

# a tale of two visionaries

## Hamilton & Lafayette

*Colin Romanick weaves the stories of two of America's earliest heroes.*

### HAMILTON

In the early morning hours of July 11, 1804, two groups of men boarded boats in Manhattan, New York and headed for Weehawken, New Jersey across the Hudson River. Their destination was the Heights of Weehawken below the Cliffs of Palisades where many duels had been held. The parties arrived separately at 6:30 a.m. and included Revolutionary War veteran and former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton and then Vice-President Aaron Burr. Hamilton won both lots cast for position and which man's second should start the duel. Hamilton chose the north side position facing New York City and Burr would face the cliffs. Both refused light trigger settings on the pistols as the seconds marked off the paces. Since dueling was illegal, none of those present saw the exchange of fire. It was thought that by not witnessing the actual duel, those present would be protected from prosecution. Those present however heard two shots. Hamilton is believed to have fired first and his shot struck a tree branch above Burr's head. Burr's shot hit Hamilton in the abdomen above the right hip. The duel concluded a life surrounded by conflict and born out of anything but traditional circumstances.

### LAFAYETTE

As his son placed American soil from Bunker Hill and then French soil on the casket, a life of fighting for democratic ideals came to a close. The Marquis de Lafayette had been an advocate of democracy in both the American and French Revolutions and beyond. His early formative years shaped the man he was to become and his passions would land him in financial ruin, an Austrian prison and at odds with nobility that was his own.

The great man was born Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Mortier, Marquis de Lafayette on September 6 in the year 1757. Born into one of France's oldest families, Lafayette could trace his ancestors to the Crusades and having fought with Joan of Arc. His own father was a Colonel of grenadiers who fought with the French Army in the Seven Years War. Lafayette would become fatherless at the age of two, when the Colonel was killed by British forces, at the famous Battle of Minden. His mother would join her husband, in death, when Lafayette was only 12 years old. Upon his mother's death, Lafayette became the heir to one of the largest fortunes in France.

### BELOW

This bronze marker at Yorktown Battlefield honors the forces under the Marquis de Lafayette led by Alexander Hamilton, who took Redoubt No. 10 by storm with the bayonet

### BOTTOM

The night assaults on Redoubts 9 and 10 are well documented by the U.S. National Park Service at Yorktown Battlefield





## HAMILTON

Alexander Hamilton's birthdate is generally accepted as January 11, 1757. Most scholars agree on the birth year as 1757 but, there are those who believe that evidence exists to suggest the year 1755. The location of birth is undisputed as being Charlestown, which is the capital of the Island of Nevis. Nevis is a part of the Leeward Islands and in the British West Indies. Alexander Hamilton and his older brother James were both born out of wedlock to Rachael Faucette. She was married to another man and the father of James and Alexander was a Scotsman named James A. Hamilton. Faucette had left her husband, Johann Michael Lavien and first son Peter, when she met James A. Hamilton and moved to Nevis. The move to Nevis came about by Faucette inheriting property from her father.

Later threatened with allegations of adultery and desertion by her legal husband, James A. Hamilton left Faucette and the boys to spare them nasty and public divorce proceedings. Faucette then moved to St. Croix and operated a small store in Christiansted. This provided a living for her and her sons until her death in 1768, of a severe fever. Alexander was then orphaned and suffered the wrath of Faucette's first husband. In probate court, Faucette's estate was seized, including everything down to the silverware and a collection of books. Many of the items were liquidated by public auction and a family friend purchased Alexander's beloved collection of 34 books and returned them to him.

Due to the illegitimacy of Hamilton's birth, he was denied entrance into church school by the Church of England. Therefore, Alexander received private tutoring and supplemented his learning by reading his book collection. Hamilton

continued to work as a self-taught clerk in his teens, which led him to write. An article written about the hurricane, which nearly destroyed Christiansted in 1772, led Hugh Knox and other community leader to send Alexander to America. Hamilton arrived in New York to finish his grammar school education in Elizabeth Town later that same year. He performed well and would enter King's College which is now Columbia University.

## LAFAYETTE

It did not take long for the young Marquis to find an equally wealthy bride in Marie Adrienne Françoise de Noailles. The bride's mother arranged the marriage, which took place in the Hôtel de Noailles, the family residence in Paris on April 11, 1774. The marriage was to produce five children, the first of which was born in 1776 and named Henriette.

Prior to his marriage, the Marquis followed his father and won a Captain's commission in the French Army. He joined the Black Musketeers in 1773. This commission was short lived, as budget reductions forced Lafayette, into militia duty at the fortress city of Metz in 1775. It was here that the Marquis would have a fateful meeting with the British Duke of Gloucester over dinner. During the meal, the Duke complained of the American colonists raising a Continental Army under George Washington. The Duke went on to explain his displeasure in the colonist's beliefs of self-government and equality. Lafayette later stated in his memoirs, that this was a turning point in his life.

## HAMILTON

Hamilton grew sympathetic to the plight of the colonists against Britain and began to publish pamphlets supporting revolution. This passion led Hamilton to

enlist in the colonial forces where he was elected Captain on March 14, 1776. The state of New York authorized him to raise an artillery company. Once the unit was raised, it formed part of Henry Knox's artillery regiment and fought in the battles of Long Island, White Plains, Trenton and Princeton during the campaigns of 1776-77. In March of 1777, Hamilton's skill both militarily and as a writer caught

### BELOW

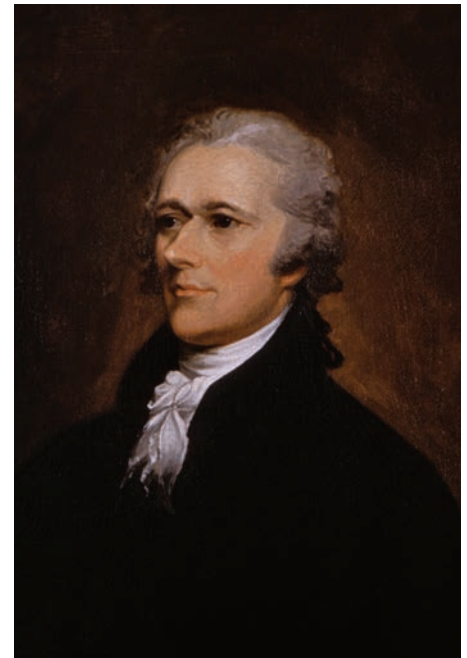
Portrait of Hamilton in 1804

### BOTTOM

The young Lafayette was only 19 when he received his commission in the Continental Army

### BOTTOM LEFT

French artillery was vital in reducing the British forces at Yorktown. This 24 pdr siege gun reportedly fired the first shot of the battle







**LEFT**  
General George Washington was beloved by his troops and may well have been a father figure to the young and impressionable Marquis de Lafayette.

rejected appeals to come back to the French Army. Instead, he set sail for America at the age of 19 and arrived in Philadelphia in 1777. Despite a lack of experience, Lafayette was appointed a Major General and, after delays, joined Washington's Camp at Brandywine Creek. Lafayette was quoted as saying, "I am here to learn, not to teach." His posting to General John Sullivan's command would give him ample opportunity to learn in a short time. Sullivan's forces were engaged

on the right flank during the Battle of Brandywine and the Marquis de Lafayette participated in the battle. It was not until the retreat began that the Marquis realized that he had been shot in the leg. He would recover from his wounds while wintering at Valley Forge. While convalescing, his and other spirits were buoyed in 1778, with the news of the French Alliance.

In contrast to the winter quarters at Valley Forge, Lafayette found himself a short time later at Monmouth New Jersey in June of 1778. The Marquis survived the 100 degree heat which took its toll adding to the casualties from battle. The Battle of Monmouth left both sides bloody but, Washington and his continentals were in possession of the field after the British retreat. Shortly after the battle, Lafayette left for France hoping to gather support for the American war effort. Although he was lauded as a hero upon his return to France, he would find sorrow. He was greatly disappointed to find that the Comte de Rochambeau was chosen over him to lead the approximately 7,000 man French force to America.

The Marquis followed his countrymen back to America where Washington sent him to Virginia. There Lafayette was to reinforce Gen. Anthony Wayne and stop the British raids taking place along the James River. Cornwallis had been seeking a new port for ships to bring in supplies when he was harassed

and cornered at Yorktown. The siege of Yorktown lasted from September 29 until October 19 and was a decisive Franco-American victory. Lafayette commanded a division at Yorktown and had foreseen this opportunity. In a letter the Marquis wrote to Washington, on August 21, 1781 he states, "In the present State of affairs, My dear General, I Hope You will come Yourself to Virginia, and that if the french Army Moves this way, I will Have at last the Satisfaction of Beholding You Myself at the Head of the Combined Armies... When a french fleet takes possession of the Bay and Rivers, and we form a land force Superior to His, that Army must Soon or late Be forced to Surrender as we may get what Reinforcements we please."

## HAMILTON

Hamilton is probably known more for his service in Congress helping to ratify the Constitution and his being the first Secretary of the Treasury. Hamilton believed in a strong central government and during his time as an assemblyman from New York, he proposed a President-for-Life and for Senators to serve life terms as well. This would cause James Madison and others to consider Hamilton a "monarchist sympathizer." Hamilton defended his position by citing the ability to impeach and remove a President or Senator for misconduct. A later personal draft comprised many aspects of the final Constitution, but Hamilton never presented it. When the Constitutional Convention ended, Hamilton was not entirely pleased with the final result. He felt that it was an improvement over the Articles of Confederation so he signed it. His is the only signature from New York, on the United States Constitution, since the other two New York members had withdrawn.

Hamilton joined John Jay and James Madison in writing 85 essays in support of the Constitution called The Federalist Papers. The purpose of these essays was to argue and influence others for the ratification of the United States Constitution. Hamilton would contribute the largest number being 51 out of the 85 essays. Hamilton did not sign his name but that of Publius, which would remain on all subsequent essays. The true identity of the authors was not known until years later.

While Hamilton was a strong supporter of the Constitution, he opposed the Bill of Rights. The Federalist Papers and particularly Federalist No. 84 written by Hamilton argued that the Bill of Rights could be interpreted as the only rights that people might have. This opposition view is countered by the fact that unrestrained government could result in tyranny. The matter would later be clarified by the Ninth

the eye of General George Washington. The commander of the Continental Army would promote Hamilton to Lieutenant Colonel and aide-de-camp to Washington. He served in this capacity for four years and interacted at the highest levels with Congress members, state governors and generals. Although this afforded Hamilton many opportunities, he longed for a field command. The long awaited opportunity came on July 31, 1781 when Washington assigned him command of a light infantry battalion. The battalion comprised the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> New York regiments and companies from Connecticut.

His command grew to three battalions during the Yorktown Campaign. Hamilton led the assault in a night-time raid on Redoubt No. 10 in conjunction with the French allies assaulting Redoubt No. 9 at Yorktown. These bayonet assaults were successful in storming the British fortifications and forcing the surrender of the entire army under Gen. Cornwallis. This surrender concluded major military operations in North America. However, Hamilton's military career did not end with Yorkton. He was breveted a Colonel on September 30, 1782 and discharged three months later. He would also return to serve as Inspector General of the Army from 1798-99.

## LAFAYETTE

He studied revolutionary ideals and



Amendment.

Hamilton would go on to be appointed the first Secretary of the Treasury in September 11, 1789. Under this position Hamilton would create Reports on Public Credit and The National Bank. He also established the U.S. Mint and the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service. Hamilton's idea to raise revenue through a "whiskey tax" resulted in rebellion. Although the so called "Whiskey Rebellion" resulted in little bloodshed, it tested the resolve of the young nation.

## LAFAYETTE

The Marquis de Lafayette returned again to France a hero. He would return to the United States two more times but, a great deal more would happen in the life of the Marquis. While in France as in America, he favored a strong central government and an end to slavery. This led him to work with Thomas Jefferson in order to draft the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen while serving in the French National Assembly. The Rights of Man would form the basis for the present day French Constitution. Lafayette also assisted in launching the French Revolution of 1789. He still supported the idea of a constitutional monarchy but soon found that the two were not compatible. When the revolution became violent, Lafayette fled the country to Austria, There he was imprisoned as a political radical at Olmutz. His wife would join him in exile for nearly two years.

During the Reign of Terror under Robespierre, the family fortune was confiscated and many of Adrienne de Lafayette's family met the fate of the guillotine. Once the couple had been released from the Austrian prison, they

settled at La Grange, an estate near Paris. The Marquis was on the move again in 1824 and made his final visit to America. When he arrived at New York Harbor a crowd of 8,000 people greeted him. While touring the country, he visited Washington's Mount Vernon. Although Washington had died in 1799, Lafayette was said to have spent an extended amount of time alone when he visited the grave of his greatest mentor and father figure. It is not a surprise that his fondness and admiration, led him to name his son, after the first president of the United States.

Lafayette's military life did not end with his revolutionary past. Several years after his return to France, the Marquis became involved in another uprising. He took command of the National Guard and aided rebels in the 1830 July Revolution against King Charles X. The king was forced to abdicate and Lafayette backed the installation of King Charles' cousin Louis-Phillipe to the throne. Louis-Phillipe's colonial conquests, weakening economy and conservative policies soon displeased Lafayette. He would not live to see the 1848 revolution which overthrew the king and brought in a provisional government. He died at the age of 76 in 1834 and is buried in Picpus Cemetery, in Paris.

## HAMILTON

In his post-Secretary years, Hamilton saw the formation of political parties. Largely Democratic-Republicans and Federalist parties began to emerge. Hamilton was obviously considered a Federalist while James Madison was joined by Thomas Jefferson and others as Democratic-Republicans. A quarrel between Hamilton and Jefferson was not the first of many political disagreements. The election of

John Adams as U.S. President in 1796 did not bode well for Hamilton. Adams did not like Hamilton and thought him overly ambitious. The irony is that Hamilton supported Adams to block Jefferson which he saw as a greater political threat.

The election of 1800 resulted in the election of Thomas Jefferson as President and Aaron Burr as his Vice-President. Burr and Hamilton had known each other for many years and disliked each other immensely. Hamilton's father-in-law Philip Schuyler had lost a Senate seat to Burr. Likewise, Burr had lost his run for Governor of New York due to Hamilton's political influence. This rivalry boiled over in an attack of journalistic defamation and neither side backed down.

The only satisfactory way to decide this dispute was considered to be an honor duel. After several letters were sent between the parties, there was no resolution – leading to the duel on July 11, 1804. Those sympathetic to Hamilton believe that he fired to purposely miss Burr thinking that Burr would reciprocate. Others see Burr as a murderer who set out to kill Hamilton. Indeed, in the following days he had a conversation where he claimed if the mist had not clouded his vision he would have shot Hamilton through the heart. Still some feel that Hamilton was struck first and his firing was simply an involuntary muscle reaction. With the passage of time and forensics, the world still cannot conclude this mystery definitively. It can only be said that Hamilton was born into a challenging life, during a period of revolutionary change, where he made great contributions. One must wonder what his final thoughts were. He suffered greatly until succumbing to his fatal wound the next day on July 12, 1804. 🗡️



No.10054  
Washington,  
No.10062  
Lafayette,  
No.10060  
Hamilton and  
No.16053  
Bodyguard