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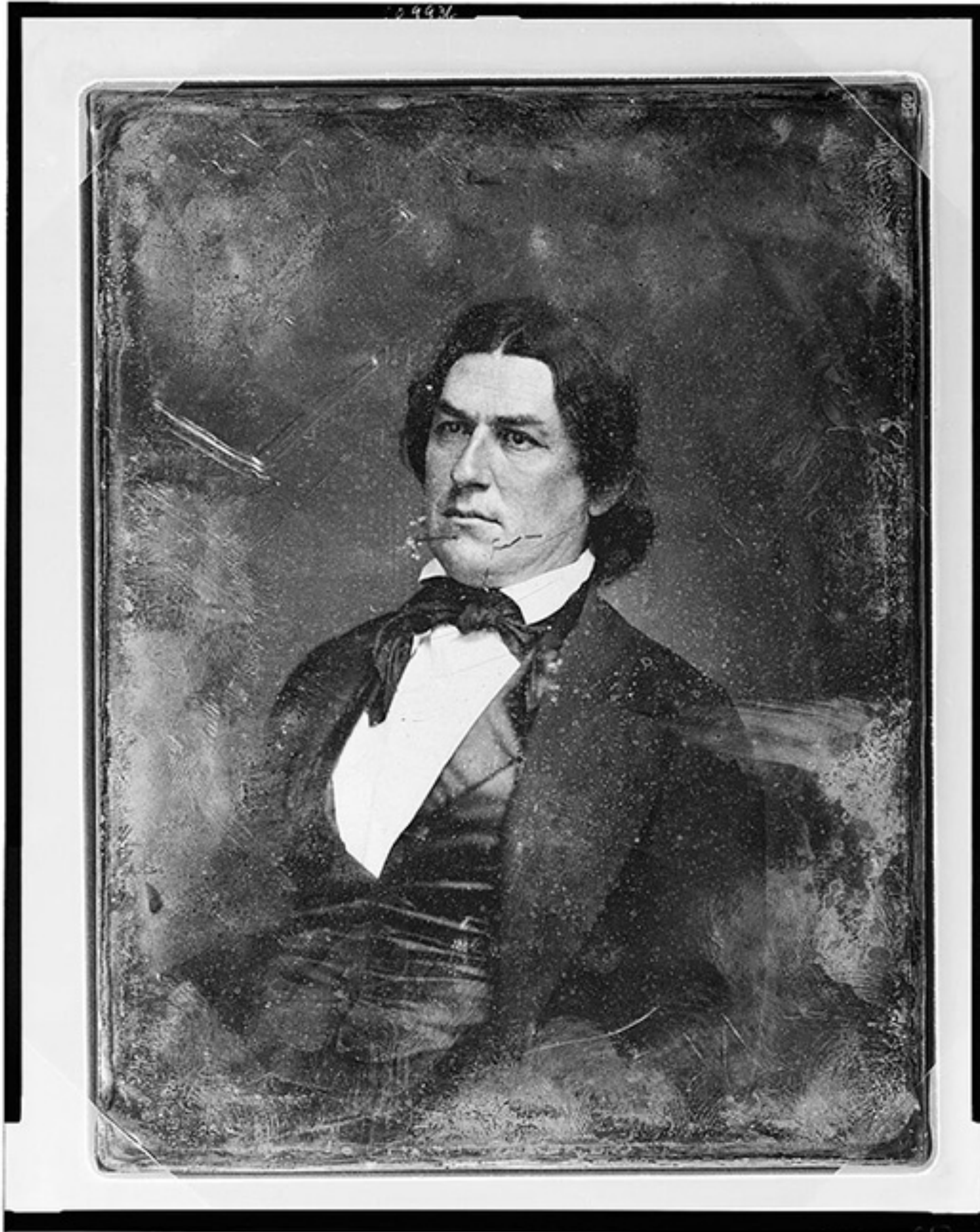
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Robert M. T. Hunter

Robert M. T. Hunter was born on **April 21**, 1809, at "Mount Pleasant," Essex County, Virginia. Educated at home, he attended the [University of Virginia](#), graduating in 1828. Hunter was admitted to the bar in 1830 and set up a legal practice in his native county, which later became his political base.

In the U.S. Congress he emerged as a major spokesman of the Democratic party's states rights faction. Although his erudition and conservatism gave an appearance of moderation to his position, Hunter remained uncompromisingly pro-slavery and pro-Southern.



[R. M. T. Hunter...](#) [Senator from Virginia]. Mathew Brady's studio, [between 1844 and 1860]. [Daguerreotypes](#). Prints & Photographs Division

First elected to public office in 1834 as a member of the Virginia House of Delegates, Hunter was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1837, serving from 1837-43 and again from 1845-47. While in the House, he was elected speaker in the 26th Congress, the youngest member ever to serve in this office. Congressman Hunter worked successfully to return Alexandria County (later known as Arlington County) to Virginia from the District of Columbia.

Hunter supported [John C. Calhoun](#) for president, writing a campaign biography of Calhoun in 1843 titled the *Life of John C. Calhoun* (New-York, Harper & brothers, 1843), which presented a condensed history of political events from 1811 to 1843. Elected to the Senate in 1846, Hunter was reelected in 1852 and 1858, resigning his seat in March 1861 prior to the secession of Virginia.



[The United States Senate, A.D. 1850](#)/drawn by P.F. Roethermel; engraved by R. Whitechurch. Philadelphia, Pa; John M. Butler & Alfred Long, c1855. [Popular Graphic Arts](#). Prints & Photographs Division

A strong proponent of state rights, Hunter was a member of the "Southern Triumvirate" with Jefferson Davis and Robert Toombs. In 1861 he was elected to the Confederate Provincial Congress and served for two years as the Confederate secretary of state, prior to serving in the Confederate Senate as senator from Virginia from 1862 to 1865.

In 1865 Hunter, alongside Alexander Stephens and John A. Campbell, was appointed a peace commissioner charged with negotiating a settlement with the Union. Hunter, Stephens, and Campbell met with [President Lincoln](#) and U.S. Secretary of War William H. Seward on February 3, 1865, on the Federal steamship *River Queen*, which they boarded at [Fort Monroe](#), Virginia. This letter from Thomas Eckert to the commissioners provides safe passage through Union lines to meet with the president.

Gentlemen.

I am instructed by the President of the United States to place this paper in your hands with the information that if you pass through the U. S. Military lines it will be understood that you do so for the purpose of an informal conference, on the basis of the letter, a copy of which is on the reverse side of this sheet, and that if you choose to pass on such understanding, and so notify me in writing, I will procure the Commanding General to pass you through the lines, and to Fortress Monroe, under such military precautions as he may deem prudent; and, at which place you will be met in due time by some person or persons for the purpose of such informal conference. And further that you shall have protection, safe-conduct, and safe return, in all events.

Thos T. Eckert.

[Thomas T. Eckert to John A. Campbell, Alexander H. Stephens and Robert M. T. Hunter, February 1, 1865](#) (Hampton Roads Conference; with copy of Abraham Lincoln's Jan. 18, 1865 letter to Francis P. Blair Sr. on verso). Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833-1916. [Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress](#). Manuscript Division

Two weeks later, the mayor of [Charleston, South Carolina](#), [surrendered](#) the city to the Union Army. One month later, General Lee evacuated Richmond and [surrendered to General Grant](#) at the village of Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia.

As with many members of the Confederate Congress, Hunter was imprisoned at Fort Pulaski, Georgia, before returning to Virginia. He was active on the Underwood Convention of 1867 and 1868 that drafted the new Virginia state constitution. Hunter held the office of state treasurer from 1875 to 1880 and was appointed by President Grover Cleveland to the post of collector for the port of Tappahannock. Robert Hunter died on July 18, 1887, at his estate "Fonthill."



[Fonthill, State Route 631 vicinity, Champlain, Essex County, VA](#). Documentation compiled after 1933. [Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscapes Survey](#). Prints & Photographs Division

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