



**Kindling's Muse at Earl Palmer
Ministries, 9/18/17**

**Dick Staub and Earl Palmer at Walker
Ames Lecture Hall at the University of
Washington**

**Alexander Hamilton: An American
Patriot and a Christian.**

*The book: Alexander Hamilton. A Biography by
Ron Chernow.*

*In this Kindling's Muse we will explore the remarkable
life story of Alexander Hamilton, his stature and
importance as a founder of our American democracy,
and the character markers in his life as a Christian Man.*

THE EARLY YEARS REVEAL A SUFFERING MOTHER RAISING TWO SONS

Alexander Hamilton was born on the island of Nevis in the British West Indies in 1755. His brother, James, was 2 years older. Their mother was a very beautiful and courageous woman, Rachel Faucette, of French Huguenot Protestant heritage. At the age of 16, she first married to a Danish farmer, Johann Lanvein, who was a brutal man who physically abused his young wife. He later accused Rachel of adultery and because of Danish law, she was imprisoned for three months in the fortress prison at St. Croix. After her release, she fled from St. Croix in fear, leaving behind her one son Peter and her husband Lanvein. She and her mother, who helped her flee, settled first in St. Kitts and then Nevis where she met and informally married James Hamilton, a Scottish tradesman. James Hamilton abandoned his family, and was not heard from until his younger son became famous in America. Hamilton later wrote of this "My father's affairs at a very early day went to wreck...This state of things occasioned a separation

between him and me, when I was very young". Lanvein legally divorced Rachel with charging papers that described her as a "scarlet woman" with two illegitimate sons.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCES SHAPE HAMILTON'S CHARACTER

Rachel bravely raised her sons and was determined to see that they were properly educated. She arranged for a private teacher for young Alexander. His teacher was a brilliant Sephardic Jewish woman who had emigrated to Nevis because of persecution against Jews in Brazil. Chernow explains that one quarter of the white population of Charlestown at that time was made up of Jewish (pg. 17). Alexander was a bright student and as a preteen youth could recite the Decalogue in Hebrew. He also becomes very proficient in French. Of later interest, Chernow points out that it was noteworthy that Alexander Hamilton was "comfortably bilingual and more at ease in French than Franklin, Adams and Jefferson, diplomats who had spent years struggling to master the tongue in Paris" (pg. 17). Hamilton, because of these early experiences, will have a lifelong respect for Jews, which later will aid him in a famous legal case when he becomes a prosperous lawyer in New York. His opposing trial lawyer called into question a witness' honesty because as the lawyer disclosed, the witness was Jewish. Hamilton answered "why distrust the evidence of the Jews? Discredit them and you destroy the Christian religion...were not the Jews witnesses of the that pure and holy, happy and heaven-approved faith, and converts to that faith" (pg. 18). Because of the inhuman terror of the slave auctions Hamilton saw regularly in Nevis in his youth, he developed an absolute opposition to the cruelty and injustice of slavery and an abiding concern for all men and women in the human family

who experience persecution and discrimination. He would later write as a Christian a theological reflection about God's love for the Jews: "The progress of the Jews... from their earliest history to the present time has been and is entirely out of the course of human affairs. Is it not then a fair conclusion that the cause also is an extraordinary one – in other words that it is the effect of some great providential plan? (33).

Rachel and her boys will move from Nevis to St. Croix, but then these early family years will become catastrophic. At the age of 38, Rachel dies of a tropical fever; her 12-year-old son, Alexander is also afflicted by the same fever and was in the bed alongside his dying mother. Because Rachel had been charged with adultery by her earlier husband, Lanvein, she was not recognized as legally married and therefore burial in the Church of England cemetery was denied. Alexander was deeply offended by this disrespect. For that reason he refused to unite with formal church membership in the Church of England until the final hours of his life following his duel with Aaron Burr when he receives the Holy Communion from the Anglican Priest of Holy Trinity Church of New York.

FRIENDS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE WHEN ORPHANED

The two lads, James and Alexander, are now orphaned and also denied any inheritance of their mother's small estate since Peter her first son now of adult age sought and was awarded almost all of the funds. James then found employment as a carpenter's helper and Alexander worked in a trading company office as an accountant's helper. Two very good things happen for Alexander at this time of his adolescence: The Thomas Stevens family will welcome him into their home, and their son Edward, who is within months of being the same age as Alexander, becomes the lifelong best friend of Alexander, Edward becoming a doctor while

Alexander becomes a lawyer. The young intellectual Alexander also finds a mentor in a young Presbyterian missionary pastor Hugh Knox, who had studied theology at Princeton where John Witherspoon at that time was President. Like Hamilton, and his friend Edward Stevens, Knox strongly opposed to slavery and further encouraged Hamilton as a student and a young writer.

THE TALENT IN WRITING OPENS DOORS

Hamilton's breakthrough as a writer happened after the devastating Caribbean Hurricane of August 31, 1772. Describing himself as "about the age of 17" , he wrote an account of the hurricane in the form of a letter. Hugh Knox, who was publisher of a journal, the Royal Danish American Gazette put the youthful letter into print.

"It seemed as if a total dissolution of Nature was taking place. The roaring of the sea and wind, fiery meteors flying about it in the air...and the ear-piercing shrieks of the distressed were sufficient to strike astonishment into angels."

He also made moral and spiritual reflections,

"Death comes rushing on in triumph veiled in a mantle of tenfold darkness...see thy wretched helpless state and learn to know thyself...o ye who revel in affluence see the afflictions of humanity and bestow your superfluity to ease them..."

The description of the hurricane proved to be a sensation. As a result, a citizen's group in St. Croix established a scholarship fund to enable young Alexander Hamilton to travel to New York for further education. This support made it possible for him to enter the next great period of his life.

EMERGENCE OF CHARACTER AND CONFIDENT LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

Hugh Knox wanted Alexander to attend his own school, The College of New Jersey, (later Princeton University), which was also Hamilton's hope. John Witherspoon, the President of Princeton was impressed by this young man and wanted him as a student. Because Hamilton, now 18, was a man in a hurry, he proposed to do his work for a degree in one year, including the required mastery of Greek and Latin languages. The Trustees at Princeton required a 2-year attendance time and would not agree to his one-year request. Therefore, Hamilton enrolled in Kings College in New York, which was a Royalist school, (later Columbia University).

In New York, Hamilton fits in. He was described as "smart, handsome, and outgoing, he marched with an erect military carriage" (pg. 41). He is strongly drawn to the vision and dreams of the growing independence movement but because of deeply felt moderate, moral integrity markers in his character he distrusted populist rhetoric and especially reckless wildness of mob violence. This character marker also later made him critical of the influence of French Revolutionary motives on young America. Later he would have sharp disagreements with Thomas Jefferson over this issue. In one terrifying incident which endangered the physical safety of the Pro-Royalist King's College Rector Myles Cooper, Hamilton boldly risked his own life to protect Cooper from the patriot rioters. He opposed their violent intent and tried to speak to the angry crowd; they would not listen to him, but his action delayed the hoard long enough that Myles Cooper was able to escape to a British Warship and then to England. Hamilton favored the goals of the Sons of Liberty but not the violence of sudden street action against civilians.

At this very decisive edge of the testing of his character and personal values, he saw a parade of patriots in the streets of New York with the man who was the people's hero riding his

horse in the parade. Hamilton would later tell of his profound respect for the man, a Virginian, a colonel of valor who had fought in the French-Indian war. He carried himself with unusual poise; Hamilton said of him he was “sober, steady and calm”. On June 15, 1775 this man, Col. George Washington, age 43, would be named by the Continental Congress the Commander in Chief of the Continental Army.

Alexander Hamilton saw in Washington and the emerging congress of patriots the leadership he respected. He wanted to serve with them; their dream was larger than the present necessary revolutionary battle. They wanted to create a more just society of laws, with an adherence to an agreed upon constitution. Hamilton himself founded an artillery group for the present necessary revolutionary battle. This group was organized under the 21-year-old Captain Hamilton who fought with Washington’s troops in brief anti-English troop military battles in the New York area.

His small group of 30 men were disciplined and the group grew to 68. Washington noticed the bravery and organizational skill of Hamilton and invited him on January 20, 1777 to become his Aide de Camp. Now it is Captain Alexander Hamilton at age 22. This relationship will last throughout the war years and then later Hamilton will become a key member of the cabinet of President Washington. During the battles of the revolution, Washington will call him “my boy” as he also called the Marquis de Lafayette, a young moderate French friend of Hamilton who was the same age as Hamilton.

George Washington was so diffident and reserved in speech making that John Adams said of Washington that he was the “great actor with the gift of silence”. But Hamilton was called “the pen” of Washington. He wrote very memorable and clearly stated pronouncements

and orders for his chief. Their relationship was founded in mutual trust and Hamilton's respect for the amazing maturity and wisdom of Washington. This resulted in a discerning and intellectually alert companionship.

Hamilton's wisdom grew as well as his quickness. Through the intellectual brilliance of the Federalist papers and his treasury role in Washington's cabinet, he later played a key role in shaping – more than any other of the founders of the American Revolution and Nation – a philosophy of strong central governance with careful checks and balances of the three equal, empowered branches of government: legislative, executive and judicial. His voice is permanently combined that of his great mentor George Washington. It will be Hamilton who Washington will seek to be the primary writer of George Washington's farewell address as he declines permanent presidency for himself. Alexander Hamilton becomes a full General in the U.S. Army of the post-Revolutionary period.

A PERSONAL LIFE OF HEART-BREAKING TRAGEDY AND FINDING GRACE

Alexander Hamilton married an amazing woman, Eliza Schuyler, a deeply committed Christian of Dutch Reform Heritage. She was unlike in wit and goodness to his own courageous mother Rachel. Eliza's love for Alexander was total and brave. She was able to become an even and steady influence in the life of her brilliant, handsome, impulsive husband. The strand in Hamilton's character that made him fascinated with beautiful women did not finally destroy his family. He loved deeply his eight children and his wife Eliza. In the most harmful and famous instance he was romantically involved with a woman, Maria Reynolds. She with her husband had planned the deception and then blackmailed Alexander Hamilton, the then very prominent

hero of the revolution. Hamilton would publically own this discretion and write a public disclosure confession that greatly harmed his political leadership.

The most devastating tragedy in Hamilton's personal and family life concerned his own impulsive son, Philip who accepted a duel challenge from another young man who had mocked Philip's father's leadership. Hamilton could not argue his 19-year-old son away from the duel of honor but then urged him to point his weapon to the sky. The other duelist George Eacher aimed for young Philip. Following the death of his son in 1801 Hamilton was broken hearted and from that date onward devoted his main literary effort toward extensive notations and reflections on the Bible and Faith in God. In one case he wrote as a lawyer a reflection on Christian Faith for his wife Eliza.

"I have examined carefully the evidence of the Christian religion and if I was sitting as juror upon its authenticity, I should rather abruptly give my verdict in its favor...I have studied it and I can prove its truth as clearly as any proposition ever submitted to the mind of man."
(13,14).

His view of God's providence was that it must be found in our experience in "wisdom and goodness" (12). Here Hamilton is giving his own interpretive understanding of perhaps the New Testament's greatest single statement about Jesus Christ. John's Gospel described Jesus as "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Hamilton's wisdom and goodness is therefore a lawyer's description in the spirit of the Gospel's affirmation about Jesus.

A DUEL ENDS A LIFE OF DEDICATION

When a report was circulated that General Hamilton had said at a dinner party that Mr. Burr was "A dangerous man and one who ought not to be trusted with the reins of

government” (680), Aaron Burr, Vice President of Thomas Jefferson, challenged Hamilton to a duel of honor. Alexander Hamilton followed his own advice to his son and aimed his shot into the air but not Burr. Hamilton was fatally wounded. In the final hours of his life, he was most of all concerned to console his wife. His words when she came to his side in frantic grief were “Remember, my Eliza, you are a Christian”, and then in receiving the Lord’s Supper from the Bishop Benjamin Moore the rector of Holy Trinity Church, his words were “I have a tender reliance on the mercy on the almighty, through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ”. Hamilton, struggling for breath, promised that if he survived he would repudiate dueling. He was 49 years of age. On that Thursday, 2 pm, July 12th, 1804, Alexander Hamilton died.

Near the end of his life he put in this way. “Arraign not the dispensations of Providence. They must be founded in wisdom and goodness. And when they do no suit us, it must be because there is some fault in ourselves which deserves chastisement or because there is a kind intent to connect in us some vice or failing of which perhaps we may not be conscious” (pg. 660).

ALEXANDER HAMILTON’S WIFE

Eliza died on November 9, 1854. Ron Chernow devotes two chapters in his book Hamilton to Eliza Hamilton. He pays tribute and special attention to this outstanding woman.

She founded an orphanage for children with no families and for 27 years she oversaw every aspect of the orphanage work. She believed that all children should be literate and established the Hamilton Free School in Manhattan that stood on land she founded. She was 50 years a widow and committed her life to preserve the convictions and writings of “my Hamilton”.

Like her husband, she was fiercely opposed to slavery. She delighted in entertaining slave children from her neighborhood in Washington D.C. when she lived there in later years. She died at age 97. Elizabeth Hamilton was buried beside her Hamilton in Trinity Churchyard in New York City.

Final Note: In November of 2015, my wife Shirley and I with our close Berkeley friends Fred and June Elia were able to attend the inspirational Broadway Musical drama Hamilton by Lin Manuel Miranda at the Richard Rodgers theater in New York City. Like so many others, including our children and grandchildren who have now also seen this brilliant portrait of a very important part of one man and the early days of the American Republic, we are encouraged to reflect on the greatness of Alexander Hamilton's life story. He and his wife Eliza have modeled such enduring markers as integrity, courage, the importance of restraint in the exercise of leadership and governance and the power of forgiveness and grace. Hamilton shared with this country the imperative need of treasuring human worth and what he called the best of all virtues, goodness and wisdom.

Finally, we owe a special lasting debt to two genuine heroes of the earliest days of our own American Story. Their stories go together – the man from Virginia, George Washington and his younger companion and nation building – the emigrant lad from a small island in the British West Indies, Alexander Hamilton.