



CAPTAIN JEFFERSON HUNT
of the
MORMON BATTALION

by
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CHAPTER 1

John Hunt, Father of Jefferson

Jefferson Hunt left the following record in three places, in the Nauvoo Temple, on the rolls of the Mormon Battalion, and on the High Priests' Roll:

"Jefferson Hunt born 20 Jan. 1803, Bracken Co. Ky.
Father, John Hunt. Mother, Martha Jenkins."

The name Jefferson is significant. Jefferson Hunt's parents were ardent admirers of Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, governor of Virginia, and in the White House at the time of Jefferson Hunt's birth. John Hunt had given the great Virginian's first name, Thomas, to a son born five years before Jefferson. John Hunt was active in public life, and a staunch defender of Jeffersonian principles, a double heritage which would pass on to future generations.

One wonders if the parents, as they gave this distinguished name of Jefferson to this their fourth son and eleventh child, had a presentiment that this infant would one day become a colorful character in the winning of the West.

Jefferson Hunt was born the year that President Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory. The following year Lewis and Clark began their great expedition. The United States, consisted of 16 states and five million people and was spreading rapidly westward.

Jefferson Hunt was scarcely three years old, toddling about his "wilderness home" in Kentucky, when many miles to the north in a snowbound cottage in Vermont, Joseph Smith, the infant, was placed in his mother's arms on December 23, 1805. This babe was to be the instrument in the Lord's hands in ushering in the Last Dispensation when the Gospel would be restored in its fullness to the earth.

The parents of Jefferson had lived a full life before his advent into their home. The birthplace of these parents is not yet authenticated, as they were settlers of the frontier, going ahead of the schools and of record-keeping. John Hunt gave indications of having had schooling, possibly in New Jersey.

Good evidence indicates this Hunt family was in Union County and Anson County in North Carolina in 1770. Hunt and Jenkins families were neighbors in Chesterfield County, South Carolina, where John and Martha did their courting, a courting which as delayed by the Revolutionary War.

John joined up with the famous militia of the Carolinas, participated in the battle of King's Mountain, where the British were practically annihilated. Then came the battle of Cowpens. General Morgan used the militia composed of backwoodsmen of the Carolinas to great advantage in this battle. So successful was his strategy that it was imitated in three successive battles.

After the victory at Yorktown, in the summer of 1781, John Hunt and his sweetheart, Martha Jenkins, were married in old Cheraw District, Chesterfield County, South Carolina.

Martha was a witty young lady, short and plump, with hair of reddish cast. She knew many a story of Morgan's raids and of Green's victories and of Marion's "Brigade" of swift horsemen and the panic they gave the British forces here and there. She had heard how Marion invited a British officer to take dinner with him, where he found the meal consisted only of sweet potatoes baked in ashes. After this feast the Officer resigned saying, it was useless to try to defeat such soldiers.

After their marriage John and Martha moved to Union County, South Carolina. Here three baby daughters came to bless their home, Jane, Nancy, and Frances.

On the 2nd of October 1786, John and Martha took a land grant of 200 acres, from Governor Moultrie located on the south side of the Tyger River in what is now Spartanburg County, South Carolina. It was probably Greenville County at that time.

John was sheriff of Greenville County until he moved away in 1794. Two more daughters, Catherine and Mary, were born to John and Martha in the new home built on the Tyger River. After five daughters it was time for a soldier man to have some sons. Martha truly rejoiced to present her sheriff husband with two fine baby boys, James born in 1792 and John two years later.

John was anxious to move on to new country. Friends from the 'old Cheraw District where John and Martha courted and married were going to Kentucky. ' Among them were the Blasinggames, the Moodys, and Charles and Christopher Hunt. Whether these latter were relatives of John's we do not know.

People moved on to new frontiers for various reasons, but it seems evident John Hunt had a desire to speculate in land and he loved adventure. John did not leave South Carolina empty handed. He sold his plantation of 200 acres for one hundred pounds sterling, as attested by a deed on record in the county court house at Spartanburg.

At this time settlers were crossing the mountains through the Cumberland Gap in a long line, like ants going to a dish of honey, some going to Tennessee and some to Kentucky. The Hunts and their company were bound for Kentucky. They left South Carolina and went on through Kentucky to settle near the Ohio River in Mason County, later Bracken County, Kentucky.

John was a trader, especially in buying and selling land. At least fourteen of his land transactions are recorded between 1800 and 1815 in Bracken County records.

On the 246 acres which he owned along Bracken Creek, he built his home. Here, soon after their arrival, an infant son Peter was born and died, probably in 1796. On June 9, 1797, Governor Gerrard appointed John Hunt captain of militia in the 15 regiment of Mason (Bracken) County. The same governor appointed him inspector of tobacco December 22, 1798. This was the year that a new son arrived, who was named Thomas in honor of Thomas Jefferson. This son was to bring honor the name in the state of Illinois where he served as a legislator. Thomas was the ninth child of John and Martha. A daughter Martha was the next born.

When the eleventh babe was placed in Martha's arms, she again felt the surge of mother love and was aware that with the coming of each child a deeper appreciation for all one's children is born in the souls of parents. Martha felt this babe had come endowed with exceptional vigor of mind and body, with a certain quality of being able to meet the battle of life.

With his maturing, Jefferson brought great happiness to his proud father who enjoyed the "leather" in the little fellow. Big brothers thought him a game child as he rode his pony like a young Indian. Big sisters revelled in this handsome baby brother with eyes so clear and blue, with clear skin and black hair. The most winning trait the child had, so the sisters thought, as his native gallantry to Martha, just older, and to the two younger sisters, Betsy and Esther. He was six years old when Esther was born and how he enjoyed the role of big brother.

Kentucky had been admitted to the union in June 1792, as the 15th state, two years previous to the coming of the Hunt family. Bracken County was in the Blue Grass area. The Hunt

plantation of 264 acres was located on Bracken Creek within a few hours' ride by horseback from the great Ohio River. By the time Jefferson was old enough to enjoy the view of the great river it was being used for "down-river trade." His eyes opened with wonder at the great flatboats with their huge and varied cargoes. Bordering the river were great forests of elm, oak, ash, and hickory trees.

The school which Jefferson attended must have been much like that which Abraham Lincoln, six years younger than Jefferson, would attend down in Hardin County to the south-west of Bracken County. It was called a "blab" school because the teacher expected the pupils to repeat the lesson aloud as they studied and he moved about the room with whip in hand to whip those who were silent. The spelling book was the first book used. The pupils learned to spell the book through several times before they began to read.

The school house was a bare log building with unchinked cracks, built upon a slope, high enough upon one end for hogs to rest under the floor and fill the place with fleas, a situation only partly remedied by the pennyroyal which the pupils brought in by the armful and tramped upon in the aisle. The benches were of puncheon and had no backs, and the legs projected upward through the surface of the seats.

The teacher read from the Bible, from Pilgrim's Progress, Aesop's Fables, and Weems' Life of Washington. All children were expected to learn to write a legible hand.

It was a great day for young Jefferson when he was permitted to accompany his father as he attended to his duties as county road supervisor. The Indian trails were being turned into roads. In swampy grounds thousands of logs were laid to make a corduroy road. Where the road descended into a shallow stream logs were laid across, their ends just outside the wagon tracks. Forked sticks were hooked over these and driven deep in the ground to hold the