# The Burr-Hamilton Duel One Hundred Years Ago

Newspaper Accounts at the Time-Curious History of the Pistols and the Monument to Hamilton.

NE hundred years ago and exactly one week after his active participation in the Fourth of July celebration in this city. Alexander Hamilton was shot in that memorable duel with Aaron Burr. Nothing now remains of the fatal field which, more than anything else, has made the name of Weehawken historic in the annals of America. The steel rails of the West' Shore Railroad pass over the oldtime dueling ground, where, long before Hamilton and Burr met, others had fallen in-adhering to the requirements of that peculiar code of honor which demanded bullets and blood as a necessary atonement for personal disputes.

It was on July 11, 1804, that the two brilliant men, separated only by the murderous distance of ten paces, leveled pistols at each other, awaiting the word to fire. Only one shot was fired by each. Burr's, simed directly at his antagonist, inflicted a mortal wound, while Hamilton's, as was ascertained the day after, passed above Burr, the bullet lodging in the branch of a small cedar tree.

Dr. David Hosack, one of New York's

ciety of the Cincinnati, of which Hamilton was President-General. On each side of the casket walked the pall bearers, a notable body of men, including Gen. Matthew Clarkson, Oliver Wolcott, Richard Harrison, Abijah Hammond, Josiah Ogden Hoffman, Richard Varick, William Bay-

ard, and Judge Lawrence. On top of the coffin were placed Hamilton's sword and hat, and immediately in the rear, to quote from the newspaper of the day, was "the General's horse. His gray horse, dressed in mourning, was led by two black servants dressed in white and white turbans trimmed with black. The General's boots and spurs, reversed, were borne by the horse."

### Services in Trinity.

De Witt Clinton, then Mayor of the city, and Gouverneur Morris, who delivered the funeral oration in the church, were among the prominent citizens in line. The Columbia College students made a conspicuous showing clad in black caps and gowns. The Tammany Society turned out in large numbers, foreign officials were well represented, and every business and social body

would ever give me pain to be obliged to shed the blood of a fellow-creature in a private combat forbidden by the laws. I have resolved, if our interview is conducted in the usual manner and it pleases God to give me the opportunity, to reserve and -throw away my first fire, and I have thought even of reserving my second fire and thus giving a double opportunity to Col. Burr to pause and reflect."

Judge Nathaniel Pendleton was Hamilton's second on the field, and he expressly states that Hamilton did not fire until after Burr's pistol had been discharged. Mr. Pendleton and a friend visited the field on the following day and discovered that Hamilton's shot passed through the limb of a cedar tree about 121/2 feet above the ground and four feet west of the direct line between him and Burr.

This limb was cut off and given to Mr. John B. Church, Hamilton's brother-in-law and one of his closest friends. William P. Van Ness, who later became

TIE GRANGE, HAMILTON'S

RESIDENCE.

Mr. Church lived at No. 25. History of the Pistols. The history of the pistols is interesting. Mr. Church purchased them in London, and it is said they were made by a celebrated gunsmith, W. H. Mortimer, gunmaker to George III. They were used in the duel between Aaron Burr and Mr. Church in 1799, and it is stated that they next figured in

the fatal meeting between Philip H. Hamilton, the eldest son of Alexander Hamilton. and George I. Eacker, who fought at Weehawken on Nov. 23, 1801, young Hamilton being shot in the right side and dying the next day. As Alexander Hamilton was the challenged party, he had the choice of weapons, and it is but natural that his brother-in-

law's famous pistols were used again. After the duel they were returned to Mr. Church and have been carefully preserved in the

family ever since Another interesting memorial of the duel

Park Place was Robinson Street then, and and his magnificent suburban residence was known as Highwood, a name still retained by the residential park section on the heights of Weehawken to-day, adjoining Clifton. Mr. King kept the portions of the monument, but gradually the pieces disappeared, and with them the large section with the inscription.

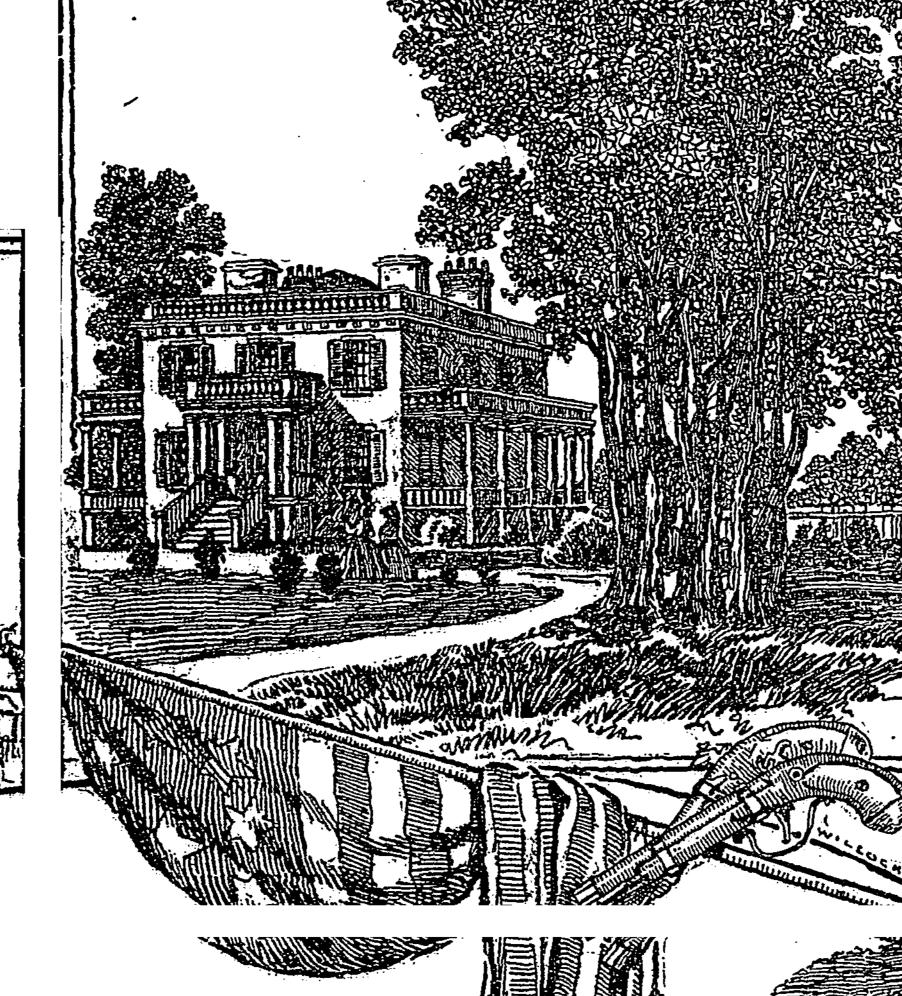
Then a curious thing happened. Hugh Maxwell, President of the St. Andrew's Socicty for many years, discovered the original marble slab in a New York junkshop, and knowing where it belonged he purchased it and returned it to Mr. King.

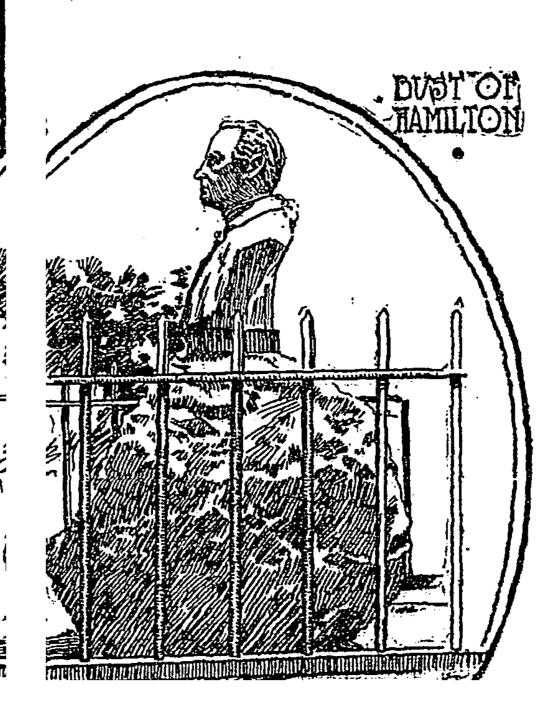
Until lately it remained in possession of the family, when Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer, the novelist, as one of the heirs of the late Archibald Gracie King, presented the slab to the New York Historical Society, and there it will be permanently preserved as an interesting historical souvenir.

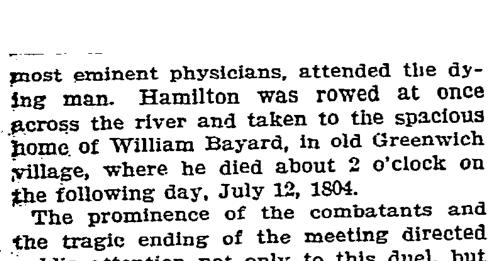
#### The Dueling Ground To-day.

When the railroad was cut through in the early seventies the last vestige of the old dueling ground was obliterated. A large red sandstone boulder had up to that time stood near the spot, and it was said that upon this boulder the head of Hamilton rested after he was shot. This original boulder may still be seen in the little inclosure on the high cliff, over 100 feet above the old fighting place.

Efforts have from time to time been made to erect a suitable monument near the site to Hamilton, but nothing except a very modest monument stands there today. A small semicircular plot of ground has been set apart in the locality now known as Highwood, and which may be reached in about ten minutes from the ferry landing at Weehawken, and here is to be seen the only memorial of the duel. The red sandstone boulder stands upon a granite pedestal, and the boulder is







public attention not only to this duel, but to dueling in general, as had never been done before in the United States. The practice was common a century ago. Alexander Hamilton's eldest son, a young man but twenty years of age, was killed upon the same field three years before his father received his death wound. The pulpit and to some extent the press

inveighed against the custom as unworthy of a civilized community, but it remained for the Burr-Hamilton duel to arouse public sentiment so strongly against this method of avenging insults that the practice was never afterward regarded in so honorable

## The Burr-Hamilton Feud.

It is difficult to imagine at the present May the effect produced by the duel not only in New York City, where its tragedy was most deeply felt, but throughout the entire country. Politicial feeling in those years was intensely bitter, but Hamilton's pervices for his country had been of such recognized value that his death and the manner of it occasioned widespread mourning. A wave of almost universal execra-

tion burst over Burr. Although Vice President of the United States, he had been out of favor in his own party ever since the election of Jefferson late in 1800. Jefferson and Burr each received 73 ballots in the original electoral yote. For over a week the House of Representatives balloted upon the question, and Burr was accused of intriguing to defeat Jefferson, the logical candidate of his party. To repair his waning political prestige, Burr secured the nomination for Governor of New York in 1804. Opposed to him was Morgan Lewis, the candidate of the Federalists. It was a bitter fight, for Burr realized that defeat meant political extinction. Hamilton was a strong supporter of Lewis, and when the latter won, Burr, after an interchange of letters regarding certain statements made by Hamilton, sent a formal challenge.

The fact that the two men were to meet on the Weehawken dueling field was known to but few in the city. It was about 7 o'clock in the morning of July 11 that the duel was fought, and, although Hamilton was immediately brought back to the city, the afternoon papers of that date make no mention of the occurrence. On July 12, in the Commercial Advertiser oc-

"We stop the press to announce the melancholy intelligence that Gen. Hamilton is dead. He expired about 2:30 o'clock."

curs the first notice of the affair:

On the following day and for several days thereafter the newspapers appeared with wide black borders on all of their pages. The newspapers in Philadelphia. Boston and other cities did the same as soon as the news was received, for, dependent upon stage coaches for information, many of the outlying towns did not hear of Hamilton's death until after the funeral in New York.

## Newspaper Accounts.

The funeral was held on Saturday, July 14. and Hamilton was buried where his remains still lie, in Trinity churchyard. Practically the entire city went into mourning. Business was suspended, for days the flags were at half mast, and hundreds of citizens were crape for thirty days. Services commemorative of Hamilton were held all over the country. Scores of orations were delivered upon his character, and it was truly said that not since the

death of Washington had such universal mourning been seen-The newspapers of Monday, July 16, 1804. contained practically but one news feature, the funeral of Hamilton. Amid sombre black lines and with a black cut of a casket, showing its place in the funeral pro-

cession. The Commercial Advertiser gives

the following account: The remains of Gen. Hamilton on Saturhav last were interred with military honors and with the strongest testimonies of respect in the cemetery of Trinity Church. The scene was in the highest degree solemn and affecting. The military, under the command of Lieut. Cci. Morton, were drawn up in front of Mr. Church's house in Robinson Street, where the body had been deposited. At 12 o'clock the procession moved through Beekman, Pearl, and Whitehall Streets and up Broadway to the church." Then comes a list of the different diviscions in the procession, which was headed by the military organizations and the Soin the city had a place in the mournful parade. The account of the services at Trinity is

HAMILTON FELL.

thus given in the same paper .: "When the advanced platoon of the military reached the church the whole column wheeled backward by sections, from the flanks of platoons, forming a lane, bringing their muskets to a reversed order and resting the cheek on the butt of the piece in the customary attitude of grief. Through the avenue thus formed the corpse, preceded by the clergy of different denominations and the Society of the Cincinnati and followed by the relatives of the deceased and different public bodies, advanced to the portico of the church, where a situation had been provided for the Hon. Gouverneur Morris, from which he delivered an address on the character, the virtues, and the services of his departed friend. The oration being finished, the troops entered the churchyard by files, formed an extensive hollow square and terminated the solemnities by firing three volleys over the grave.

"During the procession there was a regular discharge of minute guns from the Battery. The different merchant vessels in the harbor wore their colors at half mast. We also learn that his Britannic Majesty's packet and also the frigate Boston lying at the Hook paid their tribute of respect to the memory of Gen. Hamilton by wearing their colors half mast and firing minute guns during the procession, as did also the

French frigates Cybelle and Didon." Bishop Benjamin Moore, who was also President of Columbia College, wrote an interesting letter to the papers after the funeral telling of a visit he made to Hamilton at the latter's request while lying in Mr. Bayard's house. Hamilton had expressed a wish before dying to partake of the communion. Bishop Moore said:

## Hamilton's Deathbed.

"It was my duty as a minister of the Gospel to hold up the law of God as paramount to all other law; and that, therefore, under the influence of such sentiment I most unequivocally condemn the practice which had brought him to his present unhappy condition. He acknowledged the propriety of the sentiments and declared that he viewed the late transaction with sorrow

and contrition. "I then asked him: 'Should it please God to restore your health, Sir, will you never again be engaged in a similar transaction? And will you employ all your influence in society to discontinue this barbarous custom?' His answer was: 'That, Sir, is my deliberate intention. I have no ill-will against Col. Burr. I met him with a fixed resolution to do him no harm. I forgive ail that happened.' The communion was then administered, which he received with great devotion and his heart afterward appeared

to be perfectly at rest."

Nothing would be gained at the present time in endeavoring to revive the questions that have been waged over this unfortunate affair regarding the claim that Burr deliberately intended to kill Hamilton, as well as Hamilton's intention to fire in the air. We know that Hamilton fully appreciated the gravity of the encounter. He made his will just before the duel and also left a statement to be made public in case he should be killed. In this he says: "I was certainly desirous of avoiding this interview for the most cogent reasons. My religious and moral principles are strongly opposed to the practice of dueling, and it

Judge of the Southern District of New York by appointment of President Madison, acted as Burr's second, and he afterward published a detailed statement of the duel, in which he claimed that Hamilton fired first. His statement was really a protest against the widespread disapproval of Burr, amounting practically to ostracism.

Burr himself was amazed at the opprobrium heaped upon him. Never before had the popular ill-will been so denunciatory for the surviving duelist. Burr himself had fought a duel on the same spot in 1799 with John B. Church. Neither was injured, although Burr received a bullet through his

For a few days Burr continued to go about his business in his usual way, and received his friends at his famous home. Richmond Hill, now totally obliterated, but which stood for years at about the junction of Varick and Charlton Streets. Finally he left the city, and it is curious to notice that the following paragraph, published in a New York paper of July 27, 1804, is the first newspaper account after the duel of Burr's personal movements:

"As we are often asked what has become of Mr. Burr since the perpetration of his crime, we presume the following information will, in some degree, satisfy the curiosity of our readers: He has for the present, and we trust forever, fled from the city and the State. Late on Saturday evening, he, together with his servants and baggage, embarked on a barge and arrived at Amboy the following morning. He called on a respectable gentleman of the place, requested that a carriage might be immediately provided, and asked for a dish of coffee and afterward for a bed. He appeared to be extremely restless and in a few minutes arose. He departed for the southward, probably for South Carolina."

#### The Hamilton Trees. Burr was indicted for the murder of

Hamilton, but the indictment was quashed about three years' later. At the time of the duel Hamilton's wife with his young children were residing at their country home, the Grange, fortunately still standing, but slightly moved from its original position. The historic wooden house now stands at the corner of One Hundred and Forty-third Street and Convent Avenue, and across the street, in the vacant lot, are to be seen the sad remnants of the thirteen Hamilton trees.

These trees are said to have been plantcd to commemorate the thirteen original Colonies, but soon they will be things of the past. Only nine or ten stumps are standing, and of these only three have any life. One of the living trees is a large and handsome specimen, and with good care might survive many years. Within the past year one or two of the dead stumps have broken oil and fallen to the ground The trees are sweet gums, and are not destined to live long even under favorable

circumstances. The pistols with which the fatal duel was fought are now owned by Major Richard Church of Rochester. He is a grandson of John B. Church, to whose house the body of Hamilton was taken from Mr. Bay. ard's home in Greenwich village.

Thousands now pass the exact spot from which the funeral cortege started, yet it is probably known to few that this house stood on the northeast corner of Park Place and Church Street, close by the northern flight of stairs leading to the busy Park Place elevated railroad station.

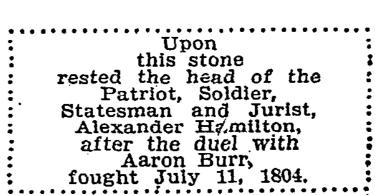
came into the possession of the New York Historical Society about three years ago after a chain of peculiar circumstances. This is the original marble slab, with its inscription, that formed the front part of the pedestal of a monument erected to the memory of Hamilton by the St. Andrew's Society in 1806. The inscription reads:

> -----On this spot July 11th, 1804, Major-General Alexander Hamilton. As an expression of their affectionate regard and of their deep regret The St. Andrew's Society of the State of New York this monument

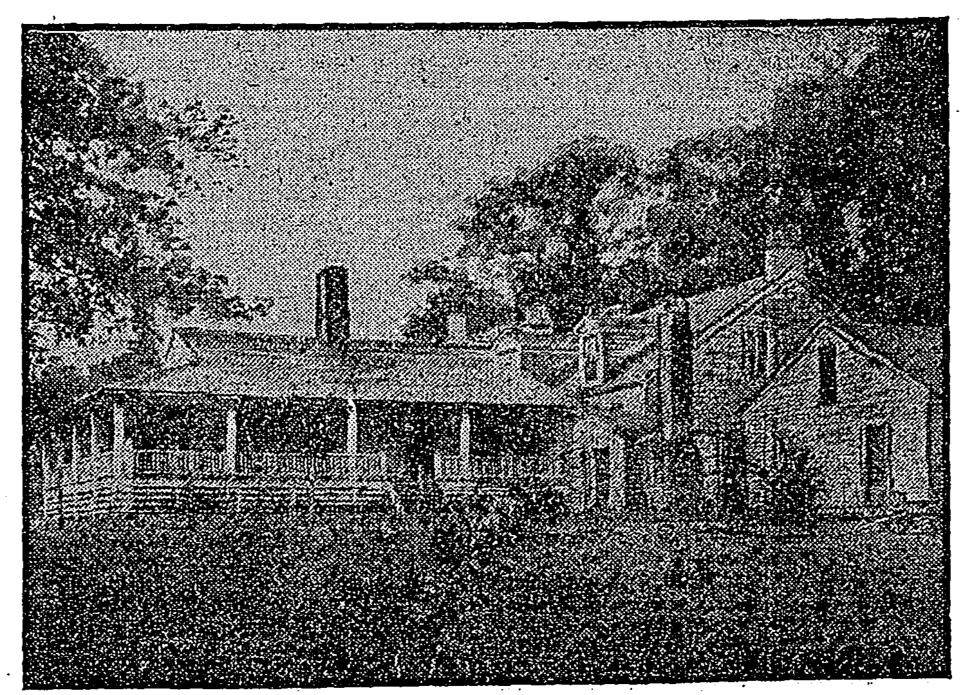
The monument, which was in the form of an obelisk surmounted with a flaming urn, was about fourteen feet in height and was placed on the spot where the duel was fought. The intention of the St. Andrew's Society evidently was that the monument should stand as a memorial to Hamilton and also as a warning of the evil effects of dueling. In the latter respect it signally failed, and, indeed, it was said that the presence of the monument occasioned the spot to be resorted to by every group of young men who had any quarrel to settle. The property at the time was owned by Capt. James Deas. He lived on the heights



surmounted by an ancient bust of Hamilton, done by the sculptor Riordan. In 1894. a number of residents in the neighborhood had a bronze tablet placed upon the boulder, and the inscription on it reads:



Beneath this inscription are two explanatory lines as follows:



Windy Hill Manor, Where Aaron Burr Found Refuge in 1807.

above the dueling field, and he personally separated many young combatants who had taken their places near the monument. An English visitor in 1821 wrote:

"The monument that was erected here to the memory of Gen. Hamilton is now taken to pieces by the proprietor of the soil and conveyed to his house under pretense of its having been too much resorted to for purposes of dueling." James Gore King, the famous banker in

the early part of the last century and one

of the sons of Rufus King, purchased the

property soon after for his Summer home.

the river near this spot, and the stone was moved here when the railroad was

In the rear of this modest little monument is a tall flagstaff, and the Hamilton Memorial Association of Highwood is planning to commemorate the centenary of the fatal duel in an appropriate manner. Many other societies will make pilgrimages to the spot on the day the duel was fought a century ago, and the locality with its simple monument will surely be better

known after July 11 than ever before.

"The duel took place on the bank of

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