

**ALEXANDER HAMILTON: NEVIS-
WEEHAWKEN. A LECTURE ON THE
MILITARY CAREER WITH ELABORATE
NOTES ON THE IMPORTANT EVENTS OF
HIS LIFE, AND FULL PARTICULARS OF
THE HAMILTON-BURR DUEL**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649402946

Alexander Hamilton: Nevis-Weehawken. A Lecture on the Military Career with Elaborate Notes on the Important Events of His Life, and Full Particulars of the Hamilton-Burr Duel by James Edward Graybill

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Cover @ 2017

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JAMES EDWARD GRAYBILL

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ON THE MILITARY CAREER
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ALEXANDER HAMILTON
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SECOND EDITION, 1898

BY

JAMES EDWARD GRAYBILL

NEW YORK

1898

lv

ALEXANDER HAMILTON

A Lecture Delivered Before Alexander Hamilton Post, G. A. R., on
Thursday, May 17, 1894.

BY JAMES EDWARD GRAYBILL.

Commander, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Every author prefixes his book with an apology, or a dedication, and I will begin my lecture with an explanation of the causes that led to its preparation and the motives that prompted it.

The many generous and warm welcomes which I have received at the hands of Alexander Hamilton Post placed me under an obligation which I was desirous, in some way, of reciprocating, and I felt that I could do so in no more appropriate manner than by preparing and delivering a lecture, taking for my subject the man after whom the Post is named. The plan once conceived, I began my investigations, but soon ascertained how incompetent I was for the task assumed, and what an undertaking I had before me in preparing something worthy of your attention.

On the very threshold of my labors I was met with serious difficulties: First, I was a Democrat, and knew that Hamilton was the founder of a political organization with which I was not in sympathy; second, I was a Southerner, imbued with the doctrine of State Rights, which I had been taught from boyhood was the most vital and essential principle of our government: Hamilton was the known advocate of a strong centralized national government. Furthermore, what I knew of Hamilton I had gleaned from the study of the life of Aaron Burr, whom I had regarded with all the reverence and veneration that the youthful mind bestows upon a brilliant, brave and chivalric person, such as he had been pictured to me. I had eagerly sought and read everything that in any way related to Aaron Burr, and remember once, while a student in Germany, searching the great libraries of Europe for a little book, the "Memoirs of Mrs. Coghlan, nee Moncrieffe," which was merely mentioned in a foot note in one of his biographies. There were traits in Burr's character which greatly pleased and impressed me. One was his great affection for and devotion to his daughter Theodosia, than which nothing could be more beautiful; the other, his conduct when wrongfully accused by General Washington of reading

Autograph 31 Dec 1938

over his shoulder. It is told that Washington was reading a letter while Burr was standing near; thinking that Burr was noting its contents, he turned upon him suddenly, and in a stern and severe manner, remarked, "How dare Colonel Burr read over my shoulder?" Burr, indignant at the unmerited rebuke, quickly replied, looking the General squarely in the eye, "Colonel Burr *dares* do anything." I have always admired courage in men, and this episode made me look upon Burr as a veritable hero.

From these early impressions it was but natural for me to entertain prejudices against General Hamilton which, I am now pleased to say, have been altogether removed by a careful study of his life, character and works. Who can read his life without revering his memory? Who can contemplate his patriotic devotion to our country without a feeling of gratitude for the services he rendered as soldier, Jurist and statesman?

My work has been one of both pleasure and profit. A pleasure in rendering a service to you, gentlemen of the Post; and a profit, in removing a groundless prejudice against one of the most brilliant and noble characters in our country's history.*

LITERATURE.

It may be well, at this time, to refer you to the literature on Hamilton. First, is the eight-volume edition of Cabot Lodge and the seven-volume edition of John C. Hamilton, both now rarely to be found; then his life, in two volumes, by John C. Hamilton, and a later and exceedingly interesting one in two volumes by John T. Morse; and the following one-volume series, viz., by Cabot Lodge, Samuel M. Schmucker, Renwick, Reitmuller and George Shea; also the Hamilton Papers, by Hawks. For details of the duel, reference may be had to Coleman's Collections, a volume printed in 1804; Volume 10 of the Historical Magazine, 1863, and Volume 4 of Gay's Popular History of the United States. In regard to the place of his birth (the island of Nevis), see Bryan Edwards' History of the West Indies, volume 1, page 472. Further valuable information may be found in Bancroft's History of America; Brice's American Commonwealth; The Narrative and Critical History of America; Laboulaye's Histoire des Etas-Unis, and Curtis' History of the United States Constitution. They all contain important and interesting allusions to Hamilton. For a short and concise review of his life and works, reference might be had to the American Encyclopaedia.

THE MAN.

Hamilton was a man of small stature, about five feet six, and weighing about 130 pounds. His head was large, with deep-set, piercing, bluish-gray eyes, and an aquiline nose. His mouth and chin were indicative of a kind and gentle disposition. He had an oval face, high forehead and ruddy complexion, light hair, combed back and gathered in a queue, and wore no beard. He had a strong Scottish cast of features, was erect in his gait, courteous in his manner and highly esteemed by those with whom he was thrown in contact. He was possessed of great personal magnetism,

(* Note 1, p. 23.)

which, with his great learning, enabled him to sway the minds of men and impress his ideas of public policy upon the leading men of his time.

James Renwick, in his "Life of Hamilton" (pp. 337-341), thus describes him:

"His motions were graceful, and the tones of his voice agreeable in the highest degree. To these natural requisites he added high powers of argument, readiness of expression and simple elegance of thought and diction. He thus, as an orator, is said to have been pre-eminent even in a country so prolific in public speakers. Whether at the bar or in the deliberative assembly, he was equally distinguished for his commanding eloquence. Ambitious to no little degree, he sought no offices of honor and emolument, nor would he have accepted them except as opportunities of being useful to his country. He looked for his recompense in the consideration of the virtuous and patriotic of his fellow-citizens, or the more sure gratitude of posterity, not in wealth or the pride of elevated rank. With such disinterested views, each call to the public service involved him in pecuniary loss, and he gradually contracted a debt of considerable amount, which remained unpaid at his decease. His appointment as Inspector-General in the Provisional Army interrupted the growth of a lucrative professional business, and, at the same time, deprived him of the means of meeting the interest on large purchases of land which he had entered into, in full confidence that his labours as a legal man would enable him to hold it. To prevent the absolute sacrifice of his landed property, his friends and admirers united after his death in a subscription, by which his debts were paid, and the proceeds of the estate finally reimbursed their advances, but left little or no surplus to his family.

"Hamilton's views of government and national policy were founded on the classic authors of Greece and Rome, and the works of the great men who maintained in England a struggle against the royal prerogative. To this he added an intimate knowledge of that unwritten code which probably took its birth in the fastnesses of Caucasus, and acquired its first strength in the forests and marshes of Germany, whence, by our Anglo-Saxon ancestors, it was brought into Britain. He found this in our own country, stripped of the feudal features with which the Norman conquerors had defaced it, and, with the greater part of the actors in the Revolution, sought no more than the maintenance of privileges already existing as a birthright. To these privileges, comprising the safety of life, liberty and property, he considered every citizen to have a right, unless deprived of them as a punishment for crime, and independently of the will of his fellows, whether they constituted a majority or not. A knowledge of the republics of antiquity had shown him that, in the absence of such a safeguard, no tyranny was ever more oppressive than that exercised in the name of the people. Hence he set his face against the principles imported from France at the breaking out of her revolution, believing that if they became the settled policy of the government they would be subversive of individual rights and personal liberty.

" With these views, he looked upon the British constitution as the noblest monument of human wisdom; and while he did not defend its corruptions, nor propose its monarchical and aristocratic features for imitation, he considered it as a model after which a permanently free government might best be formed. Those, who, with the French democrats, maintained the unlimited sovereignty of the majority, have found room for accusing him of being in favour of regal power, and of wishing to engraft a House of Lords on our institutions. With how little reason this accusation was made has already been exhibited.

" In the political struggles which succeeded his death, the party which was opposed to him triumphed; but that very triumph has shown how deeply-seated were the principles maintained by Hamilton in the hearts, if not in the judgment, of the American people. However loud may have been the tone in which an opposing theory has been proclaimed, the practice of the government has been, in almost all respects, such as Hamilton would have himself directed. The public faith has been maintained inviolate to the national creditor; the executive has acted upon and avowed its responsibility; the independence of the judiciary, if threatened, has never been directly assailed; the supremacy of the general government has been asserted in a proclamation worthy of Hamilton's own genius; an efficient army has been maintained in time of peace, and applied to curb a generous but mistaken sympathy; a navy has become the favourite institution of the country; and, except in a single local instance, the natural rights of individuals have been held sacred.

" Among his great measures, a National Bank was adopted by the successful party; and if, by the errors of its management and the multiplicity of state institutions, it has become unpopular, the wisdom of his course, and its consistency with the letter of the Constitution, has been established by judicial decisions and legislative enactments. The policy in relation to manufactures, which he failed in carrying, has since been for a time adopted; but, although again abandoned, the judgment of the public appears to be rapidly resuming a sound tone in this respect, when the cotton-growers of the South shall see that the spinners and weavers of the North are inseparably connected with them by the ties of a common interest.

" When the angry feelings excited by the long struggle between the Federal and Republican parties shall have cooled, and all the actors in those stirring scenes shall have retired from the stage, it requires little prescience to predict that Hamilton will assume, by general consent, the first place among American statesmen, and will be held, in the estimate of his patriotic services, as second to Washington alone."

There are two fine portraits of Hamilton in this city — one, by Trumbull, in the rooms of the Chamber of Commerce, and the other, by Welmer (later also attributed to Trumbull), in the Governor's Room of the City Hall. Although both are alleged to have been painted by the same artist, and at about the same time, there is absolutely no resemblance between them.

I prefer the one in the City Hall, as it comes nearer to my idea of how Hamilton should look. It is a fine study, in which his quiet dignity, intellectual bearing and genial nature are all prominently and conspicuously brought out.

NATIVITY.

General Hamilton was born on January 11, 1757, on the island of Nevis, amidst the beauties of an eternal spring, beneath a sky serene and unclouded, where fruits and flowers, with their exquisite fragrance and wealth of color, lend a charm to the varied prospects that make this spot inexpressibly beautiful.

Nevis is about the shape and half the size of our Staten Island — has a population of some 10,000 or 12,000 — one town, Charlestown, the seat of government and port of entry. Some two miles off lies St. Christopher Island, with four towns and a population of 30,000, and nearby are the islands of St. Eustatius and Santa Cruz.

Whether Hamilton was born in the town of Charlestown or in some hamlet of the island is not known. His father, John Hamilton, was a Scotch merchant, and very probably was conducting his business in town at the time of Alexander's birth, although all accounts state that he was a resident of St. Christopher Island, where he met and married Mrs. Lavine, a French Huguenot, and the divorced wife of a wealthy Danish physician. No mention is made of his residence on the island of Nevis; in fact, we seldom find any allusion to the names of the towns on the various islands of Nevis, St. Christopher and Santa Cruz (Sainte Croix), although Nevis has one town and several hamlets — St. Christopher four towns and Santa Cruz two. This fact has occasioned much doubt and uncertainty regarding the early life of Hamilton.

John T. Morse, in his *Life of Hamilton*, commenting on the peculiar qualities of his mind and character, says:

"It would be interesting speculation to inquire how far they were due to this intermingling of the blood of two widely different races (Scotch and French Huguenot), and to the superadded effect of his tropical birthplace. It seems possible, without becoming over fanciful, to trace quite clearly these diverse and powerful threads of influence. Thus there are to be plainly noted in him many of the most marked and familiar traits of the genuine Scot. He manifested, in a rare degree, the shrewdness, the logical habit of mind and the taste for discussion, based upon abstract and general principles, with which the *Waverly Novels* have made us familiar, as distinguishing aptitudes of the Scottish intellect. If his mental traits were Scotch, his moral traits carry us back to his French and Huguenot ancestry. He had the ease of manner, the liveliness and vivacity, the desire and the ability to please, which the French claim as their especial heritage. He evinced the firm moral courage, the persistence in noble generous endeavor, the power of self sacrifice, and the elements of a grand heroism, which might be expected in the descendant from one of the high-spirited Protestant exiles of France, a band of men the example of whose