

RANSOM HUNTER FOUNDATION

HONORING HIS LEGACY OF VISION,
HARDWORK AND ACHIEVEMENT

Ransom Hunter's Official Biography (1835–1918)

Land Developer, Community Planner, Entrepreneur, Farmer, and Preacher

Ransom Hunter was born in January 1835 in Gaston County, North Carolina, to Mike Johnson and Julia (Judie) Hunter, both North Carolina natives. His early years were spent in River Bend Township, Gaston County. The specifics of his birth status—whether enslaved, free, or indentured—remain undocumented.

Civil War Era

During the Civil War, records suggest Ransom was conscripted when Confederate General Edward Alexander's detachment sought horses in North Carolina. He served as a contractor, re-shoeing and caring for horses in Tennessee, according to U.S. Army Quartermaster records and his 1916 military pension application (where he used the names Ransom Crocket).

Post-War Entrepreneurship and Community Building

After the war ended in 1865, Ransom used his earnings to open a livery stable on Hawthorne Street, applying his farrier and blacksmith skills. He sold and rented draft horses, then expanded his enterprises by purchasing land.

Ransom envisioned a safe haven for former slaves and established the community of Freedom in Gaston County, North Carolina. This land, initially called "Rock Grove" due to its rocky soil, was transformed by employing residents to remove rocks, which he sold for road construction. The land then became suitable for farming and building homes.

Much of what is now downtown Mount Holly, North Carolina, stands on land once owned by Ransom Hunter. His name appears in the 1913 Act passed by the North Carolina General Assembly to amend the Town of Mount Holly.



RANSOM HUNTER FOUNDATION

HONORING HIS LEGACY OF VISION,
HARDWORK AND ACHIEVEMENT

Ransom Hunter Biography

Agricultural and Business Success

Ransom cultivated corn, cotton, scuppernong grapes, and orchards of peach, pear, and fig trees. He produced jellies and preserves for sale at the Freedom general store. His business portfolio grew to include a second livery stable in downtown Mount Holly (opened in 1886).

Between 1874 and 1914, he acquired 30 land deeds and over 1,920 acres in Lincoln and Gaston counties—an extraordinary achievement for a Black man in this era. He sold land to future mayors and local business leaders, and his real estate transactions directly contributed to the development of Mount Holly and Gastonia.

Ransom co-invested in the Mount Holly Manufacturing Mill and held shares in the First National Savings & Loan Association of North Carolina. The Mount Holly Manufacturing Mill, built on land he purchased in 1874, is Gaston County's oldest surviving mill.

Community Leadership and Education

Ransom Hunter played a central role in community life. He donated land for Gaston County's first public school for Black children after Emancipation—the District 12 Colored School—serving on the five-member Public School Committee formed in 1887. He also built and helped establish two churches in the Freedom community.

Family and Personal Life

Ransom's first wife was Rebecca (McCrorie), with whom he raised a large household documented in the 1870 and 1880 censuses. After Rebecca's passing, he married Maggie Wells in 1890. Their children were Elmina (Mena) and Torrance. Maggie's daughter from a previous relationship, Mary Frieda, and her granddaughter Johnsie, were also part of the household at various times.



RANSOM HUNTER FOUNDATION

HONORING HIS LEGACY OF VISION,
HARDWORK AND ACHIEVEMENT

Ransom Hunter Biography

Later Years and Death

Ransom Hunter remained in River Bend Township throughout his life. He died at home on September 24, 1918, at the age of 83, with arteriosclerosis listed as a secondary cause of death. He was buried at Mt. Sinai, survived by his wife Maggie and his children.

Legacy

Ransom Hunter's life spanned slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the dawn of modern America. He built a community, created opportunities for Black families, and left a legacy of land, education, and leadership that continues to inspire in Gaston County and beyond.

