



The Changing Face of the Hamilton Monument

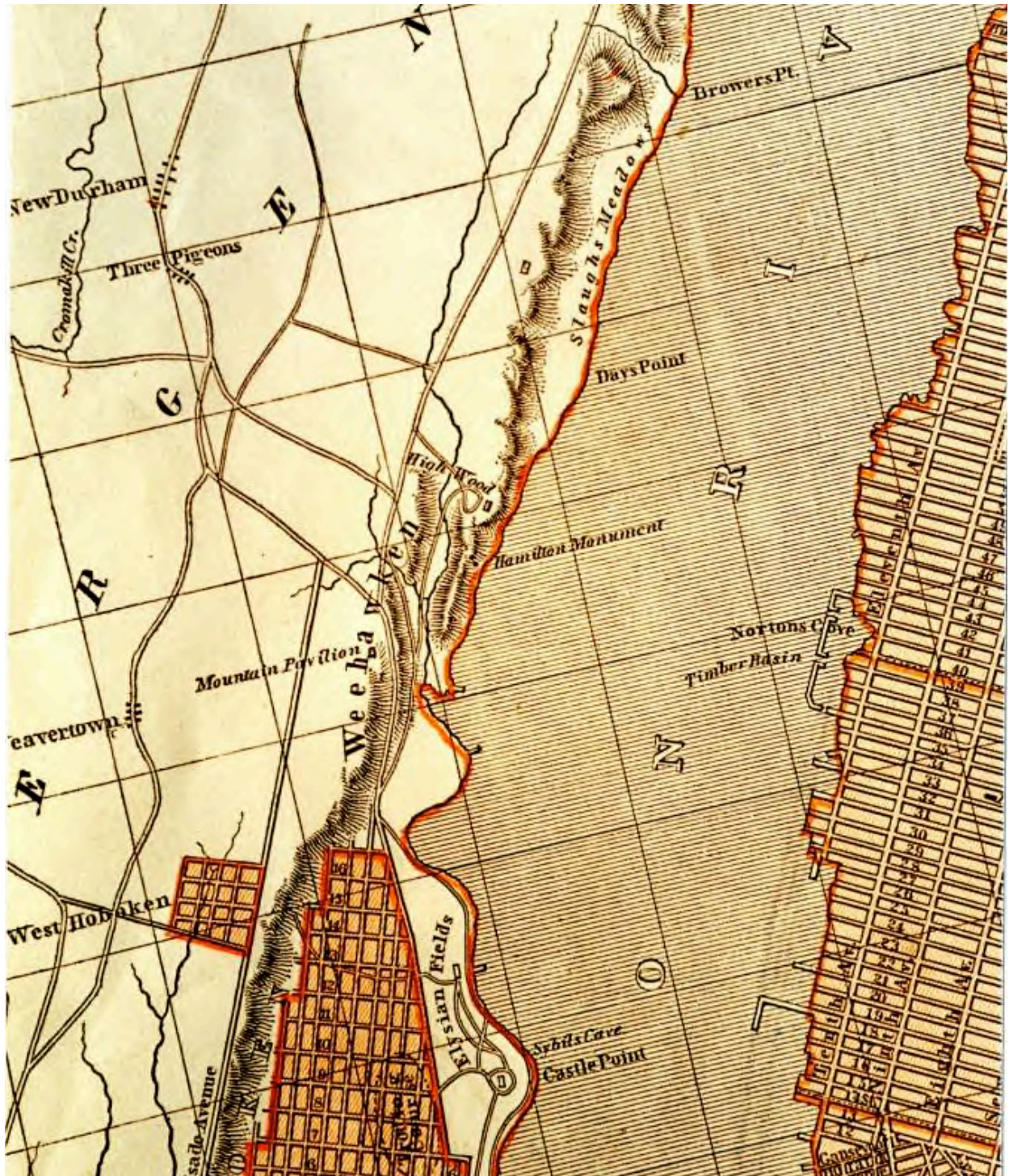
by
Willie Demontreux

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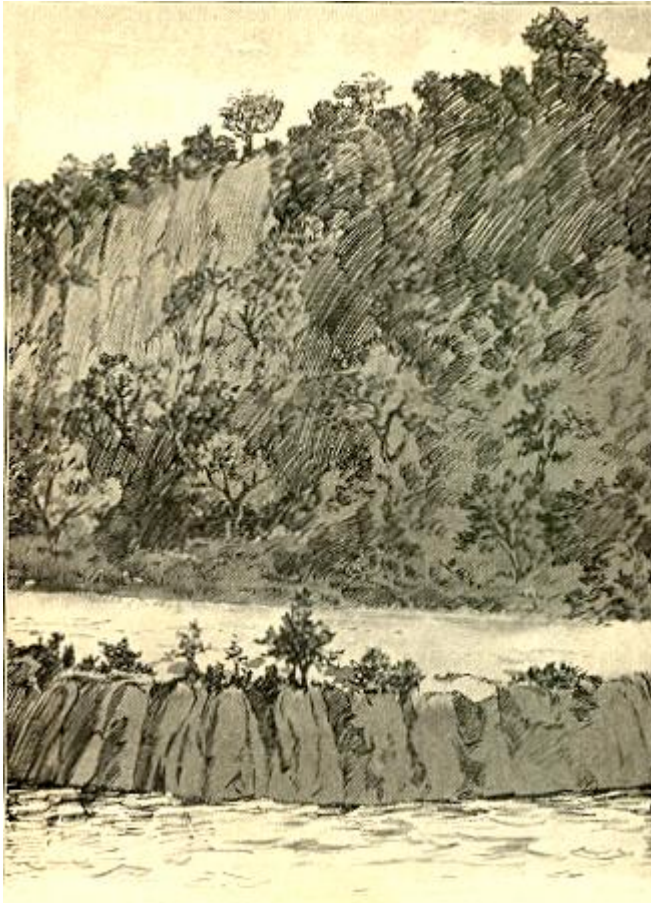
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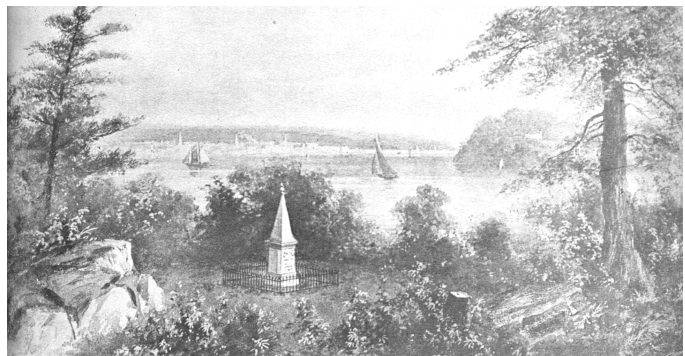


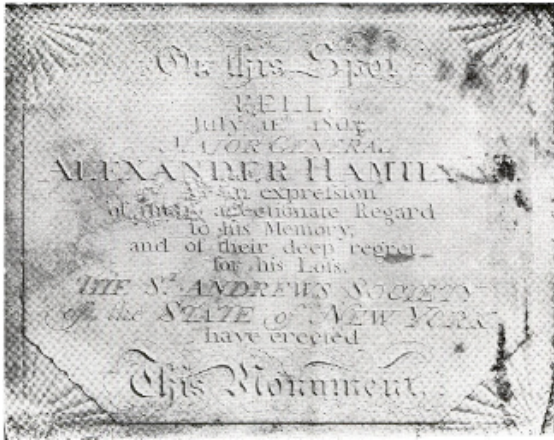
This 1841 map shows the location of the dueling ground, marked as *Hamilton Monument*.



An isolated grassy shelf, under the cliffs of Weehawken, 20 feet above the Hudson River was the site of 18 known duels, and countless others between the 1700s and 1845. Only one duel was ever memorialized - that between General Alexander Hamilton and Vice President of the U.S., Colonel Aaron Burr on July 11, 1804.

In 1806, the Saint Andrew Society, of which Alexander Hamilton was a member, erected the first memorial. The cenotaph consisted of a 4' square engraved base of marble, surmounted by an obelisk, topped with a flaming urn. The 14' high monument was enclosed within an iron fence at the dueling ground site.





The tablet on the base read:

**ON THIS SPOT FELL JULY 11TH 1804,
MAJOR GENERAL ALEXANDER
HAMILTON. AS AN EXPRESSION OF
THEIR AFFECTIONATE REGARD TO
HIS MEMORY AND OF THEIR DEEP
REGRET FOR HIS LOSS. THE
ST. ANDREWS SOCIETY OF THE
STATE OF NEW YORK HAVE
ERECTED THIS MONUMENT.**

A second tablet on the back of the monument, engraved with a quote by Horace read:

**INCORRUPTA FIDES NUDAQUE VERITAS QUANDO ULLUM
INVENIENT PAREM? MULTIS ILLE BONIS FLEBILIS OCCIDIT.**

Translated :

**WHEN SHALL UNSPOTTED FAITH AND NAKED TRUTH EVER FIND
HIS EQUAL? HE DIES LAMENTED BY MANY.**

This memorial remained in place for the next 15 years and duels continued to be fought adjacent to it. During this time, it was vandalized by souvenir seekers who removed pieces of the marble; by 1821, nothing was left. The tablet alone was salvaged from a junk shop in New York and presented to James Gore King, who owned the property which encompassed the dueling ground. He kept this piece of the memorial at his estate called "Highwood", on top of the Palisades. This tablet was later donated to the New York Historical Society in Manhattan, where it is now on display on the 4th floor.

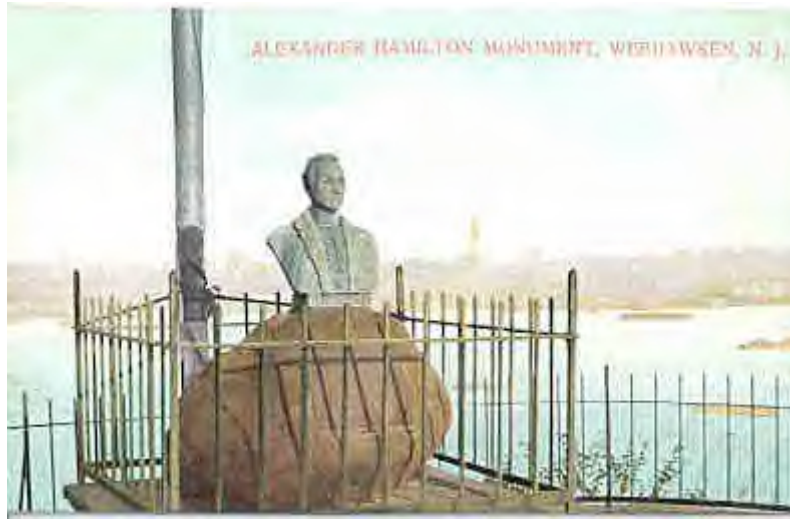
From the 1820s through 1857 the duel site remained unchanged and unmarked, except for 2 small granite stones, with the names Hamilton and Burr, placed at what were thought to be the dueling positions of the two men. As barren as the site was, it still drew thousands of sightseers to it each year, some of whom left graffiti carved into surrounding trees and rocks.

In 1858, a road from Hoboken to Fort Lee was cut through the duel site as shown above; the only marker at the site by then was a crudely engraved inscription on a red-brown boulder with the names Hamilton, Burr and July 11, 1804.

Legend has it that when Hamilton fell, he rested his head on this stone. Though this was untrue according to all accounts of those who were present at the duel in 1804, it has become part of the duel folklore.



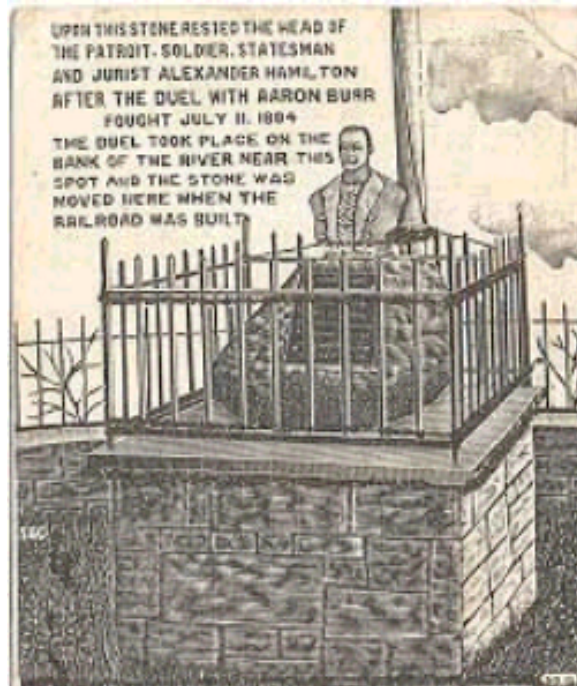
The growth of the railroads during the 1860's led to the necessity, in 1870, of reconfiguring the shoreline to allow a straighter route for the railroad tracks. In doing so, the narrow strip known as the dueling ground was destroyed. The inscribed boulder was brought up by sled to where it is today, at the top of the Palisades. This is the only remnant of the original dueling ground.



In 1894, a small walled overlook (built by Mr. King in the 1840's so that his friend, Washington Irving, would not fall off the cliff's edge when napping), was donated to the township. The boulder now rested atop a stone pier enclosed by an iron fence. A stone bust of Hamilton was set on top of the boulder; a bronze plaque was mounted on the front. On October 14, 1934, vandals tossed the stone bust over the cliff; the torso was recovered but the head was never found.



The second face lift for Hamilton came July 12, 1935. A bust of bronze was cast by artist John Rapetti (1862-1936), sculptor of the Weehawken Sailors and Soldiers Monument and one of the sculptors who had worked on the Statue of Liberty. Down came the fence around the pier; the new bust was mounted atop the boulder, as in the 1894 memorial.



By the 1980's, vandals struck again, this time taking the plaque. This old postcard transcribes the text of the stolen plaque.



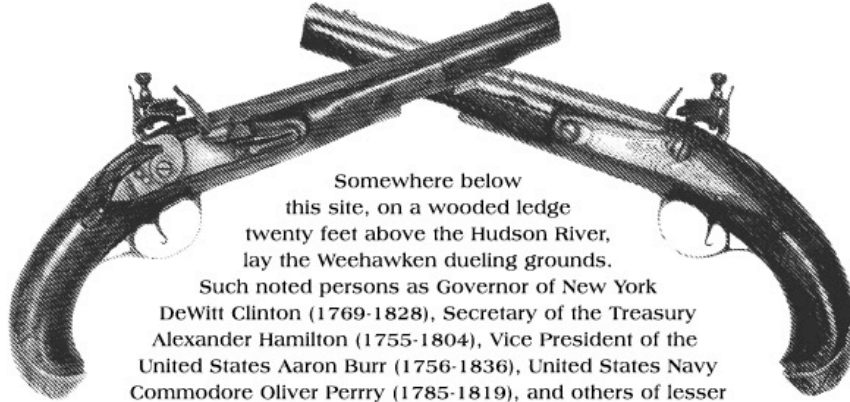
Soon afterwards, a short version of the above text was inscribed in the indentation left by the plaque. This was how the monument looked until the 1990s, when Boulevard East and Hamilton Avenue underwent an overhaul of its sidewalk, lampposts, parks, and monuments.



The memorial we see today incorporates the Rapetti bust atop a granite pedestal with the fabled boulder behind. Its present location allows visitors to view all sides of the memorial while enjoying the magnificent panorama of the New York skyline.

The 200th anniversary of the duel, July 11, 2004, will bring two new markers to the monument; one relating the history of the dueling ground, and the other commemorating America's most famous duel.

WEEHAWKEN
DUELING GROUNDS
1700'S-1840'S



Somewhere below
this site, on a wooded ledge
twenty feet above the Hudson River,
lay the Weehawken dueling grounds.
Such noted persons as Governor of New York
DeWitt Clinton (1769-1828), Secretary of the Treasury
Alexander Hamilton (1755-1804), Vice President of the
United States Aaron Burr (1756-1836), United States Navy
Commodore Oliver Perry (1785-1819), and others of lesser
note and unknown, dueled to "defend their honor."

Dedicated on July 11, 2004, the 200th anniversary of the Hamilton Burr duel.

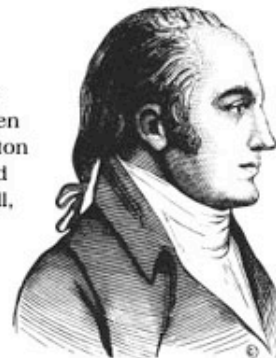
THE DUEL

Hamilton - Burr

JULY 11, 1804



The most famous duel in American
history took place on this date on the
dueling grounds in Weehawken, between
political rivals, General Alexander Hamilton
and sitting Vice-President of the United
States Colonel Aaron Burr. Hamilton fell,
mortally wounded, and died the next
day in New York City. Tragically,
Hamilton's son Philip had also met
his death here in a duel in 1801,



Dedicated on July 11, 2004, the 200th anniversary of the duel.