

## THE HUNTER FAMILY AND ITS CONNECTION WITH ARLINGTON COUNTY

By

Dorothea E. Abbott

### Abingdon

Abingdon was a plantation where corn and tobacco were grown. Then with the passing centuries this strategic land became one of the busiest metropolitan airports in the country. A recent addition to its grounds has been the elevated metro subway station.

The selection of a site for Washington National Airport was settled by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in 1938, when he chose the southern tip of Alexander's Island off Gravelly Point, and also a portion of the Abingdon property in Arlington County.

Arlington County's loss to the Federal Government was not only 680 acres of taxable waterfront land, but one of the county's oldest and most notable historic mansion sites.

In 1930 a fire destroyed Abingdon's mansion house. At that time the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad Company owned the property. The brick foundation and crumbling chimneys are all that remain of the mansion house. The ruins are surrounded by parking areas opposite the Airport Radar Station.

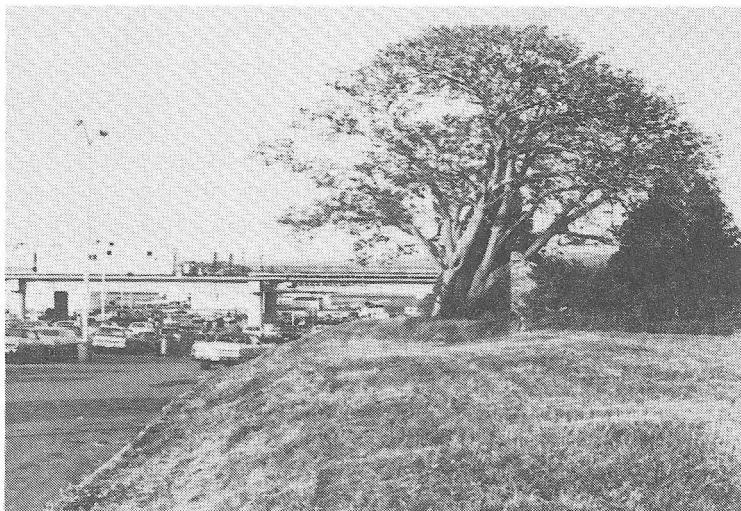
Mrs. Vivian Ford, an Arlington resident, was born at Abingdon in the early 1900's. She spent the first eight years of her life there. Her father, Mr. Allwine, was a resident foreman for the new Washington Brick Company, owners of the property.

Vivian remembers the large two story white frame house with green shutters as having double doors, in the front and back of the house, that opened on a wide hall. On the first floor there was a parlor, dining room, a room used as an office and a small front room that Vivian used as a playroom. Off a corresponding hall upstairs there were four bedrooms.

Previous owners added a room on either side of the house. One was used as a kitchen and the other was a bathroom with a copper tub. A porch extended across the east side of the house which overlooked the Potomac River.



Abingdon in the late 1800's  
*Courtesy Mrs. Vivian Ford*



Abingdon today



East Front of Abingdon, 1929  
*D.A.R. Magazine, June 1929*

A Patent of 6,000 acres was granted to Robert Howson a shipmaster, in 1669, for bringing 120 persons to the Colony. His grant was based on fifty acres per person. The land extended from Hunting Creek, south of Alexandria, to the northern boundary of the Arlington Plantation on the Potomac River. Howson sold his Patent in 1669 to John Alexander, for whom Alexandria was named, for 6,000 pounds of tobacco and some money.

Gerard Alexander, great grandson of John Alexander, inherited the northern part of the Patent in 1735. His land was north of Four Mile Run and to the north line of Arlington Plantation. In 1761 his will divided his estate between his sons, Robert, Phillip and Gerard.

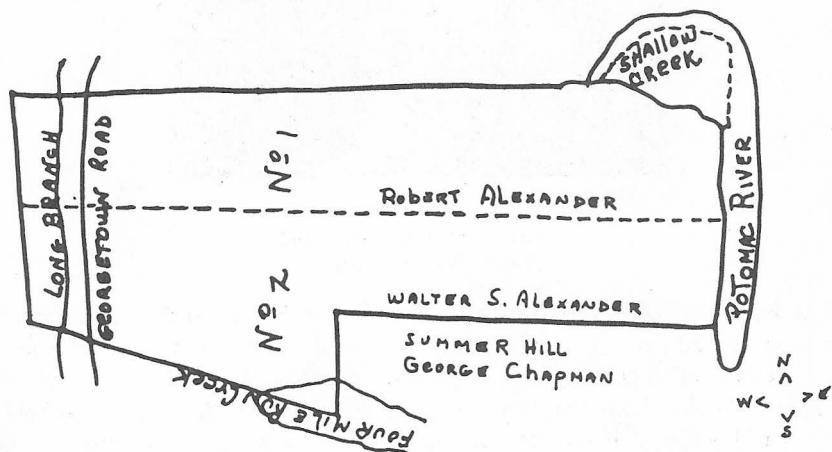
In 1778 Robert and Gerard sold their estates to John Parke Custis, stepson of George Washington.

Robert's estate consisted of 1,000 acres at 12£s per acre. The principal amount with compound interest was to be paid in twenty four years. Gerard's estate of 1100 acres was priced at 11£s per acre with payment in full on settlement. In order to purchase the Alexander estates it was necessary for John Parke Custis to sell his inherited lands on the Eastern Shore and in Tidewater, Virginia. The entire transaction depended on securing the release of the dower interest that General Washington and Martha had in these lands. In 1778, Washington did sign the release, and on Christmas Day John Parke Custis was in possession of the property.

Custis chose Robert Alexander's estate to live on and named it Abingdon. In 1779 his daughter Eleanor (Nelly) Custis was born in the mansion house. Custis died in 1781 and by 1792 ownership of the property reverted to Robert Alexander. The executors of the Custis estate could not meet the payments due on the land.

The July Court of the County of Fairfax, in 1800, appointed commissioners to survey the estate of the late Robert Alexander (1793) and to divide it equally between his sons Robert and Walter S. Alexander.

This survey accounted for 1,090 acres. Robert was assigned the upper or northern portion of 545 acres, including thirty four and three-quarters acres underwater in a shallow creek off the Potomac River. Walter received the mansion house on the lower or southern portion which had 545 acres and included thirteen and one-quarter acres underwater in Four Mile Run Creek. His land adjoined the property belonging to the Chapman family.



In 1808 Walter Alexander sold a large tract of Abingdon, with its many farm leases, to Reuben Johnston. Johnston sold it to John Withers in 1829. When Withers deeded Abingdon to Alexander Hunter, in 1835, he retained 120 acres west of Georgetown Road.

Hunter bought sixty acres, in 1837, from George Wise, and thirty nine acres from the heirs of Joseph Frank in 1842, which substantially increased the acreage he owned.

Hunter died in 1849 and left Abingdon to his brother Bushrod Washington Hunter, in trust, until his nephew, Alexander, reached the age of twenty-one. Alexander was six years old when his uncle died.

The intervention of the Civil War interrupted the Hunter family's continuity of ownership of Abingdon. "An Act for the Collection of the Direct Tax in Insurrectionary Districts within the United States and for other purposes", in 1861, resulted in the confiscation of Hunter lands by United States Tax Commissioners. One of the rules imposed was that the owner had to pay the tax in person. Abingdon's 530 acres were sold at a tax sale, in 1863, for \$8000.00, to L. E. Chittenden, while Bushrod and his son were serving in the Confederate Army.

Upon his return home Alexander took steps to recover Abingdon, his inheritance. He filed several court suits. One suit was against the United States Tax Commissioners, and the other was to remove Henry M. Bennett who had leased Abingdon from L. E. Chittenden.

At the Bennett trial, in 1866, the Court found the will of Alexander Hunter to be valid, and that Alexander had appeared before the Tax Commissioners and had taken the oath to support the Constitution of the United States. He also had paid the amount of tax, penalties, interest and other expenses of the sale subsequent to redeeming the property. He refused the oath that he had not taken part with the insurgents in the rebellion or in any way had given them aid or comfort as provided by the Seventh Section of the Act of Congress which was approved in 1865. It was noted that he had received a special pardon from the President of the United States on the fourth of September, 1865. President Andrew Johnson extended full amnesty to certain participants in the secession.

The suit filed in the Circuit Court of the United States for the District of Virginia against the United States Tax Commissioners for the sale of Abingdon had not been heard prior to the trial date of the Bennett case. The jury for the Bennett case ruled that Abingdon was to be returned to Hunter provided his case against the Tax Commissioners was determined in his favor. Abingdon was returned to Hunter in the early 1870's.

### **Abington Park**

Alexander Hunter chose 280 acres west of the Alexandria Canal to create the town of Abington. The plat and survey for this town was filed in the County Clerk's office in Alexandria on June 24, 1874.

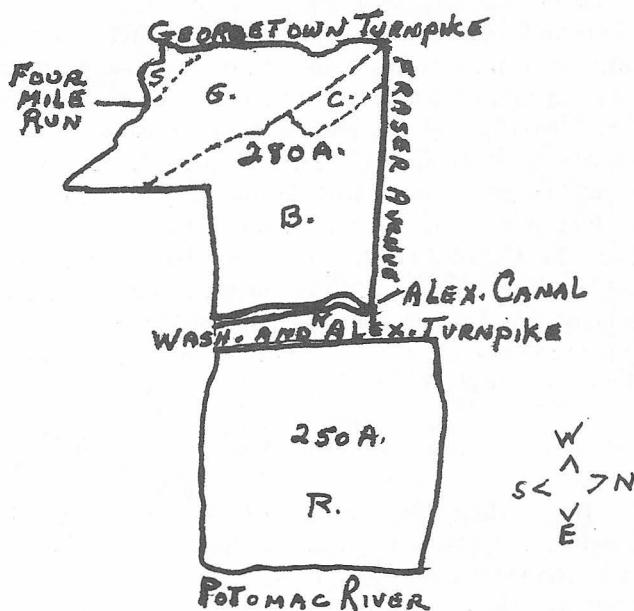
The money that Hunter used for the development of Abington Park was obtained by securing deeds of trust, thereby mortgaging his Abingdon estate.

A deed for forty three acres in Abington Park, call "Burleigh," was conveyed

by Hunter on January 22, 1876, for \$771.00, to former Judge Jeremiah S. Black, of Pennsylvania. On the twenty eighth of the month another recorded deed stated that the then Congressman James A. Garfield had paid, to Black, one half of the purchase money, for one undivided moiety of the forty three acres. Originally Jeremiah S. Black and James A. Garfield had received a quit claim deed, and in 1880 they were able to get a clear title. Alexander Hunter's extremely low price for this land was to compensate them for the legal services they rendered for the recovery of Abingdon.

On July 9, 1881, the Circuit Court of Alexandria appointed Commissioners to sell Abington Park. The highest bid of \$3784.52 was by Black and Garfield, who were to be joint tenants. James A. Garfield had been elected President of the United States, and shortly thereafter died from an assassin's gun shot wound. A deed of June 1, 1882, states that his wife, Lucretia, and their children, with Jeremiah S. Black, purchased Abington Park with the exception of the forty three acres of Burleigh. A decretal order in 1885 gave Mrs. Garfield, and her children, Lot Two in the division of the land of Jeremiah S. Black, of ninety acres. The executor of the estate of the late Jeremiah S. Black in 1885 sold his 143 acres to Frank Hume. A section of land to the south of Mrs. Garfield's land was owned by the estate of Frank Swann. Years before Abington Park was created, Alexander Hunter sold twenty acres to Montgomery D. Corse in the northwest corner. The Trustees for Margaret R. Ramey sold this land to Frank Hume in 1886.

The name of Aurora Hills has replaced Abington Park, and what was the Alexandria Canal has been filled in and is now South Eads Street. Fraser Avenue is South 23rd Street, and Georgetown Turnpike is South Arlington Ridge Road.



Author's drawing based on G.P. Strum's 1900 detailed map of Alexandria,  
now Arlington County

## **Crystal City**

Alexander Hunter deeded twenty acres between the Alexandria Canal, (S. Eads Street), and the east line of Abingdon, in 1891, to J. K. M. Norton. The adjoining land on the north, a similar tract, and part of Abingdon, belonged to F. A. King. These forty acres were part of the land for the development of Crystal City, one of the major development centers, in Arlington County in recent years.

## **Abingdon**

The mansion house at Abingdon had many owners and occupants during its lifetime. Several generations of the Hunter family lived there.

My research of available source material to determine "who built the mansion house and when" ranged from John Alexander in 1675, Gerard Alexander in 1740, to John Parke Custis in 1778-9. It is surprising that no one suggested the possibility that Robert Alexander, from whom Jackie Custis purchased the estate, could have built the house.

If the house John Parke Custis moved his family into in 1778-9 was John Alexander's it would have been 100 years old, and when it burned in 1930, 255 years old.

Abingdon's land, previously a plantation, became a commercial site in the early 1880's. Within the boundaries of Abingdon in the twentieth century there are Washington National Airport, Crystal City and Aurora Hills.

## **Hunter's Chapel**

The historic marker on the northeast corner of Columbia Turnpike and Glebe Road, at the Westmont Shopping Center, commemorates Hunter's Crossing where Hunter's Chapel, a forerunner of the Arlington United Methodist Church, once stood.

In 1859 Mrs. Louise Chapman Hunter, widow of Alexander Hunter, gave the trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church of the Baltimore Conference, a piece of land, out of the thirty acres she bought at this historic site from William Jenks in 1855.

The Chapel was built by Joe W. Angus. It was thirty by forty feet on the property that was 125 feet along County Road (Glebe), and 118 feet along the east line of Columbia Turnpike. The back line from Glebe Road to the east was fifty four feet, and from that corner south to Columbia Turnpike was 132 feet.

Federal troops took possession of the Chapel in 1861. They used it as a picket post, a block house, a commissary, a stable and eventually they tore the building apart to build barracks.

In 1856 Mrs. Hunter purchased from Sewall B. Corbett another thirty acres on the north side of Columbia Turnpike adjoining her land.

At the beginning of the war Mrs. Hunter fled with her adopted daughter Marion to Richmond never to return. She abandoned her property of almost sixty acres. Her land was sold by the Tax Commissioners in 1864. They had valued it at \$3600.00. The highest bid was V. P. Corbett's \$1560.00.

## Brookdale

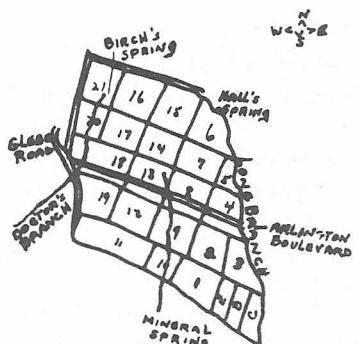
Brookdale was bought by Lt. Bushrod Washington Hunter in 1851. His deed reported that James Robertson had been issued a Patent for the 432 acres in 1724. Robertson sold it to Simon Pearson and Pearson gave it to his daughter Constant Pearson Chapman. Thereafter it was passed on to members of the Chapman family until the death of John Biddle Chapman. Lt. Hunter, who lived in Washington, D. C., bought the Chapman property at an auction at the Alexandria Courthouse, paying \$25.50 per acre, for four hundred twenty four and three-quarters acres. About ten acres had been previously sold to a Mr. Causine.

The 1860 census for Alexandria County records Bushrod W. Hunter, 57, his wife, Mary F., 40, daughters Fannie, 20, Eliza, 18, Alice, 17, Anna, 16, Mary, 11, Jane, 7, Isabelle, 5, Jane, her mother, 62, Elizabeth Gantt, 55, his sister and William Blow, for whom Hunter was guardian. (His son Alexander was living elsewhere). Hunter's real estate was valued at \$30,000.00 and personal property, \$40,000.00. At this time B. W. Hunter had Abingdon and Brookdale because his son had not reached the age of twenty-one. His taxable land holdings totalled nine hundred fifty-four and three-quarters acres.

In 1861 Lt. Hunter resigned his commission in the United States Navy. He was commissioned a Major in the Army of the Confederacy in 1862. When he returned to Northern Virginia after the war he too found that his land had been confiscated and sold for taxes. He filed a suit in the Circuit Court of the United States for the Eastern District of Virginia for the recovery of Brookdale.

Brookdale had been sold to F. McCabe in 1864 for \$5500.00. In 1871 Hunter's ejectment suit was settled, and the Brookdale tract was returned to him.

Hunter employed Thomas N. Carter, a surveyor, to make a plat and survey of Brookdale in 1872. The purpose of the survey was to divide the tract into parcels. When the survey was completed it showed eleven houses, apple and peach orchards, a mineral spring, Birch's Spring, and Hall's Spring, which was the largest in the county. Doctor's Branch and lower Long Branch, sometimes referred to as Hall's Spring Branch, were streams off Four Mile Run. Carter divided the tract into twenty-one lots.



Author's drawing based on G.P. Strum's 1900 detailed map  
of Alexandria, now Arlington County.

Lot #1 - 25 Acres more or less  
#2 - 13 A.      #3 - 13 A.  
#4 - 9 A.      #5 - 10 A.  
#6 - 19 A.      #7 - 10 A.  
#8 - 20 A.      #9 - 20 A.  
#10 - 20 A.      #11 - 27½ A.  
#12 - 17½ A.      #13 - 17½ A.  
#14 - 17½ A.      #15 - 21 A.  
#16 - 21 A.      #17 - 17½ A.  
#18 - 26 A.      #19 - 14 A.  
#20 - 12½ A.      #21 - 18 A.  
William Elliott - 10 A.  
Septimus Brown - 10 A.  
Mr. Causine - 10 A.

Bushrod W. Hunter sold Lots #1, 10 and part of 11 to H. Dwight Smith, July 1, 1877, Lot #2 to Henry L. Holmes and William H. Butler, on February 1, 1882; Lot #3 part to John Williams, September 13, 1882, part to Samuel W. Tucker and William E. Thomas, April 5, 1877, and Septer Goldman and Noah Williams, February 13, 1883. Lot #4 part to Robert Cooper, November 3, 1882, part to Cornelius West, Solomon Jackson, and Robert Boswell, November 3, 1882. Lots #5, 6, 7, 14, and 15, to James H. May, October 9, 1882. He sold Lot #7 to Francis L. Smith, August 2, 1886; on July 1, 1921, Margaret V. Smith, sold Lot #7 to Frank Lyon. Lots #8 and 9 were sold to Earnest A. Schneider, July 2, 1877; Andrew Melville bought part of Lot #11, on April 13, 1887. Edward Byron Van Every, Lot #12, October 1, 1880, and on November 9, 1887 he bought Lot #13. B. W. Hunter had Lots #16 and 21. Lamberton Doolittle, Lots #17, 18 and 20, October 3, 1882. Septimus Brown bought Lot #19, December 21, 1882; He sold it to M. Taylor, October 25, 1886.

Prior to Hunter's death in 1888, his daughter, Fannie B. Hunter, was in control of the property. She bought back Lots #3 and 4, on October 27, 1887, also Lots #6, 15 and 16 of her father's Brookdale tract from John V. Burke, and was in possession of Lots #5, 6, 14, 15, 16 and 21, when she mortgaged the 106 acres, on December 1, 1887. Ashton C. Jones bought Lots #6, 15 and 16 from Miss Hunter on December 19, 1919. Jones named this property "Moore's Fourth Addition to Clarendon", and sold it to Frank Lyon on March 18, 1921.

The years have changed the farmland of Brookdale into a thriving community in Arlington County. Lee Boulevard, a narrow road, was widened and renamed Arlington Boulevard. Thomas Jefferson Intermediate School and Community Center was built on the Van Every property. The Fillmore Elementary School was enlarged and renamed Long Branch. Frank Lyon of Lyon & Fitch, Incorporated, Real Estate developers, gave the community of Lyon Park land for a Park, and provided part of the cost of the Community Center. Hall's Spring was on this land. Approximately thirty-nine acres of Lots #17, 18 and 20 belonging to the Doolittle family became the Columbia Gardens Cemetery. In 1938 the Alexandria Park Association, Inc. (Columbia Gardens Cemetery), gave a piece of land, out of their Lot #17, to build Faith Lutheran Church on Arlington Boulevard.

## The John Hunter Family

Dr. John Hunter (1721-1763) emigrated to Virginia from his native Scotland. He married Elizabeth Chapman, daughter of Nathaniel Chapman of Pamunkey, Charles County, Maryland. Their son Nathaniel Chapman Hunter (1764-1812) settled in Dumfries, Virginia, after serving in the American Army of the Republic. He and his wife, Anne Tyler, had a large family of thirteen children. In 1806 Hunter moved his family to Alexandria.

Nathaniel's son Alexander (1792-1849) served in the War of 1812 for two years as Adjutant of the District of Columbia Regiment of Volunteers. In 1816 he married his cousin Louise Ann Adelaide Chapman, the only daughter of George Chapman, of Summer Hill plantation. He became a farmer and also held a position in the Alexandria Customhouse. During the administration of President Andrew Johnson, Hunter was appointed Marshal for the District of Columbia. He was Marshal for eighteen years, and resigned just before his death in 1849.

Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, a distinguished statesman and jurist, said of General Hunter that he "was one of the most upright of men that ever held that office."

The commission of General was that of the militia of the District of Columbia. This position he held prior to and subsequent to his becoming United States Marshal.

The Hunter home in Washington, D.C. was on the southwest corner of Third and C Streets. The house was built in 1837-8 by Major Carey Selden, who was married to Hunter's sister Emily. Following Selden's death Alexander Hunter bought the house in 1843. He died there in 1849. Hunter was buried at Summer Hill cemetery with his father and grandfather, and in 1940 they were reinterred at Pohick Church Cemetery, Fairfax County, Virginia. Although the Hunters did not have any children, Mrs. Hunter adopted a daughter named Marion, and her will of 1866 mentions her as the wife of Clement Young.

Bushrod Washington Hunter (1807-1888) brother to Alexander, was a midshipman in the United States Navy in 1827. He was commissioned a Lieutenant in 1838. During the Mexican American War Lt. Hunter was aboard the ship Truxton, on August 15, 1846, when it went aground at the mouth of the Tuxpan River north of Vera Cruz. The captain and crew surrendered to the Mexicans except for two Lieutenants, Hunter and Berryman, who had escaped in one of the brig's small boats. On the second day out they captured a Mexican coastal vessel and completed their voyage to Anton Lizardo. Hunter received injuries during the war and was relieved of active duty. He married Mary Frances Blow of Sussex, Virginia. There were nine children in their family.

Hunter resigned his commission in the Navy at the time Virginia seceded from the Union. He joined the Confederate Army as Major of Heavy Artillery in Benjamin Huger's division. Due to extreme deafness he was put on furlough and resigned in 1865. In 1877 he was living with his family in Warrenton, Virginia and remained there until his death in 1888. He was buried at St. Paul's Episcopal Cemetery, Alexandria.

Alexander Hunter (1843-1914), Bushrod's son, was a Private in the Confeder-

ate Army with the Black Horse Calvary. He was buried with full military honors in the Confederate section of Arlington National Cemetery.

He worked forty years for the United States Government Land Office in Washington, D.C. He married Alice A. Swain, formerly of Mobile, Alabama in 1880. His second wife was Filah Saunders and she is buried with him. There were no children.

In 1877-8 Hunter served as a Delegate to the Virginia General Assembly, and in 1879 was County Clerk of Alexandria.

Alexander Hunter was the author of the following books: "The Ancient Iron Pot," "The Old National," "The Huntsmen of the South," and "Johnny Reb and Billy Yank," and "The Women of the Debatable Land."

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexandria Will Book #5, p. 128.  
American Society of Civil Engineers. Committee on History and Heritage of the Nation's Capital Section. *Civil Engineering Landmarks of the Nation's Capital*.  
Arlington County Courthouse Microfilm for Deeds: A4-348, 531, 561-2. B4-319. C4- 146-8, 174, 565-6. D4-6, 7. E4-176-8, 458-60, 563-4. F4-76-7, 165-8. G4-124-5, 164, 488-9. H4-373-5, 378, 380-1, 486. I4-137. J4-192-3. M4-426-7. N2-U2-220-5, 268-9, 253-4, 309, 334-5, 350-2. Y2-466-7. X3-Z3-96-7. S4-51, 164, P467, 175, 332-3. C4-78-82.  
Arlington County Microfilm, Common Law Orders, #2 Reel 19, p. 137.  
Arlington County Microfilm, Land Suit Reel 25, p. 48.  
Arlington County Public Library Microfilm for Deed Books, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.  
Brockett, F. L. *The Lodge of Washington: History of the Alexandria-Washington Lodge #22 AF&AM of Alexandria, Virginia, 1783-1876*. Alexandria, French, 1875.  
Chapman, Sigismunda Mary Frances. *A History of the Chapman and Alexander Families*. Richmond, Dietz, 1946.  
Columbia Historical Society. *Records*, Vol. 31, p. 74; Vol. 32, p. 75.  
Fairfax County. *Survey Book 1787-1856*, p. 196. Deed Book M p. 321-323.  
Henry, Robert S. *The Story of the Mexican War*. New York, Ungar, 1950.  
Information from Michael Miller of the Lloyd House, Alexandria, about the 1860 Census.  
Mitchell, Beth. *Beginning at a White Oak*. McGregor, 1977.  
National Archives, Washington, D. C., Roll 136, Drawer 2.  
Naval Historical Center, Archives Branch, Washington Navy Yard. Information on Bushrod Washington Hunter's Navy career.  
Rose, Cornelia B., Jr. *Arlington County, Virginia: a History*. Baltimore, Port City Press, Inc., 1976.  
Stephenson, Richard W. *The Cartography of Northern Virginia*. Fairfax County, Va., History and Archeology Section, Office of Comprehensive Planning, 1981.  
Stetson, Charles W. *Four Mile Run Land Grants*. Washington, D. C., Mimeoform Press, 1935.  
Templeman, Eleanor Lee. *Arlington Heritage*. The author, 1959.  
Templeman, E. L. "Not by Bread Alone", *Arlington Historical Magazine* (1958), p. 32-42.  
Information about Columbia Gardens Cemetery from Mrs. Ned R. Thomas.  
Wall, Charles Cecil. George Washington. Citizen Soldier. Charlottesville, Univ. Press, 1980.