



Courtesy of John N. Hackney, Jr.

Bushrod Washington Hunter
1807-1888

The Hunters of Brookdale

By MARY HASSLER MCCONNELL

Bushrod Washington Hunter bought what would become his "Brookdale" estate on February 17, 1851 at an auction held at Ball's Crossroads.¹ The purchase kept the land in the family as his great grandmother, Constantia Chapman,² was one of the earlier owners of the property. In fact, the estate was referred to as the "Chapman tract" on the deed.³

The auction notice described the tract of more than four hundred acres as beautiful and "covered with an immense quantity of wood and valuable timber. The soil is excellent, the land generally level, lies well for farming, perfectly healthy and abounds with springs of pure water. . . . This property offers great inducements to all persons wishing to pursue agriculture or horticulture, or both, or for summer residences for gentlemen holding public offices in Washington," and was stated to be "about fifteen minutes drive to Washington."⁴

Today, what was once Brookdale makes up portions of Ashton Heights, Lyon Park and Arlington Heights, its southern boundary "not more than a quarter of a mile from Columbia Turnpike."⁵

Bushrod Hunter is better known for his ties to Abingdon Plantation, which became the family's primary residence from 1853⁶ to 1861. He abandoned it at the beginning of the Civil War and moved his family to Alexandria. Brookdale was also abandoned at that time,⁷ but Hunter regained it in 1871.⁸

Civil War maps show that the Hunters' house sat on a hill and near a stream. Several buildings were near the house as well as an orchard and what might have been a garden.⁹ Thomas N. Carter surveyed the Brookdale property in 1872. The plat of that survey shows the land divided into twenty-one lots. Within the boundaries of Lot 13 were a spring and stream that appear to have been those shown on the Civil War maps in close proximity to the Hunters' residence.¹⁰ I now believe that this area is the most likely location of the Hunters' house. The boundaries of that lot are today approximately First Street North, North Irving Street, Arlington Boulevard and the eastern boundary of Columbia Gardens Cemetery.¹¹

Little has come to light about the Hunters' lives at Brookdale, referred to by Alexander, Bushrod and Mary Frances' son, as their "summer seat."¹² Alexander gave glimpses of his parents' personalities in his book, *The Huntsman of the South*. Of his father he said, "I may say here there was no more indulgent and gentle master on earth. He did not farm for a living. He was a

retired naval officer, a man of great wealth in those times, and inherited the plantation [Abingdon] until I should become of age, as General Hunter, my deceased uncle, had bequeathed all of his landed estate to me.”¹³

In that same book, Alexander said that, following a misdeed serious enough to be “packed off to boarding school,” he “fled, as I always did when in trouble, to my mother’s arms, for, gentle and gracious as she was, she would have faced Satan himself and his legion undauntingly to defend me from punishment.”¹⁴

Farming apparently was a secondary career for Bushrod Hunter, but at least two references to that avocation exist. The first is a petition he signed in 1858 to prevent the “running at large of hogs,” a problem created by a shortage of fencing material because wood was in demand for construction in growing cities.¹⁵ It is probable that hogs on the loose were more of a problem at Brookdale than at Abingdon as the latter was somewhat isolated with its location on the banks of the Potomac River. Brookdale, on the other hand, was surrounded by other properties.

Bushrod Hunter’s diary of 1861 is primarily a record of farming activities at Abingdon. There is just one notation regarding Brookdale. The entry for March 12 states, “Started 3 two horse plows in the far field for oats. Jack finished sowing clover seed at Brookdale, 3 carts hauling manure.”¹⁶ That was “Notebook No. 13.” The location of the previous twelve books is unknown, but it is easy to imagine that their contents might reveal something of the Hunters’ lives at both plantations which were acquired by them during the twelve years prior to 1861. It is well documented that the residence at Abingdon was built long before Bushrod Hunter and his family lived there, but this is not the case with Brookdale. It is unclear when the house at Brookdale was built; perhaps the answer lies in the missing diaries.

The following poignant entry was dated April 21: “Sunday seems to be a day of destiny with me. On Sunday I was born, on Sunday I resigned my commission of Lieutenant in the U. S. Navy on account of the secession of the state.” Personal financial information was added on April 25. In the margin, Bushrod Hunter wrote, “The war commenced and put a stop to my farming and notes forever.” At the bottom of the page was, “Alas!”¹⁷

Alexander wrote, “In April my father removed his family to the city of Alexandria and abandoned these two places, with all of their goods, chattels, servants, stock, – in fact everything except the clothes we wore, not even employing a care-taker, for overseer we had none.”¹⁸

Bushrod and Alexander Hunter served in the Confederate Army, as a major and a private respectively.¹⁹ Evidence is lacking as to whether Mary Frances and their daughters continued to live in Alexandria for the dura-



Courtesy of Mary Hunter Brame

Mary Frances Blow Hunter
1816-1880

tion of the war. However, Eliza Waller Hunter, the second eldest child in the family, died in 1862 in Orange County, Virginia at the age of 21 of typhoid fever.²⁰

The Alexandria city directory for the years 1870-1871 has listings for Bushrod W. Hunter at 123 North Cameron and eldest daughter, Fannie,²¹

teacher, at the same address. Daughter Mary married John Bowie Gray on November 10, 1870²² and moved to his family's estate, "Traveller's Rest," in Stafford County, Virginia.²³ Alexander Hunter and his father were listed at the same address, 44 South Washington, in the 1876-1877 directory.

Sometime after 1877, Bushrod, Mary Frances and apparently their unmarried daughters, Fannie, Jane (Jennie), Anna (Nannie) and Isabel (Belle) moved to Warrenton, Virginia. Mary Frances died there on October 1, 1880,²⁴ and Bushrod in 1888. Their daughters may have continued to live there until at least 1896 as a small newspaper article on August 1 of that year states that Belle was to direct a play there, the proceeds of which were to go to the Black Horse Company to erect a monument to a local hero, Mr. Josh Martin.²⁵

By the next year, Belle Hunter was listed as living at 213 Prince Street in Alexandria. Jennie died in Washington DC in 1899.²⁶ Fannie was listed in the 1900 directory at the same address as Belle's. Later, the sisters lived at 211 1/2 Prince Street. Nannie and Alexander, a resident of Washington, DC, both died in 1914.²⁷ Fannie died in Alexandria in 1927 at the age of eighty-eight.²⁸ Belle, the last survivor of the siblings, lived at a third address in the same block of Prince Street in 1934.²⁹

This search, which began with curiosity about a neighborhood landmark,³⁰ might have ended here if it were not for a genealogy book written in 1934. In it were mentioned, among others, three young great-grandchildren of Mary Hunter and J. Bowie Gray of Traveller's Rest: John, Ernest and Mary Hunter Hackney.³¹ An Internet search led to John Hackney's home and subsequent phone visits and correspondence. They have all been very generous in sharing family photographs, letters and other information which tell more about the Hunters' and Brookdale's story.

Bushrod Hunter's will of November 3, 1886 left some personal items to each daughter, including the portraits of himself and his wife to Mary (Hunter) Gray. "The rest and residue of my estate, real and personal, I devise and bequeath to my daughter, Fanny Blow Hunter for and during the period of her natural life, by my said daughter to be used for the benefit of herself and her unmarried sisters and at her death to be equally divided among all my children. The issue of any who shall marry and die, to take the share of their deceased parent." A codicil, dated January 10, 1887 directed that "Fanny Blow shall have full power to dispose of any property I may die possessed for the benefit of herself and sisters as directed in the above will." A second codicil written on June 21, 1887 appointed Fanny B. Hunter as the executrix of her father's estate. The will and two codicils were produced to the Fauquier County Court on July 24, 1888 following Bushrod W. Hunter's death on June 26, 1888.³²

Letters written to family members in the following years indicate that Fannie took her responsibilities very seriously. Although she never mentioned Brookdale by name in those letters, it appears, from the amount of acreage and place names, that was the land she was trying to sell.³³ A letter written in 1906 stated that “When my father made his will he had sold every acre of it.” She went on to say that she had “redeemed” or bought back 127 acres which she had, at the time of the writing of that letter, “put . . . in an agent’s hand.”³⁴

Another letter, written the following year, expressed Fanny’s frustrations that the land had not been sold and with promises made and broken by the agent she had entrusted the sale to. She said, “And that is always the way? Very much interest at first – and the second time through some influence I can not fathom – a change!” She asked for \$1000 an acre plus the 7 1/2 percent the agent charged.³⁵

The land had still not been sold by 1912, as Fannie expressed in another letter her deep concerns about the debt she incurred by mortgaging the land and “how little is left for my home and living. . . .” In that letter she mentioned that an electric road had been laid off “to run through the entire place.” Fort Myer and Clarendon were also mentioned.³⁶ Her fears of being taken advantage of continued.

The urgency Fannie felt to sell was perhaps untimely as Arlington was primarily a rural area in 1910. Dorothy Ellis Lee, in her book *A History of Arlington County Virginia*, called those who settled in the county at that time “pioneers” as there were few amenities such as electricity, plumbing, stores, or doctors. It was not until 1920 that any sizable real estate development was undertaken.³⁷

Ashton Jones bought sixty-one acres of Brookdale land from Fannie in 1919.³⁸ Another seventeen and one half acre tract in the developing Ashton Heights neighborhood sold in 1920 for \$500 an acre.³⁹

Some of the Hunters’ land still may not have been sold as late as 1929. Belle Hunter wrote to her niece Mamie (Mary Hunter Gray Deans) that one hundred four acres of land to be used for the airport had sold for \$675,000. “That makes my five acres on the west side of it valuable and all the rest,” she added.⁴⁰

Belle Hunter’s obituary said that she spent her winters in Florida (with a cousin, according to Mary Hunter Brame) and lived at the George Mason Hotel in Alexandria during the rest of the year. She died on June 13, 1938 in Winchester, Virginia after going to Berkeley Springs, West Virginia for a visit.⁴¹

A letter from John Hackney to the author, dated March 5, 2002, continues the story of what happened to the Hunter family by telling how his

grandmother, Mary Hunter Gray (Mamie), went to Wilson, North Carolina to visit a cousin in the 1890s. There she met and married Ernest Deans, a Wilson County native. Her younger brother, J.B. Gray III, followed her to Wilson because he “liked Mamie’s cooking.” He also married a Wilson native, Nancy Warren, and founded Wilson Hardware Company. It is still in business today and run by J.B. Gray V. The letter concludes with:

Seven [great] grandchildren of these two Hunter-Gray family members are still living as follows: John N. Hackney, Jr., Ernest Deans Hackney, Bowie Gray Martin and John Bowie Gray V in Wilson, N.C. Mary Hunter Hackney (Brame) in Kinston, N.C., Margaret Deans Richardson (Hall) in Marion, S.C. and Donald V. Richardson III in Columbia, S.C. (One is deceased – Gray Deans Culbreth (Maddley, no issue). The other two children of John Bowie Gray II and Mary Hunter (daughter of Bushrod W. Hunter and Mary Frances Blow Hunter) were Jane Moore Gray (Hagan) and Aylmer Gray (unmarried), both no issue. All seven living grandchildren listed above now have children and grandchildren, so Bushrod Washington Hunter and Mary Frances Blow have a continuing line.

Mary McConnell grew up in Arlington, but now lives in Memphis, Tennessee. She would like to thank John Hackney, Mary Hunter Brame and others who helped with this long distance project. This is her second article for *The Arlington Historical Magazine*.

Endnotes

¹ George White, “Auction Sales,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 25, 1851.

² Charles W. Stetson, *Four Mile Run Land Grants* (1935; reprinted, Westminster, MD: Family Line Publications, 1994), p. 87.

³ Arlington County Public Library, Microfilm for Deed Book 6, p. 243.

⁴ White, “Auction Sales.”

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Sidney Methiot Culbertson, *The Hunter Family of Virginia and Connection* (Denver: 1934), p. 202.

⁷ Alexander Hunter, *Johnny Reb and Billy Yank* (New York and Washington: Neale Publishing Co., 1905), p. 41.

⁸ Under the terms of “An Act for the Collection of the Direct Tax in Insurrectionary Districts within the United States and for other purposes,” landowners had to pay their property tax in person. Those who failed to do so found that their land was subject to confiscation. When Lt. Bushrod Hunter “returned to Northern Virginia after the war he . . . found that his land had been confiscated and sold for taxes. He filed suit in the Circuit Court of the United States for the Eastern District of Virginia for the recovery of Brookdale. . . . In 1871 Hunter’s . . . suit was settled, and the Brookdale tract was returned to him.” Dorothea Abbot, “The Hunter Family and Its Connection with Arlington County,” *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 7, No. 1, October 1982, pp. 39, 42.

- ⁹ "Environs of Washington 1862," National Archives at College Park, Maryland, File F99-8 and Richard W. Stephenson, *The Cartography of Northern Virginia* (Fairfax County, VA: Office of Comprehensive Planning, 1981), p. 71.
- ¹⁰ Arlington County Deed Book No. F-4, p. 139.
- ¹¹ A re-examination of the Civil War-era map "Environs of Washington" indicates that the latitude and longitude notations on the map are in error by 4 seconds N and 18 seconds W respectively. Applying these corrections to the plotted location of the house gives a location in the vicinity of the present-day intersection of 1st Road North and North Irving Street. See the editor's note in Mary Hassler McConnell, "The Brookdale Gatepost," *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 12, No. 1, October 2001, p. 27.
- ¹² Hunter, *Johnny Reb and Billy Yank*, p. 378. In addition to Alexander, there were eight other children in the family, two of whom died very young.
- ¹³ Alexander Hunter, *The Huntsman of the South* (New York and Washington: The Neale Publishing Company, 1908), p. 13.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 23.
- ¹⁵ Wesley E. Pippenger, *Legislative Petitions of the Town and County of Alexandria* (Westminster, MD: Family Line Publications, 1995), pp. 128-29. Names of others who signed were: Bazel Williams, Edw. B. Powell, James Roach, John B. Daingerfield, J.H. Brewer, Robert Dyer, Wesley Carlin, H. Hoover, Maria Hayes, Allen Pearce, R.C. Farnsworth, Robt. Ball, Geo. W. Thompson, Richd. Southern, Caleb L. Birch, Daniel Wells, Edward P. Upton, Mrs. W.D. Wallach, A.G. Gardiner, John Birch, Timothy Milburn, Thomas Thompson, Wm. D. Nutt, W.B. Lacy, G.C. Synier, Wm. Jenks, Cyrus Martin, Lewis Martin, Philo Baldwin, John B. Brown, Addison Brown, R.B. Alexander, Jos. W. Davis, Anthony R. Fraser.
- ¹⁶ Bushrod Hunter, *Diary of Bushrod W. Hunter, 1861*, Manuscript Reading Room (Madison LM101), Library of Congress, p. 5.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 8-9.
- ¹⁸ Hunter, *Johnny Reb*, p. 41.
- ¹⁹ Abbot, "The Hunter Family," pp. 44-45.
- ²⁰ Blow family Bible (Oxford 1715), Swem Library, College of William and Mary.
- ²¹ Also spelled "Fanny."
- ²² *Index to Marriage Notices in the Southern Churchman, 1865-1941* (prepared by the Historical Records Survey of Virginia, Service Division, Works Project Division), p. 256.
- ²³ Hackney and Brame family papers.
- ²⁴ *The True Index* (Warrenton, VA), October 9, 1880.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, August 1, 1896.
- ²⁶ Blow family Bible.
- ²⁷ *Alexandria Gazette*, June 5, 1914, p. 1 (Nannie), and July 1, 1914, p. 1 (Alexander).
- ²⁸ *Ibid*, October 7, 1927, p. 11.
- ²⁹ Alexandria city directories: 1870-1871, 1876-1877, 1897-1898, 1900, 1903, 1934, Local History/Special Collections Division, Kate Waller Barrett Branch of the Alexandria Public Library.
- ³⁰ Mary Hassler McConnell, "The Brookdale Gatepost," *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (October 2001), pp. 25-28.
- ³¹ Culbertson, *The Hunter Family*, pp. 231-32.
- ³² Hackney and Brame family papers.
- ³³ Hackney and Brame family papers. A letter dated November 15, 1927 from Janie Moore Gray Hagan to her sister, Mary Hunter Gray Deans (Mamie) does mention "Brookdale."
- ³⁴ Fannie B. Hunter to "My Dear George," 28 August 1906. Blow family papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.
- ³⁵ Hackney and Brame family papers.
- ³⁶ Fannie B. Hunter to "My Dear George," 8 February 1912. Blow family papers.
- ³⁷ Dorothy Ellis Lee, *A History of Arlington County Virginia* (Richmond: The Dietz Press, Inc., 1946), pp. 50-52.
- ³⁸ Abbot, "The Hunter Family," p. 43.

³⁹ Arlington County Courthouse, Microfilm for Deeds, Book 178, p. 309.

⁴⁰ Hackney and Brame family papers.

⁴¹ *Alexandria Gazette*, June 14, 1938, p. 9.