

# The Legacy of Charles Hunt

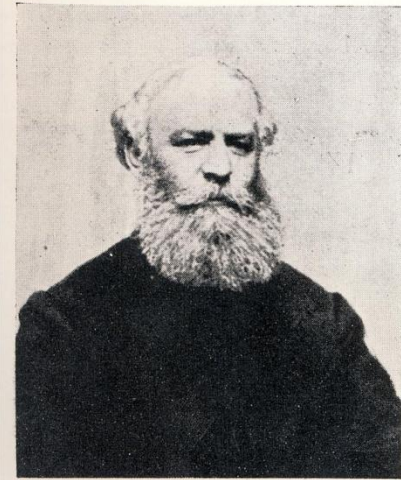
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1820-1871

One of London's most prominent businessmen of the 1850s and 1860s

**Jay Hunt**

3/28/2016



THE LATE C. HUNT, 1861-62-69.

Charles Hunt was born on March 5, 1820 at Motcombe, Dorsetshire England the oldest of three brothers. His father died when Charles was 6. At age 8 he completed his only year of schooling. At 9 he began a nine year apprenticeship in milling, baking & retail grocery businesses at Stalbridge in southern England. In 1842 he sailed from London to the USA. He worked briefly on an uncle's farm near Cleveland before moving to in what was to become Windsor in November of that year.

He began working for James Dougall, one of the most prominent businessmen in Windsor. There he learned the

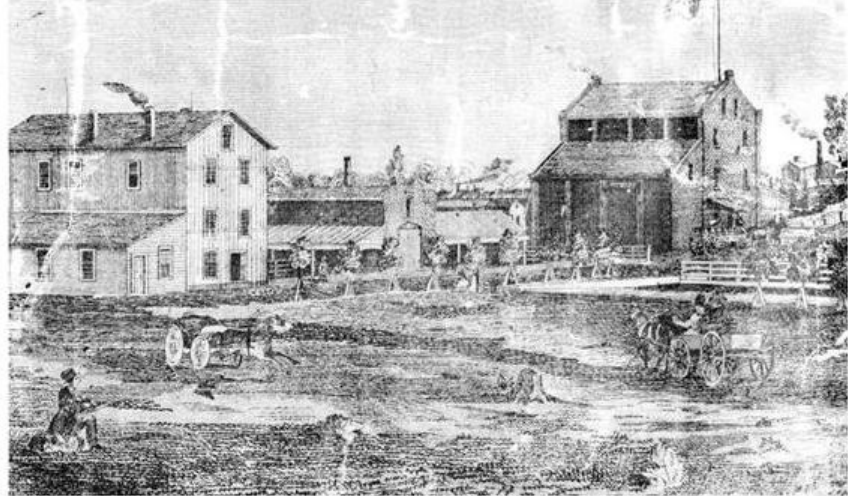


James Dougall

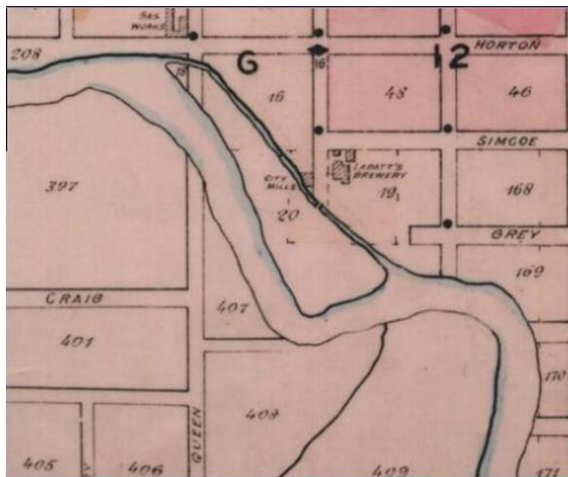


meat packing, shipping and purchasing businesses, building a slaughterhouse and a cooperage at Mr. Dougall's dock on the bank of the Detroit River.

In 1845, he met and married Emma Brewer, niece of Samuel and George Brewer who owned a farm on the Talbot Road just west of St. Thomas that was formerly the home of Dr. John Rolph, a prominent Canada West politician. As a wedding gift he was deeded the farm and ran it until 1847 when he returned to Windsor. For the next several years, he undertook a number of business ventures, including lumber forwarding, contracting and land speculation. Among other things, he built a Great Western Railway depot, a dock, a freight house and a bridge.



In 1853, Charles decided to relocate to London and bought land from John Kinder Labatt between his brewery and the Thames River. In 1854, he commenced building City Mills on the property, completing it the following year.



In 1855 he began building a dam across the Thames, just below Richmond Street, diverting water from above the dam, along a mill race to power the mill, the tail race returning the water to the river just below Ridout Street.

In 1856, the Hunt Dam was completed and in Charles' words "one that is likely to stand for ages".

That same year, he divested himself of his Windsor businesses and properties and relocated permanently to London.



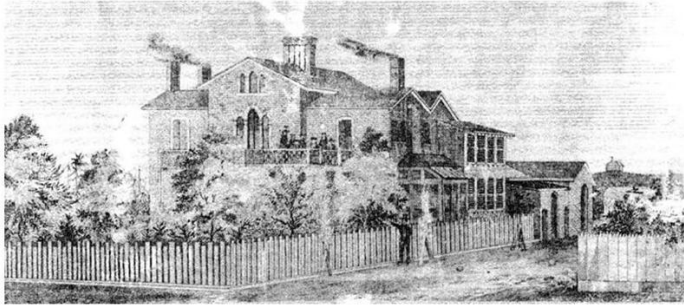
British Bank of North America

Next, he won a tender to construct a new building for the Bank of British North America. It was completed the following year at the south-east corner of Richmond and Queen Streets.

He also received a contract to build a 750 ton steamship, the 'Union' for the Great Western Railway as a ferry to run between Windsor and Detroit, "one of the strongest and best vessels ever built in the upper lakes". It was completed in 1856.



Steamship Union built by Charles Hunt 1856



Charles Hunt's Residence 'Ingledene' 50 Ridout Street

In 1857 Charles purchased a large home across the Thames River from City Mills from Thomas Craig, a stationer and bookseller. It had never been lived in and came fully furnished (It had reportedly been built for one of Thomas Craig's daughters), He named it 'Ingledene' and moved his growing family into it.

He built a cooorage on the City Mills property to manufacture his own barrels for the mill, cottages for his workers, and a granary for storing grain. The mill opened using four pairs of stones for grinding wheat, with a capacity of around 100 barrels of flour a day.



City Mills with Head Race & Foot Bridge to Ingledene

Charles undertook many varied enterprises, anywhere he thought a small profit was to be had. He purchased wheat locally and in the United States and shipped the refined flour to the UK and Europe. He and his son John Inkerman Alexander operated a retail store in the Hunt Block on Richmond Street where he sold flour and other staples.

He also received and completed a contract to rebuild an old steamer, 'Transit'.

In 1858, he purchased the Erie Mills saw mill which quickly became profitable.

In 1860, he built a wooden foot bridge across the Thames, between City Mills and Ingledene to facilitate travel between them. In his own words "we find it very convenient. It cost about \$800. Would not be without it for twice the sum."



Charles and Emma attended a gala ball for the visiting Prince of Wales and as Vice-President of the London Board of Trade presented him with a signed declaration. As church warden he helped refinance St. Paul's Cathedral's debts.

In 1862, he purchased land at the foot of Talbot Street and

closed off access through his orchard, because he was concerned about public traffic using his private foot bridge. Local residents sued to have it re-opened. His initial court win was overturned by a subsequent Ontario appeal and he was forced to re-open access.

In 1864 Charles was appointed Director of the Great Western Railway and in 1865, Chairman of the newly formed City Oil Company. City Oil drilled a number of wells, including one at the foot of Dundas Street which returned only sulphur water.

In 1866 he built a block of offices centred around 361-3 Richmond Street in downtown London which became known as “The Hunt’s Block”. His expanded businesses included commissions, wholesale and retail groceries, lumber, firewood and coal.

In 1867 he built a 70,000 bushel grain elevator at the foot of Bathurst Street.

For the next four years Charles Hunt’s business ventures continued to prosper in spite of numerous setbacks although his health began a slow decline. He died on October 2, 1871 in New York City while travelling to the West Indies for his health.

Charles Hunt held many prestigious appointments in the London financial and commercial community during his brief life:

- president of the Board of Trade in 1861–63 and 1869–70,
- chairman of the group that briefly operated the London City Oil Refining Company in 1866–67,
- first president of the City Gas Company (now part of the Union Gas Company) from 1864.
- director of the Bank of British North America
- president of the Ontario Loan and Debenture Company
- director of the Great Western Railway (1864–69),
- director of the Detroit and Milwaukee Railway (later the Detroit, New Haven, and Milwaukee Railway) in 1863.
- An Anglican, he was a warden of St Paul’s Cathedral in 1861–62 and 1864–65.

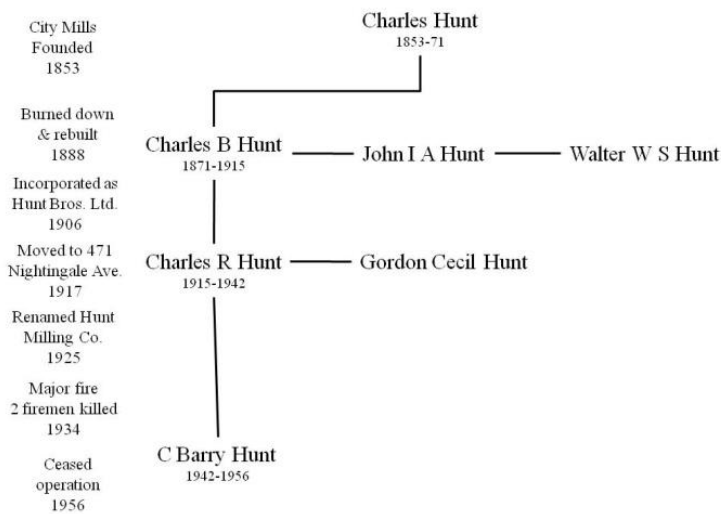
Charles was well known for his charity in the city. Among his many charitable acts, he:

- supported a missionary in the north of the diocese of Huron in 1861
- provided flour for the poor
- helped to arrange the shipment of cheap wood during a firewood shortage in 1867
- built a public skating rink in 1863 on Horton Street at the site of what later became the London Arena.



Hunt's City Mills, c. 1910.

The various Hunt enterprises continued in operation for 86 years following his death. Around 1880, the Hunts became the first millers in London to introduce the more modern, higher capacity roller process for milling wheat. In 1888, the original wooden City Mills building burned to the ground. A new more robust building was erected in its place.



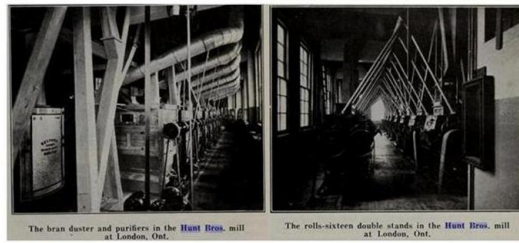
The wooden footbridge over the Thames was torn or burned down in the late 1800s.

The Hunt enterprises were incorporated as Hunt Bros. in 1906. They were operated by his sons Charles Brewer, John Inkerman Alexander, and Walter Willliam Shakespeare.

Following Charles Brewer's death in 1915, his son Charles Riches took over the company and ran it with his brother Gordon Cecil.



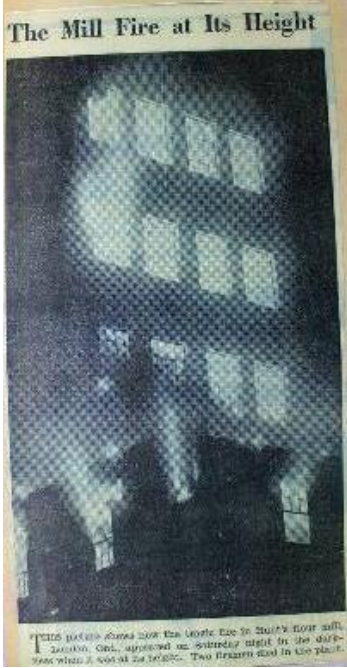
In 1917, Hunt Bros. Flour moved from the old City Mills location to a new plant at 471 Nightingale Avenue in London East to take advantage of cheap hydro electric power. Hunt Bros. Flour Mill Ltd. was the tallest building in London until 1936. It had a capacity of 1,200 bushels per day



In the 1920s, the City Mills property was acquired by the London Public Utilities Commission. The former mill building was used for years as a shop for PUC painters and carpenters until it was demolished in 1957.

In 1925, Gordon Cecil left the company and Charles Riches became its sole proprietor, renaming the enterprise the Hunt Milling Company.





On March 3, 1934 it suffered a major fire in which two London firemen lost their lives. The building was restored using materials from the original building and still stands today.

In 1934, Ingledene was torn down and replaced by the Boug Apartments

Following Charles Riches death in 1942, his son Charles Barrington Hunt took over the company. During World War II it shipped vast quantities of flour abroad to supply allied army needs. He ran the company until the mid-1950s when he sold it to a group of employees. Hunt Flour ceased operation in 1957.



Charles' youngest son, Albert Ontario, specialized in the emerging technology of electricity. After working for six years in Montreal for the Royal Electric Company, he returned to London to be superintendant of the Hunt Bros. owned London Electric Company. London Electric won a contract to install electric street lights in the City from 1909-1912. He then served 20 years as Assistant General Manager of the London Public Utilities Commission under E V Buchanan until his death in 1932.

In the early 1930s he oversaw the rebuilding of the Hunt dam as part of sanitary sewer infrastructure project conducted by the city as work stimulus program during the great Depression.



The original dam was curved inwards toward the water flow, a common practice of the day to give the dam strength. The new, straightened dam was built exactly on top of the old one using the latest techniques and materials. Albert Hunt wanted to ensure that the dam would be “one that is likely to stand for ages”.



In 1935, following the death of A O Hunt's widow Annie, the Hunt family acquired a burial plot at Woodland Cemetery. It is situated on top of a hill adjacent to the Labatt family monument. The family constructed a large underground crypt and relocated moved the remains of Charles Hunt and his family into it. A large granite monument was erected next to it and inscribed with the names of those buried there.

Sadly, all branches of the Charles Hunt family have died out except for that of Albert Ontario Hunt. He raised five sons to prominent positions in Canada and the United States and his descendants now extend to the 7<sup>th</sup> generation.