



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

(Alexander) Hamilton, 1830

Alexander Hamilton--born at Nevis in the Leeward Islands in either 1755 or 1757--emigrated to New York in 1772. There, he entered Kings College (now Columbia University) in 1773 but interrupted his studies to become involved in some of the events which led to the American Revolution by authoring several pamphlets. When the war did come, he was commissioned the captain of an artillery company. Hamilton participated in the Long Island campaign and the retreat through New Jersey before attracting General George Washington's attention and becoming his secretary and aide de camp in March 1777. He served in that capacity, in the rank of lieutenant colonel, until February of 1781 when, as a result of a quarrel with Washington, he resigned his post. Washington, both magnanimous and pragmatic in regard to Hamilton's ability, allowed him to be appointed to head an infantry regiment which he led brilliantly during the Yorktown campaign.

When the war ended, Hamilton read law at Albany, NY and was admitted to the bar. He served a single term in the Continental Congress before returning to private life and beginning the law practice in New York City. However, he remained active in his support for a strong federal government. Hamilton was appointed a delegate from New York to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 though his work at the convention was of little importance. Far more significant was his almost lone struggle in New York to secure ratification of the Constitution. He waged a fierce newspaper war in favor of its adoption and concocted the idea for the *Federalist Papers*, most of which he wrote alone or in cooperation with James Madison. Though New York at the time was extremely particularistic, the sheer force of Hamilton's arguments carried the day and secured the states adherence to the Constitution at the Poughkeepsie meeting in July 1788. In that year, the young lawyer returned to the Continental Congress and figured prominently in the formation of the new government. Hamilton was appointed Secretary of the Treasury in September 1789 and immediately set out to establish the nations credit on a sound basis. On 14 January 1790, he submitted his plan to the House of Representatives; and the document remains one of his lasting contributions to the foundation of the federal government. He argued that the central government should be responsible for all debts contracted during the Revolution--foreign and domestic--including those debts contracted by the individual states. Though the measure encountered fierce opposition, he finally secured its adoption on 4 August 1791.

Hamilton's tenure of office as Secretary of the Treasury lasted until 1795. During that period, the verbal battles with Jefferson-- Hamilton's natural antagonist--rose to fever pitch. Both conducted propaganda campaigns in the press, and Jefferson's attacks finally culminated in the introduction of nine resolutions of censure against Hamilton into Congress. The defeat of those resolutions early in 1793 proved a vindication of Hamilton and his policies. Hamilton exercised a great deal of influence over John Adams negotiations with Great Britain which secured a treaty favorable to the new nation's domestic economy. This meddling in foreign affairs no doubt influenced Jefferson's resignation as Secretary of State at the end of 1793. Jefferson intensified his anti-Hamilton campaign after that because he felt Hamilton to be too speculative at home and pro-British abroad. Domestically, however, Hamilton was secure. He proved that in 1794 when he played a leading role in the suppression of the Whiskey Rebellion. He regarded the Federal action at this time as an outstanding opportunity for the central government to exhibit its strength.

Personal financial difficulties forced Hamilton to resign from the cabinet in January 1795 and he never returned to public office. He did, however, continue to support the Federalist cause and remained a close advisor to Washington. Personal antipathy to John Adams minimized Hamilton's influence during that presidency, though he tried to exercise it upon Adams' cabinet nonetheless. His last two great acts came in 1800 and 1804, respectively, and both had Aaron Burr as their target. During the election of 1800, when Jefferson and Burr tied for the Presidency and the election went to the House of Representatives, Hamilton broke with the other Federalists and used his influence to secure Jefferson's election. In 1804, he successfully maneuvered to assure Burr's defeat in his bid to become governor of New York. Burr, it was believed, would probably have joined the secessionist Northern Confederacy had he been elected. As a result, Burr challenged Hamilton to a duel on the pretext that the latter had expressed a 'despicable opinion of him.' The affair took place at Weehawken, N.J., on 11 July 1804. Burr wounded Hamilton mortally, and the latter died the following day. Hamilton was buried at Trinity Church in New York.

Builder: New York Navy Yard

Rig: Topsail Schooner

Launched: N/A

Commissioned: 1830

Decommissioned: 9 December 1853 driven ashore in a gale

Length: 78"

Navigation Draft: 7' 8"

Beam: 21' 3"

Displacement: 112

Maximum Speed: N/A

Complement: 20-24 men

Armament: unknown, but typical of this class was 4 guns 6-9 pdrs.

History:

Hamilton was one of the 13 cutters of the Morris-Taney Class. These cutters were the backbone of the Service for more than a decade Samuel Humphreys designed these cutters for roles as diverse as fighting pirates, privateers, combating smugglers and operating with naval forces. He designed the vessels on a naval schooner concept. They had Baltimore Clipper lines. The vessels built by Webb and Allen, designed by Isaac Webb, resembled Humphreys' but had one less port.

Hamilton, the fastest vessel in the class, operated out of Boston for much of her career. She became famous for rescues and saving of property. Josiah Sturgis was her captain for much of this time. She became well known and extremely popular, so much so that music was written entitled the "Hamilton Quick step." The *Hamilton* transferred to Charleston in 1851 and was lost in a gale two years later.

Sources:

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