

The Hunton Family: A Narrative of Faith through Generations
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Stanton Hunton

After making three attempts to escape from slavery, Stanton Hunton finally convinced his owner to let him buy his freedom. He had been educated in secret by the mistress of the plantation. He traveled first to Washington and then north to Chatham, Ontario. After pioneering there for a year, he returned to the States to negotiate the freedom of his brother Ben in Mississippi. Ben returned with him to Chatham, but eventually died as a result of the difficult life and harsh climate.

Stanton was lonely and longed for a partner to share his life. To this end, he traveled to Cincinnati where he found a wife, a Mary Ann Conyer. A shrewd businessman, Hunton established himself as a brick layer who also owned several properties. He and Mary Ann had eight children who were kept busy with a range of chores, schoolwork and helping with their father's businesses.

Freed slaves and fugitives were drawn to Kent County for its rich soil and its reputation of being the Promised Land. For these reasons and the fact that Chatham was located strategically on the Underground Railroad, Chatham's population was one-third black by the 1850s. One notable member of this community was the physician and editor Martin Delaney (1812-1885). Delaney had worked with Frederick Douglas on his paper 'The North Star.' The abolitionist John Brown decided to make Chatham the base of preparations for his battle against slavery.¹ He arrived in Chatham in 1858 to raise

¹ Brown lived in a black community in North Elba, New York in 1849. The community had been established through the donation of Gerrit Smith who distributed forty acre plots to at least fifty families. In

support for the planned attack at Harper's Ferry in October 1859. Brown planned to help establish a black state in the Allegheny Mountains that would be a sanctuary for thousands of slaves who would run away from their owners when they heard about the attack.²

He took a few of the local Chatham men into his confidence including Martin Delaney, Issac Holden, part owner of a mill and the first black city councilor, J. M. Jones, as well as Stanton Hunton. Meetings and conferences were held in the church and in the homes of Holden and Hutton.³ Although the attack was a disaster for its participants and resulted in the hanging of Brown, it is believed to have had an effect on the unfolding of the Civil War.

William Alphaeus Hunton (1863-1916)

When the youngest Hunton son, William Alphaeus was four, his mother Mary Ann Hunton died. The household consisted of his father, grandmother, an older and younger sister, and six brothers. Nicknamed "the parson" by his siblings, William was a good

1855 Brown followed five of his sons to Indian territory in Kansas where he became the leader of antislavery attacks. See <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1550.htm>> accessed on July 27, 2006.

² The location of the constitutional conference is disputed. One account places it on May 8, 1858 with 46 delegates—34 blacks and 12 whites—who were gathered in the fire station of No. 3 "Coloured" Fire Company and another claims that the convention was held at a school for Black children on Princess St. in Chatham. Delaney did not think Brown's plan would succeed and only half of the group signed a resolution supporting Brown's plan to forcibly make Kansas a new terminus of the Underground Railroad instead of Canada and creating a new sovereign state there. See <<http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/delany/jbrown.htm>>. Accessed on July 27, 2006. Douglas did not agree with the plan Brown hatched to attack the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry. He warned Brown that he was walking into a steel trap that he would never survive. Ten of Brown's men were killed including two blacks and both of his sons), seven were captured, five had escaped. Brown was wounded and was taken with the other captives and executed.

³ Osborne Perry Anderson, a freed slave from Chatham, was the only Canadian in the raid and one of two survivors. Anderson escaped and subsequently described the failed attempt in the "Provincial Freeman," a newspaper published by Mary Ann Shadd of North Buxton, Ontario.

student who taught Sunday school at an early age; his father was one of his students. He finished high school and then graduated from the Wilberforce Institute of Ontario.⁴

Hunton took a teaching job at a high school in Dresden, Ontario but he nourished the hope that he might still have the chance to study for the ministry. After passing a government examination, he was appointed as clerk in the Department of Indian Affairs. While in Ottawa, he became a member of the Ottawa YMCA and was very interested in the work done by the YMCA in the United States to organize a Y for ‘coloured’ men. To this end, appeals for support were made before the International Convention in Montreal and the International Convention in Richmond, Virginia in 1875 and in Toronto in 1876. Henry E. Brown was appointed secretary of the International Committee for work among ‘coloured’ men. In 1886, members of the YMCA acknowledged Hunton’s excellent work in Ottawa and in 1888, appointed him as the black secretary for the Norfolk, Virginia YMCA.⁵

The leadership of the YMCA anticipated that Hunton would face challenges when he moved from Canada to a different racial context in Virginia. Dr. Brown asked: “Does he realize the very different relation he must in the South bear to the white from that which he now bears? Is he sufficiently consecrated to bear the change?”⁶ His “consecration”

⁴ The Wilberforce Institute had opened in 1873, incorporated by an Act of Parliament. The school was the product of a merger of the Nazrey Institute (1869) and the British-American Institute (1842) and was located on King St. beside the AME church. The school’s purpose was to educate youth, regardless of race, not just primary and secondary education but preparation for art, law, and medicine at the university level. The school also prepared students for teaching and commercial and business pursuits. Stanton Hunton was on the board along with Rev. Disney, Morris Potter, Issac Holden, Nelson Robinson, Nathaniel Murray, and Perry Chase. The school originally had 100 pupils, with 36 in the preparatory department and about 18-20 in the primary. The school owed its existence to the philanthropy of Charles Avery of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania who wanted to educate the Blacks of Canada and the United States. The teachers were the finest and included a Lillian Shreve, Dolly Scott, Vera Bently, Emma Fox, and Mollie Lewis. The building was erected in 1887 and demolished in 1952.

⁵ Addie W. Hunton, *William Alphaeus Hunton. A Pioneer Prophet of Young Men*. (New York: Association Press, 1938).

⁶ H.E. Brown to Mr. Kuhring, Secretary of the Ottawa YMCA, cited in Hunton, 15.

would be tested when he began to travel extensively in the South, but he also experienced culture shock on arrival at the Norfolk “Coloured” YMCA. A prayer group was already in place—Hunton, however, felt somewhat isolated from their practices, since the group expressed their spirituality in “an exuberance of emotion.”⁷ Hunton instilled in the Norfolk Y group a strong interest in Bible study; an interest which extended to the women’s auxiliary group. Meeting in rooms over a store, the YMCA offered a literary and debating society, education classes, a choral society, athletics, and a library. The class for Sunday school teachers cut across denominational lines in ways that were unprecedented. After three years in Norfolk, Hunton resigned in order to work full time for the International Committee of the YMCA.

When Henry E. Brown began his work in 1879, there were approximately five YMCA’s in historically black colleges. By 1896 there were sixty black associations, of which forty-nine were in colleges. Until 1933, student YMCA work among black colleges was administered by a “coloured” work department of the YMCA.⁸

At a convention held in 1892 by the “Colored Association” in Raleigh, North Carolina, delegates experienced “a deepening of spiritual life and an awakening of interest in Bible study.” The enthusiasm led organizers to consider new lines of work. College men needed some incentive to devote time to church and association work as laymen. Once students were encouraged to become student volunteers for Christian work at home, they might be persuaded to work in foreign missions. He wrote: “There is an evident need of some such effort. Are we striking out in the right direction? Is not our need akin to that which led to the volunteer movement for home work in India, etc.?”

⁷ Hunton, 1938, 20.

⁸ C. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 290.

Should such a movement be promoted by the Coloured Men's Department of our Associations, or under the auspices of the Student Volunteer Movement?"⁹

Hunton's YMCA responsibilities involved organizing conventions such as Atlanta's major interracial convention in 1914. Such an event required intensive planning and negotiations between white and Blacks interested in the event, including pastors, college presidents, and community activists. The resulting convention at Clark University brought together 600 hundred blacks and 60 whites¹⁰ John R. Mott, General Secretary of the World Student Christian Movement (WSCF) attended and gave the opening address.¹¹

Hunton graduated from planning the conferences to giving the keynote address-- Mott had invited him to be the opening speaker in 1907 at the WSCF conference in Tokyo. In 1913, he addressed the WSCF conference at Lake Mohonk, New York and shared his vision for an "all-inclusive brotherhood of man."¹² Hunton and other black delegates saw the conference at Lake Mohonk as a step forward. A major setback developed in the next year--Hunton became ill with tuberculosis. He spent two years at

⁹ Hunton to Mott, 21 Dec. 1897, RG 45, Box I, File 42, YDS.

¹⁰ C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the North American YMCA* (New York: Association Press), 419 states that the conference was attended by 600 blacks and 60 whites and was the first interracial gathering of this kind. John R. Mott opened with a speech on fostering right race relations. The purpose of the conference was not to raise issues but to get representatives of both races together in Christian fellowship. Mott was followed by Booker T. Washington who spoke about faith in the future of our race. Hunton notes that Black conventions resumed and that the American YMCA remained essentially segregated until after WWII, though by then it was far ahead of most churches.

¹¹ Wilson, *Fifty Years of Association Work Among Young Women, 1866-1916* (New York: Association Press, 1916), 272.

¹² Black delegates at Mohonk included the following men: Hope, Moton, Aggrey, Tobias, Jones and Hunton. Black women delegates included Merriman, Bond, and Pinyon. See "African Share in the WSCF," RG 46, Box 6, File 54, Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library, New Haven, CT (hereafter YDS).

Lake Saranac in the Adirondacks, presumably at the Trudeau sanatorium for TB patients, until his tragic and early death in 1916.¹³

Addie Waites Hunton (1875-1943)

Hunton's wife, Addie, was born in Norfolk, Virginia in 1875, the eldest of two daughters and a son of Jesse and Adelina (Lawton) Waites. Her father was a successful businessman and prominent resident of Norfolk, owner of a wholesale oyster and shipping company and partner in an amusement park for blacks. Jesse Waites helped found the black arm of the Elks (IBPOW) and was prominent in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Addie began school in Norfolk but while she was a young child, her mother died, and she moved to Boston to be raised by a maternal aunt. She received her high school education at Boston Latin School; then she went to Spencerian College of Commerce in Philadelphia where in 1889 she became the first black graduate. She taught school in Portsmouth, Virginia, for one year, then became lady principal at State Normal and Agricultural College in Alabama—now Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University.¹⁴

Addie met William A. Hunton in Norfolk and developed a friendship for at least three years that included many separations due to his travel. They wrote almost daily and finally married in 1893. For a time they lived in Norfolk where she taught in local schools and assisted Hunton in his work. They moved to Richmond, Virginia and then to Atlanta in 1899, where Hunton became secretary to the Y in Atlanta. Addie was the secretary and

¹³ On the Trudeau sanatorium, see Victoria Rhinehart, *Portrait of Healing* (Utica, N.Y.: North Country Books, 2002). Dr. Trudeau, pioneer of TB treatment and research died in 1915. His statue is located at Saranac, New York at the site of the Trudeau Institute.

¹⁴ "Addie D. Waites Hunton," *Notable American Women, 1607-1950*. Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 240-1. See also Jean Blackwell Hutson, "Addie D. Waites Hunton," *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*. Eds. Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston (New York: Norton, 1982), 337-8.

the bursar of Clark College in Atlanta. For more than ten years she provided administrative support for her husband, traveled with him to conferences, and advised him on many matters. No better training program could have been available for her future work with the YWCA.

Shortly after the Huntons moved to Atlanta, a violent lynching took place and then in 1906, Atlanta was shaken by violent riots. The violence had a deep influence on the Hunton family—they decided to move north to Brooklyn. Addie had been called “cultured, soft-spoken, and a great humanitarian,” but she could also be militant when necessary. While she was in Atlanta and later in Brooklyn, she spoke out fearlessly against injustice.

Addie was appointed secretary for YWCA work among blacks in 1907. She toured the South and Midwest in the winter of 1907-8. From 1910-11 she and her children studied in Europe while William Hunton continued his work at home. They spent several months in Switzerland and then in Strasburg where she completed courses at Kaiser Wilhelm University. After her return in 1910, she continued her YWCA activities and enrolled in courses at the College of the City of New York.

When the First World War began, Addie was a young widow with two teenaged children. In the summer of 1918, Addie volunteered for the war effort and sailed to France to become one of only three black women workers among two hundred thousand racially segregated black troops stationed there.¹⁵

After the war, she continued to be an active advocate for the YWCA and for a variety of organizations whose purpose was to empower black women. In 1943, Addie

¹⁵ Addie Hunton, *Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces*. (New York: G.K. Hall, reprint edition 1997).

Hunton wrote to Mott for help. She had planned to move to a smaller place but some promised help had not arrived and she needed a short term loan.¹⁶ Mott loaned her fifty dollars enabling her to move as planned. She thanked him in the following: “The strain was great and I have had to remain quiet since then. However, it is much the best for me in many ways.” She promised that as soon as she got on her feet she would repay the loan. Unfortunately, in April she had surgery and she died 22 June 1943.¹⁷

Her son William Jr. expressed his gratitude to Mott for his letter of condolence at the death of his mother. There is no indication that the son was aware of the loan or of his mother’s need for such a loan. He wrote: “If love and a worthy life are the keys to heaven, we know that mother has joined our father there, and it was that or which she passionately yearned above all else.”¹⁸

W.A. Hunton (1903-1970)

William Alphaeus Hunton Jr. was born on Sept. 18, 1903 in Atlanta, while his father served as the first black General Secretary of the Young Men’s Christian Association. When his parents moved to New York, William attended Boy’s High School in Brooklyn. Because his father had died in 1916, William worked as a porter for a few years to finance his education. He graduated from Howard University in 1924 and Harvard University in 1926. He was an assistant professor in English and Romance Languages Dept. at Howard after completing his Ph.D. at New York University on Tennyson.

Hunton attended the founding congress of the National Negro Congress in Chicago in 1936 and helped launch the Washington, D.C. branch of that organization. He

¹⁶ Addie Hunton to J. R. Mott, 3 Feb. 1943, RG 45, Box I, File 42, YDS.

¹⁷ Addie Hunton to J. R. Mott, 11 Feb. 1943, RG 45, Box I, File 42, YDS.

¹⁸ W. A. Hunton to J. R. Mott, 18 July, 1943, RG 45, Box I, File 42, YDS.

led campaigns to make the District budget serve the human needs of the community. The National Negro Congress sought to fight racial discrimination against black workers in the federal government, in industry as well as in health, education and housing. Hunton organized the NNC's third conference in Washington, D.C. He chaired the committee that drafted the NNC constitution and delivered a major address called "Negroes and the War," on nationwide radio. The NNC was a federation of 300 civic, religious, and fraternal organizations dedicated to the achievement of social, cultural, political and economic equality for blacks. During the Second World War, it was accused by the Dies Committee on Un-American Activities of attempted sabotage of the defense industry through the "infiltration of black communists" in the work force.

During a one year leave from Howard University, Hunton became the Educational Director of the Council on African Affairs in 1943. The following year he resigned his academic position and settled in New York with his third wife Dorothy Williams. He assumed the position of Executive Director of the CAA until its dissolution in 1955. He sought to educate the public about the history of Africa and its struggle against colonialism and imperialism. After refusing to submit records to the House Un-American Activities Committee, Hunton was jailed with three others for six months. The climate of suspicion was such that he was unable to resume his academic career in 1955 after the dissolution of the CAA. He published a book called *Decision on Africa* in 1957.

He was invited by the President of Guinea to immigrate to Africa. While teaching at a lycée there he accepted in 1962 an invitation to work with W.E.B. DuBois in Ghana. President Nkrumah had invited DuBois to Ghana to write a history of Africa and to this end, Hunton served as secretary of the Encyclopedia Africana Project. When Nkrumah

was overthrown, Hunton was demoted to area editor in 1965 and then expelled from Ghana along with his wife and other American expatriates. The project was abandoned. A year later Hunton and his wife returned to Ghana at the invitation from Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda. He began to work on a history and compilation of the nationalist movement in Zambia, under the sponsorship of the Kenneth Kaunda Foundation. Unfortunately, he was unable to complete this project; he died of cancer in Lusaka in 1970 at the age of 63.¹⁹

Eunice Roberta Hunton Carter (1899-1970)

The only daughter of William and Addie Hunton achieved some notable “firsts” in her life. Eunice was born in 1899 in Atlanta, Georgia. When her family moved north she attended public schools in Brooklyn and accompanied her mother when she did graduate work in Europe. Eunice completed her B.A. and M.A. at Smith College, graduating in 1921. Her mother urged her to become a teacher, but Eunice chose social work and practiced for eleven years in New York and New Jersey.

She was an aspiring author who submitted a number of articles and book reviews to an African-American journal that encouraged black writers called *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life*. During the 1920s, Eunice joined her mother in the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations. She married Lisle Carter in 1924, a native of Barbados and a dentist by profession. They had a son named Lisle Carter Jr. in 1926, who became a distinguished professor at Cornell University.

¹⁹ Inventory of the William Alphaeus Hunton Papers, 1926-1970, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York.
<http://digilib.nypl.org/dynaweb/ead/scm/schunton/@Generic_BookView>. Accessed August 16, 2006.
Hunton’s wife Dorothy wrote a biography of her husband. See Dorothy Hunton, “Alphaeus Hunton: the unsung valiant,” unpublished paper, 1986.

Eunice took night classes at Fordham University Law School and graduated in 1932. After making an unsuccessful bid for the New York state assembly, she was appointed by Mayor LaGuardia in 1935 to study racial conditions in Harlem. In 1935 she was hired by New York County District Attorney William C. Dodge as the first African-American woman District Attorney in New York State. She later worked for Prosecutor Thomas Dewey on investigation into organized crime—an investigation which led to the prosecution of Charles “Lucky” Luciano. As head of the Special Sessions Bureau, Eunice became one of the highest paid African-American attorneys. Smith College awarded her an honorary doctor of laws (L.L.D.). In 1945 Eunice returned to private practice and involvement with civic organizations like the NCNW. After her retirement in 1952, she continued work for the U.N. and for a variety of community organizations. She died of cancer in 1970, survived by her son Lisle, Jr. and five grandchildren, one of whom is the author and Yale law professor Stephen Carter.²⁰

Conclusion

The story of the Hunton is far from complete—there are more archives to visit and individuals to interview.²¹ However, even at this stage there are common themes and questions raised by this story that may guide future research. Such a remarkable family can only be understood within the context of family, faith, community, politics, and social relations as they were experienced by the black diaspora. Contextualizing this narrative will require an understanding of the role of the black church and black political

²⁰ Susan Puryear, “Eunice Roberta Hunton Carter, 1899-1970” unpublished paper, 2001. See <http://www.law.stanford.edu/publications/projects/wlhbp/papers0203/eunice.2002.pdf#search='susan%20puryear%20and%20eunice%20hunton'>. Accessed on August 23, 2006.

²¹ This paper is a work in progress. Please do not cite without the author’s permission. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Gwen Robinson, of Chatham Ontario whose enthusiasm for black history is legendary.

action as it was experienced by these generations from Ontario to Virginia, Georgia, and New York, as well as Africa. The concern with justice that was common to all generations was expressed in different ways and was mediated by expectations of gender, race, class and religious belief in each generation.

Narratives are a powerful pedagogical tool, particularly in Christian and religious education. Anne Streaty Wimberly articulates a method whereby Biblical images are linked through story to African American daily life in an intergenerational Christian education setting.²² The story of the Hunton family is one narrative that can be accessible to the African American community and to other communities who have been excluded from participation in the larger narrative as previously and exclusively shaped by Christian traditions rooted in European culture.²³

²² Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories. African American Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994). See also Yolanda Smith, *Reclaiming the Spirituals* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004) for an study of how the triple heritage of African American experience can be used as a resource for Christian Education. See also Anne Streaty Wimberly and Evelyn Parker, eds. *In Search of Wisdom* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002).

²³ See for example, Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng, "Pacific-Asian North American Religious Education," in Barbara Wilkerson, ed. *Multicultural Religious Education* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1997), 190-234. See also Jace Weaver, "Native Americans and Religious Education," in Wilkerson, 256-293.