

**HUNTER-DAWSON STATE HISTORIC SITE
GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN
PREAMBLE
2020**

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:

The Hunter-Dawson house and the period outbuildings on site are illustrative of the lifestyle of a southeast Missouri merchant/entrepreneur prior to the Civil War. William Hunter and his wife Amanda Watson Hunter planned the house, but William died in April of 1859 before construction could begin. The house exhibits Georgian, Greek Revival and Italianate architectural features and took nearly a year to construct, being finished in May of 1860. The widowed Amanda and her seven surviving children moved into the house, which was occupied continually by her descendants until 1958.

William Hunter originally emigrated from Virginia to Potosi, Missouri, moving to New Madrid in 1833. Here he went to work at a fur trading post operated by Robert Goah Watson who had operated the business as early as 1805. This post was one of the few businesses that remained to be rebuilt after the New Madrid earthquake of 1811-12. In 1836, William Hunter married one of Robert Watson's daughters, Amanda. The marriage would produce nine children, seven of which would live to adulthood.

William worked for Watson until Watson's death in 1855. Upon the death of Robert Watson, William, on behalf of Amanda, inherited one-half interest in the store and other property. William expanded his holdings to include approximately 15,000 acres in three states. Hunter also owned a substantial amount of land in and around New Madrid and became a major financier for individuals purchasing land in town. The family enslaved thirty-six people, who contributed substantially to the family's financial success and operations of various enterprises.

After William's death, Amanda and her brother continued to run the family's enterprises, which included the store, a gristmill and a lumber mill. Through the extension of personal credit to many people in the area, the community of New Madrid retained some semblance of solvency during the Civil War.

During this conflict, life in New Madrid changed drastically. Although distinctly Southern in its character, the town was divided by Union and Confederate sympathies. During the Battle of Island No. 10 and the Siege of New Madrid, Union troops incited many of the slaves to riot. To date, no documentation has been found to show a direct involvement of this site in these actions, but their impact on the whole region cannot be denied. The Hunter family and their home survived the war relatively unscathed. William Colson Hunter, a son, returned unharmed from fighting for the Confederacy. And, thirty-six enslaved people were emancipated, which directly impacted the slave-owning Hunter family economically. The family, like the nation, recovered and returned again to its farming and business operations.

Five slave houses were present on the Hunter farm in 1860. The location of the slave houses are unknown, since only one-fifth of the original farm has been preserved. After emancipation, a former slave named Phyllis, appears in the 1870 census with the family. Today, a room in the back ell of the house is interpreted as Phyllis' room.

On Christmas Eve, 1874, William and Amanda's youngest daughter, Ella was married to William Dawson. Among the Dawson family ancestors were Francois LeSieur, one of the two French traders to settle New Madrid originally in the 1780s and Pierre Antoine Laforge, who served as a French interpreter at Fort Celeste after the Spanish succession. Upon Amanda's death in 1876, the house was left to Ella and William Dawson who lived there until their deaths. While in residence, William served three terms in the Missouri State Legislature and in 1884 was elected to the United States House of Representatives and served on the planning committee for the 1893 World's Fair Exposition in Chicago, Illinois.

The house, as the core of the farm, still reflects the grand lifestyle enjoyed by the successful Bootheel merchant/entrepreneur prior to the Civil War. The relatively "unchanged" condition of the house was most likely due to the fact that it remained in the same family over the years. Adding to the significance of the site is the collection that came with it. The state received the vast majority of Amanda's original furnishings. The documentation that survived and remained with the family adds to the importance of the collection. It is also believed that the site possesses the largest *in situ* collection of Mitchell and Rammelsburg furniture in the nation.

MISSION STATEMENT:

The Mission of the Hunter-Dawson State Historic Site is to interpret the culture within the Missouri Bootheel as represented by the Hunter and Dawson families in middle- to late- 19th century Victorian America. This will be accomplished through the preservation and interpretation of original structures and landscape features; and the conservation, preservation and interpretation of the site's history and collection.

APPROVED BY:

Director, Missouri State Parks

Date

Regional Director

Date

Deputy Regional Director

Date

Facility Manager

Date

DRAFT