for visitors to stay. Various conventions, banquets and club meetings were regularly held in the ample convention hall. Hunt’s half-nephews, Robert L. Lucas and John Bunyan Lucas, had come to Dallas around 1902 and for a number of years had helped run the St. George Hotel in that city. They were both offered management roles of the Southland when it was ready to be opened, which they accepted.<sup>116</sup>

John West died in October 1915<sup>117</sup> and his estate held his interest in the hotel until November 1919 when it was sold to the Security National Bank of Dallas.<sup>118</sup> Robert Lucas inherited Hunt’s half-interest in the hotel after his death<sup>119</sup> and Robert then in turn left his portion to his

brother, John, after he died in November 1920.<sup>120</sup> Almost a year later, John sold this interest in the Southland to Fred McJunkins, who had been managing the hotel for a number of months.<sup>121</sup> He then retired to a country estate near Arlington, Texas, that he had inherited from his brother until his death in March 1935.

The Southland Hotel continued to operate until February 1971, when it was announced that it would be torn down to make way for a new 25-story office tower, called Main Tower.<sup>122</sup> Numerous articles were published in local newspapers over the next few months that detailed its history in the city and stories that locals recalled from past events. The demolition of the Southland started in June of that year<sup>123</sup>, and interestingly the firm of J. A. Jones Construction Company of Charlotte, North Carolina, was selected to be the general contractor for the project.<sup>124</sup> It is a wonder if the Jones Company knew that a former resident of Charlotte had been responsible for the construction of the very building that they were replacing.

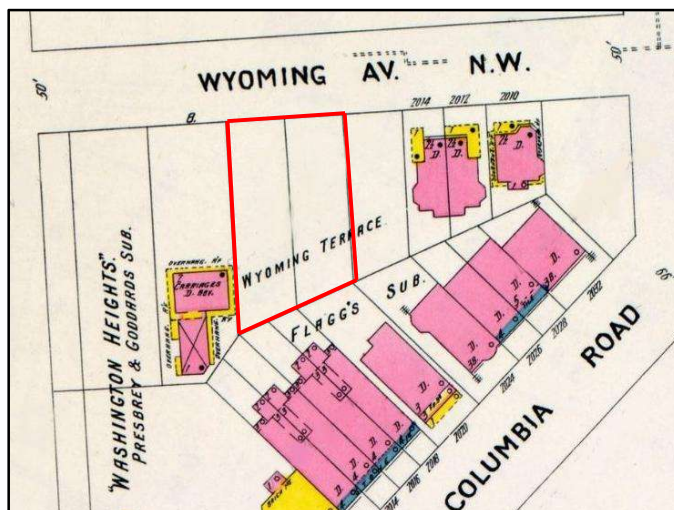
Main Tower was occupied by various organizations, including the federal government, over the next few decades. In 2005, Rockwood Realty of Dallas had the building remodeled into condominium units and the building is used for this purpose today under the name of The Metropolitan.<sup>125</sup>



## Other Properties of John Hunt

### Washington, D. C.

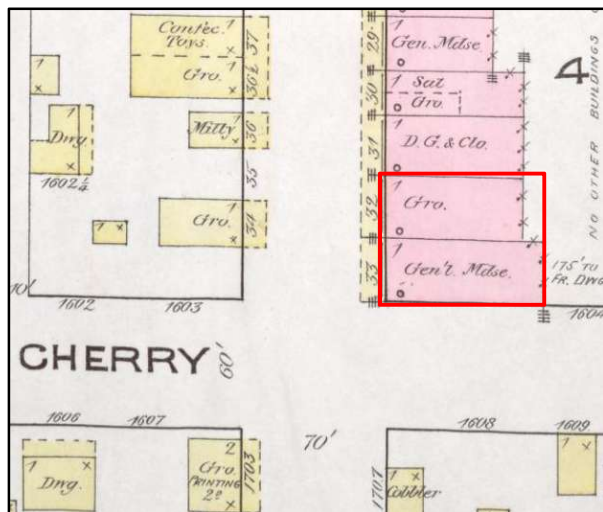
After Hunt had left Charlotte, he continued to travel up and down the eastern seaboard and spent some time in Washington, D. C., from 1900 to 1904.<sup>126,127</sup> He leased three different houses there and even bought property at the intersection of Connecticut and Wyoming Avenue.<sup>128</sup> He had intentions of building a house on the lot<sup>129</sup>, but this plan never materialized as he became more involved with the building of his hotel in Los Angeles. He also continued to travel around the United States and overseas for the next several years. The property remained vacant and undeveloped until after his death, in which it was sold off from his estate.



*Lots owned by John Hunt in Washington, D. C., outlined in red*

### Cochran, Georgia

Hunt may have gotten his knack for having buildings constructed shortly after arriving in Georgia. In November 1879<sup>130</sup>, he purchased a lot in Cochran, Georgia, at the corner of Second and Cherry Streets. He bought a second contiguous lot in June 1880 and had a brick buildings constructed on each one. Cochran was the same town that his friend and business partner, Peter L. Peacock, resided in and this probably influenced him to build on property there.



*Lots owned by John Hunt in Cochran, GA, outlined in red*

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of 1885 show the buildings as being used as stores for “General Merchandise” but they would house different business during its lifetime.<sup>131</sup>

These properties were sold off in part in 1883 and in 1887 but were purchased as a whole by Peter L. Peacock, Hunt’s business partner, in 1889. The property passed down through different members of the Peacock family until one property was sold in 1914, the other being sold many years later.<sup>132</sup>

In 1990, a fire broke out in the corner building and caused significant damage to both structures, requiring them to be torn down. Years after the buildings had been razed, a great-great-granddaughter of Peter L. Peacock found an door threshold made of iron among the rubble, inscribed with “J W Hunt 1880”.<sup>133</sup> It is interesting to think of the many people who crossed that threshold as they entered the now absent building over the decades it stood there, including John Hunt himself.

### Shawnee, Oklahoma

In December 1906, Hunt purchased 100 acres of farmland approximately two miles south of the town of Shawnee, Oklahoma. He intended this to be an investment property, as was his farm in Charlotte, and planned to run a model “stock farm” at this location.<sup>134</sup> His half-brother, Bunyan Lucas, moved onto the property in early 1907 and remained there until 1913 when he left the area and settled in Denver, Colorado in 1914.<sup>135</sup> Bunyan died in Denver in May 1916.<sup>136</sup>

## **Three Times a Lady**

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John Hunt's early life was briefly discussed near the beginning of this document. The author felt that a separate section was necessary to discuss some details of his three marriages. Although none of these unions produced any offspring, each of the marriages did create interesting situations that are practically stories within themselves.

### **Mary Jane Jordan**

Hunt's first wife was named Mary Jane Jordan. According to census records, she was born in 1852 in North Carolina, likely in the area of Black Creek.<sup>137</sup> She and John were married on 28 October 1869 in Wilson County and she listed her father, Josiah Jordan, as her only surviving parent.<sup>138</sup> She and John were shown as living in Black Creek in the 1870 Federal Census<sup>139</sup> and in Savannah in the 1880 census.<sup>140</sup> For the next two decades, information regarding Mary becomes scant. Due to the 1890 census records are unavailable, it was difficult to track down her whereabouts until 1900. However, she and Hunt had apparently divorced sometime between 1880 and 1894, as John had remarried to another woman that year.<sup>141</sup> Several counties in Georgia and North Carolina were contacted to search for a divorce record for the two but none was able to be found.

Mary died in Fulton County on 22 April 1900, at the age of 48. At the time of her death, she referred to herself as "Mary J. Jordan", her maiden name.<sup>142</sup> Strangely, John B. Lucas, Hunt's half-nephew, purchased the plot in Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta, Georgia where Mary was laid to rest.<sup>143</sup> Additionally, Mary's will, which was written the day before she died, instructed that John B. Lucas be paid \$20,000 from her estate, and that Robert L. Lucas be given a one-third share of her residence along with two other members of the Lucas family. To make the situation even more questionable was that she named Peter L. Peacock, Hunt's personal friend and business partner, the executor of her estate.<sup>144</sup>

It is curious that a number of people who should have not had a strong connection to Mary were now associated in some way with her final will and testament. This coincidence was not lost on her brother, Joseph T. Jordan, and he filed a caveat to the will, stating that Mary had been under some sort of influence by the Lucas family. His argument was that they helped construct the will so that they would end up being the biggest beneficiaries of her estate.<sup>145</sup> Mary's will was probated in the Fulton County courts until July 1901, when it was ruled that the beneficiaries should receive the disbursements as written.<sup>146</sup>

### **Marie V. Kirsch**

Hunt's second wife was Marie V. Kirsch. She was the eldest daughter of Daniel and Marie Metzger Kirsch, who were from the Alsace-Lorraine region of France.<sup>147</sup> Marie was born in 1868, although no specific date was determined for her birth. She was probably born in New York City, New York as that's where her parents were living during the year she was born.<sup>148</sup>

It is unknown how John may have met Marie but due to his regular travels to New York, he may have made her acquaintance during one of his trips there. John and Marie were married on 11 January 1894, at a parsonage on Washington Street in Hoboken, New Jersey.<sup>149</sup> They made their way back to Savannah and lived there until moving to Charlotte in January 1895. John and Marie traveled often while their house on South Tryon Street was being built, staying at different hotels in Charlotte when they came back to their newly adopted city until their house was completed.<sup>150</sup> Marie's younger sister, Barbara, was usually in their accompaniment during these travels and even lived with them in Charlotte.

In December 1897, it was published in the *Charlotte Observer* that John had recently been divorced, his ex-wife being Marie.<sup>151</sup> He had been traveling to New York frequently for the past two months prior to this announcement so it is presumed that he had finalized the divorce on one of these occasions. However, no record of their divorce was located despite inquiries to several counties in New York, New Jersey and Georgia.

After the divorce, Marie settled in a row house in Manhattan in January 1898<sup>152</sup> next to Dr. William B. Pritchard, a physician from Baltimore, Maryland but then living in New York. He had met John and Marie in May 1896 when he had gone to Charlotte to visit some friends of his there.<sup>153</sup> He had been told about the Hunt's elegant residence and because Pritchard had an appreciation for architecture, he visited them at their home and was impressed with its construction and design.<sup>154</sup> It could be construed that during this visit, Marie developed a friendship with Pritchard and that became her reason for selecting a residence next to him when she decided to live in New York.

Marie had suffered from an enlarged liver for a number of years and it was the cause of her death in March 1899.<sup>155</sup> She requested the executor of her estate select where she was to be buried, which would be Woodlawn Cemetery in Bronx, New York. As she instructed in her will, a small obelisk-style marker was placed over her grave with the simple inscription of "MARIE" carved into its surface.<sup>156</sup>

The will of Marie V. Hunt was probated in the New York courts in April 1899, with Dr. Pritchard as the executor. She left several thousand dollars to some family members and friends, as well as some personal belongings to people who had cared for her during the last stages of her illness. In addition, she gave \$1,500 each to an aged woman's home and a church society. One oddity of her will was that she left instructions to leave \$5,000 to her sister, Barbara, on the condition that she was not being supported by John Hunt in any way but if so, she was to receive only \$5.<sup>157</sup> Another strange clause was that her executor was to deliver three small packages from a bank safety deposit box to Hunt, Barbara and another unnamed person. The contents of the boxes were not disclosed and when Hunt was asked about the language in the will and the boxes, he responded with only a vague comment and said nothing else about it.<sup>158</sup> The will was probated and deemed valid however it is unclear as to which portion of Marie's estate that her sister received. While she claimed that she was employed and earning her own money, she was also still living with Hunt at the time of Marie's death and continued to do so for another year.

Barbara Kirsch went on to marry Thomas V. Walsh from Carbondale, Pennsylvania, in 1906<sup>159</sup>, where she lived out the rest of her life. She passed away in June 1942 and was buried next to her husband in a cemetery in Carbondale.<sup>160</sup>

### Harriet "Bessie" Babcock

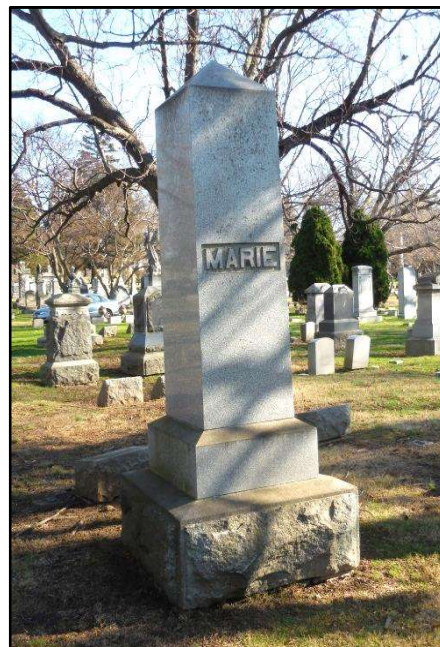


*Harriet "Bessie" Babcock Hunt  
circa 1903*

Junt's third wife, Harriet Babcock, was born on 29 October 1879, in Oskaloosa, Iowa, to Adelbert H. and Lizzie Belle Atkinson Babcock.<sup>161</sup> In 1889, Adelbert began working for the Phoenix Mutual Life Insurance Company in Detroit, Michigan, as an insurance agent.<sup>162</sup> He moved there along with his wife, Harriet, and his other two daughters, Jennie and Mabel. In her younger years, Harriet was often called by her nickname, "Bessie".

As is the case with Hunt's previous two wives, it is not known how he actually met Bessie. An article in the *The Charlotte News* in November 1900<sup>163</sup> mentioned that he had met her when her mother had rented his house in Charlotte and had Bessie with her. This fact was not able to be substantiated and conversely other news articles announced different people renting the house during the time that Lizzie and Bessie might have been in the city. Therefore, the circumstances as to how they became acquainted remain a mystery.

The marriage of Hunt and Bessie on 8 November 1900 in Detroit, Michigan, was determined however, with the announcement of their union appearing in *The Charlotte News*<sup>164</sup> and *The Brookfield Courier*.<sup>165</sup> The *Courier* ran an article detailing the ceremony, making remarks about the beautifully decorated home of her parents and Bessie's simple but pretty wedding gown. John and Bessie left for Chicago, Illinois and then went on to Los Angeles for their honeymoon later in the day after they were married.<sup>166</sup>



*Headstone of Marie V. Hunt  
Woodlawn Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York*



It seems as though Hunt always married “young”, whereas he was twelve years older than Mary Jordan when they married, twenty-eight years older than Marie Kirsch and almost forty years senior to Bessie at the time they became husband and wife. Bessie was a very attractive young woman and comments were often made about her beauty. It was said that Bessie remained faithful to Hunt throughout their marriage, however the substantial age difference between the two evidently became a point of discord, which culminated into a firestorm of accusations concerning infidelity and marital indifference in early 1909.

John Hunt had been living in a state of semi-retirement after selling his interests in his Georgia and Florida naval store commissaries in 1904. He and Bessie traveled regularly around the United States and also went abroad several times over the subsequent years of their marriage. On 21 January 1909, the couple loaded their belongings, including a touring automobile, onto the ocean liner *SS La Savoie* and sailed for Le Havre, France. After arriving there, they drove around the northern parts of Africa and the European countryside,<sup>167,168</sup> and they eventually made their way to Paris, France in early May, taking a room at the Hotel de Crillon near the center of the city.<sup>169,170</sup> During their stay at the hotel, Bessie was supposedly seen using a telephone booth by an Alexander de Tcherdiadieff, a tall, handsome Russian who claimed to be a prince and a cousin of the Czar Nicholas II. He and Bessie made some small talk and this began a flirtation between them that went on over the next several days.<sup>171,172</sup>



*Hotel de Crillon,  
Paris, France*

While at dinner on the evening of 26 May, Bessie claimed she didn’t feel well and retired to their hotel room to rest. When Hunt went to check on her awhile later, he found that she had pinned a note to his pillow, conveying that she no longer loved him and that she had eloped with de Tcherdiadieff.<sup>173</sup> John began searching for Bessie as soon as morning broke and in two days, he had tracked the pair down to a hotel in Chantilly, France. He persuaded her to meet him in the hotel’s parlor, which she did. John demanded she return jewelry that he had bought her while they had been in Europe, which amounted to about \$10,000. Bessie gave him the jewels back but remained steadfast that she had no interest in trying to reconcile their relationship.<sup>174</sup>

Hunt immediately returned to America, arriving in New York City on 11 June. The newspapers had learned of the situation between he and his wife in Europe and they immediately started to question him after he had disembarked from the passenger ship *Mauretania*. Although he had earlier claimed that he would proceed with obtaining a divorce from Bessie, he recanted his remarks and expressed hope that the two could reunite as husband and wife in the near future.<sup>175</sup> He returned to Europe in July and began looking for Bessie and even enlisted the help of his half-nephew, Robert Lucas.<sup>176</sup> It was not discovered when or where he may have found her but he came back to the United States on 26 November without his wife, indicating at that time he would proceed with a divorce after all.<sup>177</sup>

Bessie arrived back in New York two days later on the French passenger ship *La Touraine*.<sup>178</sup> The press was tipped off about her arrival and swarmed her at the dock with incessant questioning about her involvement with de Tcherdiadieff. Her father was also there to meet her and attempted to shield her from the reporters, but she answered them implicitly in that she had done nothing wrong and that the stories about her liaison in Europe were fabricated. She stayed the night in New York City and left the next day for her father’s farm in Brookfield, New York to avoid the attention being drawn to her about her alleged affair.<sup>179</sup> It appears that de Tcherdiadieff stayed in Europe and it is unknown what happened to him after Bessie returned to the United States.



## Final Years

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Over the next few months, Hunt pursued his efforts in getting a divorce from Bessie, filing paperwork in the New York courts in March 1910<sup>180</sup> and having it granted on 26 July<sup>181</sup>. His claim, of course, was that his wife had been involved in adultery and this was grounds for ending their marriage. During that time, he traveled to various cities around the United States, including Dallas, Jacksonville and Hot Springs, Arkansas. He was often accompanied by different members of the Lucas family during these times. He returned to the New York area in April 1910 and rented a house in the 500 block of Third Avenue in Asbury Park, New Jersey.<sup>182</sup> He stayed in Asbury Park until late September and then left there for Dallas.<sup>183</sup> Hunt's health had been deteriorating since the fall of 1909 and on 11 Dec 1910, he died at the Texas Baptist Memorial Sanitarium at the age of 70.<sup>184</sup> Newspapers around the country published articles and obituaries about his life. Many of them concentrated more on his marital troubles with Bessie and the state of the divorce proceedings. One newspaper however, *The Cochran Journal*, ran a long article about his simple beginnings and the path he forged to great success and wealth.<sup>185</sup>



*Burial site of John W. Hunt  
Cedar Hill Cemetery, Cochran, Georgia*

On 14 December, John was buried in Cedar Hill Cemetery in Cochran, Georgia, near the family plots of his old friends and business partners, Peter L. Peacock and John E. Harris. Shortly before his death, he mentioned to his friend and business partner, the aforementioned Harris, that “I made my money in south Georgia, and when I die I want the bulk of my fortune to go there as a fund to be expended for worthy, charitable purposes among the people where I made it.”<sup>186</sup> This went on record from his will, which he wrote on 16 August 1910 “*I give, bequeath and devise all the rest, residue and remainder of my estate of whatsoever character and wheresoever situate unto my Executors hereinafter named, in trust, for the purpose of using the proceeds therefrom in establishing and maintaining such charitable or benevolent institution as they may see fit, as a memorial for myself, the same, however to be established and maintained in the State of Georgia, my preference being that the same be established either in the middle or southern section of said State of Georgia.*”<sup>187</sup>

A number of members of the Lucas family were named to receive fairly substantial monetary disbursements from his estate and the named executors were Hunt's half-nephew, Robert L. Lucas, and his friend and business partner, John E. Harris.<sup>188</sup> The estate that John Hunt left was quite sizeable and included stocks, bonds, real estate and the entirety of the Angelus Hotel. His estate was appraised as being valued at the 2016 equivalent of \$37 million.<sup>189</sup>

## Estate Litigation

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Despite Hunt's intentions to have the bulk of his estate used for charitable purposes, all did not go according to his wishes. The first complaint that arose was from Bessie wherein she claimed that she and Hunt were not technically divorced at the time of his death. While the divorce proceedings had been filed in the Supreme Court of Kings County, New York, a judgement had not actually been passed before he died that would have legally made them ex-spouses.<sup>190</sup> The contentious point of this matter was that he had completely removed Bessie from his will and had left her nothing.

The next complainant to the disbursement of Hunt's estate was that of Bunyan Lucas, his half-brother. Lucas claimed that because the allotment for a charity was ambiguous and gave no clear instruction on how the money should be used, he felt that portion of the estate should be equally distributed among those already named as beneficiaries.<sup>191</sup> Both of these contests to Hunt's will created a procession of litigation that would last for two years before any of the parties could reach an agreement. In February 1913, the Appellate Court of Kings County decided that if the portion of the estate that was specified for charity was instead distributed to the heirs named in the will, it would deny such an organization from the benefit of this endowment.<sup>192</sup> Those named in the will received the monetary sums as listed and Bessie settled for an amount that was approximately one-sixth of the value of her deceased husband's estate (\$6 million, 2016).<sup>193</sup>

Alexander de Tcherdiadieff was not the only man in Bessie's life that she tried to hide from the public's eye. Six months after Hunt's death, Bessie married Edwin S. Gardner, an attorney from Springfield, Massachusetts, at a quiet ceremony in Easton, New Hampshire, in June 1911.<sup>194</sup> Despite this discreet union, for the next two years, Bessie was regularly referred to as "Mrs. John W. Hunt" and her new husband, Edwin, was never mentioned in any of the newspapers that covered her sensational lawsuit. Their marriage was not actually revealed until June 1913, shortly after she settled her claim against Hunt's estate.<sup>195</sup> It would seem as though she had tried to appear as a widow who had been snubbed of what she deserved while keeping the fact that she had remarried a secret.

It was not learned as to how Bessie and Edwin met, as his law practice was in Springfield. However, this marriage seemed to be much less tumultuous than her previous one. The couple traveled abroad on a number of occasions and Bessie became a large stockholder of the Brookfield Electric Light and Power Company in Brookfield, New York.<sup>196</sup> This organization was started by her father in December 1913<sup>197</sup> and it is likely through the settlement that Bessie received from Hunt's estate that she became a prominent investor in the company. The Gardner's had two children, Mary, born in 1912, and Edwin Gilmore, in 1914.<sup>198</sup> They resided in Springfield from 1913 onward and also had a summer cottage in Sebago Lake, Maine.<sup>199</sup> Bessie went on to live her life as a homemaker and did not have much attention drawn to her past. She died in November 1945 at the age of 66 and Edwin passed away in May 1958. They are both buried in a family plot at Oak Grove Cemetery in Springfield.

After the Lucas family and Bessie had accepted their settlements from Hunt's estate, the next issue at hand was the establishment of an orphanage in Georgia. While the estate was appraised at a high dollar value, not much of it was actually in cash. In fact, the money that was to be used for the orphanage was to have come from the sale of the Angelus Hotel. As mentioned in the earlier section regarding the hotel, tracking the sale of the property proved to be challenging and following the revenues from that sale were not able to be determined. It is thought that the estate remained in litigation for many years, as evidenced by a case from 1943 in which an attorney for Hunt's estate attempted to recover funds deposited in a Georgia bank in the 1920s.<sup>200</sup> It is probable that legal fees slowly whittled away at Hunt's estate and there was very little of it left by the time the courts had reached any decision on its fate.

## The Buckner Orphanage

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Although an orphanage was not built as John Hunt had wished, he did get his name on a building at the Buckner Orphanage in Dallas, Texas. Hunt's half-brother, John B. Lucas, had also become wealthy through the hotel business and had amassed a significant estate when he died in March 1935.

J. B. Lucas gave an amount of \$250,000 (\$4.4 million, 2016) to the orphanage.<sup>201</sup> His request that three buildings be erected as the Buckner administrators saw fit and that each building was individually dedicated in the names of himself, his brother, Robert L. Lucas, and his half-brother, John W. Hunt. The building which had Hunt's name on it was opened in April 1937<sup>202</sup> and removed from the property in 1994 to make way for new buildings at the orphanage.<sup>203</sup>



*John W. Hunt Memorial Dormitory  
Buckner Orphanage, Dallas, Texas*

## Closing Remarks

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When I was handed a little slip of paper with John Hunt's name on it, I had no idea I would immerse myself in trying to find out as much as I could about him. It is fair to say that I know more about John than I do some of my own family members!

However, it was a great experience that helped me hone my research skills and more importantly, I was able to provide details about his past that his family had been looking for or were not even aware of. I was also able to reveal the story of an interesting character who was connected to a myriad of places around the United States and who accomplished many things during his life.

Genealogy is a wonderful hobby where you can learn more about you and your family's history, as well as assist others who are interested in their past. I hope the reader has enjoyed the life story of John W. Hunt and that it may inspire them to engage in a similar project of their own.



## End Notes

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## **Illustration Credits**

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John W. Hunt

*Vance Peacock Dykers Papers, #3740, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC*

Area of Black Creek, NC

*Courtesy of Google Maps*

Battle of Gettysburg

*"The High Water Mark" by Mort Kunstler, 2003*

Fort Delaware

*[http://ghosts.wikia.com/wiki/Fort\\_Delaware](http://ghosts.wikia.com/wiki/Fort_Delaware)*

Branch Banking & Trust Building

*<https://nchistorytoday.wordpress.com/tag/alpheus-branch/>*

Peacock, Hunt & Co. Advertisement

*The Wilmington Morning Star, 18 September 1879*

Hunt Mercantile Building

*Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Charlotte Public Library – Main, Charlotte, NC*

Dr. Henry D. Lucas

*Courtesy of Sandy Corlett, Denver, CO*

Monticello Lucas and Children

*Courtesy of Sandy Corlett, Denver, CO*

Angelus Hotel

*Scan from author's personal postcard collection*

Southland Hotel

*Scan from author's personal post card collection*

Wyoming Terrace Plat Map

*Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Washington, D. C., 1903, Vol. 1, Map 83*

Cochran, GA Plat Map

*Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Cochran, GA, 1885, Map 1*

Marie V. Hunt Grave Site

*Provided by Find-A-Grave volunteer Bronx Aquarian (#48184135)*

Harriet "Bessie" Babcock

*Vance Peacock Dykers Papers, #3740, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC*

## **Illustration Credits (cont.)**

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Hotel de Crillon

*<http://www.gayot.com/blog/hotel-de-crillon-paris-closing-chef-christopher-hache/hotel-de-crillon/>*

John W. Hunt Grave Site

*Provided by Find-A-Grave volunteer Bonnie (#48696107)*

John W. Hunt Memorial Dormitory

*"Home Sweet Home" memorial booklet, provided by Buckner International, Dallas, TX*

Thomas J. Hadley IV

*<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=63498353>*

Peter L. Peacock

*Courtesy of Deborah L. Ellis, Cochrane, GA*

John E. Harris

*Vance Peacock Dykers Papers, #3740, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC*

## Appendix

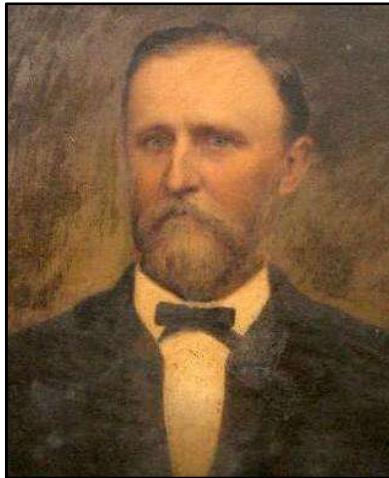
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During the course of John Hunt's life, a number of people were instrumental in helping achieve his success. Some of them were initially business partners but became close friends as time went on, while others were simply connected to him by acquaintance or business transactions. The author of this document felt it would be pertinent to list some of these individuals with a brief biography for each one.

### **Thomas J. Hadley IV**

9 July 1838 - 3 August 1917

Thomas Jefferson Hadley IV was born in Wayne County into a prominent family. He was the sixth of eight children and due to his father's wealth and social connections, Hadley had many advantages in his favor while growing up in the otherwise nondescript farming villages in the area where he lived.



Soon after he graduated with a Bachelor's degree of Arts from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he enlisted in the Confederate Army as a Private on 10 May 1862, in the same regiment and company as John Hunt. He steadily rose through the military ranks and was a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant when he was captured at the Battle of Globe Tavern in Petersburg, Virginia on 21 August 1864. He was sent to Fort Delaware, a Confederate POW camp near Wilmington, Delaware, and remained there until he was released in June 1865.

Hadley returned home after the Civil War and went back to college to earn a Master of Arts degree and additionally completed a law course. He engaged in business and farming ventures shortly after finishing his education. In October 1867, he married Sarah Sanders and they made their home in Wilson, now the county seat of Wilson County, which was established in February 1855. The Hadley's had nine children, although a few of them died in infancy.

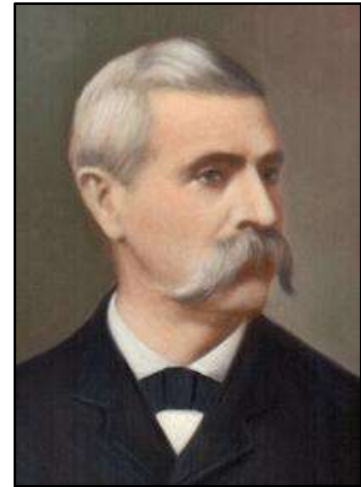
One of the most notable business ventures of Hadley was the creation of a bank in 1872 in Wilson with Alpheus Branch, which loaned money to local farmers who were trying to get their farms running again after the Civil War was over. Hadley was involved with the bank until 1887, when he sold his shares to Branch. This bank went on to become what is known today as the BB&T Corporation, a bank that stretches from the Mid-Atlantic States to the Southeast and into Florida, as well as in the state of Texas.

The Hadley family is buried in a modest plot in Maplewood Cemetery in Wilson, North Carolina.

### **Peter L. Peacock**

31 October 1834 - 21 February 1907

Peter Peacock was born in Wayne County in 1834 and grew up on his father's farm there. His brother, Albert, moved to Georgia before the Civil War to expand his turpentine business in that state. Although Albert returned to North Carolina after the war, Peter made his way to the area of Cochran, Georgia in 1873 to start his own turpentine business. Within a few years, he had partnered with John W. Hunt to start a naval stores commissary in Savannah, Georgia. The naval stores operation, named "Peacock, Hunt & Co." was very successful from its inception and it was regularly mentioned about its high turpentine yields in the trade reports of that industry.



In May 1901, the city of Jacksonville, Florida suffered a great fire and much of the waterfront businesses had been leveled by the flames, including several established naval stores companies. Peacock, Hunt and their other partner, John W. West, likely saw the opportunity to literally start from the ground up and expand their already successful business from Georgia into Florida in 1902. Peacock retained interest in the Savannah and Jacksonville businesses until 1904 when he sold his portion of the naval store commissaries in each state to his partners, John West and William J. Kelly, one of Peacock's long-time associates. He then returned to his large home in Cochran to live in retirement.

Peacock's wife, Sarah, died on February 13, 1907 and Peter passed away only a week later. Many friends claimed that he was overly grieved of a broken heart from his wife's death. Peter, Sarah and a number of their children are buried at Cedar Hill Cemetery in Cochran.

### **John W. West**

3 February 1853 – 23 January 1915

John W. West was born in Brooks County, Georgia, to a large family with many siblings. His father, James West, moved the family to Madison County, Florida, around 1860. He initially worked on his father's farm in Florida but eventually became involved in the lumber industry and also with the naval stores business.

He ran a turpentine supply company in Hamilton County, Florida, until merging its assets with Peter L. Peacock and John W. Hunt, from Savannah, Georgia in 1900. Shortly afterwards, they opened a new naval stores operation in Jacksonville, Florida. West retained his interest in the business until he sold out his shares to other partners in 1904. During this time, he built a large warehouse and office building known as the "West Building" near the Jacksonville waterfront and it stood at that location until July 1972, when it was torn down.

In May 1906, he invested a half-interest with John Hunt to build the Southland Hotel in Dallas, Texas. It was widely known for its elegance and modern amenities. West's estate held his interest in the hotel after he died until January 1921, when it was sold to Fred McJunkins, a local real estate investor. The Southland stood at the corner of Main and Murphy Streets in Dallas until June 1971 when it was torn down to make way for a new office tower.

John West, Sr., died at his home in Valdosta, Georgia and is buried with the rest of his family at Sunset Hill Cemetery in that town.



### **John E. Harris**

19 June 1859 – 15 June 1920



John Harris was born and reared in Macon, Georgia. His parents, William G. and Eliza, were also Georgia natives. He first started work as a clerk in his father's business and then became a traveling salesman. In 1889, he formed the Southern Hardware Company with another Macon resident, Roswell A. Merritt. This business eventually became known as "Merritt's Hardware" in later years.

He married Virginia R. Peacock, daughter of Peter L. Peacock, in September 1888 in Georgia. They had three sons; Tyndall, Wallace and John E. Harris, Jr. Due to his connection to Peter Peacock through marriage, he got involved in the Peacock & Hunt naval stores business and became the president of that company after it was sold in 1904. He was also a director of the Atlantic National Bank in Jacksonville, Florida.

Harris became a close friend and confidante of John Hunt and was one of the executors of Hunt's estate. He was known for being a very clever in business and finance and possessed a great wit and extraordinarily pleasant demeanor.

The Harris family is buried at Cedar Hill Cemetery in Cochran, Georgia near John's old business partners and friends, John W. Hunt and Peter L. Peacock.

### **Francis Taylor**

24 March 1836 – 18 September 1927

Francis Taylor and his wife, Susan, immigrated to America in 1882 and they came to Charlotte around 1891. He was skilled in many forms of construction and was regularly called upon to erect many different structures in the Queen City. A lengthy news article in April 1893 about the newly built James M. Oates residence on South Tryon Street was a testimony to his craftsmanship. It is quite possible that John Hunt noticed the handsome home of Mr. Oates after arriving in Charlotte in 1895 and requested Taylor's services to build his elegant house, just a block away on the same street.

During Mr. Taylor's time in Charlotte, he was involved in several remodeling projects, including those at the Central and Buford hotels, the Charlotte Trouser Factory and he even did contract work out of town. Susan was a dedicated church member and taught Sunday school classes at the First Baptist Church at the corner of South Church and West Morehead Streets.

The Taylors lived on South Church Street for many years until Susan died in October 1923. After his wife's death, Francis moved to East Boulevard and lived out his remaining years until he died at 91 years of age.

Francis and Susan Taylor are buried in a simple plot in Elmwood Cemetery in Charlotte, North Carolina.

### **John G. Hood**

11 September 1852 – 9 February 1909

John Hood was born near Pineville, North Carolina, in September 1852 and was married twice. He had three children from the two unions.

Hood was involved in the merchandising business as well as real estate. In February 1900, Hood bought both John Hunt's mercantile building on North Tryon Street and his residence on South Tryon Street. The house was sold in June 1906 to Dr. Charles L. Alexander, a local dentist. The mercantile building was eventually sold to Hector T. McKinnon in February 1906.

Although the sales of the Hunt properties were transacted in a typical fashion, it seems as though not all of Hood's business dealings were without strife. In January 1886, Hood accosted his brother-in-law, J. W. Summers, with a hatchet after a trade disagreement. Mr. Summers then shot Hood just under the collarbone in what he claimed was self-defense. Both were brought before a judge the following month and each man was fined \$100 and the case was dismissed. In December 1901, after a failed business sale, Hood attempted to end his life by drawing a razor across his throat. He was immediately attended to after doing so and recovered from the injury, although an ugly scar present on his neck always bore witness to the day he tried to end it all.

Hood may have survived some of the attempts on his life, self-inflicted or otherwise, however he would have one last encounter with an angry ex-business partner before he faced them no more. On the morning of 9 February 1909, Will S. Biggers happened to come upon Hood in front of the Central Hotel, located at Trade and Tryon Streets in Charlotte. Eyewitnesses claimed that some words were exchanged between the two men and then Biggers produced a pistol and pointed it squarely at Hood. Raising his hands in front of him, Hood pleaded with Biggers not to shoot, a request which Biggers ignored. He pulled the trigger several times and Hood dropped to the ground after the second shot. Biggers made no attempt to flee and was quickly apprehended by the police. He was brought to trial but acquitted of the crime that June, the argument being what would be defined today as "temporary insanity". Will Biggers continued to live in the Charlotte area until his death in September 1955.

John Hood and members of his family are buried in Elmwood Cemetery in Charlotte, North Carolina.

### **Paul J. Chatham**

2 Sep 1869 – 8 Aug 1944

Paul Chatham was born in Elkin, North Carolina, into a wealthy family who owned the Chatham Woolen Mill in that town and he became involved in this business as he grew into a young adult. In 1898, Chatham moved from Elkin to Charlotte to become the manager of the newly formed Piedmont Pants Company in the 200 block of South Tryon Street. It was likely no fluke that his family's textile mill would supply wool to this new company for the clothes that would be manufactured there.

After a few years in this endeavor, Chatham became interested in developing real estate and purchased the farm owned by John Hunt in 1902. He held the property as a farm until May 1912, when he filed a subdivision plan with the city of Charlotte, calling "Chatham Estates". This subdivision did not fill out as well as Chatham had hoped but it eventually became known as the "Plaza-Midwood" neighborhood. Most of the area bordered by Central Avenue, Hawthorne Lane, Mecklenburg Avenue and Briar Creek sit on what was the original property that Chatham purchased.

Paul Chatham died in August 1944 in Charlotte and is buried in Hollywood Cemetery in Elkin, North Carolina.

**Dr. William B. Pritchard**

12 June 1862 – 6 June 1932

Dr. William Pritchard was born in Baltimore, Maryland, to Rev. Thomas H. and Frances Brinson Pritchard. Rev. Pritchard was a native of Charlotte, North Carolina and began to travel while serving the Baptist Church after his marriage to Frances in November 1858.

Dr. Pritchard received his medical degree in 1884 from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Baltimore and moved to New York City in May 1887 to begin practice there. Prior to moving to New York, he married Miss Virginia Faison in April 1886, in Duplin County, North Carolina. They had two daughters, Virginia and Elizabeth.

In May 1896, Pritchard came to visit friends in Charlotte and had heard about the grand home of John Hunt on South Tryon Street. He visited the residence and remarked about its impressive design and style. It is perhaps at this time that he got to know Hunt's second wife, Marie, and because she suffered from a regular illness, it was the reason why she chose to live near him when she relocated to New York after her divorce from Hunt.

Although Dr. Pritchard's primary residence was in Manhattan, he bought a "country home" in the town of Princess Anne, Maryland, in 1904. He remodeled some of the home, which was originally built around 1860, and had some additions put onto it, as well. He died at this home just six days prior to his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday in June 1932. His home was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.

Dr. Pritchard and his wife are buried at the Faison Cemetery in Faison, North Carolina.



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