

Southern New Hampshire University

In Search of a Father

Alexander Hamilton and His Father Figures

A Capstone Project Submitted to the College of Online and Continuing Education in Partial
Fulfillment of the Master of Arts in History

By

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Abstract

Alexander Hamilton has long been considered a controversial founder. His political and economic beliefs polarized a new nation. Due to his controversial nature, Hamilton's childhood circumstances were brought to public attention by his adversaries. These childhood experiences would shape not only Hamilton's political career but would also shape the relationships he built with prominent and influential men and how he interacted with them. This paper aims to reconstruct the relationships Alexander Hamilton had with George Washington, Philip Schuyler, and James Hamilton Sr. in order to deconstruct the impressions of a father/son relationship. This paper will review the impact childhood abandonment can have on adulthood relationships within the colonial context.

Dedication

For Mom and Dad

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Preface

“How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten spot in the Caribbean by providence, impoverished, in squalor, grow up to be a hero and a scholar?”¹ This was my reintroduction to Alexander Hamilton in 2016. Prior to this, he was just a name I heard in passing in my middle school, high school, and undergraduate history classes. I could not tell you a single thing he did. But the *Hamilton* musical came into my life just as I was about to begin my master’s degree program in the summer of 2016 and suddenly, I was curious about everything to do with Hamilton. Ron Chernow’s 2004 biography, the very biography that led to the creation of the musical, was instrumental in peeling back the layers of time that separated Hamilton from the present. Alexander took shape before me, a man of immense charisma, talent, and flaws. But I wanted to understand why. Why did Hamilton want nothing more than to be a military martyr? Why did Elizabeth Schuyler attract him? Why did he almost never talk about his difficult past? Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton was critical in ensuring her Hamilton’s story was told, yet we do not have the multi-volume biographies that some of his contemporaries, like Washington and Jefferson, have.

Many historians of the founding generation are often questioned whenever a new publication emerges. People will ask, *is there really anything we do not already know about these men? Why do we need to care about dead, white men?* The answer is not always simple to the latter question, but to the former I propose a question to you; do your friends and family really know everything there is to know about you? The answer, unless you share every detail of your life with those closest to you, is likely no. In a day and age where social media breaks down

¹ Lin-Manuel Miranda, “Alexander Hamilton,” 1, in *Hamilton: An American Musical*, New York: Hamilton Uptown, LLC with Atlantic Records, 2015.

barriers between what is for public consumption and what is private, is anything ever really private anymore? The same applies to the men of the founding generation. What has been left behind by them varies, yet they primarily left behind what they considered to be important documents or letters, and less of personal information.

In his critically acclaimed Broadway musical, *Hamilton: An American Musical*, Lin-Manuel Miranda asks, “who lives, who dies, who tells your story?” It is up to us, present day Americans in particular, to tell the still remaining mysteries within the lives of the men we consider to be our Founding Fathers. For Alexander Hamilton, understanding his childhood experiences has been relatively elusive to historians. With a lack of letters surviving, every detail and thought will likely never be known, but in the two hundred fourteen years since Hamilton’s death a wide array of Hamilton’s accomplishments has been documented by historians. Yet, historians have generally neglected Hamilton’s childhood and the influence it held on his formation of relationships with older men.

Hamilton’s life will not be told from beginning to end, for a complete analysis see some of the many biographies cited. Instead, his life will be told in a series of direct interactions with George Washington, Philip Schuyler, and James Hamilton. Certain events and important contributions are therefore briefly alluded to if in direct correlation to the aforementioned people.

A brief note on eighteenth century grammar, in hope of providing as much as possible about Hamilton’s, Washington’s, and Schuyler’s thoughts, I have maintained the original spelling, punctuation, and syntax in quotations from their writings.

Acknowledgments

There are many people that made this work happen. First and foremost, my family for their endless support and encouragement, despite endless hours of writer's block and self-doubt. Specifically, I thank my mom for being my constant sounding board throughout my entire education and indulging me even if she did not always understand what I was talking about. I thank my dad for being the one to encourage and foster a love of history from an early age, and for putting up with my need to go to historic reenactments. To Susanne Bardsley, Olivia Bowman, and Bethan Archer, for their countless days and nights of encouragement, reminders to stay on task, comic relief, and lending an ear when I needed it most – thank you.

Second, without my professors at my alma mater, the University of North Carolina at Asheville, I never would have believed I could do something with history. Thank you to Dr. Ellen Holmes Pearson and Dr. Darin Waters, for their endless support, encouragement, and belief that this project was something worth pursuing. Thank you both for making your classes incredibly interesting, putting up with my repeated enrollment in your classes, and taking the time after I graduated to still meet with me. I wish you both could be there to see me walk again.

Third, thank you to Jessie Serfilippi at the Schuyler Mansion in Albany, NY for her insight and guidance, and to Liz Covart at the Ben Franklin's World podcast for opening my eyes and ears to sources and historians I otherwise would not have been exposed to. A huge thanks to the National Archives Founders Online collection for making my research process just a little bit easier.

Finally, to Lin-Manuel Miranda and the entire cast and company at *Hamilton* for reminding me that history can still be new and exciting.

Introduction

Alexander Hamilton. My name is Alexander Hamilton, and there's a million things I haven't done. But just you wait, just you wait.¹

-Lin-Manuel Miranda as Alexander Hamilton

Childhood is considered one of the most formative periods in a human being's life. The experiences one faces in childhood has a direct and profound impact on that person in adolescence and adulthood. A man's childhood in the eighteenth century was traditionally one of work and education. A man's journey to adulthood varied greatly depending upon economic and social status, with work being the one factor consistent between the wealthy and the poor.² Alexander Hamilton encompassed a belief that a young man could better himself through both work and education. Caroline Cox and Darcy Fryer describe the general colonial belief that by age twelve children were old enough to enter into formal apprenticeships; it should be unsurprising that some boys would find the day-to-day monotony unappealing of whatever their apprenticed trade happened to be. "The pension records that exist for boy soldiers, sparse in quantity and detail, nevertheless remind us that children of varied backgrounds for varied reasons were actors in the most tumultuous events of their century, and grew to experience the vivid changes their revolution had wrought."³

¹ Miranda, "Alexander Hamilton."

² Caroline Cox and Robert Middlekauff, *Boy Soldiers of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 8, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost (accessed August 28, 2018).

³ Cox, 10, 156.

As a young man, Hamilton sought a life of education as either a way out of his current circumstance or as a way to better himself for the future. However, Hamilton had also previously desired military service as a means of freeing himself from being a merchant's apprentice. He wrote to Edward Stevens, a childhood friend, at the age of fourteen, expressing these desires.⁴ For Hamilton, this period in the late 1760s, was often lonely and difficult. Abandoned by his father and left effectively orphaned after the death of his mother, Hamilton's childhood experiences shaped him into the man he would become, but also left him with a need to prove himself. The experiences of abandonment, heartbreak, desire, ambition, and a profound sense of purpose that would determine the steps he took and the relationships he built throughout his life.

The relationships Hamilton pursued have been divided into three distinct but interrelated chapters. The first chapter discusses colonial interpretations of childhood and covers a partially biographical analysis of Hamilton's childhood and life on St. Croix. Placing Hamilton's childhood within the context of the greater colonial belief of the role of a child and how that role varied upon geographical location, allows for a better understanding of what environmental and social factors contributed to his pursuit to make a name for himself. Through the use of personal correspondence and familial revelations, Hamilton's childhood, in primarily his words, can be placed within the context provided from the colonial interpretations. Secondary source research provided by Hamiltonian biographers such as Ron Chernow, Harold Larson, John C. Miller, Samuel Smucker, Broadus Mitchell, Robert Hendrickson, and Richard Brookhiser will supplement and provide historiographical insight. All of these historians attempt to make sense of the uncertain origins of Hamilton's life, but they approach it in different ways. Smucker's

⁴ Alexander Hamilton to Edward Stevens, November 11, 1769, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 3.

documentation of Hamilton's childhood is basic at best, providing a general overview of his parents and what they experienced prior to meeting.⁵ Brookhiser quickly advances through Hamilton's earliest years, encapsulating birth to immigration in one chapter.⁶ Broadus Mitchell and Robert Hendrickson spend most of the beginning of the book vehemently arguing Hamilton's birth year than spending it on the facts of Hamilton's early life. John C. Miller and Ron Chernow, though, are different from the other historians mentioned because they take what facts are known of Hamilton's early life and expand upon them. Likewise, Miller remarked upon Hamilton's awareness of his ability and his situation and how that put him into the company of men who "by intelligence and industry rise superior to their station in life."⁷ Of all of these historians, Chernow delved the deepest into Hamilton's past.

The next three chapters reflect upon the relationships Hamilton had with George Washington, Philip Schuyler, and James Hamilton, Sr. The first of these three chapters will center on Hamilton's relationship with Washington. Hamilton's earlier biographers equated the relationship between Hamilton and Washington as one of father and son, while his later biographers discussed this father/son relationship as predominantly one-sided. Lin-Manuel Miranda alludes to the father-son relationship of Hamilton and Washington in *Hamilton: An American Musical*.⁸ In fact, Miranda mocks it. During the musical, Hamilton's and

⁵ Samuel Smucker, *The Life and Times of Alexander Hamilton* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter & Company, 1858), 25-29, Internet Archive, accessed August 27, 2016, <https://archive.org/details/lifetimesofalexa02smuc>.

⁶ Richard Brookhiser, *Alexander Hamilton: American* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 13-29.

⁷ John C. Miller, *Alexander Hamilton and the Growth of the New Nation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Harper & Brothers, 1959), repr., Transaction Publishers, 2004, 4.

⁸ Lin-Manuel Miranda, "Meet Me Inside," 16, in *Hamilton: An American Musical*, New York: Hamilton Uptown, LLC with Atlantic Records, 2015.

Washington's disagreement over Hamilton receiving a field command reaches its fever pitch following Hamilton's participation in a duel, against direct orders, with General Charles Lee. Washington, in an attempt to reason with Hamilton, repeatedly calls him "son." Hamilton, in turn, shuts Washington down at every turn, replying harshly and with more anger and frustration at each reference "I'm not your son."⁹ The song ends with Washington ordering Hamilton to go home to his wife and unborn child. Miranda's mocking of this relationship stems from historian's discussion of Washington and Hamilton's father-son relationship and the disagreement of whether it was a father-son relationship or not. The fact Washington continues to call Hamilton "son" and ignores Hamilton's repeated claims that he is not Washington's son throws the audience into the middle of the fight and leads them to believe Hamilton did not view himself as a surrogate son to Washington.

In order to understand why there are two interpretations where Washington and Hamilton are concerned, this chapter will introduce a short biographical analysis of Washington to determine why he would pursue younger men with promise to bring into his "family." Using Hamilton's and Washington's letters to one another, as well as their referencing each other in letters to other people, will aid in the understanding of how Hamilton and Washington perceived each other and the nature of their relationship.

The second of these three chapters focuses upon another apparent father figure in Hamilton's life, his father-in-law Philip Schuyler. Hamilton courted and married Schuyler's second daughter, Elizabeth, in December 1780. This chapter will discuss and interpret Hamilton's introduction to the Schuyler family, his relationship with Philip and the rest of the

⁹ Miranda, "Meet Me Inside."

family, and how Hamilton's and Schuyler's relationship differed from Hamilton's and Washington's through the language used addressing each other. Hamilton's relationship with Schuyler was important to the political and social well-being of Hamilton and his family.

The remaining chapter will encapsulate the nature of Hamilton's relationship with his father, James Hamilton, Sr. Although James abandoned Hamilton's mother, Rachel and their two sons, Hamilton remained in occasional contact with his father throughout his adolescence and adulthood. Hamilton attempted to pursue some sort of a relationship with his father and kept him informed with the events of his life, however, Hamilton never saw his father again. This chapter will use the letters Hamilton sent to his father, the one letter Hamilton received from his father in 1793, letters to Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, and letters to Hamilton's older brother regarding their father to understand the nature of Hamilton's relationship with his own family. This chapter distinguishes the difference between Hamilton's relationship with his own father to that of his relationship with other men.

The conclusion will address Hamilton as a father to his eight children and his relationship with his wife. Hamilton's early life greatly impacted his relationships, but in a comparison of those relationships with his own parenting skills, we can begin to see how Hamilton strove to be better than what he had been given. Tragedy struck Hamilton's family from the beginning until the end of his life in 1804 yet in the face of tragedy, the family endured and upheld the legacy Hamilton created. Lastly, the conclusion will provide an overview of the paper and its central argument.

Hamiltonian scholars have frequently run into difficulties accessing Hamilton's early life. Hamilton's childhood as a relatively poor, illegitimate, and essentially orphaned boy on the

Caribbean island of St. Croix is not well documented and what writings do still exist are not overly biographical in nature. Samuel Smucker in 1858 briefly discussed the nature of Hamilton's birth and earliest years before promptly moving into Hamilton's better documented teen years as a clerk before his arrival in New York in 1772.¹⁰ Broadus Mitchell in 1957 provided an extensive genealogical survey of both Hamilton's mother and father and worked tirelessly to piece together parts of Hamilton's life prior to his mother's death and father's abandonment. Ron Chernow and John Ferling also extensively covered Hamilton's formative years and provided a depth that no one else has yet to replicate. John C. Miller, although accurately depicts Hamilton's childhood, is hyper-critical of the situations Rachel Lavien and James Hamilton, Alexander's parents, found themselves in on St. Croix. This different treatment of Hamilton's childhood is almost as diverse as the treatment of Hamilton during his life. Hamilton's contemporaries varied in their opinions of him, some following him and his beliefs and some denouncing him completely. The treatment of Hamilton's childhood is met with a similar fate. Historians, as mentioned above, have often discounted the lack of source material available on Hamilton's early life and as such do not pay it much attention in its impact Hamilton's later life.

Hamilton rarely spoke of his earliest years, however, through analyzing his correspondence with men of importance to him and pulling apart what he did say of his early life, a picture of how deeply Hamilton sought some sort of father figure begins to emerge. The following will evaluate this often skated over aspect of Hamilton's life. Alexander Hamilton grew up as an illegitimate and essentially orphaned child, something he was incredibly sensitive

¹⁰ Smucker, 25-29.

about. In an effort of self-preservation, Hamilton was selective in who he allowed to be close to him. Those he felt in competition with, like George Washington, Hamilton did not allow himself to be close to despite Washington's apparent desire to do so. Others, like Philip Schuyler, Hamilton chose to share some of the more personal elements of his life to. Whether this was done so nothing would come as a surprise later on, or because Hamilton wanted to ensure trust and acceptance with his new family can be determined through Hamilton's correspondence. The abandonment by James Hamilton at such a critical point during Hamilton's childhood led to varied relationships with men of importance and prominence.

Chapter 1: Childhood

My Ambition is prevalent that I contemn the grov'ling and condition of a Clerk or the like, to which my Fortune &c. condemns me and would willingly risk my life tho' not my Character to exalt my Station. ¹

-Alexander Hamilton to Edward Stevens, November 11, 1769

Alexander Hamilton's childhood was a predominately unhappy one. As an adult, Hamilton rarely wrote of or spoke of his youth, only referencing it briefly when defending himself against political opponents who tried to use his past against him. He was born to Rachel Lavien and James Hamilton on January 11, 1755, on the Caribbean island of Nevis.² Historians have long disputed the actual year of Hamilton's birth. Samuel Smucker published in 1858 that Hamilton was born in 1759. Hamilton and his family maintained a birth year of 1757. However, modern historians have agreed upon the year of 1755 as Hamilton's birth based upon three pieces of supporting evidence. In 1766, Hamilton signed as witness to a legal document, which would have been quite the honor if he was nine. In 1768, Hamilton was documented as being thirteen in



Figure 1: Young Alexander Hamilton - Age 15

¹ Alexander Hamilton to Edward Stevens, November 11, 1769, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 3.

² Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 7.

a testimony by his uncle in a probate court in St. Croix.³ Lastly, a 1771 poem published in the *Royal Danish American Gazette* signed by A.H. begins, “I am a youth about seventeen,” a way of saying he was actually sixteen and supporting a birth year of 1755.⁴ For the sake of ease, a birth year of 1755 will be used.

Sixteen-year-old Rachel Faucette was described as a beautiful, strong-willed young woman and was likely “hotly pursued in a world chronically deficient in well-heeled, educated European women.”⁵ In a charming anecdote by her grandson, John Church Hamilton, recalled his father, Alexander, recalling Rachel “with inexpressible fondness, and often spoke of her as a woman of superior intellect, highly cultivated, of elevated and generous sentiments, and of unusual elegance of person and manner.”⁶ The second daughter of John Fawcett [*sic*] and Mary Uppington, a small time Caribbean planter, Rachel was left as the minor heiress following her father’s death in 1745. John Fawcett [*sic*] was of French Huguenot descent and served as both a physician and a planter.⁷ Rachel and her mother emigrated to St. Croix, joining her sister, Ann, and brother-in-law James Lytton in a prospering estate outside Christiansted. Ron Chernow asserts that it was likely through the Lytton’s that Rachel met Johann Michael Lavien, a Dane who aspired to planter status. Rachel’s track record with men, as will be seen, was consistently called into question. Lavien, according to Hamilton was “a fortune-hunter...bedizzened with

³ Robert Hendrickson, *Hamilton I: 1757-1789* (New York: Mason/Charter, 1976), 1-2.

⁴ Alexander Hamilton to the Royal Danish American Gazette, April 6, 1771, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed October 26, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0003>.

⁵ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 11.

⁶ John Church Hamilton, *The Life of Alexander Hamilton*, volume 1 (New York: Halstead & Voorhies, 1834), 2-3.

⁷ Hendrickson, 3.

gold” who “paid his addresses to my mother then a handsome young woman having a *snug* fortune.”⁸ According to Chernow, “snug”, in eighteenth century terms referred to “one sufficient for a comparatively easy life.”⁹ Hamilton recalled with disdain his grandmother’s captivation “by the glitter” of Lavien while Rachel had remained uninclined to marry Lavien, ultimately did so anyway at her mother’s behest.¹⁰

Rachel’s marriage to Lavien was an unhappy one and, following the birth of her first-born son, Peter, in 1746, abandoned Johann and Peter and fled to St. Kitts around 1750. Hamilton’s grandson later remarked in documenting Hamilton’s life, that Johann Lavien was a “coarse man of repulsive personality.”¹¹ Rachel, in accordance with both Hamilton’s and Chernow’s interpretations of her, felt stifled beneath her husband which prompted her leaving. Lavien, in his decree for divorce lambasted Rachel, remarking she “committed such errors which as between husband and wife were indecent and very suspicious” and that she was “shameless, coarse, and ungodly.”¹² Lavien’s rage did not end there, he sought to further humiliate Rachel. Citing a Danish law where a husband could imprison his wife if she was found guilty of adultery twice and no longer lived with him Lavien had Rachel arrested and imprisoned in the Christiansted fort, Christiansvaern, which doubled as the town jail.¹³ Many of Hamilton’s critics

⁸ Alexander Hamilton to William Jackson, August 26, 1800, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 931.

⁹ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 11.

¹⁰ Hamilton to Jackson, 931.

¹¹ Allan McLane Hamilton, *The Intimate Life of Alexander Hamilton: Based Chiefly Upon Original Family Letters and Other Documents, Many of Which Have Never Been Published*, 1910, Reprint, Forgotten Books, 2015, 11.

¹² Chernow, *Hamilton*, 11.

¹³ Broadus Mitchell, *Alexander Hamilton: Youth to Maturity, 1755-1788* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957)

in adulthood frequently referenced his mother's adultery and supposed prostitution in an attempt to discredit him. John Adams famously referred to Hamilton as the "bastard brat of a Scotch peddler" two years after Hamilton's death.¹⁴ After Rachel was released from prison, she fled to St. Kitts. In doing so, Rachel forfeited any future benefits that would have come from legal separation and doomed her next two children to a life labeled under illegitimacy.



Figure 2: Fort Christiansvaern, National Park Service.

James Hamilton was described by his son as someone "certainly of a respectable Scotch Family" but was also someone who was "too generous and too easy a temper he failed in business, and at length fell into indigent circumstances."¹⁵ Hamilton's grandson was less generous with his interpretation of James Hamilton, writing "Hamilton's father does not appear

¹⁴ John Adams to Benjamin Rush, January 25, 1806, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed October 30, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-5119>.

¹⁵ Hamilton to Jackson, 931.

to have been successful in any pursuit, but in many ways was a great deal of a dreamer, and something of a student, whose chief happiness seemed to be in the society of his beautiful and talented wife, who was in every way intellectually his superior.”¹⁶ Hamilton’s assessment of his father was a fair judgment. Born around 1718, James Hamilton was the fourth child of Alexander Hamilton, laird of Grange in Ayrshire, Scotland. The Hamilton’s of Grange were part of the supposed Cambuskeith line. Chernow speculates that as a child Hamilton likely heard repeatedly that the Cambuskeith Hamilton’s had held a castle near Kilmarnock for centuries.¹⁷ Alexander took pride on this membership in the Scottish gentry, and a genealogy that can be traced back to the fourteenth century: “the truth is that on the question who my parents were, I have better pretensions than most of those who in this Country plume themselves on Ancestry.”¹⁸

As the fourth son, it was highly unlikely James would ever inherit the title of laird. As his son later points out, James, “himself being the younger son of a numerous family was bred to trade.”¹⁹ In Hamilton’s opinion, his father, as the least likely option for direct inheritance, had not been given the same opportunity as James’s siblings. James was considered to be “easygoing and lackadaisical, devoid of...ambition” and “did not seem to internalize the Glaswegian ethos of hard work and strict discipline.”²⁰ Alexander, who remarked at seventeen-years-old, “my Ambition is prevalent,” was the anti-thesis of his father.²¹ Between James’s lack of ambition, and

¹⁶ McLane Hamilton, 13.

¹⁷ Mitchell, 9.

¹⁸ Hamilton to Jackson, 930.

¹⁹ Hamilton to Jackson, 931.

²⁰ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 13.

²¹ Hamilton to Stevens, 3.

desire for wealth, following the expiration of an apprenticeship in the textile trade, James immigrated to the West Indies.²²

The seduction of wealth in the sugar colonies drew James Hamilton to St. Kitts in 1741. James likely started off with a level of social respect due to his status as a laird's son, but that was perhaps the only good thing to come his way. He struggled quickly upon arriving in St. Kitts falling "into indigent circumstances."²³ Hamilton pitied his father in adulthood but forgave James for his transgressions. "It was his fault," Hamilton wrote, "to have had too much pride and too large a portion of indolence—but his character was otherwise without reproach and his manners those of a Gentleman."²⁴

James Hamilton met Rachel in St. Kitts in the early 1750s and both were shaped by certain similarities. Both suffered from a significant decline in social standing and struggled to adjust to the change. It is not surprising then that Hamilton grew up hypersensitive to his status in society and very aware of eighteenth-century social hierarchy. He would later write, "my birth is the subject of the most humiliating criticism. On this point as on most others which concern me, there is much mistake—though I am pained by the consciousness that it is not free from blemish."²⁵ In order to protect himself from the stigma associated with being an illegitimate child, Hamilton pretended his parents were married, declaring "a marriage between them ensued, followed by many years of cohabitations and several children."²⁶ Through a child's eyes, it is

²² Chernow, *Hamilton*, 14.

²³ Hamilton to Jackson, 931.

²⁴ Hamilton to Jackson, 931.

²⁵ Hamilton to Jackson, 930.

²⁶ Hamilton to Jackson, 931.

likely that Hamilton's interpretation of his parent's relationship appeared to be that of marriage, and that the nature of his and his brother, James's, births was merely a legal technicality. It is likely, though never formally mentioned by Hamilton, that the "several children" he referenced in 1800, died in childhood.

The distance between Rachel and Johann Michael Lavien did not keep him from seeking additional revenge against her in 1759 by obtaining official divorce summons. Lavien, keeping in track with his actions in Christiansted, declared Rachel had "absented herself from him for nine years and gone elsewhere, where she has begotten several illegitimate children, so that such action is believed to be more than sufficient for him to obtain a divorce from her."²⁷ Lavien sought to deny Rachel any legal right to his property in the event he died before her. He wholeheartedly believed Rachel would "possibly seek to take possession of the estate and therefore not only acquire what she ought not to have but also take this away from his child and give it to her whore-children."²⁸ Lavien's destruction of whatever was left of Rachel's reputation appears to have worked as he was able to safeguard Peter's inheritance and ensured James Jr. and Alexander Hamilton were constantly faced with the stigma of illegitimacy.

James Hamilton, Sr. received a business assignment in Christiansted in April 1765, when Alexander was ten years old. In the years prior, Lavien had moved to the other end of St. Croix to Frederiksted and Peter moved to South Carolina, which gave Rachel and James the opportunity to move to Christiansted without fear of reproach from Lavien. Rachel and her sons resided mere blocks from Fort Christiansvaern where she had been imprisoned around 1750.

²⁷ Harold Larson, "Alexander Hamilton: The Fact and Fiction of His Early Years," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (April 1952), 143.

²⁸ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 20.

Returning to the place she had fled and the people she knew, Rachel was no longer able to pose as “Mrs. Hamilton.” James Jr. and Alexander were now twelve and ten respectively and were at an age where they would fully understand their mother’s reputation and the circumstances of their births.

James Hamilton, Sr. exited his family’s life roughly a year after removing them to St. Croix. The exact circumstances remain unknown, but Chernow theorizes on a few different reasons.²⁹ The most popular theory is that James, continuing to struggle financially, could no longer care for the family. By the age of ten, colonial children were expected to be able to take on more responsibility within the family business. In these situations, older children were largely entrusted with secretarial work as clerks, couriers, and assistants.³⁰ By this reasoning, James Jr. and Alexander had reached an age where they could assist Rachel and “James Sr., may have believed he could wash his hands of paternal duties without undue pangs of guilt.”³¹ Hamilton later wrote to his uncle William Hamilton in 1797, sympathizes with Chernow’s conclusion: “you no doubt have understood that my fathers [*sic*] affairs at a very early day went to wreck; so as to have rendered his situation during the greatest part of his life far from eligible. This state of things occasioned a separation between him and me, when I was very young.”³²

Hamilton’s relationship with his father did not end with James disappearing. As will be later investigated, Hamilton maintained a minimal correspondence with his father in adulthood.

²⁹ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 21.

³⁰ Darcy R. Fryer, “‘Improved’ and ‘Very Promising Children’: Growing Up Rich in Eighteenth-Century South Carolina,” in *Children in Colonial America*, James Marten, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 106.

³¹ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 21.

³² Alexander Hamilton to William Hamilton, May 2, 1797, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed October 30, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0037>.

The nature of this adulthood relationship was detached and estranged, both psychologically and geographically. Although Hamilton never saw his father again after the age of ten, he would impart upon his father a desire to help him out of economic ruin and would provide the bare minimum of information surrounding his family.

Hamilton appears to have received his resilience in the face of adversity, his tenacity in everything he did, and his curiosity about the world around him from his mother. Rachel, following the abandonment of James, was suddenly a single mother of two young boys in a society that saw them as inferior. Rachel resided in a two-story house at 34 Company Street near the Anglican church and school. She tried to bring a sense of politeness to her household. Residing in the upper floor, Rachel turned the lower floor into a shop selling food to planters. Rachel was unlike the traditional white woman in St. Croix. “One traveler to St. Croix remarked, ‘white women are not expected to do anything here except drink tea and coffee, eat, make calls, play cards, and at times sew a little.’”³³ Rachel’s supplies for her shop came from her landlord, but also from David Beekman and Nicholas Cruger, two young New York merchants, who would later alter Hamilton’s childhood.³⁴

However, a young Alexander Hamilton likely did not attend the Anglican school as a result of his illegitimate birth status. He likely had individual tutoring. In an endearing story, “he [Hamilton] mentioned his having been taught to repeat the Decalogue in Hebrew, at the school of a Jewess, when so small that he was placed standing by her side on a table.”³⁵ It is believed

³³ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 23.

³⁴ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 23.

³⁵ John Church Hamilton, 3.

Hamilton's earliest education was probably very limited, "probably embracing little more than the rudiments of the English and French languages," which greatly contributed to his bilingual abilities during his teenage and adulthood years.³⁶

Rachel also contributed to Hamilton's eager learning. We know from an inventory of Rachel's estate following her death, the living quarters of 34 Company Street held thirty-four books, highlighting Alexander's voracious literary appetite.³⁷ We can assume, from this fact, that Hamilton served both his appetite for learning, but also his need to escape whatever was so stifling about St. Croix.

Yet, Hamilton's life was about to once again become fully uprooted. Shortly after New Year's Day, 1768, Rachel became horribly ill with a raging fever. By February 17, Alexander had also contracted the unknown illness. A Dr. Heering, summoned by Ann McDonnell who had been caring for Rachel, treated Rachel and Alexander with medical practices so prevalent during the eighteenth-century, fever medicine, emetics, blood-letting, and enemas. Rachel and Alexander must have made a horrible sight, riddled with vomiting, flatulence, and defecation "as they lay side by side in a feverish state in a single upstairs bed."³⁸ Rachel succumbed to the fever at nine o'clock two days later on the night of February 19.

Alexander had recovered enough from the illness to attend his mother's funeral alongside his brother. With the death of their mother and the abandonment of their father within a two-year span, James Jr. and Alexander were left effectively orphaned and leaving them in the hands of

³⁶ John Church Hamilton, 3.

³⁷ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 24.

³⁸ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 24.

friends, family, and the community. This method of childrearing, referred to by Darcy R. Fryer, is called “extensive parenting.” The method of ‘extensive parenting’ refers to the reliance of biological parents on a network of formal and informal guardians, whether family, friends, business associates, or even near strangers, to help bring up children in the event of parent death before the child is of age. This method gave children stability and allowed for children to maximize their educational, professional, and travel opportunities.³⁹ Although predominantly used by the elite, it appears Rachel instituted this method in the event of her death.

Alexander and James Jr. were left in the hands of Rachel’s cousin, Peter Lytton. During the settlement of Rachel’s estate, which took roughly a year, Rachel’s personal effects were auctioned off by the court. Peter Lytton’s father, James, bought back Alexander’s books. The entire estate, primarily Rachel’s slaves and business supplies, were ultimately awarded to Peter Lavien. Alexander and James Jr. were left disinherited and destitute. Life with Peter Lytton was not easy for Alexander and James Jr. By July 1769, the two boys were once again left without a caretaker or funds after Peter Lytton committed suicide and left his entire estate to his black mistress and mulatto son.⁴⁰

Peter Lytton’s death led to the separation between the brothers. James was apprenticed to a Christiansted carpenter while Alexander served as a clerk for Beekman and Cruger’s mercantile house, the same Beekman and Cruger Hamilton’s mother stocked her shop from.⁴¹ Hamilton’s time with Beekman and Cruger was considered “the source of great and lasting

³⁹ Fryer, 105.

⁴⁰ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 25-26.

⁴¹ Mitchell, 18.

benefit” to Hamilton and “he felt himself amply rewarded for his labours, by the method and facility which it imparted to him; and amid his various engagements in after years, adverted to it as the most useful part of his education.”⁴²



Figure 3: Port and Shipyard of Christiansted c. 1800. National Park Service.

It was while under Beekman and Cruger that Hamilton met Hugh Knox. Knox, a “respectable Presbyterian divine, who, delighted with the unfolding of his mind, took a deep interest in his welfare.”⁴³ Knox noticed Hamilton in 1772 following the publication of poetry in the *Royal Danish American Gazette*. The first poems, which must have shocked Knox’s Presbyterian soul, was unbelievably erotic. In two April 6, 1771 poems, Hamilton writes two contrasting versions of love (Chernow refers to them as “schizophrenic.”)⁴⁴ In the first, the poet

⁴² John Church Hamilton, 6.

⁴³ John Church Hamilton, 3.

⁴⁴ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 34.

happens upon his virgin love and woos her, stealing her off to marital bliss, remarking that such bliss appeared as:

*Content we tend our flocks by day,
Each rural pleasure amply taste;
And at the suns retiring ray
Prepare for new delight:
When from the field we haste away,
And send our blithesome care to rest,
We fondly sport and fondly play,
And love away the night.⁴⁵*

The second was a complete opposite. Instead of the “artless” yet faithful young woman from the first poem, Hamilton’s second poem begins “Celia’s an artful little slut.”⁴⁶ The portrait of this woman, compared to the first, is one of a manipulative woman who conceals herself well, until the poor, unfortunate soul who ends up in her grasp. Hamilton concludes this poem:

*So, stroking puss’s velvet paws,
How well the jade conceals her claws
And purrs, but if at last
You hap to squeeze her somewhat hard
She spits—her back up—prenez garde;
Good faith she has you fast.*

These poems appear to speak well for the young man who wrote them, who later struggled with these two conflicting views of women in adulthood, the first with his later wife, Elizabeth Schuyler, and the second with his extramarital affair with Maria Reynolds.

In 1772, Hamilton published two more poems, but the tone of these two were nothing like the first poems published the year before. The change in tone is more than likely as a result

⁴⁵ Alexander Hamilton to Royal Danish American Gazette, July 6, 1771, “A Look at Alexander Hamilton’s Saucy, Religious, Sentimental Poetry,” Library of Congress, September 22, 2017, accessed October 26, 2018, <https://blogs.loc.gov/catbird/2017/09/a-look-at-alexander-hamiltons-saucy-religious-sentimental-poetry/>.

⁴⁶ Hamilton to Royal Danish American Gazette, Library of Congress.

of Knox's influence upon Hamilton. "In his [Knox's] earliest surviving letter, he defended his confirmed belief that illegitimate children should be baptized and argued that clergymen should rescue them from their parents instead of rejecting them."⁴⁷ It is unknown exactly how Knox and Hamilton met, but Knox did open his library to Hamilton, encouraged him to write and toward a scholarship. Hamilton's second set of poems hold a more religious tone that can only be attributed to an affirmation of faith. His son referred to the poem of April 17, 1772 as "a hymn...possessing not a little poetical merit, and strongly illustrative of the state of his feelings."⁴⁸ Most prevalent to support John Church Hamilton's assessment of his father's poem is the third stanza.

*I come oh Lord! I mount, I fly,
On rapid wings I cleave the sky;
Stretch out thine arm and aid my flight,
For oh! I long to gain that height,
Where all celestial beings sing
Eternal praises to their King.*⁴⁹

For a young man of seventeen, the personal desire to escape from his circumstances is clearly present in this poem.

Within four months, Hamilton experienced yet another upheaval to his life. On the night of August 31, 1772, a horrible hurricane struck St. Croix, St. Kitts, Nevis, and other surrounding islands. The storm, as much as it wreaked havoc on Hamilton's life as a resident of St. Croix, also provided him with his ticket off the island. Likely inspired by Knox's September 6 sermon,

⁴⁷ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 35.

⁴⁸ John Church Hamilton, 10.

⁴⁹ Alexander Hamilton to Royal Danish American Gazette, April 17, 1772, , "A Look at Alexander Hamilton's Saucy, Religious, Sentimental Poetry," Library of Congress, September 22, 2017, accessed October 26, 2018, <https://blogs.loc.gov/catbird/2017/09/a-look-at-alexander-hamiltons-saucy-religious-sentimental-poetry/>.

Hamilton wrote a long letter to his father in attempt to convey the horror he had witnessed.

Published in the *Royal Danish American Gazette* on October 3, Knox likely wrote the prefatory note, explaining “the following letter was written the week after the late hurricane, by a youth of this island, to his father; the copy of it fell by accident into the hands of a gentleman, who, being pleased with it himself, showed it to others to whom it gave equal satisfaction, and who all agreed that it might not prove unentertaining to the public.”⁵⁰

The language Hamilton uses to describe the destruction is astonishing for a seventeen-year-old and begins to showcase Hamilton’s depth and understanding of language that would make him so memorable in adulthood. He describes the storm, much like his poetry of the two women, in contrasting ways. The first way he describes it is almost romantic,

Good God! what horror and destruction. Its [*sic*] impossible for me to describe or you to form any idea of it. It seemed as if total dissolution of nature was taking place. The roaring of the sea and wind, fiery meteors flying about it in the air, the prodigious glare of almost perpetual lightning, the crash of the falling houses, and the ear-piercing shrieks of the distressed, were sufficient to strike astonishment into Angels.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 36-37.

⁵¹ Alexander Hamilton to the Royal Danish American Gazette, September 6, 1772, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 6.

The second description Hamilton used “sounded like a cross between a tragic soliloquy and a fire-and-brimstone sermon.”⁵²

But alas! how different, how deplorable, how gloomy the prospect! Death comes rushing on in triumph veiled in a mantle of tenfold darkness. His unrelenting scythe, pointed, and ready for the stroke. On his right hand sits destruction, hurling the winds and belching forth flames: Calamity on his left threatening famine disease and distress of all kinds. And Oh! thou wretch, look still a little further; see the gulph of eternal misery open. There mayest thou shortly plunge—the just reward of vileness. Alas! whither canst thou fly? Where hide thyself? Thou canst not call upon thy God; thy life has been a continual warfare with him.⁵³

The religious overtone in the second half of Hamilton’s letter can likely be attributed to the influence of Knox on Hamilton.

Hamilton’s hurricane letter proved to be his ticket off St. Croix. The letter created a fervor among the people of Christiansted who in turn took up a subscription to send the author to North America to receive an education.⁵⁴ This generosity was astonishing considering how shortly after the hurricane, and the total destruction of the island and economic hardship the island faced thereafter. Hugh Knox was likely the chief sponsor for Hamilton’s voyage to North America, who later wrote Hamilton, “I have always had a just & secret pride in having Advised you to go to America, & in having recommended you to Some of my old friends there; Since you have not only *Answered*, but even far *Exceeded*, our most Sanguine hopes & Expectations.”⁵⁵

⁵² Chernow, *Hamilton*, 37.

⁵³ Hamilton, September 6, 1772, 7.

⁵⁴ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 37.

⁵⁵ Hugh Knox to Alexander Hamilton, July 28, 1784, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed November 5, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0372>.

Hamilton sailed from St. Croix around October 1772 and never returned to the island. Chernow states Hamilton “took his unhappy boyhood, tucked it away in a mental closet, and never opened the door again.”⁵⁶ Although Hamilton may have never openly spoke about his childhood, he did pursue friendships and relationships with men of higher stature than he had been accustomed to and his childhood directed those relationships.

⁵⁶ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 39.

Chapter 2: George Washington

He was grave, silent, and thoughtful, diligent and methodical in business, dignified in his appearance, strictly honorable in his deportment.¹

-David Ramsey.

George Washington invokes the image of a detached, unreachable man who peers out from the canvas of Charles Willson Peale, Rembrandt Peale, Gilbert Stuart, and John Trumbull. Yet, George Washington was a complex man with a burden placed upon him that few today could possibly comprehend. The relationships he formed with those he trusted implicitly, or brought into his “family,” are intriguing. Was Washington searching to fill a void from his own childhood? Or was he inclined to bring young, bright men into his fold to allow himself the opportunity to parent them as a result of his inability to father children of his own? These two questions bring forth the relationship between Hamilton and Washington.

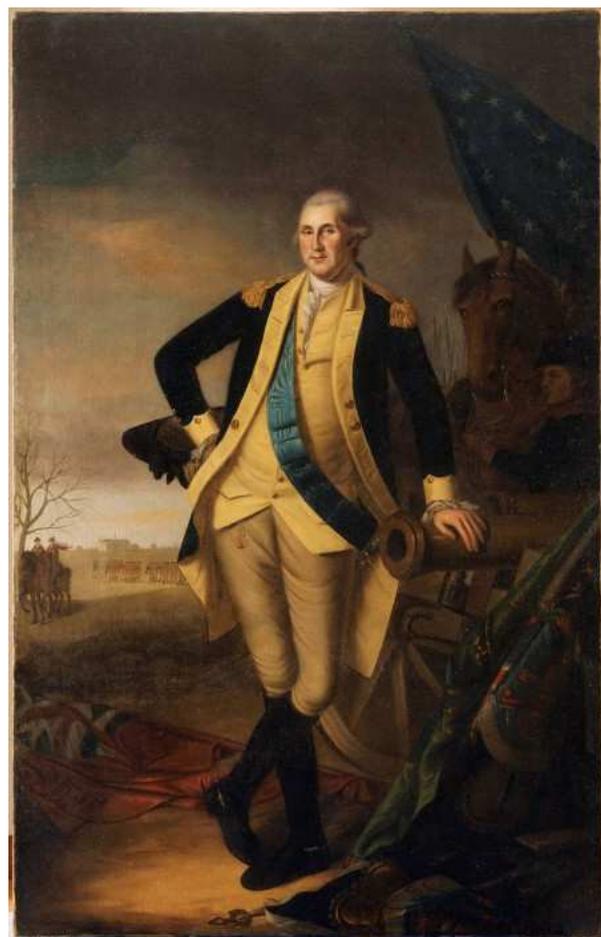


Figure 5: George Washington at the Battle of Princeton, 1779, Charles Willson Peale.

¹ David Ramsey, *The Life of George Washington: Commander in Chief of the Armies of the United States in the War Which Established; And First President of the United States* (London: Luke Hanford & Sons, 1807), 3, Internet Archive, accessed November 9, 2018, <https://archive.org/details/lifegeorgewashi00mdgoog/page/n8>.

George Washington was born on January 11, 1732 to Augustine Washington and Mary Ball in Westmoreland County, Virginia. Washington, unlike Hamilton, later admitted a little uncomfortably, “this is a subject to which I confess I have paid very little attention,” when posed with filling in the gaps of his own genealogy.² Washington’s upbringing was riddled with uncertainty and tragedy. When Washington was eleven, his father passed away suddenly following an illness at the age of forty-nine. In Augustine’s will, young George was dedicated as beneficiary of Ferry Farm, where his family resided in Fredericksburg, and the owner of ten slaves.³ Yet, because he was not of age, his bequests were left in the hands of his strong-willed mother, who did not give George Ferry Farm for another thirty years.

Despite these symbols of wealth left for George upon Augustine’s death, this early death restricted George from an education that would have propelled him into the upper echelon of the Virginia gentry. His mother, Mary Ball Washington, was a stern and formidable woman. Chernow speculates that George struggled with the fact his mother never remarried. The lack of a father figure in Washington’s life forced him to mature faster than he normally would have under the guidance of a father. Children in the planter elite of the south were considered old enough to take on more responsibility within the family business between the ages of ten and twelve. In this situation, older children were largely entrusted with secretarial work as clerks, couriers, and assistants.⁴ By the same age, planter children were expected to “write legibly,

² George Washington to Isaac Heard, May 2, 1792, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed November 9, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-10-02-0211-0001>.

³ Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life* (New York: Penguin Group, 2010), 10.

⁴ Fryer, 106.

perform simple calculations, and keep records systematically and accurately.”⁵ George, much like Hamilton, was unable to receive the education of a young boy in the rising planter class, leaving him with an overwhelming sense of a lackluster education in relation to his brothers and his contemporaries.

The relationship between George and his mother was difficult and strained. The death of Augustine forced Mary to “eliminate any frills of family life” but also “removed any moderating influence between mother and eldest son, who clashed with their similarly willful personalities.”⁶ George’s letters to his mother, upon first glance, appear cold and rigid. He would always address her as “Honored Madame” and sign them formally, “Your most Dutiful and Obedient Son, George Washington.”⁷ This frigidity highlighted the lack of mother/son relationship between George and Mary. George considered himself to be the opposite of his mother, yet he took after her in more than one way. “She was a fine horsewoman, enjoyed dancing, reputedly possessed enormous strength, was manic in money matters, tenaciously superintended her farm, and displayed a stubborn independence.”⁸ He sought to be everything she had not been, “if his mother was crude and illiterate, he would improve himself through books. If she was self-centered, he would be self-sacrificing in serving his country.”⁹ His ambition, like many of the

⁵ Fryer, 106.

⁶ Chernow, *Washington*, 10-11.

⁷ George Washington to Mary Ball Washington, May 6, 1755, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 10, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/02-01-02-0132>.

⁸ Chernow, *Washington*, 11.

⁹ Chernow, *Washington*, 11.

eighteenth century, drove him forward to make a better life for himself and to surround himself with men of stature to emulate from.

It is not clear exactly when Hamilton and Washington met, but by March 1, 1777, Hamilton was appointed as an aide-de-camp for General Washington and had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Hamilton had been serving as the captain of a New York artillery company since January 1776. In the retreat to Harlem Heights, Hamilton appears to have been first recognized by Washington as Washington “watched him supervise the building of an earthwork.”¹⁰ It was also at this time that Hamilton’s company first came under direct command of Washington. Hamilton was noticed by senior officers once again shortly after New Year’s Day 1777 upon marching into Princeton. A senior officer recalled, “I noticed a youth, a mere stripling, small, slender, almost delicate in frame, marching beside a piece of artillery, with a cocked hat pulled down over his eyes, apparently lost in thought, with his hand resting on a cannon, and every now and then patting it, as if it were a favorite horse or pet plaything.”¹¹

¹⁰ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 81.

¹¹ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 84.



Figure 6: Alexander Hamilton in the Uniform of the New York Artillery, Alonzo Chappel

Within two weeks, Hamilton received a note from Washington personally inviting him to join Washington's staff as an aide-de-camp. This was not the first time Hamilton had been approached for a staff position under a commanding general. Three other generals—Alexander McDougall, Nathanael Greene, and Lord Stirling—expressed their interest in obtaining Hamilton for their staffs. Hamilton did not immediately accept the opportunity to join Washington's staff. His son relayed "having served with distinction through the most arduous campaign of the revolution, and having thus entitled him to rapid promotion in the line of the army, Hamilton hesitated much before he consented to relinquish this prospect for a place in the staff." Why did

Hamilton hesitate? The young Crucian boy who had been stuck in a dead-end job desired nothing more than notoriety and to make a name for himself. He knew as a child that the only way he could escape his circumstances in St. Croix was through military service, once saying to a childhood friend “I wish there was a war.”¹² Yet Hamilton did accept the position under Washington. Washington’s reputation likely influenced Hamilton’s decision to join the staff with complete “devotion due to his early and illustrious friend.”¹³

Historians have often discussed the type of relationship Hamilton and Washington shared during the American Revolution. Ron Chernow documents the relationship as one of “complimentary talents” yet they were also incredible tension between them that encouraged competition.¹⁴ Samuel Smucker documented that Washington trusted Hamilton implicitly, citing Hamilton “was invited to assist in arranging the plans of the campaigns; in devising means for the concentration, increase and support of the army; and in confirming the resolution and unity of the various portions of the confederacy.”¹⁵ Noemie Emery documents the family atmosphere Washington created for his aides. “Washington ran his staff like a large household, treating his intimates as kin. He called his staff ‘the family’; his generals, like Anthony Wayne, Nathanael Greene and Henry Knox, ‘my brothers’; and the younger men, ‘my child’ or ‘my boy.’ The aides lived very much like children in a nursery, bunking together six or seven to the room, writing at their desks all day like schoolchildren and joining their elders—generals, diplomats and visiting

¹² Hamilton to Stevens, 3.

¹³ John Church Hamilton, 65.

¹⁴ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 88-89.

¹⁵ Smucker, 56.

Congressmen—in the common dining room for meals.”¹⁶ Emery alludes to both men filling some sort of familial need that both men had been lacking in their lives. This need is likely why some historians, like Joseph J. Ellis, had equated the nature of Washington’s relationship with his aides as one of surrogate sons. Yet the type of father/son relationship evident here also highlights the undercurrent of societal need these young men desired. “Part extended family and part court, these favored aides traded influence for total loyalty,” Ellis wrote.¹⁷ However, not all historians agree with the father/son relationship assessment. John Ferling wrote that for all that Hamilton was useful to Washington, “the commander did not see his young aide as the son he never had.”¹⁸

How did Washington view Hamilton? Hamilton’s biographers consistently remark upon the esteem with which Hamilton was held in within Washington’s “family.” Washington recognized an ambition in Hamilton that likely reminded him of himself. It is likely that Washington, who had a keen eye for young talent, sought to bring Hamilton into the mold. The majority of Washington’s aides were from affluent backgrounds, yet Hamilton was not. What led Washington, by this point, an affluent and well-known Virginia planter, to select the rash, impulsive, and extremely intelligent young Crucian to join his ranks? The answers can be inferred from Washington’s later correspondence. In 1798, Washington wrote a letter to then President John Adams regarding the establishment of a permanent standing army for the new United States. In this letter, Washington praises Hamilton, reminiscing “although Colo. Hamilton

¹⁶ Noemie Emery, *Alexander Hamilton: An Intimate Portrait* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1982), 38-39.

¹⁷ Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 80.

¹⁸ John Ferling, *Jefferson and Hamilton: The Rivalry That Forged a Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 69.

has never acted in the character of a General Officer, yet his opportunities, as the principal & most confidential aid of the Commander in chief, afforded him the means of viewing every thing [sic] on a larger scale than those whose attentions were confined to Divisions or Brigades.”¹⁹

Additionally, this letter attempts to address Hamilton’s ambition, which had always seemed to be both a blessing and a curse for him. Washington describes Hamilton:

By some he is considered as an ambitious man, and therefore a dangerous one. That he is ambitious I shall readily grant, but that it is of laudable kind which prompts a man to excel in whatever he takes in hand. He is enterprising, quick in his perceptions, and his judgment intuitively great: qualities essential to a great military character and therefore I repeat, that his loss will be irreparable.²⁰

Washington’s letters to Hamilton are generally, especially in the earliest years, cordial and formal, always beginning with “Dear Sir” or just “Sir.”²¹ Yet upon Washington’s retirement from public life after his two terms as president, the letters became much warmer. By the late 1790s, Washington’s letters to Hamilton began with “My Dear Sir” and were reciprocated by Hamilton. In 1797, around the same time Hamilton publicly published the details of his extramarital affair with Maria Reynolds, Washington suddenly sent Hamilton and his wife, Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, a silver wine cooler. Washington reasoned that he sent the wine cooler to the Hamilton’s “as a token of my sincere regard and friendship for you, and as a remembrance of me.”²² Washington wished Hamilton’s family well and reminded him that “I

¹⁹ George Washington to John Adams, September 25, 1798, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed November 11, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-03-02-0015>.

²⁰ Washington to Adams, September 25, 1798.

²¹ George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, September 21, 1777, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 11, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0288>.

²² George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, August 21, 1797, Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-01-02-0276>.

remain your sincere friend, and Affectionate Humble Servant.”²³ This wine cooler was treasured by Eliza for the rest of her life and had been subsequently passed down in the family.



Figure 7: George Washington’s Wine Cooler Presented to Alexander Hamilton

Despite Washington’s high praise of Hamilton to others, Hamilton consistently felt frustrated in his interactions with the General, particularly during the war. Serving as an aide to General Washington was not easy, despite the family atmosphere Washington sought to create among his staff. Alexander, at his appointment, was twenty-two years old and a volatile personality. Washington saw that Hamilton needed a firm and steady hand, yet did not express affection to Hamilton, despite his preferred status in the “family.” This lack of open affection and inability to “penetrate the general’s reserve” deprived Hamilton of that father

²³ Washington to Hamilton, August 21, 1797.

figure in his life.²⁴ Hamilton was not the surrogate son his historians have documented him to be. The transition from being in charge, at a minor level, of an artillery company to being at the general's beck and call must have made it incredibly difficult for Hamilton to put himself in a position of direct subordination. Hamilton's proximity to Washington allowed him an opportunity to evaluate Washington and discover his flaws. However, Hamilton knew the importance of befriending men like Washington, even if he did not always agree with him, yet Hamilton would never speak ill of the general in public.²⁵

Hamilton's impressions of Washington are best exhibited in a 1781 letter to his then father-in-law Philip Schuyler. In 1781, shortly after Hamilton's marriage he wrote to Schuyler regarding a falling out he had with Washington. Hamilton recalled,

Two days ago The General and I passed each other on the stairs. He told me he wanted to speak to me. I answered that I would wait upon him immediately. I went below and delivered Mr. Tilghman a letter to be sent to The Commissary containing an order of a pressing and interesting nature. Returning to The General I was stopped in the way by the Marquis De la Fayette, and we conversed together about a minute on a matter of business. He can testify how impatient I was to get back, and that I left him in a manner which but for our intimacy would have been more than abrupt. Instead of finding the General as usual in his room, I met him at the head of the stairs, where accosting me in a very angry tone, "Col. Hamilton (said he), you have kept me waiting at the head of the stairs these ten minutes. I must tell you Sir you treat me with disrespect." I replied without petulance, but with decision "I am not conscious of it Sir, but since you have thought it necessary to tell me so we part" "Very well Sir (said he) if it be your choice" or something to this effect and we separated.²⁶

²⁴ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 88.

²⁵ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 89.

²⁶ Alexander Hamilton to Philip Schuyler, February 18, 1781, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 93-94.

Hamilton's defense of his decision to leave Washington's "family" provides the most compelling evidence of Hamilton's honest impressions of Washington. Alexander bitterly related his dissatisfaction with his treatment by Washington. "I believe you know the place I held in The Generals confidence and councils," he wrote to Schuyler, "of which will make it the more extraordinary to you to learn that for three years past I have felt no friendships for him and have professed none."²⁷ Hamilton continues to expound his reasons of removing himself from Washington's command citing that he wished to "stand rather upon a footing of military confidence than of private attachment."²⁸

Hamilton recognized that Washington was a better political leader than a military leader and respected him as such. Additionally, Hamilton was concerned his opinions would influence Schuyler's perceptions of Washington. Hamilton wanted nothing more than a field command, and made such sentiments clear in his letter to Schuyler, writing "as I cannot think of quitting the army during the war, I have a project of re-entering into the artillery."²⁹ After much complaint to Washington, Hamilton ultimately received his field command and military prestige, leading a small artillery company at the Battle of Yorktown in 1781. Eliza, then approximately six months pregnant with their first-born child, had been apprehensive and scared Hamilton would not return to her, something Hamilton alludes to in an October 16 letter to her. He acknowledges her fear, "my duty and my honor obliged me to take a step in which your happiness was too much

²⁷ Hamilton to Schuyler, 95.

²⁸ Hamilton to Schuyler, 95.

²⁹ Hamilton to Schuyler, 96.

risked.”³⁰ Yet, Hamilton quickly penned “I commanded an attack upon one of the enemy’s redoubts; we carried it in an instant, with little loss,” although he reassures Eliza that “There will be, certainly, nothing more of this kind; all the rest will be by approach; and if there should be another occasion, it will not fall to my turn to execute it.”³¹ Three days after Hamilton wrote this letter, British General Cornwallis surrendered effectively ending the majority of fighting.

Hamilton ultimately repaired his relationship with Washington and maintained a relationship with him until Washington’s death in 1799. Upon Washington’s death, Hamilton wrote at least three documented letters about it, revealing some of his repaired sentiments of the General. Shortly after Washington’s death in December 1799, Hamilton wrote to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney “the death of our beloved commander in Chief was known to you before it was to me. I can be at no loss to anticipate what have been your feelings. I need not tell you what are mine. Perhaps no friend of his has more cause to lament, on personal account, than myself.”³² It is difficult to fully reach Hamilton’s feelings on the passing of someone who could be considered his mentor, yet the language he uses in expressing himself to Pinckney shows how he placed himself within Washington’s inner circle.

Hamilton, at the time of Washington’s death, was serving as major general in the United States Army in preparation for war with France, which never occurred and has such been known as the Quasi-War. In keeping with military tradition, Hamilton issued general orders to the rest

³⁰ Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Hamilton, October 16, 1781, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed November 30, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-1201>.

³¹ A. Hamilton to E. Hamilton, October 16, 1781.

³² Alexander Hamilton to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, December 22, 1799, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 922.

of the army surrounding funeral services for the late Washington. Hamilton's aide-de-camp and nephew, Philip Church, penned:

words would in vain attempt to give utterance to that profound and reverential grief, which will penetrate every American bosom... If the sad privilege of pre-eminence in sorrow may justly be claimed by the comparisons in arms of our lamented Chief, their affections will spontaneously perform the dear, though painful duty. 'Tis only for me to mingle my tears with those of my fellow soldiers, cherishing with them the precious recollection, that while others are paying a merited tribute to '*The man of the age*,' we in particular allied as we were to him by a close tie, are called to mourn the irreparable loss of a kind and venerated Patron and father!³³

Hamilton's language is pure veneration, but remarks upon Washington's persona as a military and political leader, not as a personal friend. The only section where he elaborates on a personal emotion is when he will "mingle my tears with those of my fellow soldiers." But even then, he did so in conjunction with other military personnel.

The last example is perhaps the most personal of Hamilton's three correspondence surrounding Washington's death. In January 1800, Hamilton wrote to Martha Washington expressing his grief at the loss of Washington, but also his sympathy for her in the face of her loss. Hamilton appears to be sincere, yet throughout the letter he frequently focuses on himself instead of on Martha. He would write "no one, better than myself, knows the greatness of your loss" and "there can be few, who equally with me participate in the loss you deplore. In expressing this sentiment, I may without impropriety allude to the numerous and distinguished marks of confidence and friendship, of which you have yourself been a Witness; but I cannot say in how many ways the continuance of that confidence and friendship was necessary to me in

³³ Alexander Hamilton "General Orders," December 21, 1799, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-24-02-0099>

future relations.”³⁴ Although self-centered, Hamilton’s letter to Martha expresses the formal nature of his relationship with George, one he wished to continue with Martha.

Hamilton’s and Washington’s relationship is difficult to fully comprehend yet some aspects can be discovered from how they wrote of each other to others and interacted professionally. Historians have often remarked that their relationship was one of father and son yet with Hamilton’s cold approach to his correspondence with Washington, acknowledging him only as “Your Excellency” suggests otherwise. Alternatively, Washington’s letters about Hamilton reveal he held Hamilton in great esteem and warm devotion. The so-called father/son relationship between Hamilton and Washington, therefore, was one-sided. Although they may not have seen that relationship to be as such, within the framework of extensive parenting, Washington would have served as a sort of surrogate father to Hamilton while fostering his intellectual and analytical mind. As a result of this sort of pseudo-extensive parenting, Hamilton was provided with the opportunity to set foot within a circle in society he had previously been denied due to his birth status. Hamilton’s determination to remain emotionally distant from Washington was in self-defense, in order to save himself from the emotional toll of becoming close with a potential father figure and then let down when that relationship did not work out. Trust was not something Hamilton gave freely and was selective in who he would provide with information surrounding his past.

³⁴ Alexander Hamilton to Martha Washington, January 12, 1800, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 922-23.

Chapter 3: Philip Schuyler

Participate afresh in the satisfaction I experience from the connection you have made with my beloved Hamilton. He affords me happiness too exquisite for expression...He is considered, as he certainly is, the ornament of his country.¹

-Philip Schuyler to Elizabeth Hamilton, 1782.

Philip Schuyler was born in 1733 to a prominent New York family of Dutch ancestry. His family was one of the wealthiest in New York Colony and was closely related to other wealthy New York families including the Van Rensselaer's and the Van Cortlandts. In 1755, Schuyler married Catherine Van Rensselaer, "an heiress to the 120,000-acre Claverack estate in Columbia County."² The parents of fifteen children, eight of whom survived to adulthood, Philip and Catherine Schuyler maintained two large estates; the first, a Georgian mansion dubbed The Pastures, situated on eighty acres overlooking the Hudson River, located on present-day Catherine Street in Albany, New York, and the second, a two-story house in Saratoga with four water-power mills, a blacksmith, and storehouses.³

Schuyler has been described as "tall and slim, with a raspy voice and bulbous nose...hobbled with rheumatic gout" with a "rigid sense of social hierarchy" and was incredibly status-conscious.⁴ Opinions of his personality varied on who and how they knew Schuyler. His

¹ Philip Schuyler to Elizabeth Hamilton, 1782, in Chernow, *Hamilton*, 136-37.

² Chernow, *Hamilton*, 135.

³ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 135.

⁴ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 134-35.

enemies saw him as arrogant and petulant while his friends found him “courteous and debonair, a model of etiquette, and very amiable in mixed company. He could behave magnanimously toward his social peers.”⁵ Perhaps the best way to understand Schuyler’s personality is through his actions. During the Battle of Saratoga in 1777, General John Burgoyne burned Schuyler’s house and most of the other buildings on the property for military purposes, yet after the battle Burgoyne apologized and Schuyler “replied graciously that his conduct had been justified by the rules of war and that he would have done the same in his place.”⁶ In fact, Schuyler invited Burgoyne, Baroness Riedesel—the wife of the Hessian commander—and Burgoyne’s twenty-man entourage to stay at The Pastures and treated them to days of fine dinners.

Schuyler served on the committee to draft rules for the army with George Washington on June 14, 1775, although Washington was ultimately selected to serve as commander in chief. Schuyler’s military career was not over then. As the structure of the army was determined, Schuyler was appointed as a major general of the New York department of the army. Schuyler’s principal biographer, Don R. Gerlach, writes that Schuyler joined the rebellion in 1775 for the same reason many others joined, they were frustrated and fed up with the royal provincial government.⁷ Prior to the Revolution, Schuyler served in the Mohawk Valley during the Seven Years’ War.

Yet, Schuyler’s service to the new American army was marred with issues. Schuyler planned the invasion on Canada but due to illness, deferred command to General Montgomery

⁵ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 135.

⁶ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 136.

⁷ Don R. Gerlach, *Proud Patriot: Philip Schuyler and the War of Independence, 1775-1783* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 5.

before returning to Fort Ticonderoga, and then Albany. The invasion of Canada became a complete failure, with Montgomery becoming a casualty and the American forces failing to capture Quebec. Upon retreat, American forces evacuated Ticonderoga, leading General Horatio Gates to move to Schuyler's removal from service. Congress heard the case and Schuyler was replaced by Gates. In an attempt to repair his reputation, Schuyler requested to plead his case before a military court. He was acquitted of all charges against him in 1778, but the damage to his reputation had already been done. Schuyler resigned from service in April 1779.⁸ Hamilton told Governor George Clinton in February 1778, "I wish General Schuyler was either explicitly in the army or in Congress."⁹ Hamilton knew Schuyler's prestige and influence both in the military and in the Continental Congress and if he could not have Schuyler serving in the

⁸ "Philip Schuyler - Biography," American Battlefield Trust, accessed December 2, 2018, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/philip-schuyler>.

⁹ Alexander Hamilton to George Clinton, February 13, 1778, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed December 2, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0365>.

military, he would want Schuyler back in Congress where someone with military experience could advise the delegates on the state of affairs within the army.

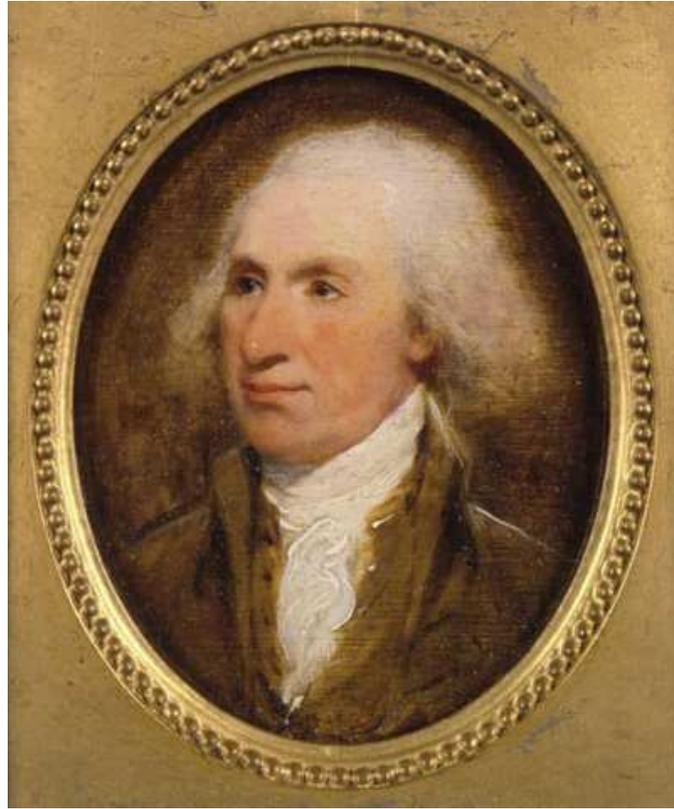


Figure 8: Philip Schuyler by John Trumbull, 1792.

Hamilton first met Schuyler in 1777 following the Battle of Saratoga. Although not present at the battle, Hamilton was sent to Albany by Washington to attempt to convince General Horatio Gates to turn over his troops to Washington. Hamilton dined with the Schuyler's and met his future bride, Elizabeth, for the first time. The relationship between Alexander and Eliza is key to understanding the depth of the relationship between Alexander and Philip. Although Alexander and Eliza met in 1777, it was not until Eliza journeyed to Morristown, New Jersey in February 1780 to visit her aunt Gertrude Cochran, wife of Dr. John Cochran—Washington's

private physician. Hamilton, at age twenty-five, was instantly enchanted by Eliza, then twenty-two. Hamilton's fellow soldiers recognized the change in him, "Hamilton is a gone man," remarked fellow aide Trench Tilghman. One night, upon returning from visiting Eliza at the Cochran home, Hamilton, reminiscing on whatever occurred during the visit, was left speechless and unable to recall the password to reenter camp. "The soldier-lover was embarrassed," relayed Gabriel Ford, "the sentinel knew him well, but was stern in the performance of his duty. Hamilton pressed his hand to his forehead and tried to summon the important words from their hiding-place, but, like the faithful sentinel they were immovable."¹⁰ The image of Alexander Hamilton, a man who was never at a loss for words no matter the situation, as a fumbling, lovesick fool. It was not until another young man reentering camp took pity upon Hamilton and supplied him with the password.¹¹

Within one month, Hamilton and Eliza knew they wanted to be married. Hamilton must have known he had hit a matrimonial jackpot by entering into the Schuyler family. Already holding two large properties, an amalgamation of the cream of New York society, and a large family consisting of seven existing children with still one more to join the clan in 1781, the orphaned boy from the Caribbean suddenly had the close, loving, and large family he must have so desperately desired. In a late June letter to his closest friend and fellow aide, John Laurens, Hamilton expounded upon Eliza's personality, harkening back to a letter a year earlier he sent to

¹⁰ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 129.

¹¹ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 129.

Laurens about the qualities he wanted in a wife. In the 1779 letter, Hamilton remarked that he desired a woman who was

young, handsome (I lay most stress upon a good shape) sensible (a little learning will do), well bred (but she must have an aversion to the word *ton*) chaste and tender (I am an enthusiast in my notions of fidelity and fondness) of some good nature, a great deal of generosity (she must neither love money nor scolding, for I dislike equally termagant and an economist). In politics, I am indifferent what side she may be of; I think I have arguments that will easily convert her to mine. As to religion a moderate stock will satisfy me. She must believe in god but hate a saint. But as to fortune, the larger stock of that the better. You know my temper and circumstances and will therefore pay special attention to this article in the treaty.¹²

Yet in the June 1780 letter, Hamilton finally writes to Laurens of his impending marriage to Eliza. “I give up my liberty to Miss Schuyler. She is a good hearted girl who I am sure will never play the termagant; though not a genius she has good sense enough to be agreeable, and though not a beauty, she has fine black eyes—is rather handsome and has every requisite of the exterior to make a lover happy. And believe me, I am a lover in earnest, though I do not speak of the perfections of my Mistress in the enthusiasm of Chivalry.”¹³ The high praise Hamilton gives of Eliza also speaks volumes of Philip Schuyler’s parenting style. Tilghman described Eliza, or Betsy as she was known among her family and occasionally to Hamilton, as “a Brunette with the most good natured lively dark eyes that I ever saw, which threw a beam of good temper and benevolence over her whole Countenance.”¹⁴ Tilghman recalled Eliza as unlike other women of her age. She was one who was the outdoors type, climbing hills without assistance and making

¹² Alexander Hamilton to John Laurens, April 1779, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 16, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0100>.

¹³ Alexander Hamilton to John Laurens, June 30, 1780, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed November 16, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0742>.

¹⁴ Miller, 64.

“herself merry at the distress of the other Ladies.”¹⁵ She was a vivacious, intelligent, and amiable woman who impressed many in Albany society.



Figure 9: Mrs. Alexander Hamilton by Ralph Earle, 1787

On April 8, 1780, Philip Schuyler wrote Hamilton a formal letter stating he had discussed his marriage proposal with Mrs. Schuyler and “she consents to Comply with your and her daughters wishes.”¹⁶ However, the Schuyler’s had a caveat to the terms of the engagement, “Mrs.

¹⁵ Miller, 64.

¹⁶ Philip Schuyler to Alexander Hamilton, April 8, 1780, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 16, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0642>.

Schuyler did not see her Eldest daughter married. That also gave me great pain, and we wish not to Experience it a Second time.”¹⁷ Eliza’s older sister, Angelica, eloped in order to marry John Barker Church, bringing shame to the Schuyler family as a result. Ultimately, Eliza would be the only Schuyler daughter who would not elope. In order to escape total shame and judgement upon their parenting skills, Philip and Catherine Schuyler required Alexander and Eliza to have a wedding with the family in order to maintain the family’s approval of the match. Alexander reassured the Schuyler’s by writing to Catherine “I cannot forbear indulging my feelings, by entreating you to accept the assurances of my gratitude for your kind compliance with my wishes to be united to your amiable daughter.”¹⁸ Within this letter, Hamilton appeals to his future in-laws familial sentiments maintaining “the sincerity of my affection for her” and “the respect I have for her parents.”¹⁹ He hopes to always keep their confidence and friendship, something he had been sorely lacking in his youth. He also appeals to Catherine directly, pledging he will “give you proofs of the respectful and affectionate attachment, with which I have the honor to be.”²⁰ Hamilton wants nothing more than to make a good impression upon his new family, especially since he had nothing to provide to the marriage.

This fear of inadequacy is something that haunted Hamilton during his engagement with Eliza. In July 1780, Hamilton hints that he has had moments of misgivings of the reciprocation of love. He tells Eliza, “banish your uneasiness my love; I discard for ever, every idea injurious

¹⁷ Ph. Schuyler to Hamilton, April 8, 1780.

¹⁸ Alexander Hamilton to Catherine Schuyler, April 14, 1780, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 16, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0648>.

¹⁹ Hamilton to C. Schuyler, April 14, 1780.

²⁰ Hamilton to C. Schuyler, April 14, 1780.

to your tenderness which everything convinces me is without equal but in mine.”²¹ A month later, Hamilton puts forward more of his concerns,

do you soberly relish the pleasure of being a poor mans [*sic*] wife? Have you learned to think a homespun preferable to a brocade and the rumbling of a waggon [*sic*] wheel to the musical rattling of a coach and six? Will you be able to see with perfect composure your old acquaintances flaunting it in gay life, tripping it along in elegance and splendor, while you hold an humble station and have no other enjoyments other than the sober comforts of a good wife? Can you in short be an Aquileia and cheerfully plant turnips with me, if fortune should so order it?²²

He warns her that if she does not believe she can cope with these realistic versions of their future life, they should “correct the mistake before we begin to act the tragedy of the unhappy couple.”²³ In addition, he has not hidden his past from Eliza, something he shared with very few. He tells her in this letter, “I have not concealed my circumstances from my Betsey; they are far from splendid; they may possibly be worse than I expect.”²⁴ Yet, in reassurance to Eliza and probably himself in writing the letter, Alexander tells her sweetly, “beloved by you, I can be happy in any situation and can struggle with every embarrassment of fortune with patience and firmness.”²⁵

Hamilton’s marriage to Elizabeth Schuyler in December 1780 brought him immense happiness, especially in his connection to his father-in-law. Philip Schuyler’s rigidity in social

²¹ Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Schuyler, July 31, 1780, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 16, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0795>.

²² Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Schuyler, August 1780, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 16, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0834>.

²³ Hamilton to E. Schuyler, August 1780.

²⁴ Hamilton to E. Schuyler, August 1780.

²⁵ Hamilton to E. Schuyler, August 1780.

hierarchy is something he pressed upon his children. The fact he allowed Eliza, his second eldest daughter, to marry an orphaned young aide-de-camp from impoverished circumstances is testimony to Hamilton's impression upon Schuyler. Hamilton and Schuyler enjoyed an instant rapport and connection; both men "spoke French, were well-read, appreciated military discipline, and had a common interest in business and internal-development schemes, such as canals. They also shared a common loyalty to Washington and impatience with congressional incompetence" even though Schuyler was in the Continental Congress.²⁶ Hamilton's marriage into the Schuyler family provided him with substantial support politically and would be incredibly beneficial in his future endeavors after the war.

Hamilton's letters to Schuyler, and vice versa, are revealing in what they felt needed to be shared with each other. Although we will never know the full intention of some of the things said, we can assume Hamilton told his father-in-law of his illegitimate birth prior to the marriage to Eliza. Schuyler wrote to Hamilton "I am pleased with every instance of delicacy in those who are dear to me, and I think I read your soul on that occasion you mention."²⁷ Although it is uncertain exactly what the "instance of delicacy" was both Ron Chernow and Broadus Mitchell infer it involved Hamilton revealing his birth status to Schuyler.²⁸ Schuyler also provided Hamilton with much encouragement and advice pertaining to matters of personal attacks, especially after Schuyler felt he had become a scapegoat for the Battle of Saratoga. "A man's

²⁶ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 135.

²⁷ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 149.

²⁸ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 149; Mitchell, 202.

character ought not to be sported with,” he said, “and he that suffers stains to lay on it with impunity really deserves none nor will he long enjoy one.”²⁹

Schuyler’s letters to Hamilton spanned a variety of topics. He worried immensely over the health of Eliza and the children during the summer months in Philadelphia while Hamilton served as Treasury Secretary. In a May 1791 letter, Schuyler implored Hamilton to impress upon Eliza the importance of leaving the city for fresher air during the summer. “I entreated Eliza to let me know when she would set out from Philadelphia for this place [Albany], that I might engage a good and discreet master of an Albany Sloop to bring her to this place, and begged her to bring all the children and their nurse with her. I fear If she remains where she is until the hot weather commences that her health may be much injured. Let me therefore intreat you to expedite her as soon as possible.”³⁰ Schuyler’s worries were not completely out of the realm of fatherly concern; during the summer months in more densely populated cities like Philadelphia, residents were likely to contract yellow fever which would ravage the population.

Both Alexander and Eliza Hamilton contracted the fever in the summer of 1793 and were separated from their children briefly, who ultimately were sent to Albany, while the parents were treated by Hamilton’s boyhood friend, Edward Stevens.³¹ Once Alexander and Eliza had recovered, they eagerly ventured to Albany to be reunited with their children. Yet, upon arrival, they were stopped in a village directly across the Hudson River from Albany for fear they were still contagious. Once they were deemed cleared by a group of physicians, the Hamilton’s settled

²⁹ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 149.

³⁰ Philip Schuyler to Alexander Hamilton, May 15, 1791, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 17, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-08-02-0311>.

³¹ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 449.

into Schuyler mansion. Hamilton's dissenters quickly picked up on the story and twisted it to suit their needs. One rumor arose that "after embracing Eliza, Philip Schuyler had swabbed his mouth with vinegar disinfectant and then washing his face and mouth, as if she might still be contagious. Schuyler, highly offended, informed Albany's mayor, Abraham Yates Jr., that his family had followed all the precautions necessary to ensure the safety of the people of Albany. By late September 1793, Hamilton had learned that his father-in-law had "submitted to strict conditions" in order to receive the Hamilton family.³² In a heated letter to Yates on September 26, Hamilton defended himself and Schuyler:

it was then for the first time, I understood, that I had come to this place upon *conditions*; which General Schuylers [*sic*] paternal anxiety led him to submit to, but which are of a nature too derogatory to my rights, as a citizen of this State, to be permitted by me to continue in force...I undertook the journey to this place, upon the urgent advice of my Phisician [*sic*] accompanied [*sic*] with his assurance that I might do it with perfect safety to myself and to *others*. I began it, for greater caution, two days later than he had recommended...as well as for our own *safty* [*sic*] as from an unwillingness to spread a dangerous desese [*sic*] through the Country—we were particularly carefull [*sic*] in leaving be hind [*sic*] us every article of Clothing which had been on us or near us from the Earliest approach of the Complaint, except *perhaps* some washed linen which was first thoroughly washed...and as to being ourselves confined under the eye of a guard or exposing the family of General Schuyler to the mortifying situation of being cut off from their usual intercourse with the Town & their friends, it is absolutely inadmissible.³³

Hamilton's relationship with his father-in-law and extended family was incredibly rewarding for him. It offered him a place and sense of belonging he had been seeking within a large, loving, and supportive family. Their defense and support of each other, even in the face of

³² Chernow, *Hamilton*, 451.

³³ Alexander Hamilton to Abraham Yates, Jr., September 26, 1793, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed November 17, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-15-02-0268>.

hardship, contributed to Hamilton's political endeavors and enabled him with connections that lasted throughout his life. Of each of Hamilton's paternal-based relationships, the one with Schuyler was perhaps the closest Hamilton had ever come to having a father who stuck by him, guided him, and aided him in career tracks. In addition, the personal nature of his relationship with Schuyler through marriage allowed Hamilton with a large family who all adored him.

Chapter 4: James Hamilton, Sr.

But what has become of our dear father? It is an age since I have heard [*sic*] from him, though I have written him several letters. Perhaps, alas! he is no more, and I shall not have the pleasing opportunity of contributing to render the close of his life more happy than the progress of it. My heart bleeds at the recollection of his misfortunes and embarrassments.¹

-Alexander Hamilton to James Hamilton, Jr., June 22, 1785.

Alexander Hamilton scarcely wrote of his father. What we do have from brief mentions and from his pay book, allows us the opportunity to investigate their relationship after James Hamilton, Sr. abandoned the family in 1766. Hamilton's relationship with his father in adulthood was restricted to the occasional letter and requests for financial support. Hamilton once explained to a friend, "for some time he was supported by his friends in Scotland, and for several years before his death by me" but that "it was his fault to have had too much pride and too large a portion of indolence—but his character was otherwise without reproach and his manners those of

¹ Alexander Hamilton to James Hamilton, Jr., June 22, 1785, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 141.

a Gentleman.”² For a person to have been abandoned by their father, the amount of forgiveness Hamilton appears to present is astonishing.

Hamilton’s concern for James Sr. appears multiple times in his letters. Sometime in the summer to autumn of 1780, Hamilton wrote to his then-fiancé, Elizabeth Schuyler, concerning his father.

I wrote you, my dear, in one of my letters that I had written to our father, but had not heard from him since, that the operations in the islands hitherto cannot affect him, that I had pressed him to come to America after the peace. A gentleman going to the island where he is, will in a few days afford me a safe opportunity to write again. I shall again present him with his black-eyed daughter, and tell him how much her attention deserves his affection and will make the blessing of his grey hairs.”³

Hamilton had a rough estimate of where his father was in 1780, but five years later he had no idea where James Sr. was. By 1792, Hamilton was greatly concerned for the health and welfare of his father, seeking to bring James Sr. to the mainland.⁴

Around the same time, Hamilton’s older brother, James Hamilton Jr., resurfaced writing to Alexander on May 31, 1784. However, Alexander did not reply until June 1785. He chastised his brother for the lack of letters. “I have received your letter of the 31st of May last, which, and one other, are the only letters I have received from you in many years” despite writing to James six months prior.⁵ However, James Jr. seems to have followed in his father’s footsteps and

² Hamilton to Jackson, August 26, 1800.

³ Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Schuyler, June-October 1780, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 16, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0746>.

⁴ Alexander Hamilton to William Seton, August 17, 1792, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 18, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-12-02-0176>.

⁵ Alexander Hamilton to James Hamilton, Jr., June 22, 1785, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 140.

reached out to his wealthier brother for money. “The situation you describe yourself to be in gives me much pain,” Alexander wrote, “and nothing will make me happier than, as far as may be in my power, to contribute to your relief. I will cheerfully pay your draft upon me for fifty pounds sterling, whenever it shall appear. I wish it was in my power to desire you to enlarge the sum; but though my future prospects are of the most flattering kind my present engagements would render it inconvenient to me to advance you a large sum.”⁶ Hamilton’s letter to his brother follows much of the format that his letters to his father followed. In both letters to James Sr. and James Jr., Alexander would frequently implore his family to join him in the United States instead of remaining in the Caribbean. “Let me only request of you to exert your industry for a year or two more where you are,” Alexander implores his brother, “and at the end of that time I promise myself to be able to invite you to a more comfortable settlement in this Country.”⁷

James Sr.’s pride likely got in the way of any acceptance of his son’s help which led to a creation of excuses. In a June 1793 letter, James Sr. remarked that his “bad State of health...prevented my going to Sea at this time being afflicted with a complication of disorders.”⁸ Father and son had never fully lost touch but were relegated to intermittent and unfamiliar letters through couriers. Yet, in attempt to stay current with Alexander’s life, James Sr. would conclude his letters inquiring upon the health of his son and extended family. “I beg you will drop me a few lines letting me know how you & your family keeps your health as I am uneasy at not having heard from you for some time past. I beg my respectfull [*sic*] Compliments to Mrs.

⁶ Hamilton to James Jr., 140.

⁷ Hamilton to James Jr., 140-41.

⁸ James Hamilton Sr. to Alexander Hamilton, June 12, 1793, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 18, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-14-02-0369>

Hamilton & your Children, & wishing you health and happiness.”⁹ Despite the seeming positive tone of this letter from James Sr., Alexander must have held some unspoken hostility toward his father. In a 1795 will Alexander had written in the face of a prospective duel, Hamilton contemplates the fate of his father and the money owed to his creditors should he perish.

I hesitated whether I would not also secure a preference to the drafts of my father—but these as far as I am concerned being a merely voluntary engagement, I doubted the justice of the measure and I have done nothing. I regret it lest they should return upon him and increase his distress. Though I am informed a man of respectable connections in Scotland he became bankrupt as a Merchant at an early day in the West Indies and is now in indigence. I have pressed him to come to me but his great age & infirmity have deterred him from the change of climate.¹⁰

Hamilton, although expressing pity for his father’s plight, would still leave him at the mercy of his creditors.

On June 3, 1799, James Hamilton Sr. died on the island of St. Vincent at roughly the age of eighty years old. During this time, a bloody insurrection of native Caribs and French speaking inhabitants began an uprising against the British. Although the British ultimately put a halt to the insurrection, it must have been a terrifying environment to reside in during one’s elder years.¹¹ Alexander never returned to the Caribbean, yet still took care of his absent father financially with “approximately two remittances per year, right up until his last payment at Christmas 1798.”¹² A November 29, 1796 log in Hamilton’s cash book records “Account of Donations pd draft of my

⁹ James Sr. to Hamilton, June 12, 1793.

¹⁰ Alexander Hamilton to Robert Troup, July 25, 1795, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 18, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-18-02-0312>.

¹¹ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 580.

¹² Chernow, *Hamilton*, 580.

father 300.”¹³ Hamilton lived in fear that his father would never heal from his economic circumstances and desired nothing more than to provide for James Hamilton Sr. in his old age, despite never receiving a return payment for the loan he provided James with. In the years before James’ death in 1799, Hamilton received a letter for the first time from his Scottish relatives. A William Hamilton, Alexander’s uncle, wrote a letter on March 10, 1797 to Alexander. Although that letter has not survived, Alexander’s reply has. Alexander found the contact with his Scottish relations to be “extremely gratifying” and proceeded to inform his uncle of his life story as of 1797.¹⁴ The letter is warm toward his father who Alexander remarks sadly that should James join him in New York “the change in Climate would be fatal to him.”¹⁵ In turn, Alexander accepted

¹³ Alexander Hamilton, “Cash Book, vol. 2, 1795-Jan. term 1801,” Alexander Hamilton Papers: Financial Papers, 1782-1804, Library of Congress, image 28, accessed November 21, 2018, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120766>.

¹⁴ A. Hamilton to W. Hamilton, May 2, 1797.

¹⁵ A. Hamilton to W. Hamilton, May 2, 1797.

to receive William's son Robert and allow him to stay with Alexander and Eliza while pursuing a career as an officer in the United States Navy.¹⁶

Nov 29. 1796		
Account of Donations	to draft of my father	300
Account of Summons	for Credit	3
Account of Expenses	for this sum due Mr. H	50
	paid for Campbell's (Falkland)	3.75
	Mr. H's sum due	307.30

Figure 10: Segment of Alexander Hamilton's Cash Book, vol. 2, 1784-1804.

Hamilton's relationship with his father, and his father's extended family, was restricted and restrained, only appearing when they were in need of something from Hamilton. Yet, Hamilton appeared more to pity his father than to hold some sort of repressed hostility toward him. In fact, Hamilton named his fourth and supposed favored child, James Alexander, after his father in 1788.¹⁷ Although Hamilton never saw his father again after the age of ten, he did remain in contact with him and aided him financially whenever he was able. Despite Hamilton's insistence to aid his father, the abandonment Hamilton faced haunted him throughout his life greatly impacted his ability to trust other men and build a relationship with those in father-figure-

¹⁶ Alexander Hamilton to Benjamin Stoddert, August 8, 1798, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 21, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-22-02-0039>.

¹⁷ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 203.

like roles. But Hamilton's relationship with his own children was also impacted by the lack of a relationship with his father. Alexander strove to be the father he never had, one who was available for his children, took an interest in their education, and strove to create a better future for them.

Conclusion

Happy, however I cannot be, absent from you and my darling little ones. I feel that nothing can ever compensate for the loss of the enjoyments I leave at home, or can ever put my heart at tolerable ease. In the bosom of my family alone must my happiness be sought, and in that of my Betsey is everything charming to me. ¹

-Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Hamilton, September 8, 1786.

Elizabeth and Alexander Hamilton raised eight biological children and one adopted child together in their twenty-four years of marriage. Despite his upbringing and his busy public life which kept him away from his family often, he was still very involved with the raising and educating of his children. His son recalled “his gentle nature rendered his house a most joyous one to his children and friends. He accompanied his daughter Angelica when she played and sang at the piano. His intercourse with his children was always affectionate and confiding, which excited in them a corresponding confidence and devotion.”² Eliza, as a devout Episcopalian, chose to raise her children within New York City’s Trinity Church. In October 1788, Eliza and Alexander took their three eldest children—Philip, Angelica, and Alexander Jr.—to have them baptized at Trinity Church. Although Hamilton had been a devout young man who had actively participated in twice daily prayer while attending King’s College, during the war and for some

¹ Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Hamilton, September 8, 1786, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 21, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0554>.

² James Alexander Hamilton, *Reminiscences of James A. Hamilton: Or, Men and Events, at Home and Abroad, During Three-Quarters of a Century* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1869), 3, Reprint, Nabu Press, 2013.

years after, Hamilton was not actively religious. Yet in order to appease Eliza, who was once classified as “the little saint” by fellow aide-de-camp Tench Tilghman, Alexander and his family rented pew ninety-two and he would perform pro bono legal work for the church.³ Yet Alexander likely did not attend church regularly or take communion. Chernow postulates that Hamilton had likely fallen under the sway of deism like many other founders of Hamilton’s generation. Deism, as classified in *The Church Cylopedia: A Dictionary of Church Doctrine, History, Organization and Ritual*, is the belief of only one God. He “denies the Divinity, the Incarnation, and the Atonement of Christ, and the work of the Holy Ghost; who denies the God of Israel, and believes in the God of nature.”⁴ Deist’s did not deny they were Christian, they just did not adhere to the belief in the Holy Trinity or in the miracles of Christ. While Hamilton may have faded from his Episcopalian beliefs, he did not force Eliza to adhere to his beliefs either.

All the same, Hamilton ensured his children received a religious upbringing and took pride in the intelligence of his children. In a charming letter to a friend in 1782, “you cannot imagine how entirely domestic I am growing. I lose all taste for the pursuits of ambition, I sigh for nothing but the company of my wife and my baby.”⁵ In fact, Hamilton considered removing himself from public life after Philip’s birth in January 1782, yet “the ties of duty alone or

³ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 132.

⁴ L.W. Gibson, “Deism,” in A.A. Benson, ed., *The Church Cylopaedia: A Dictionary of Church Doctrine, History, Organization and Ritual* (New York: James Pott & Company, 1883), 224, Google Books, eBook, Accessed November 22, 2018, <https://books.google.com/books?id=L6EAAAAMAAMAJ&lpg=PA56&ots=3gpyTGej8W&dq=the%20church%20cylopedia%201883&pg=PA56#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

⁵ Alexander Hamilton to Richard Kidder Meade, March 1782, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 22, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0011>.

imagined duty keep me from renouncing public life altogether. It is however probable I may not be any longer actively engaged in it.”⁶ Hamilton remarked of eldest son, Philip,

our little stranger...is truly a very fine young gentleman, the most agreeable in his conversation and manners of any I ever knew—nor less remarkable for his intelligence and sweetness of temper. You are not to imagine by my beginning with his mental qualifications that he is defective in personal. It is agreed on all hands, that he is handsome, his features are good, his eye not only sprightly and expressive but it is full of benignity. His attitude is sitting by connoisseurs esteemed graceful and he has a method of waving his hand that announces a future orator. He stands however rather awkwardly and his legs have not all the delicate slimness of his fathers. It is feared He may never excel as much in dancing which is probably the only accomplishment in which he will not be a model. If he has any fault in manners, he laughs too much. He has now passed his seventh month.⁷

Hamilton considered his eldest child to have much potential and sought to ensure that potential was fostered. While Philip attended school, Hamilton frequently wrote back and forth with his son regarding his education and what was occurring within the family. In 1791, Hamilton wrote back to Philip praising him on his work in school. “Your Master also informs me that you recited a lesson the first day you began, very much to his satisfaction. I expect every letter from him will give me a fresh proof of your progress. For I know that you can do a great deal, if you please, and I am sure you have too much spirit not to exert yourself, that you may make us every day more and more proud of you.”⁸ But within this same letter, Hamilton imparts a significant piece of advice upon his son that he probably gave to his other children as well. In considering retrieving Philip from school the following weekend, Hamilton wrote that unless Philip

⁶ Hamilton to Meade, March 1782.

⁷ Alexander Hamilton to Richard Kidder Meade, August 27, 1782, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 21, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0064>.

⁸ Alexander Hamilton to Philip Hamilton, December 5, 1791, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 735.

requested the pick-up be pushed back, Hamilton would still arrive “for a promise much never be broken; and I will never make you one, which I will not fulfill as far as I am able.”⁹

When Philip was eighteen and had graduated with a law degree, Hamilton created a set of rules for Philip to follow. Within these rules, Hamilton required his eldest son to “rise not later than Six O'clock—the rest of the year not later than Seven” between April and October, to read the law “from the time he is dressed in the morning till nine o'clock...At nine he goes to the office & continues there till dinner time—he will be occupied partly in the writing and partly in reading law. After dinner he reads law at home till five O'clock.”¹⁰ As strict as Hamilton’s set of rules may appear, they were for the benefit of Philip’s beginning law career and to ensure few outside distractions. All of Hamilton’s children were tutored in French, something he remarked upon in a brief letter to his eldest daughter, Angelica.

I was very glad to learn, my dear daughter, that you were going to begin the study of the French language. We hope you will in every respect behave in such a manner as will secure to you the good-will and regard of all those with whom you are. If you happen to displease any of them, be always ready to make a frank apology. But the best way is to act with so much politeness, good manners, and circumspection, as never to have occasion to make an apology. Your mother joins in best love to you. Adieu, my very dear daughter.¹¹

Alexander and Eliza raised their children in a very hands-on and cohesive manner. James Alexander Hamilton recalled how Eliza and Alexander would work together to ensure their children received a quality education in the mornings during breakfast. “My dear mother, seated as was her wont at the head of the table with a napkin in her lap, cutting slices of bread and

⁹ A. Hamilton to Ph. Hamilton, December 5, 1791.

¹⁰ Alexander Hamilton to Philip Hamilton, 1800, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 932.

¹¹ Alexander Hamilton to Angelica Hamilton, November 1793, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 810.

spreading them with butter for the younger boys, who, standing at her side, read in turn a chapter in the Bible or a portion of Goldsmith's Rome. When the lessons were finished the father and the elder children were called to breakfast, after which the boys were packed off to school."¹² Yet Eliza and Alexander did not only take care of their children. James recalls his parents taking in orphaned Fanny Antill, the daughter of Colonel Edward Antill, a King's College graduate and Revolutionary War veteran. Edward Antill suffered significant hardship financially and personally, and when Fanny was two, surrendered her into the care of the Hamilton's. The Hamilton's kept Fanny within their care until she was twelve. James Alexander recalled "she was educated and treated in all respects as his own daughter, and married Mr. Tappan, an eminent philanthropist of New York."¹³ Eliza's older sister Angelica praised the decision to Hamilton from London, "all the graces you have been pleased to adorn me with, fade before the generous and benevolent action of My Sister in taking the orphan Antle [*sic*] under her protection."¹⁴

Hamilton's interactions with and his immense concern for his children seems to be a complete attempt to act counter to how his family interacted with him. Although never clearly stated or defined, the fact Eliza married an orphan, that Alexander and Eliza took in an orphan, and that Eliza helped establish the first private orphanage in New York City later in life, showcases how much Hamilton's past influenced their private decisions. Alexander probably did

¹² James Alexander Hamilton, 3-4.

¹³ James Alexander Hamilton, 3.

¹⁴ Angelica Church to Alexander Hamilton, October 2, 1787, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 23, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-04-02-0144>

not want to have his children experience what he did as a young boy. Yet seven of his eight children would experience considerable tragedy between 1801 and 1804.

Philip considered the family's "brightest hope," was much like his father.¹⁵ A gifted orator yet also had a tendency to drift into situations that would require parental guidance. It was these situations that led to Alexander issuing the rules for Philip in 1800. Although Alexander hinted at some sort of tolerance and amusement at Philip's antics, once writing to Eliza in October 1801, "I am anxious to hear from Philip. Naughty young man." Yet also much like his father, Philip was brash and confrontational in defending his family's honor. Philip would enter into an affair of honor against Jeffersonian Republican, George Eacker, in November 1801. Philip's death brought much pain to the family. A friend of Philip's described the scene at Angelica Church's house, "On a bed without curtains lay poor Phil, pale and languid, his rolling, distorted eyeballs darting forth the flashes of delirium. On one side of him on the same bed lay his agonized father, on the other his distracted mother, around [him] his numerous relatives and friends weeping and fixed in sorrow."¹⁶ Hamilton, upon arrival at Philip's side, was so overcome with emotion he fainted.

On Philip's burial day, Alexander had to be propped up by friends while the three months pregnant Eliza was inconsolable.¹⁷ Robert Troup wrote two weeks after the duel, "never did I see a man so completely overwhelmed with grief as Hamilton has been."¹⁸ What Hamilton must have been feeling in the wake of his eldest and most treasured son's untimely death is

¹⁵ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 651.

¹⁶ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 654.

¹⁷ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 653-55.

¹⁸ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 655.

indescribable. One can only imagine how the man who had been abandoned by his own father must have felt an overwhelming sense of failure at the inability to keep his son safe from harm. Benjamin Rush wrote to the Hamilton's expressing his sympathy and shared grief in the loss of Philip, yet it was four months before Hamilton had collected himself enough to draft a response. He expressed to Rush, "My loss is indeed great. The highest as well as the eldest hope of my family has been taken from me," yet in a fit of unparalleled depression, Hamilton continued, "But why should I repine? It was the will of heaven; and now he is out of reach of the seductions and calamities of a world, full of folly, full of vice, full of danger—of least value in proportion as it is best known. I firmly trust also that he has safely reached the haven of eternal repose and felicity."¹⁹

As a result of Philip's death, Hamilton's second child, Angelica, suffered a mental breakdown and never recovered. Angelica Hamilton, then seventeen, had been described as "a lively, sensitive, musical girl who resembled her beautiful aunt."²⁰ Alexander attempted to help his daughter throughout the fall, even requesting from Charles Cotesworth Pinckney some watermelons and "three or four of your paroquets [*sic*] [parakeets]" as Angelica was "very fond of birds."²¹ However, Angelica never recovered and was stuck in an continued state of childhood and talked of Philip as if he were still alive.

Tragedy once more struck the Hamilton family in July 1804. Alexander, after weeks of conflict and a flurry of heated letters back and forth with then Vice President, and long-term

¹⁹ Alexander Hamilton to Benjamin Rush, March 29, 1802, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed November 23, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-25-02-0312>.

²⁰ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 655.

²¹ Alexander Hamilton to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, December 29, 1802, Founders Online, National Archives, Accessed November 23, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0056>.

adversary, Aaron Burr, also met in an affair of honor on the cliffs of Weehawken, New Jersey where Philip Hamilton dueled George Eacker only three years prior. As Hamilton prepared for the duel, he wrote a letter to Eliza for her to read should he not survive. While Hamilton lay in the home of William Bayard following the duel, he remained stoic and concerned for others, predominantly his wife and children. Eliza had been notified but not told the full extent of Hamilton's injuries, "let the event be gradually broken to her; but give her hopes."²² No one wanted to tell Eliza the truth of what had occurred for fear "she would become frantic."²³ Upon arrival to the Bayard household, Eliza was overcome with grief. Throughout the whole ordeal, Hamilton attempted to keep Eliza calm, reminding her "*Remember, my Eliza, you are a Christian.*"²⁴ By the morning of July 12, Hamilton, though of sound mind, was physically weak. Eliza, in an attempt to shield their children from the fate of their father, had kept the seven surviving Hamilton children from the room. Yet as Hamilton's condition worsened, Eliza realized the time had come to allow Alexander the chance to say goodbye to his children. David Hosack recalled Alexander continually inquiring on the welfare of his wife and children.²⁵ Eliza brought their seven children into the room and held up two-year-old Philip—affectionately known as Little Phil to the family and named for his elder brother—to Alexander's lips for a last kiss. Eliza then lined up all the children at the foot of the bed, so Hamilton could see them one last time. "But his fortitude triumphed over his situation, dreadful as it was; once, indeed, at the

²² David Hosack to William Coleman, August 17, 1804, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed November 24, 2018, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0280>.

²³ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 706.

²⁴ Hosack to Coleman, August 17, 1804.

²⁵ Hosack to Coleman, August 17, 1804.

sight of his children, brought to the bed-side together, seven in number, his utterance forsook him; he opened his eyes, gave them one look, and closed them again, till they were taken away.”²⁶ At 2:00 PM on July 12, 1804, Alexander Hamilton passed away quietly.

Philip Schuyler’s already delicate health became compromised following the news of Hamilton’s death. Eliza stayed in Albany to care for her ailing father. He told his eldest daughter, Angelica, Eliza “knows how tenderly I loved my dear Hamilton, how tenderly I love her and her children.”²⁷ In a cruel stroke, Philip Schuyler died on November 18, 1804, four months after Alexander died in New York City. How Eliza must have felt at the end of that year. In three years, she had lost her son (1801), her sister Peggy (1801), her mother (1803), her husband (1804), and then her father (1804).

It is unknown exactly how long it took Eliza to read the letters Hamilton left for her, but it was likely within the few days after Alexander’s death. In one letter dated the day before the duel, Alexander implored Eliza to treat Mrs. Ann Mitchel, Hamilton’s cousin on his mother’s side, “with the tenderness of a Sister.”²⁸ Hamilton had asked his cousin to come to the United States in order to pay her back for her kindness, likely for the scholarship that aided Hamilton’s immigration to the mainland. Alexander then proceeded to reassure Eliza that his soul will be well cared for should he perish. “Heaven can preserve me and I humbly hope will but in the contrary event, I charge you to remember you are a Christian. God’s Will be done. The will of a

²⁶ Hosack to Coleman, August 17, 1804.

²⁷ Chernow, *Hamilton*, 723.

²⁸ Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Hamilton, July 10, 1804, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 1023.

merciful God must be good.”²⁹ But it was Hamilton’s farewell letter to his wife written a week before the duel that perhaps showcased the depth of his despair at potentially leaving Eliza alone.

In turn, Eliza cherished this letter until her death fifty years later.

This letter, my very dear Eliza, will not be delivered to you, unless I shall first have terminated my earthly career; to begin, As I humbly hope from redeeming grace and divine mercy, a happy immortality.

If it had been possible for me to have avoided the interview, my love for you and my precious children would have been alone a decisive motive. But it was not possible, without sacrifices which would have rendered me unworthy of your esteem. I need not tell you of the pangs I feel, from the idea of quitting you and exposing you to the anguish which I know you would feel. Nor could I dwell on the topic lest it should unman me.

The consolations of Religion, my beloved, can alone support you; and these you have a right to enjoy. Fly to the bosom of your God and be comforted. With my last idea; I shall cherish the sweet hope of meeting you in a better world.

Adieu best of wives and best of Women. Embrace all my darling Children for me.

Ever yours
AH³⁰

Alexander Hamilton lived an impressive life in forty-nine years. A boy who came from difficult origins in the Caribbean managed to insert himself within the inner circles of two of the most powerful men in their respective regions. The relationship he had with George Washington and Philip Schuyler was unlike that of the one he maintained with his father. It is likely for this reason why historians have considered Hamilton and Washington’s friendship to be more of that as a father and son while the relationship between Hamilton and Schuyler has largely been

²⁹ A. Hamilton to E. Hamilton, July 10, 1804.

³⁰ Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Hamilton, July 4, 1804, in *Hamilton: Writings*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 1019.

ignored. Hamilton never spoke openly about his relationships with these men, yet his letters to them and stories of their interactions suggest something different.



Figure 11: Philip Hamilton 1782-1801, age 20.



Figure 12: John Church Hamilton 1792-1882

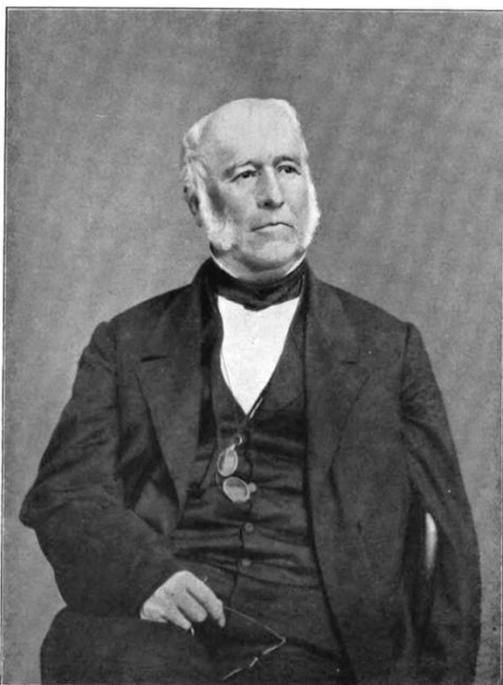


Figure 13: Philip Hamilton 1802-1884

Hamilton's relationship with Washington is often described as one of father and son. However, this would be incorrect to assume. The relationship for Washington was likely one he wished for as one of a father and son. Washington's inability to have his own children, coupled with a difficult childhood where he did not receive the full guidance possible from his father before Augustine's death, drove him to surround himself with young men who showed great potential. Washington believed he could offer guidance to these men and bring them close into his fold. His future notoriety and influence would allow these young men to build alliances and gain access to a more exclusive part of society. Yet Hamilton, in spite of this, purposely kept himself distant from Washington. If Hamilton desired a father figure, or saw a father figure, in Washington, why would he distance himself? Alexander Hamilton did not seek a father figure in Washington.

Yet, the relationship between Hamilton and Philip Schuyler was different. Hamilton's relationship with Washington was predominantly professional, although personal issues were shared between them. However, Hamilton and Schuyler shared a more personal and intimate relationship as well as a professional one. The reason for this would be clear considering Hamilton married one of Schuyler's daughters. However, Hamilton appears to have maintained a sense of respectful decorum in his correspondence while still providing updates on his family's wellbeing and concerns for Schuyler's as well. Schuyler aided Hamilton in his military, law, and political career and served as a sounding board for Hamilton, as evidenced in Hamilton's explanation of terminating his service as Washington's aide-de-camp. Hamilton and Schuyler shared a father and son relationship in the sense that Schuyler provided his son-in-law with a

way to continue his law education, a place to work when in Albany, and family ties that provided Hamilton with access to the blue-blooded society in New York.

The abandonment of James Hamilton, Sr. was just one contributing factor in Hamilton's desire to build connections with prominent men in North American society, but it was not the sole factor. Hamilton knew from an early age that he would need to build relationships with and show-off his capability to prominent men in order to build a name for himself in the eighteenth-century world. Hamilton did not have his father to guide him and was put to work at the age of ten by his mother. Upon his mother's death when he was twelve, Hamilton knew the only way to escape his circumstances was to find a way to build up his reputation. However, the abandonment of James Hamilton Sr. also made Alexander incredibly nervous about building lasting relationships with men he feared could be a father-like figure to him. This nervousness kept him from allowing himself to become close to older men he acknowledged had flaws.

Hamilton's relationship with these men was not the only relationship he held that was affected by the abandonment of his father. Hamilton's investment into his children's upbringing was a direct reflection of what Hamilton would have liked from his father. Although Hamilton never wrote about this, the fact Hamilton suffered from the loss of both parents actively in his life by the age of twelve likely made Hamilton recognize how he wanted to be as a father. Even in his dying moments, he wanted to see and have the image of his surviving children lined up at the foot of the bed.

Historians have long debated the extent to which Hamilton and Washington had a father and son relationship with most dismissing this form of relationship completely. The majority of Hamiltonian scholars have also completely avoided Hamilton's relationship with Philip Schuyler

and with the Schuyler family as a whole. But by ignoring the extent of these relationships and what they mean for someone who essentially came from nothing diminishes the importance of self-advocacy and self-preservation. The lessons someone, like Hamilton, learned from these men were invaluable to him. He was able to pursue avenues that had otherwise been unavailable to him and gain connections that aided him in his career. He, in turn, was able to build a life for himself that was incredibly successful for forty-nine short years. By understanding the relationship between Hamilton and men of influence close to him we, as historians, are able to decipher whether these relationships were as important as originally believed and the impact these types of relationships have on men who suffer from abandonment within the larger colonial childrearing context.

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