James Walton "Jim" Hunter died in Houston, Texas, on February 4, 1984, of heart failure after a short illness. He was born on the family ranch in Fruita, Colorado, on December 28, 1897. He was the son of James Baker Hunter and Emma Vosburgh Hunter, and had one brother and two sisters. His father, along with several other family members, had come west via the Overland Trail, and after many adventures, had become a pioneer settler in the Grand Valley of Colorado in the early 1870s. Jim, often quoting his father who claimed that “life on the Hunter Ranch was a little bit of heaven on earth,” wholeheartedly agreed. Life on the ranch was one round of tremendous activity. James Baker believed that men or mules should never be idle, so winter work was done as well in spite of cold weather. Young Jim was involved in coal mining, cattle feeding, hauling hay and sugar-beet pulp for livestock feed, in addition to tending the 30 acres of fruit trees his family had as their main crop. Water was scarce there, then as it is now, and Jim spent much of his boyhood helping his father with the irrigation ditches that supplied the water so vital to their crops.

However, life on the Hunter Ranch was not all work and no play. In a letter to his granddaughter, Julie Benson, Jim said,

The young people who grew up in my community had a part in so many opportunities for wholesome activity, helping with harvesting, riding good horses, swimming, hunting, going to High School on the Interurban trolley to Grand Junction and being at all times close to nature. I always made myself useful around the ranch but enjoyed everything my situation had to offer. I have always considered myself so fortunate to have grown up where I did.

Jim graduated from Fruita High School in 1915. He stayed on the ranch one year and then entered the University of Colorado at Boulder in the fall of 1917. He joined the United States Marine Corps in July 1918, and served on the USS New York in the Marine Guard until his discharge in July 1919, after World War I was over. Coincidentally, his ship docked at various Mexican and Caribbean island ports near where he was later to be stationed as a geologist. Interestingly, his decision to become a geologist was made while riding home on the train after his discharge from the Marines. He related the story to friends and family many times.

I was riding on the train and idly gazing out the window to pass the time. Now and then the train would pass through “cuts” in the mountains, and I could see the different layers of rock formations plainly. Although I had lived around these things in the mountains all my life, I had never really noticed them before. Now they fascinated me. I decided then and there that I would go back to college and find out all that I could about geology and make it my life’s work.

Jim Hunter fulfilled this vow. He returned to the University of Colorado and graduated first in his class in geology in 1923.

While in college, he played football and joined Delta Tau Delta fraternity, to which he was a faithful and loyal member for the rest of his life. He more or less worked his way through college (as times were bad at the ranch) by waiting on tables at various sorority houses on campus and at other odd jobs. After graduation, he went to work for Standard Oil of Indiana. When this company merged with Standard Oil of New Jersey, he was kept on and remained forever grateful. He often said that he couldn’t believe the company was paying him to do something that he dearly loved so much, and that sometimes he felt he should have been paying them. All his life, he was a good “company man” and said that he “always made it a policy to accept ALL transfers.”

Right after college, he was sent to Mexico where he worked around the Tampico area and did reconnaissance work in Baja California as well as in Nicaragua. When he first reported to Mexico, he traveled by train, which in those days took no little amount of time. He used to laughingly recall this first trip into Mexico.

I was on this train with nothing to do and struck up a friendship with three rather charming elderly Mexican ladies since they were the only other people in my area of the train. I could speak rather halting Spanish and they knew even less English but somehow we managed to play bridge for the entire three day trip. So I learned to play bridge and speak Spanish just as if I had been thrown into an icy mountain lake without knowing the first thing about swimming. It was either “sink or swim” but I did my best.

He remained a bachelor for some time, but on June 14, 1932, he married Lucel Klingman whom he met in Tampico. She was there visiting her sister, Clementine Klingman Clower (Mrs. Charles McGee Clower), whose husband was the assistant manager of the Creole refinery. Both couples had looked forward to participating in the fabulous social life enjoyed by members of the American Colony in foreign countries—parties galore at the country club and in people’s homes, lots of bridge and golf, “dressing for dinner,” etc. Everything was lovely for just three weeks when the company transferred the Hunters to McAllen, Texas, where they lived almost untouched by the great depression. The sisters never had the pleasure of being anywhere together for very long in the succeeding