



MAURA HEHIR

**WEEHAWKEN HIGH SCHOOL
GRADE 8 A.T.**

01 JUNE 2004

The fatal duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr not only resulted in the death of Hamilton, but also altered political America for years to come. Prior to this significant dent in American history, the lives of these two men were key elements for the political foundation of the United States. The beliefs, actions, and accomplishments of the two men are still recognized and practiced today in United States government. Furthermore, this single pistol shot not only became legendary as the most famous duel in American history, but also is familiar to us because it had occurred at the waterfront in our small town of Weehawken.

Although this dispute ended with one of our founding fathers dead, Alexander Hamilton led a successful life before his and Burr's political lives had clashed. Despite his impoverished origins, Hamilton managed to climb up the political ladder of the republic. He was born in the British West Indies, but when his aunts discovered his early talent and ambition for writing, they sent him to America. His service to America began with his joining the army during the eruption of the American Revolution. By early 1776, Hamilton was serving under George Washington's command, and by the year 1777, he was Washington's secretary and aide-de-camp. He eventually went into law practice in New York City after the war had been

won, and ended up as one of New York's delegates to the Constitutional Convention.

Alexander Hamilton, a powerful Federalist, signed the Constitution, and in October he published the 'Federalist-papers,' documents supporting the country's new government. Hamilton then took on the important role of persuading New York State to agree on adopting the new Constitution. His accomplishments did not end there however; George Washington himself chose Hamilton as the first secretary of the treasury. Hamilton then composed a new fiscal system for the country, established a national bank and national mint, and then tackled the national debt. Hamilton was one of the founders and advocates of the Federalist Party, and without his drive and determination to have America adopt the Constitution, who knows? We could have quite possibly failed to accept the most important documents of our government into this country.

Today's Republican party derives most of its philosophies from Hamilton's Federalist party; however, this political party wouldn't exist if we were lacking Alexander Hamilton's history. Finally, his loose interpretation of the Constitution launched the beginning of our 'modern' loose interpretations (i.e. Medicare, Welfare, Social Security).

Contrary to the opinions of many United States citizens, Aaron Burr also played a principal role in sculpting the political scene of America. Along with Hamilton, Burr was considered one of the eight most prominent founding fathers of our nation.

Ending his life as an experienced politician, Burr began it with a distinguished bloodline. He began his service to America by fighting in the Revolutionary War, leading up to his career as a lawyer. He soon was elected a U. S. senator, leaving Hamilton fuming. Burr was then nominated as vice-president by the Democratic-Republican Party in 1800, but ended up running for the presidency. Because of the election between Burr and Jefferson ending up in a tie, the 12th amendment was created; stating that electors are directed to vote for a President and for a Vice-President rather than for two choices for President. Hamilton slightly affected the outcome of Jefferson winning by persuading a fraction of the House of Representatives not to vote for Burr. An irritated Burr then became vice-president. When his term ended, Burr ran for governor of New York, but with Hamilton's negative influence trailing behind him on his every attempt, he was defeated. Aaron Burr, becoming overwhelmingly frustrated at Hamilton crushing all of his efforts, challenged him to a duel. Although several people side with Hamilton, believing that he was ultimately 'the good guy,' being the man who died (at 49, making him a year older. than Burr), both men were experts in their fields; Hamilton in law and banking, and Burr in the political arena.

A reason why this duel was especially well known was because it led to the termination of nearly all duels in the northern states. The Hamilton-Burr Duel was a prime example of how not to duel; before this legendary gunfight, dueling was about demonstrating courage and aristocracy. Afterwards, it began to display a juvenile way to flaunt the common insecurity of two men.

Today, this little town would be otherwise unknown, if it weren't for the tragic duel that took place between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr. As a result, Weehawken is listed online, in books, and in schoolbooks across the nation, being recognized as the town across from New York City where 'The Duel' occurred. People from all over the world come to see Hamilton Park where the duel of July 11, 1804 is remembered and honored.

Overall, both men assisted in the clarification of the confusing United States government of their time, paving the way for the clear government of our time. Both men were undoubtedly dedicated to America's welfare and benefit, and devoted their lives to this country's future.