



# Edward Hunter

## Generous Pioneer, Presiding Bishop

*Prior to serving as Presiding Bishop for 30 years, Edward Hunter opened the way for missionaries in Chester County, Pennsylvania.*

**BY LARENE PORTER GAUNT**  
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**W**hen the schoolhouse in Chester County, Pennsylvania, burned to the ground in 1833, wealthy Quaker Edward Hunter offered to replace it on land he would donate if residents “would allow all persons and persuasions to meet in it to worship God.”<sup>1</sup> This requirement was included in the articles of agreement for the donated land and building. The finished building was called the West Nantmeal Seminary.

Quaker and Scotch-Irish Presbyterian farmers populated Chester County, which is located about 12 miles west of Philadelphia. In the spring of 1839, Latter-day Saint missionaries Elijah H. Davis and Lorenzo Barnes arranged to use the West Nantmeal Seminary building to teach the gospel. When residents became outraged, Edward Hunter reminded them of the agreement made in 1833 allowing people of every religion to have the privilege of meeting there to worship God. He told the people that the “Mormons” would have

their rights or he would take the building back. Such were the circumstances that surrounded the first visit of the missionaries to the valley that would eventually become known as “Mormon Hollow,” circumstances that prepared Edward Hunter to be an advocate for these early Saints.

### **An Ancestor’s Influence**

Born on 22 June 1793 in Newtown Township, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, Edward Hunter was the second son and seventh child born to Edward and Hannah Maris Hunter (p. 227; see note 1 for complete reference). As a youth, he was strongly influenced by stories of his stalwart ancestors from England and Ireland. Of particular influence was the story of his second great-grandfather, Robert Owen of North Wales, also a man of wealth and power. Ancestor Robert was imprisoned for five years because he refused to take the oath of allegiance when Charles II was restored to the British throne. After his release, Robert immigrated to America and purchased land in Philadelphia amid other Quakers such as himself.

As an adult, strong-willed and tenacious, Edward Hunter was fond of referring to this incident in the life of his ancestor. He would tell the story and then end by repeating, “Oath of allegiance—yes, yes—refused to take it—imprisoned for five years.” Then, lifting up his hands, throwing back his head, and half shutting his eyes in a sort of dreamy ecstasy, he would exclaim, “Beautiful! beautiful!” (p. 228).

No doubt Edward drew upon this example of integrity shown by his ancestor when he stood firm in behalf of the Latter-day Saint missionaries in 1839.



PHOTO BY LARRY C. PORTER

**Remodeled into a home, the West Nantmeal Seminary building still stands in Chester County, Pennsylvania.**

### **Light Filled the Room**

Soon after the missionaries taught the gospel in 1839 in the West Nantmeal Seminary building, Edward heard that missionary Elijah H. Davis was going to speak in Locust Grove, a few miles away, and that there were plans to treat him badly. He mounted his horse and rode over to Locust Grove. Of Elijah Davis and his teachings, Edward said: “He was a humble young man, the first one that I was impressed was sent of God. . . . He spoke well on the subject [of the Atonement], but before he was through [Robert] Johnson interrupted him and ordered him to quit preaching. I sprang up and said: ‘He is a stranger and shall have justice shown him and be respected; we will hear him and then hear you speak.’ I was informed that there were many present opposed to the ‘Mormons,’ but I resolved as I lived that Mr. Davis should be protected, if I had to meet the rabble on their own ground. I kept my eye on them and determined to stand by him at the risk of person and property. I had friends, though Mr. Davis had none. Mr. J. Johnson, brother to Robert



**Orson Hyde (above) baptized Edward Hunter in 1840. Orson F. Whitney (below) wrote of Bishop Hunter’s honesty, generosity, and integrity.**



Johnson, came to me as I was going out and apologized for his brother's conduct. I walked out of the crowd, got on my horse and rode home alone" (p. 229).

After going home and retiring for the night, Edward lay awake for some time thinking about what had taken place. "My reflections were," he said, "why have I taken such a decided stand for those strangers, and I asked the Lord: 'Are those Mormons thy servants?' Instantly, a light came in the room at the top of the door, so great that I could not endure it. I covered my head with the bed-clothes and turned over to the wall. I had exerted my mind and body much that day and soon fell asleep" (p. 229).

### **Baptisms in Chester County**

On 8 October 1840, Edward Hunter was baptized by Elder Orson Hyde. Edward's wife, Ann, was also baptized. Of Edward's baptism, neighbor H. W. Vallette said, "I only felt that if a man like Edward Hunter, whose name was a synonym of upright probity, of sound sense and discernment, could be brought to believe in these things, what right had I or others of less understanding to . . . ridicule them."<sup>2</sup>

Hearts were softened among these Quaker residents, and soon about 200 were baptized, sometimes at the rate of eight to ten a week. The Prophet Joseph Smith stopped in "Mormon Hollow" for about two weeks in January 1840 in connection with a trip to Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. The Prophet spoke to the Saints at the West Nantmeal Seminary and stayed with the Hunter family. During the autumn of 1840, Hyrum Smith visited Edward. They attended conference in Philadelphia, and Brother Hunter "subscribed liberally to the building of the Nauvoo House and the Temple" (p. 229).

On a subsequent visit, Hyrum walked with Edward along the banks of the Brandywine River, and Edward

told Hyrum about the death of his young son George Washington Hunter. Hyrum taught him of the plan of salvation. This brought great comfort to Brother Hunter, who had been "devotedly attached" to his son. About a year later, Brother Hunter had a dream wherein he saw his young son. "In appearance he was more perfect than in natural life—the same blue eyes, curly hair, fair complexion, and a most beautiful appearance," said Edward.

Edward begged him to remain, but George said "in his own familiar voice" that he had many friends in heaven (p. 230).



**The original home of Edward Hunter is located not far from the West Nantmeal Seminary building.**

PHOTO BY LARRY C. PORTER

### **Exodus to Nauvoo**

Edward had found financial success from the time he was a young man because of his hard work and good business sense. But he was also generous. In September 1841 Brother

Hunter visited Nauvoo, Illinois, and purchased a farm and several town lots. He then returned to Chester County and sold two of his farms. In June 1842 the Hunter family moved to Nauvoo. Once there, he cheerfully donated \$7,000 in cash and nearly \$5,000 in goods to the Prophet Joseph for the building of Zion. He continued to donate generously, so much so, that the Prophet Joseph Smith told him he had done enough and to reserve the rest for his own use (p. 230).

In Nauvoo, as persecution against the Saints began to mount, Brother Hunter was arrested with others on the charge of treason and taken to Carthage Jail in June 1843. Now Edward had been wrongfully imprisoned as had his ancestor. Fortunately, the imprisonment was short, and all were soon sent free.

When the Prophet was put on trial in Springfield, Illinois, Brother Hunter was there. After the Prophet's acquittal, Edward offered his home to the Prophet as a place of safety. Loyal and devoted, Edward became one

of Joseph’s bodyguards. During this time, Brother Hunter enjoyed the confidence and friendship of the Prophet.

Among the revelations the Prophet received in the Hunter home were sections 127 and 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants concerning baptism for the dead. Of this time, Brother Hunter said, “The two years I was in Nauvoo with Joseph, it was one stream of revelations.”<sup>3</sup>

As a member of the Nauvoo City Council, Edward voted to put an end to the *Expositor*, a libelous paper created by apostates and enemies of the Saints to encourage mob

***Amid persecution in Nauvoo in late 1842, the Prophet found refuge in the Hunter home. From here he sent counsel to the Saints that included sections 127 and 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants.***

violence. Soon after the destruction of the press, the Prophet Joseph asked Brother Hunter to go to Springfield to represent the Church’s position to the governor.

“You have known me for several years,” said the Prophet to Edward. “Say to the governor, under oath, everything good and bad you know of me” (p. 230).

Brother Edward and two other men did so. They returned to Nauvoo late in the afternoon on 27 June 1844—about the same time Joseph and Hyrum were killed at Carthage Jail. Of the events following the Martyrdom, Edward wrote: “Next day, [Joseph and Hyrum’s] bodies were brought from Carthage to Nauvoo. We formed two



***Edward Hunter and his young family moved to a lush valley in Chester County, Pennsylvania, in about 1832. This area became known as Mormon Hollow because of the large number of Latter-day Saint converts living there between 1839 and 1846.***



PAINTING BY ROBERT T. BARRETT

lines to receive them; I was placed on the extreme right, to wheel in after the bodies, and march to the Mansion. As we passed the Temple, there were crowds of mourners there, lamenting the great loss of our Prophet and Patriarch. The scene was enough to almost melt the soul of man. Mr. Brewer, myself and others took brother Joseph's body in to the Mansion House. . . . At midnight [we] carried the body of Joseph from the Mansion House to the Nauvoo House, and put him and Hyrum in one grave. Their death was hard to bear. Our hope was almost gone, not knowing then that Joseph had prepared for the Kingdom to go on, by delivering the keys to the Twelve and rolling off the burden from his shoulders on to theirs" (p. 231).

#### Ordained a Bishop in Nauvoo

Five months after the Martyrdom, President Brigham Young, assisted by Elder Heber C. Kimball and Presiding Bishop Newell K. Whitney, ordained Edward Hunter a high priest. He was then set apart as a bishop of the Nauvoo Fifth Ward. When he was promised that he should "have power to raise up the drooping spirit," he felt simultaneously "a remarkable sensation thrilled through his

#### THE POSITION OF PRESIDING BISHOP

The Presiding Bishopric consists of three men—the Presiding Bishop and his two counselors—who make up one of the presiding councils of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These General Authorities, who each hold the office of bishop, serve in their positions under the direct supervision of the First Presidency. Since its formation, the Presiding Bishopric has been responsible for many of the temporal affairs of the Church. These have included involvement in receiving, distributing, and accounting for member tithes, offerings, and contributions; administration of programs to assist the poor and needy; design, construction, and maintenance of places of worship; and auditing and transferring records of membership. Men chosen to be Presiding Bishops have been recognized for their business and management skills as well as their religious commitment.

By scriptural designation the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the Presiding Bishopric constitute the Council on the Disposition of Tithes (see D&C 120). This council monitors the receipt of tithes and controls the expenditure of funds. It considers matters of financial importance and authorizes budgets for Church organizations and departments. (See Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. (1992), 3:1129.)

**Below: The current Presiding Bishopric: H. David Burton, Presiding Bishop (center); Richard C. Edgley, First Counselor (left); and Keith B. McMullin, Second Counselor (right).**



being, confirming the truth of the speaker's words" (p. 231).

Elder Orson F. Whitney wrote of Bishop Hunter's character: "Honest, straightforward in his dealings, and candid even to bluntness in his speech, his heart overflowed with kindness and he enjoyed the love and confidence of all. Childlike and humble, he was nevertheless shrewd and discerning. He was charitable and open-handed to all. . . . He was a great exhorter to

faithfulness, particularly in the payment of tithes and offerings. His familiar speech at the Bishop's meetings: 'Pay your tithing and be blessed,' has passed into a proverb" (p. 232).

When the Saints were forced from

Nauvoo, Bishop Hunter and many of the "Mormon Hollow Saints" left together in the spring or summer of 1846 and joined the main body of Latter-day Saints in Winter Quarters. Bishop Hunter had suffered from sickness in Iowa, but upon arrival at Winter Quarters, he again served as bishop.

#### Winter Quarters to Salt Lake Valley

As the hard winter of 1846–47 ended and the exodus to the Salt Lake Valley began, President Young appointed Bishop Hunter captain of 100 wagons. The



group arrived on 29 September 1847. Once in the valley, Bishop Hunter again served as bishop.

In the fall of 1849 President Young sent Bishop Hunter back to the Missouri River to supervise the immigration of the poorer Saints to Zion. Bishop Hunter played an integral part in the implementation of the Perpetual Emigrating Fund (PEF). Under the direction of the First Presidency and as a member of the PEF committee, he helped “set in motion the vast emigrating enterprise which has peopled with souls from two hemispheres the mountain vales of Utah” (p. 231). Bishop Hunter’s generous donation of \$5,000 of his own money literally helped build Zion.

On 7 April 1851, following the death of Newell K. Whitney, second Presiding Bishop, Edward Hunter was sustained as the third Presiding Bishop of the Church. At the time, “they were responsible for Church temporal affairs, for local bishops, and for stake Aaronic Priesthood quorums. Bishop Hunter met every two weeks with northern Utah bishops to coordinate efforts regarding public works, tithes, resources, immigration and immigrants, and the needy. However, the First Presidency, not the Presiding Bishopric, made finance and resource policy and called and released bishops.”<sup>4</sup>

Two years later, during general conference on 6 April 1853, he laid the southwest cornerstone of the Salt Lake Temple.

### Bishop Hunter’s Death

For 62 years Bishop Hunter watched over the temporal workings of the Church. He succeeded in his desire to magnify his calling in the Church and was a loyal and loving husband and father to his wife and children. He once said he hoped his life’s work was acceptable “in the sight of God and those who preside over me in this Latter-day work” (p. 232).

Bishop Hunter died on 16 October 1883 after a long illness. According to Elder Whitney: “His health had been feeble for a long time, though his mind was unimpaired, and for the last month he had frequently been absent from his office. Among those who visited his bedside during his illness were President John Taylor and Apostle Erastus Snow. So passed from this stage of action, where for over 90 years he had acted well and faithfully every part assigned him, a man of God as noted for his uprightness and integrity, as for his genial nature and overflowing kindness of heart. His memory will live as long as the great work with which he was identified, and which he labored so long and faithfully to establish” (p. 232). ■

### NOTES

1. In Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (1901–36), 1:228. Unless otherwise noted, all citations are from this source, and pages will be noted parenthetically in the text.
2. Letter from H. W. Vallette, in Earl H. Peirce, “Mormon Hollow” (Provo, Utah: 1999, photocopy), 6.
3. Susan Easton Black, comp., *Early LDS Membership: LDS Collectors Library* (Provo, Utah: Infobase, 1996).
4. In Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. (1992), 1:120.

***Bishop Hunter and the Mormon Hollow Saints spent the winter of 1846–47 together in Winter Quarters (top). In the spring, as captain of 100 wagons, Bishop Hunter traveled to the Salt Lake Valley. Later, he played an integral part in the implementation of the Perpetual Emigrating Fund (PEF), which helped Saints come by handcart and wagon train (below).***

