

**DESCENT FROM CAPTAIN ROBERT HUNKINS (1738-1818):  
MILITIAMAN IN THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR;  
MILITIA OFFICER IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR;  
EARLY SETTLER OF VERMONT**

Robert Hunkins (1738-1818), m.1769 Lydia Chamberlin (1746-1831); parents of  
Lydia Hunkins (1772-1846), m.1794 Nathan Atwell (1766-1844); parents of  
Phebe Atwell (1806-1889), m. Johnson Robinson (1806-1878); parents of  
Artelisa Adelia Robinson (1837-1892), m.1859 Chauncey Brewer Crocker (1838-1924); parents of  
Cora Ella Crocker (1860-1937), m.1889 Fred Scott Whitney (1863-1891); parents of  
Mertie Belle Whitney (1889-1964), m.1928 Ralph Burton Wimble (1903-1995); parents of  
Robert Whitney Wimble (1933-2023), m.1960 Helen Eileen Abrahamson (1927-1990); parents of  
Carol Ruth Wimble (living), m.1984 David Jay Webber (living); parents of  
Catharine Helen Webber (living), m.2016 Andrew Paul Soule (living); parents of  
Mary Luella Soule (living).



## CAPTAIN ROBERT HUNKINS, AND FAMILY

From *A History of Bradford, Vermont*, by Rev. Silas McKeen  
(Montpelier: J. D. Clark & Son, Publishers, 1875), pp. 201-09.

Captain Hunkins, one of the earliest settlers of this town [Bradford, Vermont], was universally esteemed an upright, kind hearted, and truly worthy man. His farm was on the Connecticut River, in the north-east part of the town. There he long lived, and on the 1st of April, 1818, died in the eightieth year of his age. The farm is now (1868) occupied by his grandson, Asher Emerson Hunkins. For most of the facts constituting the following sketch, I have been indebted to Mrs. James Abbott, of Newbury, a grand-daughter of the Captain.

Robert Hunkins was born in Haverhill, Mass., January 13, 1739. While he was quite young, his father, John Hunkins, moved with his family to Hampstead, N. H., where both he and his wife [Ednah (Hastings) Hunkins] not long after died, leaving five children, of whom Robert was the oldest. He was taken to live with Captain – afterwards General – [Moses] Hazen. When some sixteen or seventeen years of age, he went with Captain Hazen and his company into what is now called “the old French and Indian war,” then fiercely raging between the French and Indians on one side and the English North Americans and British Government on the other.

Hazen and his men were sent to strengthen the force at Fort William Henry, on the northern shore of Lake George. That fort, after a brave defense, was taken by the French commander, Montcalm, in 1757. The English who survived the slaughter were carried by the French and their savage allies into Canada as prisoners, and were there treated with great severity. Hunkins seeing two Indians dragging away his friend, Captain Hazen, ran up, with a fellow soldier, behind them, and gave them so violent a push as to break their hold on Hazen, who escaped; but the young men fell into the hands of the savages, and by them were carried off, instead of their Captain, into the enemy’s country. But to what place in particular, or how long they were held as prisoners, is not now definitely known. The time however, is believed to have been over six months.

The Indians, Mr. Hunkins said, took away most of his clothes, and at night would tie his hands behind him, and require him to lie down between some two of them, who were charged with his safe keeping. One night he succeeded in getting his hands loose, and was not long in untying the hands of his fellow prisoner. They softly crept away, ran down to the shore, got into a birch-bark canoe, and pushed off to some other point, so as not to be tracked. On coming to land again, they broke a hole in the canoe and sank it, then hid in some hollow logs that happened to be near. They were, however, pursued, and the Indians several times the next day came to the very logs in which they were hid, but without discovering them. At night they started again, and got beyond the reach of their pursuers. Mr. Hunkins said when he escaped he had no hat or shoes, in fact no garment but his shirt, and that with

one sleeve missing! What they could find in the woods had to suffice for food until they reached a Dutch settlement, where a kind woman refreshed them with buttermilk, and gave him an old hat without a brim. Pressing on through difficulties and humiliations, they finally reached in safety their friends at home, who had long been waiting anxiously for them. When Mr. Hunkins was twenty-one years of age, he went on to a farm which had been owned by his father, in Hampstead, and married Phebe Emerson, of that town, as the wife of his youth. He remained there a few years, when he came to Newbury, Vt., then almost a wilderness, and commenced labor on a river lot which subsequently became the fine farm of Colonel Moody Chamberlin. He had been there but a short time when a man came after him with the sorrowful tidings that his wife was dangerously sick, when he took the messenger's horse and with all speed set out for home. For most of the distance there was but a bridle path, and that so full of obstructions that he left his horse by the way, and pursued his journey on foot. When he reached home he found to his grief that his beloved wife was dead, and that the friends were just then returning from the burial.

He returned to Newbury, having disposed of the first lot taken up, purchased another about a mile North of it, where the road now turns off to go to West Newbury and Topsham. In due season he married for his second wife Lydia Chamberlin, of Litchfield, Conn. She had previously come from her native State, with some friends, to visit her relatives in Newbury. Their journey was in the Winter, and most of it on the frozen river. She was glad to reach her uncle Chamberlin's, but in that early stage of the settlement found everything so different from what she had been used to, that she hardly knew how to stay, even for a night. She soon, however, began to like such a rustic manner of life much better than she expected; and was employed during the Summer in teaching a school, though she had never been to school but one half day in her life. By her own efforts she had made good progress in reading and writing, and was somewhat acquainted with arithmetic. Great things, in those days, were not expected of teachers in the new settlements. Her uncle Chamberlin kept a ferry between Newbury and Haverhill[, N. H.], and, as there was no looking-glass in the house, when the school mistress and her lady cousins dressed for meeting on pleasant Summer mornings, they were accustomed to go down to the ferry, step into the flat-bottomed boat, and look over on the water to see that their toilets were properly made. The smooth surface of the water furnished a splendid mirror, larger, too, than the rich, even now, can show in any of their parlors.

When Mr. Hunkins and wife commenced house keeping in Newbury, the friendly Indians about there were very plenty, and almost every night several of them would come and sleep on the floor of their only room. Mr. Hunkins had also a lot of land in Bradford, then called Moretown, on which he had erected a temporary habitation. The house stood on the bank of the Connecticut, on the extreme margin of the bow now comprising Johnson's and Hunkins meadows, and he lived there part of the time. The river has since so worn away the Vermont side that the foundation of his chimney may now, when the water is low, be seen near the New Hampshire shore.

Several men of Newbury, and the vicinity, on account of their active exertions in the Revolutionary cause, had become so obnoxious to the royalists that bounties had been offered for their arrest and delivery to any of the British commanders, and strenuous efforts were made to seize them. Captain Hunkins was one who had been thus honored. On this account, for months he dared not sleep in his own house, but lodged in any shed or other out door place where he supposed he could with safety; changing often from one place to another, to elude the vigilance of his enemies. Mrs. Hunkins said that many times the Tories would come in the evening and look in at the window, to see if her husband was at home, and that when she was going to bed with her children she would set the ax near her, resolved that if they meddled with her she would use it upon them to the extent of her power. The situation of the family in Moretown at length became so trying that they thought it best to return to their place in Newbury for a while, where there were more inhabitants in whom they could place confidence.

But even there they were not long at ease. For some time, either before or after this, Capt. Hunkins was away in the Revolutionary army, and his wife and daughters had to work on the farm, as well as in the house, and take care of themselves as best they could.

In the autumn of 1780, when the Captain was at home again, a scouting party came in saying that the Indians and Tories were coming in strong force to destroy the place, and would be there before morning. There was, of course, great alarm, and immediate efforts were made to get the women and children across the river to Haverhill, A foggy and dark evening was upon them. The men were resolved to stay and defend the place. Their only means at hand for taking their families across the river were dugout canoes, and but few of them. Capt. Hunkins hastily constructed a raft of boards, and, while taking over his first load of passengers, his wife, with an infant son in her arms, was left with others, anxiously waiting for his return. At the second passage she with so many others had come on to the raft that it was overloaded, and before they could get over was found to be in the utmost danger. The Captain asked the man assisting him if he could alone bring the raft to shore, if it were lightened. He thought he could. "Then, Sister Eaton," said he, "you and I must take our chance in the river." She knew that he was a strong swimmer, and trusted in him for help. The case was urgent; no time for deliberation. He plunged into the water. She, like a brave woman as she was, quickly followed him. Their feet would touch no bottom. He, acting with great self-possession and energy, succeeded not only in keeping her head above the water, but in bringing her to the desired shore, where the whole party, to their unutterable joy, soon found themselves in safety. The women and children were so numerous as to throng the houses of their Haverhill friends. Beds, compared with the number of visitors, were few, but as the farmers had brought their corn into their houses, to be husked by their firesides, fine accommodations were found among the husks on the floor. Mrs. Hunkins said she got a large pumpkin and sat on it, with her baby, for awhile, when one of the older children cried, and, while attending to that, some one of the sleepers accidentally kicked her seat into

the fire, so that she was obliged during the rest of the night either to stand or to take her lot among the rest in the husks.

The enemy were really coming, as had been expected, but learning that the men of Newbury had been forewarned and were ready for them, went off in some other direction, to plunder, burn, seize captives, and commit other acts of violence upon the patriotic people where ever they could. It was just about that time that Royalton[, Vt.], was devastated by the Indians and Tories, and numbers of the people murdered or carried into captivity.

The day after the fright at Newbury, the women and children were brought again to their homes, rejoicing in the happy deliverance which they and their brave protectors had experienced. Capt. Hunkins and wife returned to their farm in Bradford, and there long lived to enjoy peace and competency as the fruits of their early perils, hardships, and sufferings, and when satisfied with length of days quietly passed away, cheered by the hopes and consolations of the gospel, leaving a very respectable posterity, who have ever cherished their memories with sincere respect and filial affection. Mrs. Hunkins, who was universally esteemed a pious, strong-minded, excellent woman, died Jan. 26, 1831, at the age of 85 years. She was the "Mother in Israel" who related to her then youthful pastor, the writer of this article, the interesting and true story subsequently published by the American-Tract Society under the title "The Worth of a Dollar." The Deacon M. therein referred to, was Dea. Murray, of, I think, Orwell, Vt.

Capt. Robert Hunkins and his first wife, Phebe Emerson, had one son and two daughters, all natives of Hampstead, N. H., namely.

- 1 John, who married Mary Norris, of Newbury, and died at Fletcher, Franklin County, Vt., Feb., 1844.
- 2 Sarah, who married Nicholas Stevens, of Bradford, and died here in March, 1857.
- 3 Betsey, who married Samuel Miller, of this town, and died at Johnson, in Lamoille county, Vt., in 1839.

Capt. Hunkins and his second wife, Lydia Chamberlin, had five sons and three daughters, most of them natives of Newbury ; the others of this town, namely.

- 1 Moses, born in Newbury, married Hannah Seagel, of that town; removed to Harmon, St. Lawrence county, N. Y., where in 1870 he was still living.
- 2 Lydia, born in Newbury, married Nathan Atwell, and died at Johnson in this State, in January, 1846.
- 3 Robert H., born at Newbury, married Hannah Emerson, of Hampstead, N. H., and died at New Berlin, Wisconsin, in 1853.
- 4 Phebe, born in this town, died here in September, 1861, at the age of eighty-four years. She remained through life unmarried.

- 5 Asher, born in Newbury, Jan., 1780, married Jane Emerson, of Boscawen, N. H., in 1805. They lived on the old homestead in Bradford, where she died October 25, 1827, at the age of forty-six years. They had four children. Their eldest daughter, Phebe H., born February, 1807, was married with James Abbott, Esq., of Newbury, April 18, 1865, where she resided for a few years, and then, after her husband's decease, returned to her native place, and resides with her brother, Asher E., being interested with him in the ancestral estate. Lydia, her sister, born October 9, 1811, died December 14, 1838, at the age of twenty-seven years. The next child, a son, died in his infancy. Asher Emerson Hunkins, born January, 1823, married Miss Sarah E. Rowe, of Bradford, and occupies the good old farm which was cultivated by his grandfather, nearly one hundred years ago. Where the venerable old family residence of Captain Hunkins long stood, a commodious two-story dwelling, recently erected, and finished in modern style, now appears, and the natural scenery around has lost nothing of its early freshness and beauty by the lapse of years. Mr. Asher E. Hunkins and wife have, at this date, two sons, Thomas A., born October 31, 1862, and James Frank, born June, 1865. Their eldest son, James H., died in his infancy. I now go back to say that Mr. Asher Hunkins, in the year 1833 married for his second wife Miss Hannah Martin, of Newbury, with whom he happily spent the evening of his life, and died in March, 1863, in the eighty-fourth year of his age. His worthy widow, in great feebleness, was most kindly cared for by Mr. Asher E. and his good wife till she died, August 30, 1872, at the age of eighty-three years. In the principal cemetery at Bradford, their remains, with those of many of their kindred, await the resurrection unto life.
- 6 Benjamin Hunkins, M. D., the next son of Captain Robert, was born at Newbury, in January, 1782. Having studied his profession, he married Miss Drusilla S. Everett, of Lancaster, N. H., successfully practiced medicine there for many years, and in that place died December, 1868, in the eighty-seventh year of his age.
- 7 James Hunkins was born in Bradford, in June, 1784; he was an industrious farmer, an honest, kind-hearted man, who never married, but remained on the old home place in quietness and contentment until, by a shock of apoplexy, in November, 1855, his earthly course was suddenly terminated in the seventy-second year of his age.
- 8 Susan, the youngest member of this family, born in Bradford, August, 1787, married Samuel Chamberlin, of Troy, Vt., and lived for a number of years at Stanstead, Canada East, where she died in July, 1870, in the eighty-third year of her age.

It is understood that the several members of this large family of Captain Hunkins, who married, had families of their own; but of their children, except in the case of Mr. Asher Hunkins, I have had no definite information; and indeed, in most cases, no occasion to speak particularly. So far as we have ever heard, they have been estimable citizens wherever their lot in life has been cast. And to the writer it is a very grateful realization that Captain Robert Hunkins and his second wife, and



their daughter Phebe, and son Asher, with both of his wives, all now gone to their final rest, and Mrs. Abbott, still living, were all beloved members of the church long under his pastoral care, and gave so satisfactory evidence of being true members of the household of Faith, and heirs of the Great Salvation.

