

**“OPENING A DOOR TO  
THEIR EMANCIPATION”  
ALEXANDER HAMILTON  
AND SLAVERY**

**AN ESSAY TO ADDRESS  
RECENT ALLEGATIONS AGAINST  
ALEXANDER HAMILTON AND  
HIS HISTORY WITH SLAVERY**

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# **“OPENING A DOOR TO THEIR EMANCIPATION”**

## **ALEXANDER HAMILTON AND SLAVERY**

By

Michael E. Newton

Philo Hamilton

With the opening of the *Hamilton* musical on Broadway in New York City in 2015, interest in the life of Alexander Hamilton has soared. Since its debut, millions have seen the show at the theater and on television. Not only has Hamilton’s popularity grown, but his wife Eliza and two of her sisters, Angelica and Peggy, collectively known as the “Schuyler Sisters,” have also garnered abundant attention.

This attention has not been entirely positive. One recent complaint against Hamilton, both the man and the musical, is that he was not an abolitionist, as asserted by a number of biographers and perpetuated by the musical. Indeed, Hamilton never claimed to be an abolitionist and that term was rarely used in the eighteenth century. One critic of Hamilton on the topic of slavery has been the Schuyler Mansion in Albany, New York. The Schuyler Mansion has for the last hundred years served as a public gathering place to present the home, family, and patriotic record of Philip Schuyler, Alexander Hamilton’s father-in-law. The musical tripled attendance at their location, and yet they recently published a negatively biased and error-filled essay about Alexander Hamilton and slavery.

The claims made in that essay, authored by Jessie Serfilippi and entitled “*As Odious and Immoral A Thing*”: *Alexander Hamilton’s Hidden History as an Enslaver*,<sup>1</sup> should be read with skepticism and examined objectively prior to drawing conclusions. Serfilippi’s essay is riddled with errors, omissions, assumptions, speculations, and misrepresentations concerning the history of Alexander Hamilton on the subject of slavery. Stories in *The New York Times* (both in print and online),<sup>2</sup> the *Smithsonian Magazine* (so far just online),<sup>3</sup> and elsewhere have brought undue attention to this essay and have spread the misinformation, especially among those who see the sensa-

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<sup>1</sup> Serfilippi, Jessie. “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”: *Alexander Hamilton’s Hidden History with Slavery*, Schuyler Mansion State Historic Site, Albany, NY, 2020, [parks.ny.gov/documents/historic-sites/SchuylerMansionAlexanderHamiltonsHiddenHistoryasanEnslaver.pdf](https://parks.ny.gov/documents/historic-sites/SchuylerMansionAlexanderHamiltonsHiddenHistoryasanEnslaver.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Schuessler, Jennifer, “Alexander Hamilton, Enslaver? New Research Says Yes,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/11/09/arts/alexander-hamilton-enslaver-research.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/09/arts/alexander-hamilton-enslaver-research.html).

<sup>3</sup> Kindy, David, “New Research Suggests Alexander Hamilton Was a Slave Owner,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 10, 2020, [www.smithsonianmag.com/history/new-research-alexander-hamilton-slave-owner-180976260/](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/new-research-alexander-hamilton-slave-owner-180976260/).

tional headlines and believe them without reading the articles or the original essay and without doing their own research.

To counter the false allegations against Alexander Hamilton, here is a more complete and accurate evaluation of Hamilton's history with slavery.

### **Early Years in the Caribbean (1757–1772)**

In January of 1757,<sup>4</sup> Alexander Hamilton was born on the Caribbean island of Nevis. Eight years later, he moved with his family to the island of St. Croix. Ninety percent of the population on both islands were enslaved people primarily engaged in sugar production. The remaining ten percent were mostly white plantation owners and merchants who supported the plantations. Hamilton's views on slavery were influenced by parents who inherited, purchased, owned, rented, and possibly sold enslaved persons during Hamilton's childhood. At the time of Hamilton's mother's death, she owned nine enslaved persons. At her probate court hearing, Hamilton's uncle, attempting to get something of value for Alexander and his brother, claimed that each of the boys had been given a slave by their mother.<sup>5</sup> The court rejected this claim and the two Hamilton boys received nothing as their half-brother collected their mother's entire estate. So even though both his parents owned slaves, Alexander Hamilton did not inherit any of these enslaved persons and there is no record of young Alexander Hamilton buying, selling, or owning any slaves.

In 1766 or early 1767, Hamilton started working as a clerk for New York merchant Nicholas Cruger, who ran an import-export business in Christiansted, St. Croix.<sup>6</sup> In January 1771, Cruger received a shipment of 300 enslaved Africans to be sold on St. Croix.<sup>7</sup> Alexander Hamilton may have participated in some capacity during this event, possibly in recording each transaction in his capacity as clerk. In October 1771, Hamilton took over management of the business for five months when Cruger went to New York to recover his health. In the many extant letters Hamilton wrote during his management of the company, he did not mention any purchase, sale, or importation of slaves.<sup>8</sup>

In mid-1772, the Presbyterian Reverend Hugh Knox settled on St. Croix and took Hamilton under his wing. Hugh Knox wrote against the evils of slavery and it has been said that "Knox probably provided Hamilton with his earliest and certainly his deepest exposure thus far to the intellectual and religious arguments against slavery."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, Hamilton's birthdate was thought to be January 11, 1757. However, more recent evidence—the discovery of his mother's probate record in the 1930s and research by Michael E. Newton in the 2010s—have uncovered a probable earlier year of birth. This essay will use 1757 because it fixes the age he was thought to be during his adult life.

<sup>5</sup> Ramsing, Holger Utke, *Alexander Hamilton's Birth and Parentage*, 1939, Trans. Solvejg Vahl, New York Public Library, 1951, p. 24; Hendrickson, Robert, *Hamilton I (1757–1789)*, Mason/Charter, New York City, 1976, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Newton, Michael, *Discovering Hamilton*, Eleftheria Publishing, Phoenix, AZ, 2019, p. 172.

<sup>7</sup> *The Royal Danish American Gazette*, January 23, 1771, p1 c1; *ibid.* January 26, 1771, p1 c1.

<sup>8</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, Ed. Harold Syrett, et. al., Columbia University Press, New York, vol. 1, pp. 9–30.

<sup>9</sup> Newton, *Discovering Hamilton*, p. 227.

In her essay for the Schuyler Mansion, Jessie Serfilippi argues that “it is more likely that Hamilton’s exposure to slavery as a child caused him to internalize the lesson that enslavement was the symbol of success for a white man like himself and could lead to the higher station he sought.”<sup>10</sup> This is pure, unfounded speculation. In fact, a number of Hamilton biographers have argued the exact opposite—that Hamilton’s early exposure to slavery caused him to oppose the evil institution.<sup>11</sup> Serfilippi discounts such arguments by stating that “no primary sources have been found to corroborate these claims,”<sup>12</sup> and yet she promotes the opposite view without citing any primary sources to back her position. Since Hamilton wrote nothing on the subject, it is impossible to know how he felt about slavery at this time or how his thoughts on the topic may have changed along with his experiences.

In 1769, Hamilton wrote to a friend, “I . . . would willingly risk my life tho’ not my Character to exalt my Station.” His hope for doing so was explained in one of the most famous sentences from this letter: “I wish there was a War.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, Hamilton hoped that the military could provide him with a path to “exalt” his station, i.e., improve his reputation, which was also referred to as “Fame.” To Hamilton, exalting his station was not about owning many slaves or becoming wealthy, and indeed Hamilton never sought riches. Rather, in wishing for a war, Hamilton wanted to earn a reputation for courage, bravery, and attention to the public good.

This was Alexander Hamilton’s experience with slavery in the Caribbean, in which as a child under the age of majority he had little choice and took little if any active part. Going forward, Hamilton’s actions and decisions would reflect his feelings and attitudes toward this institution. His eighteenth-century determinations were made in a world quite different from our own, and it is in his era and to his peers that he should be compared and judged.

### **Arriving in America (1772)**

In September 1772, Alexander Hamilton departed the Caribbean islands and headed to America for a formal education and a new beginning. Upon his arrival, he attended Francis Barber’s grammar school in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, and then in September 1773 he enrolled in King’s College in New York City.<sup>14</sup> The political exigencies of the mid-1770s strongly influenced the direction of Hamilton’s energies and education.

### **Pamphleteer (1774–1775)**

One of Hamilton’s early roles for the patriotic cause was as a pamphleteer. On December 15, 1774, he published a pamphlet titled *A Full Vindication of the Measures of the Congress*. . . .<sup>15</sup> In this essay, Hamilton wrote that “all men have one common original: they participate in one com-

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<sup>10</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Chernow, Ron, *Alexander Hamilton*, Penguin Press, New York, 2004, pp. 23 and 210.

<sup>12</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 1, p. 4; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0002](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0002).

<sup>14</sup> Newton, *Discovering Hamilton*, p. 208.

<sup>15</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 1, pp. 45–78; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0054](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0054).

mon nature, and consequently have one common right. No reason can be assigned why one man should exercise any power, or pre-eminence over his fellow creatures more than another; unless they have voluntarily vested him with it.” On January 25, 1775, in *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, “A Philadelphian” used this quote to argue against “the iniquity of the Slave-Trade.” Thus, Hamilton’s arguments were understood to be philosophically opposed to slavery and were being quoted for that purpose.<sup>16</sup>

### **“Battalions of Negroes” (1779)**

In March 1777, Alexander Hamilton became an Aide-de-Camp to General Washington. The following year, a new Aide-de-Camp by the name of John Laurens joined Washington’s staff. Hamilton and Laurens discovered they had much in common, including the idea of enlisting black soldiers. On March 14, 1779, Hamilton wrote a letter recommending John Laurens’s plan to John Jay, the President of the Continental Congress. Hamilton explained that Laurens wanted to “raise two three or four batalions of negroes” and then give them their freedom at the end of the war. “I have not the least doubt, that the Negroes will make very excellent soldiers, with proper management; and I will venture to pronounce, that they cannot be put in better hands than those of Mr. Laurens.” Hamilton goes on to say, “I frequently hear it objected to the scheme of embodying negroes that they are too stupid to make soldiers. This is so far from appearing to me a valid objection that I think their want of cultivation (for their natural faculties are probably as good as ours) joined to that habit of subordination which they acquire from a life of servitude, will make them sooner become soldiers than our white inhabitants.” Hamilton urged Jay to support the idea, writing that “an essential part of the plan is to give them their freedom with their muskets. This will secure their fidelity, animate their courage, and I believe will have a good influence upon those who remain, by opening a door to their emancipation.”<sup>17</sup>

Hamilton’s statement regarding “negroes” that “their natural faculties are probably as good as ours” is one that was not often heard in America in the 1770s or for many decades afterwards, even in the North.

### **Marriage to Elizabeth Schuyler (1780) and the Schuyler Family**

On December 14, 1780, in Albany, New York, Alexander Hamilton married Elizabeth Schuyler, daughter of Gen. Philip and Catherine Schuyler. The Schuylers had eleven children, including Angelica (married to John Barker Church) and Margaret (also known as Peggy and later married to Stephen Van Rensselaer). Hamilton’s exposure to the trading of enslaved persons was mostly due to his connection to Angelica, Peggy, and their husbands.

According to the U.S. Census (see the appendix below for images), Philip Schuyler owned thirteen slaves at his residence in Albany in 1790 and had eleven slaves at that location in 1800. He owned more at his farm outside the city. John B. Church was in Europe in 1790 but participated in the 1800 Census in New York and reported owning no slaves. Stephen van Rensselaer in the

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<sup>16</sup> Newton, Michael, *Alexander Hamilton: The Formative Years*, Eleftheria Publishing, Phoenix, AZ, 2015, p. 106.

<sup>17</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, pp. 17–19; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0051](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0051).

1790 Census had fifteen slaves in his household and in the 1800 Census he recorded fourteen slaves, with more at other locations.<sup>18</sup>

According to Hamilton's cash books (see below), Hamilton between 1780 and 1804 was linked to two slave transactions for his sisters-in-law and their husbands, namely the sale of a woman by Peggy van Rensselaer and the purchase of two slaves by John B. Church. Additionally, Philip Schuyler purchased an enslaved woman and child for the Hamiltons. On the surface, based on these transactions and Hamilton's records of them, it may appear that Hamilton owned slaves and was involved in the slave trade on behalf of his wife's sisters, but this was not the case. Each of these transactions will be discussed below.

### **"The woman Mrs. H had of Mrs. Clinton" (1781)**

In late April 1781, four months after their wedding, Alexander and Eliza Hamilton set up a temporary residence at De Peyster's Point, New York. On May 22, Hamilton wrote to New York Gov. George Clinton telling him that he soon hopes to "receive a sufficient sum to pay the value of the woman Mrs. H had of Mrs. Clinton."<sup>19</sup> The editors of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* write that "this sentence provides one of the few pieces of extant evidence that either H[amilton] or his wife owned slaves."<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Jessie Serfilippi of Schuyler Mansion asserts that when Hamilton wrote "to pay the value of the woman" it "implies Hamilton was paying Clinton *for* the woman. He did not say he was paying for the value of her labor as other historians have argued." She concludes that this "reveals he purchased an enslaved woman."<sup>21</sup> Further analysis is required to determine whether the Hamiltons hired or purchased this woman from Mrs. Clinton.

Alexander Hamilton married Elizabeth Schuyler in Albany in December 1780. By early January 1781, he returned to the army as General Washington's Aide-de-Camp. Eliza left Albany soon thereafter to join Hamilton in New Windsor. On February 16, Hamilton informed Washington that he was resigning his position. While not necessarily the primary reason behind his resignation, it was no secret that Hamilton wanted a field command to lead soldiers into battle. At the time, Washington was prevented from promoting his aides ahead of other officers and giving them field commands. Hamilton knew the war was soon coming to an end and he was running out of time to win military recognition. He continued to serve Washington until April 22, 1781. Five days later, Hamilton wrote to Washington requesting a field command.<sup>22</sup>

While waiting for his field command, Hamilton relocated to a house at De Peyster's Point on the east side of the Hudson River directly across from Washington's headquarters and the Continental Army. From there he could pester Washington for a field command and have easy access to Aide-de-Camp Tench Tilghman for daily updates. Eliza, who had probably been staying with

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<sup>18</sup> [www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/](http://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/).

<sup>19</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, p. 642; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-1174](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-1174).

<sup>20</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, p. 643 note 2; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-1174](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-1174).

<sup>21</sup> Serfilippi, "As Odious and Immoral a Thing", p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, pp. 600–601; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-1164](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-1164).

her uncle John Cochran and aunt Gertrude in New Windsor, joined Hamilton at De Peyster's Point, where she spent two months with him before returning to Albany.

The house at De Peyster's Point was formerly the summer home of Abraham De Peyster, who had died in 1775, and the house had been vacant since then.<sup>23</sup> The home was passed on to his brother Johannes, who by this time was 86 years old and living in Albany. Johannes had been married to Anna Schuyler, a second cousin twice removed from Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton. This connection possibly enabled the Hamiltons to stay in the house for free or at a discounted rate, a happy circumstance for a soldier short on funds. On April 28, Eliza had just moved into the house when Hamilton contacted the deputy quartermaster requesting an artificer to make him four kegs (buckets and barrels) and two pails with handles, which sound a lot like cleaning utensils, and a small table.<sup>24</sup> From the start, Hamilton knew that his residence at De Peyster's Point would be temporary. It was only a matter of time before he received a field command and rejoined the army. The house therefore needed a quick cleaning, rather than the more thorough one which would have been required if he had intended to live there for a long time.

At some point, Mrs. Clinton, the wife of New York Gov. George Clinton, living in nearby Poughkeepsie, was asked by or offered Eliza some assistance. Mrs. Clinton made arrangements to have a woman come from her house to help Eliza. There is no record of when this woman arrived or when she left. The only information about this woman comes from Hamilton in his May 22 letter to Gov. Clinton, in which he wrote, "For some time past I have had a bill on France lying in Philadelphia the sale of which has been delayed on account of the excessive lowness of the exchange." He expected to soon "receive a sufficient sum to pay the value of the woman Mrs. H had of Mrs. Clinton. I hope the delay may be attended with no inconvenience to you."<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, there is no evidence of how much the Hamiltons eventually paid Clinton, which would have helped determine whether this woman was purchased or hired. However, Hamilton used the phrase "the woman Mrs. H had," indicating that she was no longer at the house nor with the Hamiltons and that this woman was not permanent to them. Needing the woman just to clean a house and having her services for only a short time, it would seem that this woman was a temporary hire.

It is also worth noting that Hamilton described the person from the Clintons as a "woman" and not a slave. Could the person Eliza hired have been a white person or a free black person? While there is no census data for 1781, we know from the 1790 U.S. Census report for the George Clinton household that in addition to himself, his wife, and his five daughters, there were other people in the house, namely a white woman, two free black persons, and eight slaves. While it cannot be known for sure what the status of the white woman was, it is very likely that the two free black persons acted as servants. This opens up the possibility that the person employed by Eliza could have been white, free Black, or an enslaved person.

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<sup>23</sup> Cring, Christopher, *The Most Important House in the American Revolution that Nobody Knew About*, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, p. 603; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-1165](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-1165).

<sup>25</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, pp. 642–643; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-1174](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-1174).



Richard Varick	1		2	1	1
George Clinton Esq.	1	1	7	2	8
1. : Destitute	2	1	3		2

1790 U.S. Census (New York)

Source: [www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/](http://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/)

George Clinton Esq. | 1 | 1 | 7 | 2 | 8

1 free white males 16 & over | 1 free white males under 16 | 7 free white females | 2 other free (non-white) persons | 8 slaves

Historian and Hamilton biographer Forrest McDonald points out that “given Hamilton’s limited means at the time,” it is far more likely that Eliza, “in keeping with common practice, had merely hired a servant employed by or belonging to Mrs. Clinton.”<sup>26</sup> Hamilton earned \$60 a month, though he had not been paid since August 1, 1780.<sup>27</sup> The amount of his wages probably didn’t matter much anyway since Hamilton was being paid in Continental dollars and the currency had been devalued so much that by this time it took 225 Continentals to make one dollar of specie.<sup>28</sup> Without having received any pay for nine months and the severe devaluation of the currency, Hamilton had to spend his financial reserves prudently and could hardly afford to purchase a slave.

Finally, Jessie Serfilippi asserts that by social custom Hamilton would have been expected to purchase a slave for his wife. “She [Eliza] would expect Hamilton to provide her with an enslaved servant to aid her in the many duties she had to perform. This should not be surprising. Slave-ownership was so expected of everyone in the Hamiltons’ social class.” Serfilippi goes further, “Hamilton would have been expected to provide and maintain a lifestyle reflective of his status as part of one of the wealthiest and most prominent families in New York. There is no documentation of him speaking out against these expectations.”<sup>29</sup> But in fact he did. Prior to their marriage, Hamilton wrote to Eliza, “But now we are talking of times to come, tell me my pretty damsel have you made up your mind upon the subject of housekeeping? Do you soberly relish the pleasure of being a poor mans wife? Have you learned to think a home spun preferable to a brocade and the rumbling of a waggon wheel to the musical rattling of a coach and six?”<sup>30</sup> It seems Hamilton felt no pressure to keep up with the Schuylers, and after this letter, Eliza probably would not have expected Hamilton to provide her with slaves to help with the housekeeping.

In the end, there is no evidence that Hamilton purchased this woman from the Clintons. Instead, the evidence suggests that the woman was hired because (1) the employment of this woman from day one was always expected to be temporary, (2) the woman appears to have worked for the

<sup>26</sup> McDonald, Forrest, *Alexander Hamilton*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1979, p. 373.

<sup>27</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 1, p. 192; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0078](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0078).

<sup>28</sup> Hatfield, Stuart, “Continental Congress vs. Continental Army: Paying For It All,” *AllthingsLiberty.com*, January 21, 2019, [allthingsliberty.com/2019/01/continental-congress-vs-continental-army-paying-for-it-all/](http://allthingsliberty.com/2019/01/continental-congress-vs-continental-army-paying-for-it-all/).

<sup>29</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, pp. 397–400; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0834](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0834).

Hamiltons for just a short time, (3) there is no indication if she was white or black, (4) no indication whether she was free or enslaved, (5) Hamilton could hardly afford the price of a slave, (6) Eliza did not feel entitled to an enslaved person, and (7) when the time came for Hamilton to go back to the army, Eliza went home to Albany where she could use her family's slaves and therefore did not need her own enslaved person. Based on these factors, Hamilton most likely hired this woman rather than having purchased her.

### **The Return of Formerly Enslaved Persons? (1783–1795)**

During the War for Independence, thousands of enslaved Blacks sought refuge behind British lines. At the conclusion of the war, the American negotiators demanded that the treaty include language requiring Great Britain to return these enslaved people and forbidding their removal from America. Article 7 of the Peace Treaty stated that “his Britannic Majesty shall with all convenient speed, and without causing any destruction, or carrying away any Negroes or other property of the American inhabitants, withdraw all his armies, garrisons, and fleets from the said United States, and from every post, place, and harbor within the same.”<sup>31</sup>

In a June 1, 1783, letter to Gov. Clinton, Hamilton complained that the state of New York was in violation of Article 5 of the preliminary peace treaty, which prohibits the Americans from persecuting loyalists and confiscating their property. Hamilton pointed out that New York, by violating this article, was giving the British a reason to renege on their end of the bargain. A further concern for Hamilton was that since the treaty had not yet been finalized, Americans will say that they cannot be held to the terms of the agreement. Hamilton stated that the “provisional or preliminary treaty is as binding from the moment it is made as the definitive treaty which in fact only develops explains and fixes more precisely what may have been too generally expressed in the former.” Referring to Article 7, Hamilton continued, “Suppose the British should now send away not only the negroes but all other property and all the public records in their possession belonging to us on the pretence above stated should we not justly accuse them with breaking faith? Is this not already done in the case of the negroes, who have been carried away, though founded upon a very different principle a doubtful construction of the treaty, not a denial of its immediate operation?”<sup>32</sup>

Based on this letter, Jessie Serfilippi argues that Hamilton “advocated for the return of the formerly-enslaved people because he argued the people were property, which the British promised to return under the treaty.” She then adds, “In 1795, he presented a completely different view,” saying that the proposed plan to force the British to return “formerly enslaved people made free after the war . . . was wrong.” Serfilippi says that “Hamilton’s switch from advocating for the return of formerly-enslaved people by the British to writing it was immoral to take freedom from a person made free did not come from personal beliefs, but political ones.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The Paris Peace Treaty of September 3, 1783, [avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/paris.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/paris.asp).

<sup>32</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, pp. 367–392; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0244](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0244).

<sup>33</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, pp. 2–3.

The above argument by Serfilippi is a misrepresentation of the text. First of all, she falsely claims that Hamilton's June 1, 1783, letter to George Clinton, as quoted above, was written after the treaty was signed, but the signing did not take place until September 3, 1783. More importantly, Hamilton did not say that he supported the return of formerly enslaved people. In fact, Hamilton pointed out that the "Negroes" had "already" been sent away and the concern was that "other property and all of the public records in their possession belonging to us" would also be sent away. At no point did Hamilton argue that these freed Blacks should be returned and re-enslaved.

Serfilippi also failed to mention in her essay that six days prior to writing to Clinton, on May 26, 1783, Alexander Hamilton in Congress proposed a resolution regarding the formerly enslaved people who fled to the British. Hamilton quoted Article 7 of the Peace Treaty, which stated "that his Britannic Majesty shall, with all convenient speed, and without causing any destruction, or carrying away any negroes or other property of the American inhabitants, withdraw all his armies, garrisons and fleets from the said United States, and from every port, place and harbour within the same." Hamilton then pointed out that "a considerable number of negroes belonging to the citizens of these states, have been carried off therefrom, contrary to the true intent and meaning of the said articles." He then resolved, "That . . . the ministers plenipotentiary of these states for negotiating a peace in Europe . . . be directed to remonstrate thereon to the Court of Great Britain, and take proper measures for obtaining such reparation as the nature of the case will admit."<sup>34</sup> In other words, Hamilton did not demand or even request the return of freed slaves. Instead, he sought reparations for all the property taken away by the British, including the formerly enslaved, a way to hold the British responsible without re-enslaving the freed Blacks.

Serfilippi also ignores Hamilton's October 1789 meeting with unofficial British Minister to the United States George Beckwith, in which Hamilton stated, "On our side there are also two points still unadjusted, the *Western Forts, And the Negroes*, although, as to the latter I always decidedly approved Lord Dorchester's conduct on that occasion, he could not do otherwise. To have given up these men to their Masters, after the assurances of protection held out to them, was impossible, and the Reply of Your Cabinet to our application on this subject was to me perfectly satisfactory."<sup>35</sup>

Serfilippi claims that Hamilton argued in 1783 for the return of slaves but had changed his mind by 1795 for political reasons, but here we see that Hamilton did not argue for the return of the freed slaves in Congress in 1783 and in 1789 he said that he "always" opposed the return of these formerly enslaved people. As his 1783 resolution in Congress and his 1789 statement were made prior to the return from France of Thomas Jefferson, the new Secretary of State, and before a political rivalry developed between them, Serfilippi's assertion that Hamilton changed positions for political reasons are not supported by the facts. Hamilton never supported the return of these freed slaves, "always" believed that the return of "those men to their Masters" would be "impos-

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<sup>34</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904–1937, vol. 24, pp. 363–364; [memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lljc&fileName=024/lljc024.db&recNum=370](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lljc&fileName=024/lljc024.db&recNum=370).

<sup>35</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, p. 487; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-05-02-0273](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-05-02-0273).

sible,” and held that the British refusal to return the formerly enslaved was “to me perfectly satisfactory.”

Likewise, in early 1792, in another conversation that Serfilippi fails to discuss in her essay, Hamilton spoke with George Hammond, British envoy to the United States, about violations of the peace treaty. According to Hammond, “With respect to the Negroes, Mr Hamilton seemed partly to acquiesce in my reasoning upon this point,” or as Hammond reported elsewhere, that the “Negroes, thus emancipated, had acquired indefeasible rights of personal liberty, of which the British government was not competent to deprive them, by reducing them again to a state of slavery, and to the domination of their ancient masters.” Moreover, Hammond wrote that Hamilton told him “that this matter did not strike him as an object of such importance as it had appeared to other members of this government.”<sup>36</sup> Yet again, Hamilton sided with the British and against “other members” of his own government regarding the return of formerly enslaved people emancipated by the British during the war.

In 1794, Hamilton shared with President Washington some “points to be Considered in the Instructions to Mr. Jay” as John Jay prepared to negotiate a new treaty with Great Britain. Among these points were “indemnification” for various injuries, including “depredations upon our Commerce,” “prizes made by proscribed Vessels,” and “obstructions to the recovery of debts.” But when it came to “indemnification for our negroes carried away,” Hamilton put that under “grounds of adjustment with regard to the late Treaty of Peace on the part of the British,” suggesting that he no longer sought reparations but merely to use this as a tool to get better terms during the negotiation.<sup>37</sup> Yet again, Hamilton did not argue for the return of freed slaves.

In July 1795, with the Jay Treaty negotiated but strongly opposed by some, Hamilton prepared some remarks for President Washington on the subject, even though he was no longer in Washington’s cabinet. Hamilton argued, “Her proceedings in seducing away our negroes during the War were to the last degree infamous—and form an indelible stain in her annals. But having done it, it would have been still more infamous to have surrendered them to their Masters.” Hamilton further contended that “compensation for the negroes, if not a point of doubtful right, is certainly a point of no great moment. . . . The actual pecuniary value of the object is in a national sense inconsiderable & insignificant.”<sup>38</sup>

In defending the treaty to the public in a series of essays, Hamilton also addressed this issue. “In the interpretation of Treaties things odious or immoral are not to be presumed. The abandonment of negroes, who had been induced to quit their Masters on the faith of Official proclamations promising them liberty, to fall again under the yoke of their masters and into slavery is as odious

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<sup>36</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 10, pp. 493–496; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-10-02-0074](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-10-02-0074).

<sup>37</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 16, p. 321; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-16-02-0252-0002](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-16-02-0252-0002).

<sup>38</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 18, pp. 415 and 431; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-18-02-0281](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-18-02-0281).

and immoral a thing as can be conceived. It is odious not only as it imposes an act of perfidy on one of the contracting parties; but as it tends to bring back to servitude men once made free.”<sup>39</sup>

From 1783 through 1795, Hamilton repeatedly and consistently opposed the return of formerly enslaved people who had gone over to the British and been given their freedom by them. Hamilton never, as Serfilippi contends, “advocated for the return of the formerly-enslaved people because he argued the people were property.” He did, however, call for the British to pay reparations, but even in this he argued that it was not very important and used this threat as a tool to get better terms rather than expecting Americans to actually receive any reparations.

### **Alexander Hamilton’s Cash Books (1782–1791 and 1795–1804)**

After the siege of Yorktown in October 1781, Hamilton returned to his wife in Albany and resigned from the army. By the end of 1782, he had qualified himself to practice law. In November 1783, Hamilton set up a law office on Wall Street in New York City. To track his income and expenditures, Hamilton kept two so-called “cash books,” covering the years 1782 to 1791 and mid-1795 until his death. In these books, Hamilton recorded financial transactions from both his legal practice and his personal life. But in fact, the two cash books are very different. The first one is an account book, in which Hamilton kept accounts for those with whom he did business. The second is a transaction journal, where Hamilton recorded his own financial transactions day by day.

Many entries in Hamilton’s cash books show him sending or receiving funds, but oftentimes a transaction did not involve any cash and Hamilton simply recorded an outstanding debit or credit. There are also numerous transactions that were not for Hamilton himself, but rather were for his clients doing business with someone else. In these instances, Hamilton handled the exchange of money or merely debited and credited accounts, depending on the case, and recorded these in his cash books. Hamilton’s role in these transactions has been described as that of a “middleman,” but perhaps his involvement can better be described as that of a “banker.”<sup>40</sup> As a banker, Hamilton paid out or received cash on behalf of his clients but occasionally just recorded the debit or credit to be settled up later. It’s like a person today writing a check and another one depositing it or like a credit card transaction. The bank transfers the money between the two people and the credit card processor records the transaction for future settlement, but the bank or credit card processor has nothing to do with the goods and services being bought and sold. Likewise, in the records of the transactions of Hamilton’s clients, unless otherwise stated, there is no record of Hamilton having anything to do with the transaction itself or the goods and services being bought and sold. In these cases, Hamilton merely acted as a banker, paying or receiving money or just recording debits and credits for transactions already completed without his involvement or even knowledge.

Found in Hamilton’s cash books are two entries for the purchase and sale of enslaved people by John B. Church and Peggy Schuyler van Rensselaer, in which Hamilton acted as a banker who

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<sup>39</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 18, p. 519; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-18-02-0317](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-18-02-0317).

<sup>40</sup> Hamilton did not just act as a “banker” for his Schuyler in-laws. The Baron von Steuben reportedly declared, “The Secretary of the Treasury is my banker—my Hamilton takes care of me.” (Hamilton, John C., *The Life of Alexander Hamilton*, D. Appleton & Co., New York, 1834–1840, vol. 1, p. 182.)

had nothing to do with the transactions themselves. There is also an entry noting that Philip Schuyler purchased two enslaved people for Hamilton. Each of these entries will be discussed below. Outside of the Schuyler family, there are no other transactions recorded in Hamilton's cash books for the purchase or sale of enslaved people.

### **John B. Church Acquires Enslaved Woman (1783)**

A record from March 1799 states, "The following . . . laid before the committee by the chairman . . . as follows. A black woman by the name of Sarah was brought from the state of Maryland about six<sup>n</sup> [sixteen] years since by Holm Salmon [Haym Salomon] who sold her to John B. Church. A. Hamilton was agent for Church in the business."<sup>41</sup> (The circumstances of this 1799 statement and the resulting actions will be discussed later.)

The purchase of this "black woman by the name of Sarah" must have taken place in or prior to July 1783 because the March 1799 record states that it took place "about six<sup>n</sup> [sixteen] years" earlier, the seller died in January 1785, and the Churches left for Europe in July 1783.<sup>42</sup>

At the time of this transaction, the two parties involved were both in Philadelphia. Haym Salomon was a merchant in Philadelphia. The Churches came to Philadelphia prior to their departure for Europe.<sup>43</sup> Another person who may have been involved, John Chaloner, who served as the agent for John Barker Church, was also in Philadelphia. As a member of Congress, Alexander Hamilton was also in Philadelphia and Princeton at this time as Congress moved from one city to the other in June 1783.

There is no record of Hamilton being involved in John B. Church's purchase of Sarah. As a congressman at this time, Hamilton was too busy to also be working as Church's "agent." Indeed, Hamilton did not start working as Church's banker and attorney until sometime in 1784, as the only entry in Hamilton's cash book from 1783 involving Church shows Hamilton borrowing £48 from him.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Church was in Philadelphia at this time and therefore had no need for an agent to do his business for him.

In Hamilton's cash book, we find an entry dated April 1784 crediting the account of John Chaloner, who in addition to being the agent of John B. Church also acted as Hamilton's banker during his stay in Philadelphia. The entry reads "By my draft in favor of Haym Solomon . . . 150."<sup>45</sup> In other words, Hamilton had written a draft for £150 Pennsylvania Currency to Haym Salomon, which Solomon presented to Chaloner for payment in April 1784. So now, instead

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<sup>41</sup> New York Historical Society, Digital Collection, New York Manumission Records, Vol. 7, p. 113; [digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A133138#page/57/mode/1up](http://digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A133138#page/57/mode/1up).

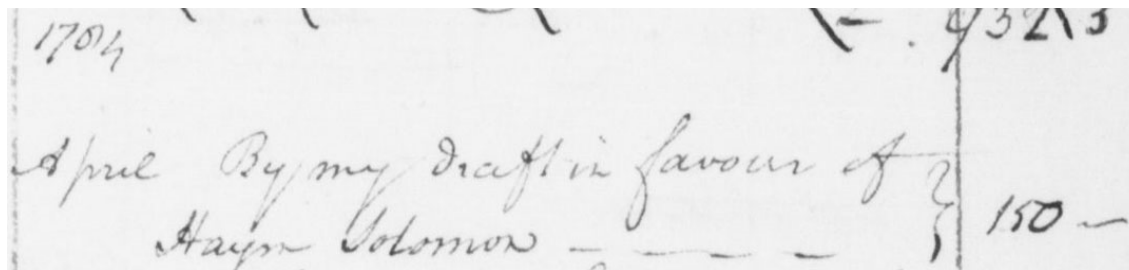
<sup>42</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, p. 417; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0270](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0270).

<sup>43</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, p. 417; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0270](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0270).

<sup>44</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, pp. 10–12; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0007](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0007); [www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0403\\_0454/?sp=6](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0403_0454/?sp=6).

<sup>45</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, p. 12; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0007](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0007); [www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0403\\_0454/?sp=7](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0403_0454/?sp=7). For an understanding of this transaction, see the similar transaction involving Hamilton, Chaloner, and John Mayly [*sic?*] on the same page of the cash book along with *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, p. 473; [https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0300](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0300).

of owing £150 to Solomon, he owed that sum to Chaloner and therefore credited Chaloner's account.



*Cash Book #1 – Draft in favour of Haym Salomon*

*Source: Alexander Hamilton Papers, Library of Congress*

There is no evidence that this “draft in favor of Haym Solomon” had any connection to John B. Church’s purchase of Sarah the previous year. It would seem that Hamilton, while in Philadelphia in 1782 and 1783, borrowed or purchased goods on credit from Solomon to the tune of £150 and that this had nothing to do with John B. Church’s purchase of Sarah in 1783. Indeed, one finds a dividend of £1,320 credited to Church’s account in February 1784 and the same amount debited to Chaloner’s account,<sup>46</sup> but this £150 draft was credited to Chaloner with no offsetting debit to Church, showing that this draft on Solomon had nothing to do with Church’s purchase of a slave.

### **Peggy and Angelica Request Assistance Getting Back a Slave (1784)**

In 1784, Angelica Church, writing from Europe, reached out to Peggy van Rensselaer, who then reached out to Hamilton, requesting help in getting back a Negro by the name of Ben, who Angelica had sold for a term of years to Major William Jackson.<sup>47</sup> Major Jackson lived in Philadelphia, so Hamilton on November 11, 1784, sent a letter to John Chaloner, John B. Church’s business associate in Philadelphia, passing the request on to him to handle. Chaloner contacted Major Jackson, who replied to Chaloner that he declines to part with Ben but says when Mrs. Church returns he will let her have him should she request it in person but will not part with him to anyone else. Chaloner responded back to Hamilton and he or Elizabeth presumably forwarded the information to Peggy or Angelica.<sup>48</sup> There is no known further correspondence on the subject, but Angelica and John Church returned to New York in June 1785 for a visit of about two months and then they returned to England. There is no record of whether or not Angelica went to Philadelphia to reclaim Ben. If anything came of this, there is no record of Hamilton being involved.

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<sup>46</sup> The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, vol. 3, pp. 10–12; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0007](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0007); [www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0403\\_0454/?sp=6](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0403_0454/?sp=6); [www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0403\\_0454/?sp=7](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0403_0454/?sp=7).

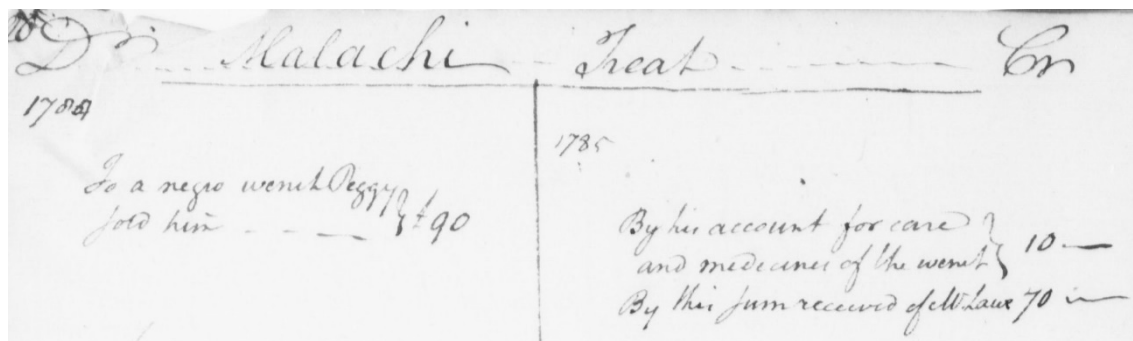
<sup>47</sup> The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, vol. 3, pp. 584–585; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0390](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0390).

<sup>48</sup> The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, vol. 3, pp. 587–588; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0392](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0392).

In her retelling of these events, Jessie Serfilippi writes that Alexander Hamilton reached out to find an enslaved servant, Ben, so that he could get him back for Angelica. Serfilippi implies that Hamilton was the initiator and therefore labels him a “slave trader.”<sup>49</sup> Alas, Serfilippi fails to identify the Schuyler sisters, Angelica and Peggy, as the instigators in this affair. She also fails to mention the response from John Chaloner and Major Jackson.<sup>50</sup> Finally, she wrongly labels Hamilton a “slave trader,” when in reality all Hamilton did was pass along some information between the parties involved. There is no evidence that any slaves were “traded” or that Hamilton was involved in any such slave trading.

### “A Negro Wench Peggy Sold Him” (1784–1785)

There is an entry in Hamilton’s cash book dated 1784 debiting Dr. Malachi Treat’s account for “a negro wench Peggy sold him” in the amount of £90. In the facing column, dated 1785, Treat is credited £10 “for care and medicine of the wench” and another £70 “by this sum received of Mr. Lowe.”<sup>51</sup>



*Cash Book #1 – Peggy sells enslaved person to Dr. Malachi Treat*

*Source: Alexander Hamilton Papers, Library of Congress*

This entry highlights the challenge of understanding some of Hamilton’s cash book notes. This specific entry could either mean “a negro wench [named] Peggy [that was] sold [to] him [Malachi Treat]” or it could be read as “a negro wench [that] Peggy [Schuyler van Rensselaer] sold [to] him [Malachi Treat].”

According to Jessie Serfilippi, “It seems as if ten of the paid pounds were for medicine Hamilton purchased for Peggy while he was waiting to sell her to Treat. Seventy pounds were paid to Hamilton through Mr. Lowe (likely Nicholas Lowe, with whom Hamilton often conducted other business). The other ten pounds remained unpaid. Hamilton’s record of money spent on medicine for Peggy reveals that Hamilton purchased her at Treat’s direction and held her for Treat until he

<sup>49</sup> Serfilippi, “As Odious and Immoral a Thing”, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, pp. 587–588; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0392](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0392).

<sup>51</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, p. 21; [www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0403\\_0454/?sp=14](https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0403_0454/?sp=14).



could purchase her from Hamilton. While this may not place Hamilton in the role of enslaver, it does firmly place him in that of a slave trader.”<sup>52</sup>

Dr. Malachi Treat was friendly with the Schuylers but there is no evidence he was close to Hamilton. He was not one of Hamilton’s legal clients. These cash-book entries is the only listing for Treat in the index of *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, so even though he and Hamilton must have known each other it seems like they were not close friends. In contrast, Dr. Treat spent much of the war in the Albany area<sup>53</sup> and knew Philip Schuyler and his family during that time.<sup>54</sup> In one letter, mostly about business, Treat informs Schuyler, who was away in Philadelphia attending Congress, that “Mrs. Schuyler is well and the Family at Saratoga, this I fancy not altogether easy.”<sup>55</sup> So Treat apparently knew the Schuylers better than he knew Hamilton.

In his cash books, Hamilton never mentioned the name of an enslaved person being bought or sold. On the other hand, in the only other slave-related transactions for his Schuyler in-laws, he always mentioned the name of the individual for whom he did the banking transaction. In this case, “Peggy” probably is not the name of a slave but rather of the seller, Margaret “Peggy” Schuyler van Rensselaer, who Hamilton nearly always referred to as Peggy.<sup>56</sup> Even Jessie Serfilippi writes in one place that “when Hamilton purchased an enslaved person for a friend or family member, he always recorded who the transaction was carried out for.”<sup>57</sup> But in this case, Serfilippi decides that Peggy is not Peggy van Rensselaer but rather that the slave’s name was Peggy.<sup>58</sup> In deciding whether it was Hamilton or Peggy Schuyler van Rensselaer who sold this enslaved person, it makes more sense for it to be Peggy Schuyler van Rensselaer, whose family knew Treat and who owned quite a few slaves, fifteen in her household as of 1790 (see the Appendix below), rather than for this to be Hamilton, for whom there is no record of him owning any slaves and no record of him being close to Treat.

Moreover, it appears that Hamilton originally wrote 1785 on the debit side of the ledger and then corrected that to 1784. On top of that, for all three of these transactions with Treat, Hamilton

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<sup>52</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, pp. 7–8.

<sup>53</sup> *Public Papers of George Clinton*, New York and Albany, 1899–1914, vol. 5 pp. 370–371, 385, 731, vol. 6 pp. 67, 321.

<sup>54</sup> Gerlach, Don R., *Proud Patriot: Philip Schuyler and the War of Independence, 1775–1783*. Syracuse University Press, 1987, pp. 328 and 402.

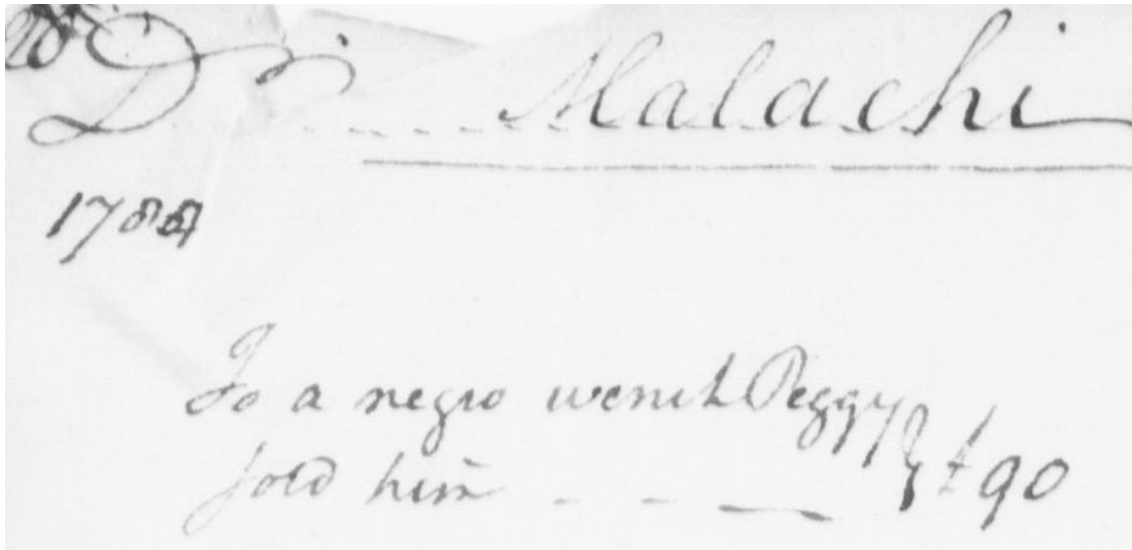
<sup>55</sup> Malachi Treat to Philip Schuyler, April 26, 1780, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, [digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/288494d0-6c89-0134-92c6-00505686a51c](https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/288494d0-6c89-0134-92c6-00505686a51c).

<sup>56</sup> Hamilton calls her Peggy fourteen times in his correspondence (*The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, pp. 286, 456, 493–494, 666, 683; vol. 3, pp. 572, 684; vol. 7, p. 35; vol. 9, p. 172; vol. 20, p. 354; vol. 21, p. 496; vol. 25, pp. 342, 346, 347; [founders.archives.gov/?q=%20Author%3A%22Hamilton%2C%20Alexander%22%20Peggy&s=111121113&r=1](https://founders.archives.gov/?q=%20Author%3A%22Hamilton%2C%20Alexander%22%20Peggy&s=111121113&r=1)) but only twice refers to her as Margaret (*The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 21, p. 482; vol. 24, p. 212; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0266](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0266)), once as Marg (*The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 26, p. 778; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0003-0012](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0003-0012)), and twice as Mrs. Rensselaer (*The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, pp. 584–585; 22, p. 443; vol. 25, p. 482; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0390](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0390); [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-22-02-0259](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-22-02-0259); [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-25-02-0274](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-25-02-0274)).

<sup>57</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, pp. 7–8.

did not write a month or day, as he did for nearly all other entries in this cash book. It would seem that Hamilton did not learn of these transactions until after the fact, probably when he received the money from Lowe, and at that time recorded all three transactions. He subsequently found out that the enslaved person had been sold to Treat the previous year and fixed his error. Recording the wrong year and omitting the months and days would seem to indicate that Hamilton was unaware of these transactions when they took place and that Hamilton merely served as banker for someone else, i.e., Peggy Schuyler van Rensselaer. There is no record of Hamilton having anything to do with the transaction itself or the enslaved person. He was acting as a banker after the fact.

A photograph of a handwritten entry from a cash book. The text is written in cursive ink on aged paper. At the top, it says "Dr. Malachi" followed by a horizontal line. Below the line, the year "1784" is written. Further down, the entry reads "To a negro wench Peggy" and "sold him" followed by a horizontal line and the amount "£90".

*Cash Book #1 – Peggy sells enslaved person to Dr. Malachi Treat*  
*Source: Alexander Hamilton Papers, Library of Congress*

Additionally, Serfilippi's claim that Hamilton "held" the enslaved person until Treat "could purchase her" has no support. All the cash book shows is that there was a delay in payment, not a delay in the delivery of the enslaved person. Peggy van Rensselaer sold this "negro wench" to Malachi Treat in 1784 but Treat did not pay until the following year, and even then he did not pay the full amount, at least not through Hamilton's hands. Such a lag in payment was not unusual as business was often done "on credit," in some cases with a mortgage as collateral. Indeed, Dr. Treat was credited for the "care and medicine" of the enslaved person, which as a medical doctor he probably provided personally, suggesting that the slave was already with Treat before Hamilton received the £70 from Mr. Lowe. Serfilippi asserts that "ten of the paid pounds were for medicine Hamilton purchased for Peggy while he was waiting to sell her to Treat,"<sup>59</sup> but if that were the case it would have appeared as a debit to Treat's account rather than a credit.

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<sup>59</sup> Serfilippi, "As Odious and Immoral a Thing", pp. 7–8.

## **Founding the New York Manumission Society (1785)**

On January 25, 1785, nineteen New Yorkers met and formed a committee “to draw up a set of Rules for the Government of the said Society.” Hamilton was not at that meeting but attended the following one on February 4, along with thirty-one other New Yorkers, at which time they organized the Society for the Manumission of Slaves. At this meeting, Hamilton and two others were chosen to “be a Committee to Report a Line of Conduct to be recommended to the Members of the Society in relation to any Slaves possessed by them; and also to prepare a Recommendation to all such Persons as have manumitted or shall Manumit Slaves to transmit their names and the names and Ages of the Slaves manumitted; in Order that the same may be Registered and the Society be the better Enabled to detect Attempts to deprive such Manumitted Persons of their Liberty.”<sup>60</sup>

Hamilton presented the committee’s report to the Society on November 10, 1785, recommending members to manumit all slaves under twenty-eight years old when they “arrive at the age of thirty-five years,” that all slaves between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty-eight be freed “within seven years from the present time,” that all slaves between the ages of thirty-eight and forty-five be “manumitted as soon as the said slave . . . attain the age of forty five,” and all slaves “above the age of forty five . . . be manumitted immediately.” This was too severe a measure for most of the Society’s members. The committee was promptly disbanded and a new one formed, which meekly suggested that members manumit their slaves if and when it suited them.<sup>61</sup>

## **Attempts to End the Slave Trade in New York (1786)**

In February 1786, Alexander Hamilton joined a committee of the New York Manumission Society, which lobbied the New York legislature to stop the export of slaves and published a pamphlet “A Dialogue on the Slavery of the Africans etc.” promoting that effort. On March 13, 1786, Hamilton and other memorialists signed a petition to the New York legislature urging the end of the slave trade, “a commerce so repugnant to humanity, and so inconsistent with the liberality and justice which should distinguish a free and enlightened people.”<sup>62</sup> The petition fell on deaf ears and the attempt to abolish the slave trade in New York failed, for now.

## **Constitutional Convention (1787)**

On May 30, 1787, during a discussion on representation, Hamilton proposed “that the rights of suffrage in the national Legislature ought to be proportioned to the number of free inhabitants,” thereby reducing the number of seats and power of the slave states. The Convention evaded the

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<sup>60</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, p. 597; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0409](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0409); Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, pp. 214–215.

<sup>61</sup> New York Historical Society, Digital Collection, New York Manumission Records, Vol. 6, pp. 29–30; [digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A133001#page/16/mode/1up](http://digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A133001#page/16/mode/1up); Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, p. 215.

<sup>62</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, p. 654; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0503](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0503); Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, p. 215–216.

conflict by postponing the proposal.<sup>63</sup> Some say that Hamilton had a significant say in the three-fifths rule, but the discussions of that rule on June 11 and again between July 9 and 13 do not support that claim.<sup>64</sup> For a large part of the Convention, New York had no vote because the state lacked a quorum. After July 15, New York cast no votes. Hamilton was absent from the convention, except for two days, from June 29 to September 2, but he returned in time to help finalize the wording of the Constitution, to vote in favor of it, and to put his signature to the document.

### **New York Manumission Society Creates the African Free School (1787)**

In 1787, the African Free School was created in New York City by the New York Manumission Society, of which Hamilton was a leading member. The school's explicit mission was to educate black children to take their place as equals to white American citizens. It began as a single-room schoolhouse with about forty students, the majority of whom were the children of enslaved persons, and by the time it was absorbed into the New York City public school system in 1835, it had educated thousands of children, a number of whom went on to become well known in the United States and Europe.<sup>65</sup>

### **President of the New York Manumission Society (1790)**

On February 18, 1790, the New York Manumission Society "proceeded to appoint a President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary for the ensuing year, and on counting the ballots, Alexander Hamilton was found to be elected President."<sup>66</sup> Hamilton served in this role until he "removed to Philadelphia" with the government in October. A "special meeting of the Society" was held on November 30, 1790, to elect a replacement.<sup>67</sup>

### **1790 U.S. Census**

In an article about the U.S. Census, the New York Public Library pointed to a 1790 U.S. Census record of an Alexander Hamilton in New York City and believed it to be the Secretary of the Treasury.<sup>68</sup> This record shows that the household had two males aged sixteen and over, one male under age sixteen, one female, no "other free persons," and no slaves.

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<sup>63</sup> Madison, James, *Notes on the Debates in the Federal Convention*, [avalon.law.yale.edu/subject\\_menus/debcont.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/debcont.asp).

<sup>64</sup> Madison, James, *Notes on the Debates in the Federal Convention*, [avalon.law.yale.edu/subject\\_menus/debcont.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/debcont.asp).

<sup>65</sup> [www.nyhistory.org/web/africanfreeschool/](http://www.nyhistory.org/web/africanfreeschool/).

<sup>66</sup> New York Historical Society, Digital Collection, New York Manumission Records, Vol. 6, p. 142; [digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A133001#page/73/mode/1up](http://digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A133001#page/73/mode/1up).

<sup>67</sup> New York Historical Society, Digital Collection, New York Manumission Records, Vol. 6, p. 146; [digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A133001#page/75/mode/1up](http://digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A133001#page/75/mode/1up).

<sup>68</sup> Sutton, Philip, "Stories from the U.S. Census," New York Public Library, [www.nypl.org/blog/2020/04/13/federal-census-history-and-uses](http://www.nypl.org/blog/2020/04/13/federal-census-history-and-uses); United States Census, 1790, New York, New York City West Ward, image 5; [familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YB6-9V81](http://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YB6-9V81). Based on the analysis presented in versions 1.0 and 2.0 of this essay, the New York Public Library article has since been corrected, as noted at the end of the article.

Abraham Brouwer . . . . .	5	2	4		
James Anderson . . . . .	1	2	4		
Alexander Hamilton . . . . .	2	1	1		
Grace Beekman . . . . .	4	1	3	2	
Sebastian Bauman . . . . .	1		4	2	

*United States Census, 1790, New York, New York City West Ward, image 5.*

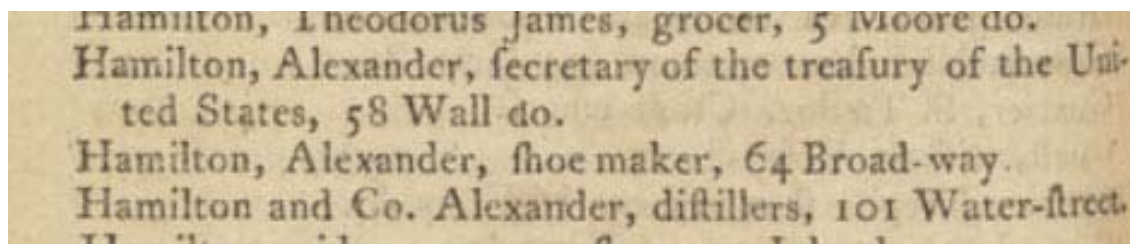
*Source: familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YB6-9V81*

*Alexander Hamilton | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | -*

*2 free white males 16 & over | 1 free white males under 16 | 1 free white female | no other free persons | no slaves*

Since this census record did not accurately reflect the number of people in the Hamilton household, Schuyler Mansion's Jessie Serfilippi concluded (1) that U.S. Censuses are not accurate, (2) that this "heightens the likelihood that the people the Hamiltons enslaved were not recorded on the census," and (3) the fact that no slaves are listed "does not mean the Hamiltons did not enslave people."<sup>69</sup>

The New York Public Library and Jessie Serfilippi assumed that this was Alexander Hamilton, the secretary of the treasury, but failed to verify it. A comparison of the census to the city directory shows that this was a different Alexander Hamilton. According to the city directory, Abraham Brouwer lived at 66 Broadway, James Anderson at 65 Broadway, and Sebastian Bauman at 62 Broadway. Grace Beekman, is not found in the city directory but Christopher Beekman is at 63 Broadway. So the Alexander Hamilton in the census was the one living at 64 Broadway, which according to the city directory was Alexander Hamilton, the shoemaker.<sup>70</sup>



*Source: The New-York Directory, and Register, for the Year 1790, p. 46.*

Alexander Hamilton, the secretary of the treasury, lived at 58 Wall Street. Looking in the city directory for Hamilton's neighbors, one finds William Heyer Jr. at 61 Wall Street, Francis Mallaby at 59 Wall Street, John Jauncey at 56 Wall Street, and Edmund Seaman at 54 Wall Street.<sup>71</sup> These

<sup>69</sup> Serfilippi, "As Odious and Immoral a Thing", pp. 24–25.

<sup>70</sup> *The New-York Directory, and Register, for the Year 1790*, Hodge, Allen, and Campbell, New York, 1790, p. 7, 11, 12, 18, 46; digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/dfc54ca0-e67b-0134-0aa0-5ddffb4c30ce.

<sup>71</sup> *The New-York Directory, and Register, for the Year 1790*, p. 50, 55, 65, 88; digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/dfc54ca0-e67b-0134-0aa0-5ddffb4c30ce.

individuals are found in sequential order in the 1790 Census, with others interspersed between them, but Alexander Hamilton is not there, nor is he found anywhere else in the New York census.<sup>72</sup>

William Hyndman	1	1	3	1
Oliver Vandubilt	5	3	2	
Francis Maleby	1	3	4	1
William Vesterly	1			
James H. Maxwell	1		3	5
Henry Hays	1	1	1	3
Reuben Dunn	1		1	
Gabriel Ludlow	3		7	3
John Jauney	1		1	4
Michael Huck	1	1	5	1
Edmund Seaman	1	1	3	1

United States Census, 1790, New York, New York City North Ward, image 8.

Source: [familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YB6-9J1C](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YB6-9J1C)

The New York Public Library and Jessie Serfilippi must have forgotten that in 1790 the U.S. government moved from New York City to Philadelphia. On October 20, 1790, Hamilton and his family left New York City. By October 26, 1790, they had moved into a house at 79 South Third Street in Philadelphia. In the 1790 Census for Philadelphia, “Alexander Hamilton Esqr secretary of the Treasury of US” appears inserted above Doctor Benjamin Rush at 79 South Third Street. Other U.S. Treasury employees appear in the census in a similar manner. (Based on this analysis, as presented in versions 1.0 and 2.0 of this essay, the New York Public Library article was corrected, as is noted at the end of that article.<sup>73</sup>)

John Ford	1	1	1	1
Alexander Hamilton Esqr secretary of the Treasury of US	1	1	1	1
Doctor Benjamin Rush	1	1	1	1
Reuben Dunn	1	1	1	1

1790 U.S. Census (Philadelphia)

Source: [www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/](https://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/)

Alexander Hamilton Esqr secretary of the Treasury of US ¶ Doctor Benjamin Rush | 79  
/ D | 2 | 3 | 6 | - | -

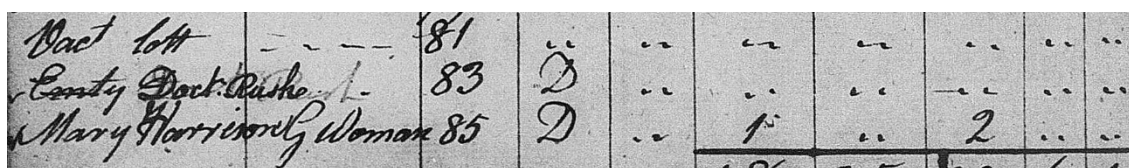
<sup>72</sup> United States Census, 1790, New York, New York City North Ward, image 8; [familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YB6-9J1C](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YB6-9J1C).

<sup>73</sup> Sutton, Philip, “Stories from the U.S. Census,” New York Public Library, [www.nypl.org/blog/2020/04/13/federal-census-history-and-uses](https://www.nypl.org/blog/2020/04/13/federal-census-history-and-uses).

*79 South Third Street / 2 free white males 16 & over / 3 free white males under 16 / 6 free white females / no other free persons / no slaves*

In the first two versions of this essay, it was argued that the people counted at 79 South Third Street belonged to the Hamilton household. Further research calls this into question. Philadelphia was divided into three census districts. Two of them, including the one that lists Alexander Hamilton, have no date of enumeration, but the third is recorded as September 17, 1790.<sup>74</sup> It seems likely that the section of Philadelphia that Hamilton moved to was also counted around that time and therefore the totals given for the Benjamin Rush house are for Rush's household. When Rush moved out and the Hamiltons moved in, the census taker inserted "Alexr Hamilton Esqr secretary of the Treasury of US" above "Doctr Benjn Rush" and wrote "mov[ed]" next to Rush.

Benjamin Rush also appears at 83 Walnut Street. The entry for that address originally read "Emty" but that was crossed out and "Doctr Rush" was added.<sup>75</sup> No numbers are given because his household was already counted at 79 South Third Street.



Doctr lot	81								
Emty Doctr Rush	83								
Mary Harrison Woman	85				2				

*United States Census, 1790, Pennsylvania, Water Street East Side, image 37*

*Source: [familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YYB-WPF](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YYB-WPF)*

It would thus appear that Hamilton was counted in neither the New York nor the Pennsylvania census, and therefore the 1790 Census cannot tell us whether he owned slaves at that time.

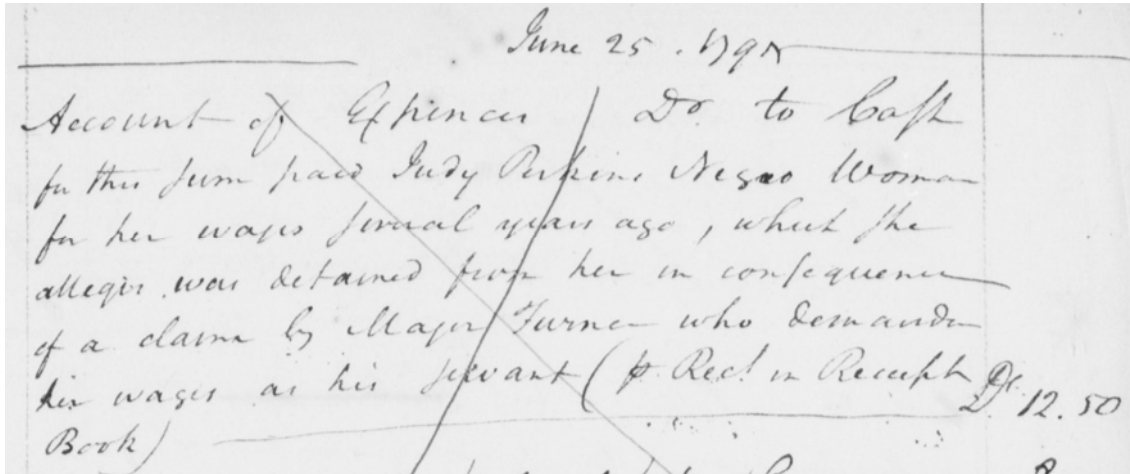
Regardless whether the numbers for 79 South Third Street belong to Hamilton or Rush, Serfilippi's assertion that the 1790 census is inaccurate was based entirely on a record for Alexander Hamilton the shoemaker in New York rather than the secretary of the treasury. An inability to understand the count of people in a household does not mean the information is incorrect; it simply means that we do not understand the situation. Moreover, the argument that possibly inaccurate census records "heightens the likelihood that the people the Hamiltons enslaved were not recorded on the census" and that no slaves are listed "does not mean the Hamiltons did not enslave people" is specious at best. A lack of evidence is not evidence, and an assertion—that Hamilton owned slaves—requires evidence, not just a lack of evidence to the contrary. The 1790 census, in which Hamilton's household is not counted, proves nothing about whether Hamilton owned or did not own enslaved persons.

<sup>74</sup> United States Census, 1790, Pennsylvania, Water Street East Side, image 153; [familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YYB-ZHG](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YYB-ZHG). Some parts of Pennsylvania were not counted until as late as March and May 1791 (United States Census, 1790, Pennsylvania, Cumberland, Hopewell, Newton, Tyborn, and Westpensboro, image 4; [familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YYJ-SF5X](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YYJ-SF5X); United States Census, 1790, Pennsylvania, Berks, Reading, image 3; [familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YYJ-S6PT](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YYJ-S6PT)).

<sup>75</sup> United States Census, 1790, Pennsylvania, Water Street East Side, image 36; [familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YYB-WPF](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YYB-WPF).

## Hamilton Pays Wage to Negro Woman (1795)

Hamilton's cash book includes an entry dated June 25, 1795, stating that he "paid Judy Perkins Negro Woman for her wages several years ago, which she alleges was detained from her in consequence of a claim by Major Turner who demands her wages as his servant."<sup>76</sup>



*Cash Book #2 – Sum paid Judy Perkins Negro Woman*

*Source: Alexander Hamilton Papers, Library of Congress*

It is not clear from Hamilton's description whether Judy Perkins was enslaved then, enslaved now, or was ever enslaved. Hamilton's cash-book entry specifically says the original payment of \$12.50 was made to Judy Perkins for her wages several years ago and that a Major Turner demanded her wages as his servant. The implication is that Judy Perkins felt she deserved the wages, and Hamilton thought so as well, but she was not permitted to keep them. Since Hamilton originally gave her the money, he must have considered it wages paid to a free black woman. If Hamilton had thought her an enslaved person, he would have given the money to Major Turner. This situation must have been brought to Hamilton's attention and he generously decided to give her the \$12.50 wage again.

## "2 Negro Servants Purchased By Him For Me" (1796)

On December 17, 1795, Hamilton's father-in-law Philip Schuyler and three associates purchased a property known as Cosby Manor. Hamilton was engaged by them to collect and consolidate quarterly payments from each of the buyers into a single payment to the seller.<sup>77</sup> For the second payment, Hamilton recorded in his cash book on March 23, 1796, that he received \$128.55 in cash from Nicholas Lowe, a New York merchant, plus \$250 in "stock." Both items were debited

<sup>76</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, Ed. Julius Goebel Jr., Columbia University Press, New York, 1981, vol. 5, p. 373; [www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0455\\_0542/?sp=10](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0455_0542/?sp=10). Jessie Serfilippi mistakenly gives this man's name as "Major Furne" (Serfilippi, "As Odious and Immoral a Thing", p. 22).

<sup>77</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 19, pp. 200–203; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-19-02-0027-0001](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-19-02-0027-0001).



to Hamilton's account with Philip Schuyler, totaling the \$378.55 needed for Schuyler's payment for the Cosby Manor purchase. What's unusual about the \$250 was a comment by Hamilton that reads, "For 2 Negro servants purchased by him for me."<sup>78</sup> Since Hamilton debited his account with Philip Schuyler for \$250, it is understood that Schuyler purchased two Negro servants for Hamilton.

March 13		
Cash Dr.	to Philip Schuyler	
	for this sum received of Widow	128.35
Stock Dr.	to D.	
	for 2 Negro servants purchased by him for me	250
		378.55

*Cash Book #2 – Cosby Manor Transaction Quarterly Payment*  
*Source: Alexander Hamilton Papers, Library of Congress*

Hamilton probably was not surprised that Philip Schuyler purchased these slaves for him. Seven months earlier, on August 31, 1795, Schuyler wrote to Hamilton telling him that "the Negro boy and woman are engaged for you" and that Mr. Witbeck, manager for Schuyler's son-in-law Stephen Van Rensselaer, was waiting on Hamilton "to conclude the bargain."<sup>79</sup> It is not clear whether the term "engaged" was meant to imply a purchase or a hiring. Also, there is no evidence in Hamilton's letters or his cash book that he ever completed the transaction. Philip Schuyler would have been aware of this inaction. There is a good chance that the two persons purchased by Schuyler were the same "Negro boy and woman" from the van Rensselaer estate that had been "engaged" for Hamilton.

While there is no indication that Hamilton refused this purchase, there also is no evidence that he ever received these enslaved persons and indeed there are no slaves listed in the Hamilton household according to the U.S. Census for 1800 (see 1800 Census below) nor in the lists of assets Hamilton prepared just prior to his death (see Papers Prepared by Hamilton below). The absence of slaves brings to mind a comment made by John C. Hamilton, son and biographer of Alexander Hamilton. In 1840, John wrote about his father, "He never owned a slave; but on the contrary, having learned that a domestic whom he had hired was about to be sold by her master, he immediately purchased her freedom."<sup>80</sup> John C. Hamilton, born in 1792, would have remembered these two people had they been part of the household. Moreover, Eliza Hamilton was still alive when

<sup>78</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, p. 409;  
[www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0455\\_0542/?sp=17](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0455_0542/?sp=17).

<sup>79</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 19, pp. 203–204; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-19-02-0027-0002](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-19-02-0027-0002).

<sup>80</sup> Hamilton, *The Life of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, p. 280.

John C. Hamilton wrote his book, and she either was the source of this information or would have been able to confirm it. In fact, the 1800 Census records four free Blacks in the Hamilton household but no enslaved persons. Knowing that the Hamiltons had free blacks in their household, it seems likely that Alexander Hamilton gave this “Negro boy and woman” their freedom, as John C. Hamilton claimed. Rather than being an “enslaver,” it would seem that Alexander Hamilton was an emancipator and did so with his own hard-earned money.

Regarding the free Blacks in the Hamilton household, it is interesting that many chose to live in white households, as it appears these people did in Hamilton’s case. There were benefits for both the employer (24/7 access to help, people at the house when the head of the household or spouse were absent) and for the employee (housing, food, perhaps some security, especially not being captured by someone claiming they were escaped slaves). Besides Hamilton, several members of the New York Manumission Society also housed free black persons, including William Shotwell, Lawrence Embree, Willet Seaman, Melancton Smith, George Clinton, Aaron Burr, Egbert Benson, Matthew Clarkson, Daniel Tompkins, and Robert R. Livingston.<sup>81</sup>

### **John B. Church Purchases “a Negro Woman and Child” (1797)**

Hamilton’s cash book shows that on May 29, 1797, he recorded a \$225 payment “for a negro woman & Child.”<sup>82</sup> From this entry, biographer Nathan Schachner in 1946 concluded that Hamilton owned slaves.<sup>83</sup> In 1959, Hamilton biographer John C. Miller agreed with Schachner’s observation and also decided that Hamilton was a slave owner.<sup>84</sup> Unfortunately, Schachner failed to observe that this entry was for John B. Church, and John C. Miller apparently never checked Schachner’s source material. Author Ron Chernow got it right by concluding that this transaction was indeed for John Barker Church.<sup>85</sup>

John and Angelica Church, Eliza Hamilton’s sister and brother-in-law, had just returned to New York City from London on May 20, 1797.<sup>86</sup> John Church had been out of the country since 1785, though Angelica Schuyler Church had been in New York for about six months in 1789.<sup>87</sup> Hamilton managed Church’s legal and business activities in New York during his absence. A few days after their arrival, on May 29, 1797, an entry in Hamilton’s cash book reads, “John B Church debit to Cash paid for a negro woman & Child . . . \$225.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> [www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/](http://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/).

<sup>82</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, p. 494;  
[www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0455\\_0542/?sp=34](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0455_0542/?sp=34).

<sup>83</sup> Schachner, Nathan, *Alexander Hamilton*, Thomas Yoseloff, New York, 1946, pp. 183 and 449.

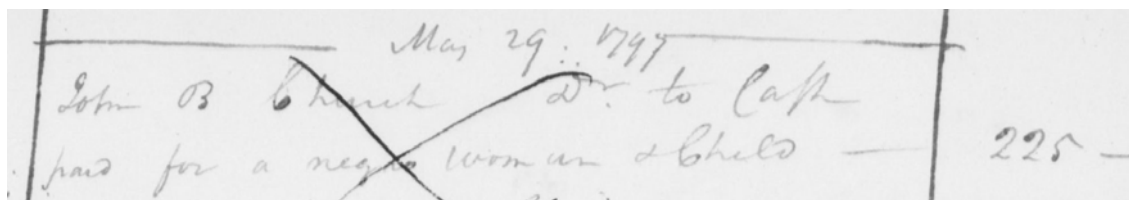
<sup>84</sup> Miller, John C., *Alexander Hamilton: Portrait in Paradox*, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1959, p. 122.

<sup>85</sup> Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, p. 211.

<sup>86</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 21, p. 91; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0049](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0049).

<sup>87</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, pp. 59–60; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0007](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0007);  
[www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0403\\_0454/?sp=50](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0403_0454/?sp=50); *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, pp. 501–503; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-05-02-0297-0001](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-05-02-0297-0001);  
[founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-05-02-0297-0002](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-05-02-0297-0002).

<sup>88</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, p. 494;  
[www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0455\\_0542/?sp=34](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0455_0542/?sp=34).



*Cash Book #2, May 29, 1797 – John B. Church account “for a negro woman & Child”*  
*Source: Alexander Hamilton Papers, Library of Congress*

After this purchase, Hamilton met with John Church to review his account. For this meeting, Hamilton prepared a summary highlighting the last twelve months of activity.<sup>89</sup> Near the beginning of this document, Hamilton wrote “\$1008.12 = £403.5,” a conversion factor of 2.5. Beyond this entry, all amounts are stated in New York pounds. The \$225 transaction for “a negro woman & Child” from his cash book was described in this summary as “paid price of Negro woman” in the amount of £90 New York currency. This summary along with the accompanying footnotes in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* make it clear that the transactions recorded in the cash book and in the summary were one and the same.<sup>90</sup>

Schuyler Mansion’s Jessie Serfilippi, however, not only fails to recognize the transition from dollars to pounds in this summary document, but she also declares the summary document to be a separate bill, thereby double counting this one purchase of an enslaved woman and child by John B. Church. She then incorrectly states that Hamilton never recorded this “summary transaction” in his cash book, pointing to this as evidence that there could be more such missing transactions. And finally, she wrongly guesses that maybe this additional enslaved person (who did not exist) was Sarah, who John B. Church had purchased back in 1783.<sup>91</sup>

More importantly, these records do not show Hamilton “purchas[ing] enslaved servants,” as Serfilippi says. Rather, Hamilton acted as a banker, transferring money between the two parties and recording the payment. There is no record of him having anything to do with the transaction itself or the enslaved persons.

### **“First-Named” Counsellor of the New York Manumission Society (1798)**

On January 16, 1798, Alexander Hamilton was chosen to be a counsellor of the New York Society for promoting the Manumission of Slaves, as were “Peter Jay Munro, William Johnson, & Martin S. Wilkins, Esquires,” with Hamilton being the “first-named” of the four.<sup>92</sup> In this role, Hamilton “helped defend free Blacks when slave masters from out of state brandished bills of sale

<sup>89</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 21, pp. 109–111; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0067](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0067).

<sup>90</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 21, pp. 109–111; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0067](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0067).

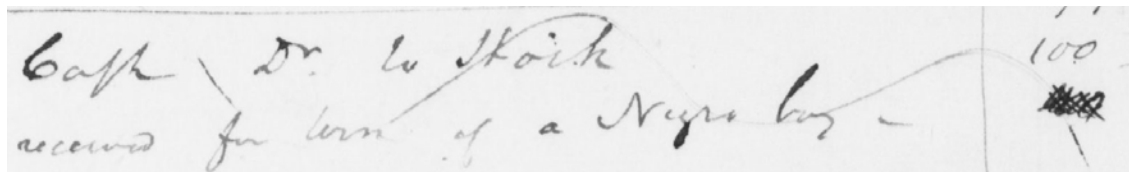
<sup>91</sup> Serfilippi, “As Odious and Immoral a Thing”, pp. 9–10.

<sup>92</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 21, pp. 354–355; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0208](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0208).

and tried to snatch them off the New York streets.”<sup>93</sup> Based on his cash book, it appears that Hamilton offered his services pro bono in all or most of these cases.

### Hamilton Receives \$100 for the “Term of a Negro Boy” (1798)

Hamilton’s cash book for June 25, 1798, shows that he “received for term of a Negro boy . . . \$100.”<sup>94</sup>



*Cash Book #2, June 25, 1798 – Hamilton received \$100 for the term of a Negro boy*  
*Source: Alexander Hamilton Papers, Library of Congress*

Jessie Serfilippi argues, “The fact that he was able to lease the boy to another person absolutely indicates that Hamilton enslaved the child.”<sup>95</sup>

But the facts are less “absolute” than Serfilippi makes them out to be. Nothing is known about the status of this “Negro boy” for whose “term” Hamilton received \$100. Was he the boy purchased by Philip Schuyler for Hamilton in 1796, who Hamilton apparently emancipated? Or was he the child that John B. Church purchased in 1797? Was he a free Black who worked for Hamilton? Or was Hamilton simply helping out a free Black, perhaps a relation of one of his paid servants, maids, or laborers? Was he one of the free Blacks who lived in the Hamilton household?

On the same day that Hamilton received \$100 “for term of a Negro boy,” he gave Eliza \$100 for “expenses.”<sup>96</sup> Was this the same hundred dollars? Did Hamilton give Eliza the \$100 to give to the boy?

By this time, there were more than three thousand free Blacks living in New York City, more than the number of enslaved persons.<sup>97</sup> More specifically, the Hamiltons had four free Blacks living with them according to the 1800 census but no enslaved persons (see 1800 Census below). Since the Hamiltons had free Blacks working and living with them but no enslaved persons, it seems likely that this “Negro boy” was a free Black who lived with or worked for the Hamiltons, and Hamilton received the boy’s wages because either Hamilton hired him out or the boy hired himself out and Hamilton collected his wages for him.

<sup>93</sup> Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, p. 581.

<sup>94</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, p. 555;  
[www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0455\\_0542/?sp=46](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0455_0542/?sp=46).

<sup>95</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, p. 17.

<sup>96</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, p. 555;  
[www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0455\\_0542/?sp=46](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0455_0542/?sp=46).

<sup>97</sup> *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, Second Edition, Yale University Press, 2010, p. 1191.

## Servants and Maids (1798–1799)

On August 21, 1798, Philip Schuyler asked his daughter Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton to come to Albany “if the yellow fever should spread in New York” and to “bring all the Children, the General & Servants with you.”<sup>98</sup> A few months later, Schuyler mentioned the death of one of the Hamiltons’ “servants,” a man named Dick.<sup>99</sup>

Jessie Serfilippi suggests that almost any use of the word “servant” implies an enslaved man, woman, or child and that the “servants” working for the Hamiltons were actually enslaved persons.<sup>100</sup>

Noah Webster, a contemporary of Hamilton, in his *American Dictionary of the English Language*, defined “servant” as “A person, male or female, that attends another for the purpose of performing menial offices for him, or who is employed by another for such offices or for other labor, and is subject to his command. The word is correlative to master. Servant differs from slave, as the servant’s subjection to a master is voluntary, the slave’s is not. Every slave is a servant but not every servant is a slave.”<sup>101</sup>

The 1800 Census reports that the Hamiltons had in their household two unidentified white males, two unidentified white females, and four free black persons (see 1800 Census below). Most likely, these individuals provided some service to the Hamilton family and would have appropriately been called “servants.” If a free black person were performing the job of a domestic servant, would they not be called a servant? Also, if “servant” universally meant an enslaved person, why would Hamilton and so many other leading individuals of that age close their correspondence with the phrase “Your Obedient Servant”?

Thus, a servant was a servant, a slave was a slave, all slaves were servants, but not all servants were slaves. Yet, in Serfilippi’s essay, it would seem that nearly every servant was indeed a slave, even though many whites and free Blacks worked as servants.

There is no need to speculate here because Hamilton himself wrote of “the debt and debts which I owe to my household and other servants and labourers, and to the Woman who washes for Mrs. Hamilton.”<sup>102</sup> Serfilippi contends that “laborers are hired workers who are paid whereas servants appear to be enslaved workers who are given money.”<sup>103</sup> But Hamilton said he owed debts to his “servants” and debts could not possibly be owed to enslaved persons. Hamilton’s “servants” were white or free black workers, much like the “labourers” he also employed, the difference being

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<sup>98</sup> [www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0641\\_0701/?sp=54](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0641_0701/?sp=54).

<sup>99</sup> [www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612a.04408/?sp=31](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612a.04408/?sp=31).

<sup>100</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, p. 15.

<sup>101</sup> *An American English Dictionary of the English Language*, Ed. Noah Webster, S. Converse, New York, 1828; [webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/servant](http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/servant).

<sup>102</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 26, pp. 301–302; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0258-0001](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0258-0001).

<sup>103</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, p. 27.

that a servant “attends another,” as Noah Webster said, whereas laborers, again according to Webster, was “one who labors in a toilsome occupation.”<sup>104</sup>

On August 31, 1798, Schuyler again wrote to Eliza asking her to come to Albany, adding, “The maid for Angelica [Hamilton] was to go tomorrow but I doubt whether she will.”<sup>105</sup> This “maid” or “maid servant,” or perhaps a different one, appears in Schuyler’s letters again on September 13 and 20, 1799.<sup>106</sup> According to Jessie Serfilippi, “Schuyler’s reference to a ‘maid’ for Angelica does not mean this woman, or more likely girl, was hired. It was common practice to purchase an enslaved child to act as a companion to the enslaver’s child.” Serfilippi then speculates on how Angelica could have gotten this maid even though “the purchase of a girl or woman is not recorded in Hamilton’s cashbook,” including such theories as “not every purchase made its way onto the pages of his accounting books” and “it is also possible that Schuyler ‘gifted’ the enslaved girl to his granddaughter.” Serfilippi further supports her point by asserting, “What is certain is there are no mentions of a maid being paid by Hamilton in his cashbooks from that day until the day he dies, meaning whoever the maid was, she was enslaved.”<sup>107</sup>

Yet again, the evidence suggests that this “maid” was a free person who worked for wages. Of course, a “gift” from Philip Schuyler to Angelica Hamilton might not appear in any record, but no slaves are listed in the Hamilton household in 1800 or in Hamilton’s lists of assets in 1804. But the key argument that Serfilippi made is that “there are no mentions of a maid being paid by Hamilton in his cashbooks from that day until the day he dies.” While this is true, it was generally the case that the woman of the house was in charge of daily household expenses, including paying maids and servants, and there is at least one record of Eliza Hamilton managing the family’s household finances. On January 23, 1791, James McHenry wrote to Alexander Hamilton, “Present me to Mrs. Hamilton. I have learned from a friend of yours that she has as far as the comparison will hold as much merit as your treasurer as you have as treasurer of the wealth of the United States.”<sup>108</sup> Indeed, Hamilton’s cash book lists dozens of cases in which he gave Eliza thousands of dollars for unspecified household expenses. Overall, the money given to Eliza for household expenses exceeded Hamilton’s “other expenses,” which included spending on apothecary, books, cash for himself, coal, furniture, hairdressing, house and quarters rent, postage, stable rent, sundries, taxes, travel, wine, wood, and donations to churches, servants, his father, his cousin Ann Lytton Venton Mitchell, and other miscellaneous people.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> *An American English Dictionary of the English Language*, Ed. Noah Webster, S. Converse, New York, 1828; [webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/laborer](http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/laborer).

<sup>105</sup> [www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612a.04408/?sp=9](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612a.04408/?sp=9).

<sup>106</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 23, p. 413; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-23-02-0396](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-23-02-0396); [www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612a.04408/?sp=43](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612a.04408/?sp=43).

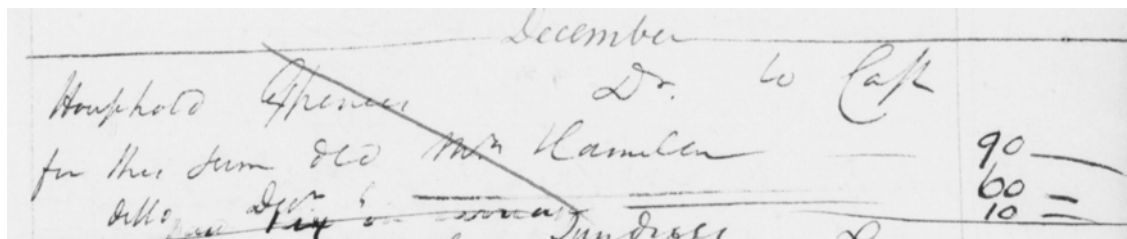
<sup>107</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, pp. 18–20.

<sup>108</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 7, pp. 409–410; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-07-02-0283](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-07-02-0283).

<sup>109</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, pp. 369–590; [www.loc.gov/item/mss246120766/](http://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120766/). The table represents our best approximation of these totals. There are dozens of entries for each category and Hamilton’s notations are not always consistent or even completely legible.

*Cash Book #2*

	<u>Jun-Dec 1795</u>	<u>FY 1796</u>	<u>FY 1797</u>	<u>FY 1798</u>	<u>FY 1799</u>	<u>Total</u>
"Household Expenses" to Eliza	\$1,305	\$2,425	\$3,135	\$2,440	\$3,090	\$12,395
"Other Expenses"	\$2,330	\$2,040	\$1,410	\$2,210	\$1,330	\$9,320



*Cash Book #2, December 1795 – Household Expenses, debit to cash, for the sum delivered Mrs. Hamilton*

*Source: Alexander Hamilton Papers, Library of Congress*

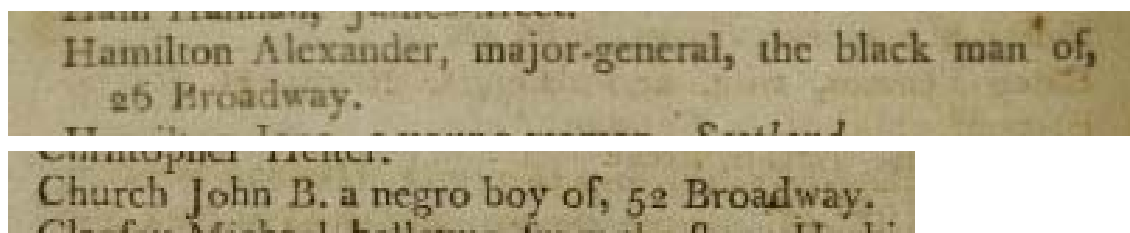
In 1800, the Hamiltons had two non-family white males, two non-family white females, and four free Blacks living with them (see 1800 Census below). The free Blacks probably worked for the Hamiltons as servants, laborers, and maids, as probably did all or some of the extra white people. In addition to receiving room and board, they received their wages from the funds Alexander Hamilton gave Eliza.

In the end, there is no evidence that the servants or maids working for the Hamiltons were enslaved persons. Instead, it is known that the Hamiltons had additional whites and free Blacks in their household working as servants and maids who, it would appear, were paid by Elizabeth Hamilton from money given to her by Alexander Hamilton.

### **“The Black Man of” Alexander Hamilton (1798)**

As noted above, one of the Hamiltons’ “servants,” a man named Dick, died during the yellow fever epidemic of 1798. A published list of “persons interred in the several burying grounds in the city of New-York, and at Bellevue, and Potters-Field,” covering the period of August 1 to November 14, 1798, includes “the black man of” Alexander Hamilton along with “a negro boy of” John B. Church.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Hardie, James, *An Account of the Malignant Fever, Lately Prevalent in the City of New-York*, Hustin and McFarlane, New York, 1799, pp. 96 and 106; [collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/100/mode/2up](https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/100/mode/2up); [collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/110/mode/2up](https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/110/mode/2up). This Alexander Hamilton record was recently brought to the public’s attention by a piece on the New York Slavery Records Index website, [nyslavery.commons.gc.cuny.edu/alexander-hamilton-enslaver/](https://nyslavery.commons.gc.cuny.edu/alexander-hamilton-enslaver/). That piece did not mention John B. Church’s “negro boy.”



*Hardie, James, An Account of the Malignant Fever, pp. 96 and 106.*

In this list of about two thousand people, seventy-nine are described as “black,” three as “negro,” seven as “slave,” and five as “mulatto,” with some overlap between these categories because one person is listed as “a negro slave” and another as “a black woman, slave.” There are also six people described as “wench,” another four described as “servant,” one “hired servant,” and one “hired woman,” but no race is given for any of these people.

Each entry in this book includes the person’s name or, if a name was not available, some other form of identification. A number of Blacks are listed under the names of white residents with “belonging to” or “of” added. Many wives and children are also described as the “wife of” and “child of” the man of the household. Others are listed as Mr. and Mrs. along with their last names but without first names. It would seem that the compiler of this list was unable to obtain first names for many people.

In some cases, the person’s first name was available but the last name was not. For example, one finds “Charles, a mulatto,” and right below him is “Charles, a Swede.”<sup>111</sup> Many people have additional descriptive information recorded about them, such as their occupations or their ages. Most have a place of residence and/or place of death listed. Some even have their place of origin listed. And one man “died at Boston” yet was still listed as being buried in New York City.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, the author notes “that the sextons of two of the smallest congregations were absent during a great part of the calamity, and in these the names of the dead were only given by memory, and in other instances, the books have not been kept with that accuracy which could have been wished” and indeed a number of deaths that appear in the newspaper did not make this list. The author explains that he tried “by annexing to the names, the trade, occupation, age, place of nativity or some other circumstance to point out the particular person intended . . . but . . . it cannot be expected that it will be entirely free from errors or defects.”<sup>113</sup> Whether there are any errors in the list is not known, but it is certain that the author was unable to obtain names, occupations, ages, etc., for many of the people listed.

All this makes it clear that the compiler of this list was dealing with incomplete information. He did not always have first or last names. He did not always have a place of residence or death.

<sup>111</sup> Hardie, James, *An Account of the Malignant Fever*, p. 96; [collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/100/mode/2up](https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/100/mode/2up).

<sup>112</sup> Hardie, James, *An Account of the Malignant Fever*, p. 89; [collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/92/mode/2up](https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/92/mode/2up).

<sup>113</sup> Hardie, James, *An Account of the Malignant Fever*, p. 87; [collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/90/mode/2up](https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/90/mode/2up).



He did not always record the person's occupation. He listed upwards of a hundred Blacks yet wrote that "in my list containing the number of persons interred in each of the burying grounds of this city, . . . I have only mentioned 41 negroes. It ought therefore to be observed, that exclusive of these 41 who were buried in what is called the Negroes Burying Ground, there were no doubt six times that number buried in the Potter's field, at Bellevue, and in some of the grave yards of this city."<sup>114</sup> Accordingly, the author expected that about three hundred Blacks died during the epidemic, yet he only found a hundred or so to include in his list. This should not be too surprising. If information was hard to come by for many of the white people, it would be even more difficult to obtain accurate data for the recently deceased Blacks.

In total, the compiler listed seven people as "slave" and one as a "free black." Five more are described as "belonging to," which would seem to imply ownership. But what about the approximately ninety other Blacks listed? Were they free or enslaved? Was "Degrote Pompey, a black, labourer," enslaved or free? How about "Dibble Phillis, a black"? It is impossible to determine, and with the city's black population being split about evenly between free and enslaved,<sup>115</sup> one cannot even guess.

What about "the black man of" Alexander Hamilton? Does the word "of" imply ownership? Or does it indicate his place of occupation or residence? Was the "servant of Patrick H. Merry" owned by Merry or just employed by him? It is impossible to determine without further evidence. In this essay (and in versions 1.0 and 2.0), we mentioned "Jessie Serfilippi of Schuyler Mansion." We hope that no one took this to imply ownership where we obviously meant to indicate employment.

It should be recalled that this list often included a person's place of residence, place of death, and occupation. Perhaps, the "black man of" Alexander Hamilton was a paid "man" or "servant"<sup>116</sup> "of" Alexander Hamilton or a member "of" the Hamilton household, i.e., he lived with the Hamiltons. The same may be said of the "negro boy of" John B. Church. Unfortunately, in the entire list, there is just one "black man of," one "negro boy of," two cases of "wench of," and one "the boy of," though the latter two do not mention the races of the individuals. The inability to compare the various descriptive clauses against known cases makes it impossible to determine the status of these individuals.

If the "black man of" Hamilton and the "negro boy of" Church were slaves, why didn't the compiler of the list record them as such, as he did in seven other cases? Likewise, why didn't he list them as "free black," as he did once? Probably, the list's compiler did not know their status.

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<sup>114</sup> Hardie, James, *An Account of the Malignant Fever*, p. 46; [collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/52/mode/2up](https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/52/mode/2up).

<sup>115</sup> *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, Second Edition, Yale University Press, 2010, p. 1191.

<sup>116</sup> One definition of "man" in 1768 was "a servant; an attendant; a dependant" (*A Dictionary of the English Language*, Ed. Samuel Johnson, W. G. Jones, Dublin, 1768). Noah Webster in 1828 had a similar definition of "a servant, or an attendant of the male sex" (*An American English Dictionary of the English Language*, Ed. Noah Webster, S. Converse, New York, 1828; [webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/man](http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/man)). Even in more recent British society, the term "man" was used to describe a servant. It is well-known that Jeeves was Bertie Wooster's "man" and P. G. Wodehouse even titled one of his books *My Man Jeeves*.

The author obtained his information from “the books of the different sextons and other persons having the charge of burying grounds in this city, at Potter-Field and Bellevue” or “by memory.”<sup>117</sup> The list’s compiler did claim to try to obtain additional information about each person, but the lack of information for many makes it clear that he was unsuccessful. If the information about the black person’s status was not included in the burial book and not known by the sextons, the list compiler was unable to include it without additional work that was unnecessary for the completion of his project.

If the list’s compiler was unaware of the status of these individuals, as appears likely, and for that reason did not record whether they were free or enslaved, one should not draw conclusions about their statuses based on his use of the word “of” in a handful of cases.

Regarding the identity of the “negro boy of” John B. Church, he may have been the “child” that Church acquired along with his mother in 1797, but it is also possible that this was a different “negro boy,” either a free or enslaved one. The Churches had no enslaved or free Blacks living with them in 1800 (see Appendix below), which makes speculation about whether they owned or employed any black persons in 1798 all the more difficult. The fate of the “Negro Woman” acquired by Church in 1797 is also a mystery.

Although it is clear that “the black man of” Alexander Hamilton was named Dick, nothing more is known about him. He could have been “the Negro boy” that Philip Schuyler purchased for Hamilton in 1796, who Hamilton may have freed along with his mother, as noted earlier. While he was called a “boy” in 1795, he could have become a man by 1798. Likewise, he could have been the “Negro boy” for whom Hamilton received \$100 for his “term” of service, who perhaps was the same boy that Schuyler purchased in 1796. In the end, it is not clear whether these were one, two, or three different black males.

Since the Hamiltons had four free Blacks living with them in 1800 (see below), they probably also had free Blacks living with them just two years before that census was taken. Accordingly, the “black man” named Dick who died during the 1798 yellow-fever epidemic could have been a free Black working for or living with the Hamiltons. Working for the famous Alexander Hamilton, Dick may have been better known around town as “the black man of” Alexander Hamilton rather than by his own name. Indeed, being associated with Hamilton would have given this otherwise unknown servant a degree of prominence that others in his station lacked.

There is no evidence that Dick, “the black man of” Alexander Hamilton, was enslaved rather than free. Looking just at the record of his death in this book, one cannot be certain of his status. But recalling the statement by John C. Hamilton that Alexander Hamilton “never owned a slave,”<sup>118</sup> a statement that was made while Elizabeth Hamilton was still alive, and knowing that the Hamiltons had free Blacks in their household just two years after Dick’s death, suggests that “the black man of” Alexander Hamilton probably was a free Black working for the Hamiltons and probably living in their household.

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<sup>117</sup> Hardie, James, *An Account of the Malignant Fever*, p. 87; [collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/90/mode/2up](https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/bookviewer?PID=nlm:nlmuid-2556027R-bk#page/90/mode/2up).

<sup>118</sup> Hamilton, *The Life of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, p. 280.

## John B. Church Frees Enslaved Woman (1799)

It will be recalled that in 1783, John B. Church purchased an enslaved woman in Philadelphia. Sixteen years later, the minutes of a March 1799 meeting of the New York Manumission Society read, “The following . . . laid before the committee by the chairman . . . as follows. A black woman by the name of Sarah was brought from the state of Maryland about six<sup>n</sup> [sixteen] years since by Holm Salmon [Haym Salomon] who sold her to John B. Church. A. Hamilton was agent for Church in the business.”<sup>119</sup> (See above “John B. Church Acquires Enslaved Woman (1783)” for a discussion of the original transaction.) At the next Manumission Society meeting, “The Chairman . . . informed the Committee that Sarah with Church is liberated through the interference [sic?] of the standing Committee.”<sup>120</sup>

Schuyler Mansion’s Jessie Serfilippi reports that Sarah was “brought to New York around 1793” and sold to the Church family “probably in 1797.”<sup>121</sup> She obviously misread the “six<sup>n</sup> [sixteen]” as “six” and did not know that the person who sold Sarah to Church had died in 1785. Serfilippi also suggests that John B. Church’s purchase of Sarah, which she thought took place in 1797, “does reveal that not every transaction Hamilton made was recorded in his cash book. He purchased and sold people to and for his family, friends, and legal clients more often than indicated in the cash book.”<sup>122</sup> This too is incorrect because the transaction took place in 1783 and it does not appear in Hamilton’s cash book because this was before Hamilton started working as banker and attorney for Church.

## New York Passes Law for Gradual Abolition of Slavery (1799)

Hamilton was a leading member of the New York Manumission Society when in 1799 they successfully pushed into law the gradual abolition of slavery in New York, “a considerable achievement in a state where slavery was a real presence.”<sup>123</sup>

In 1827, when slavery finally ended in New York, William Hamilton, a black carpenter, orator and journalist, marked the occasion with a speech at the African Zion Church. “This day has the state of New-York regenerated herself—this day has she been cleansed of a most foul, poisonous and damnable stain.” How, in William’s opinion, had this happened? While he said that the New York Quakers “ought ever to be held in grateful remembrance by us” for being “the first to enter their protest against the deadly sin of slave-holding,” he argued that “the most powerful lever, or propelling cause was the Manumission Society.” He goes on to name the “good men,” the “men of good and virtuous minds,” who founded and led the Society. “First, that great and good statesman, the right honourable John Jay, the first President of the Manumission Society.” William

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<sup>119</sup> New York Historical Society, Digital Collection, New York Manumission Records, Vol. 7, p. 113; [digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A133138#page/57/mode/1up](http://digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A133138#page/57/mode/1up).

<sup>120</sup> New York Historical Society, Digital Collection, New York Manumission Records, Vol. 7, p. 115; [digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A133138#page/58/mode/1up](http://digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A133138#page/58/mode/1up).

<sup>121</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, p. 10.

<sup>122</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, p. 10.

<sup>123</sup> Brookhiser, Richard, *Alexander Hamilton, American*, Simon & Schuster, 1999, pp.175–176; Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, p. 581.

Hamilton then named five more men: John Murray, Samuel Franklin, John Keese, “general Alexander Hamilton, that excellent soldier, and most able civilian and financier, and first of his profession at the bar,” and Robert Bowne. He then named nineteen more men, among them other luminaries such as Alexander McDougall, Robert Troup, John Lawrence, Peter Yates, Melancton Smith, and John Laurence. He said, “These are the men that formed the Manumission Society, and stamped it with those best of principles, found in the preamble to the constitution, framed by them. It is too excellent to pass over.” William Hamilton then read the preamble of the Society’s constitution.<sup>124</sup>

## 1800 U. S. Census

The 1800 U.S. Census records the Hamiltons living in New York City. This census was expanded to include five age categories of Free White Males, five age categories of Free White Females, one category of All Other Free non-white Persons, and one category for Slaves. In 1800, there were eight white males in the Hamilton household, suggesting there were two non-family white males in the house. There were five white females in the household, suggesting two non-family white females in the house. Finally, the category of “Other Free (Black) Persons” included four people and the category of “slaves” showed none.<sup>125</sup>

Nicholas Low	2	3	2		1	1		1	3		1	3	17
Alexander Hamilton	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	4		17
Paschal A Smith		1		1	1	1		2	2		2		10

1800 U.S. Census (New York City)

Source: [www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/](http://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/)

Alexander Hamilton | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | - | 17

2 white males under 10 yrs. (John and William) | 2 white males 10 to 15 (Alex Jr. and James) | 1 white male 16 thru 25 (Philip) | 2 white males 26 thru 44 (both unknown) | 1 white male 45 and over (Alex Sr. accepting birth year of 1755 or earlier) | 1 white female under 10 (Elizabeth) | 1 white female 10 thru 15 (Angelica if census done before September 25, 1800) | 1 white female 16 thru 25 (Angelica if census done after September 25, 1800) | 1 white female 26 thru 44 (Elizabeth) | 1 white female 45 and over (unknown) | 4 all other free (non-white) persons | no slaves | 17 Household members

According to the New York City Directory of 1799, Hamilton had a law office at 69 Stone Street. The 1800 Directory shows Hamilton’s law office at 36 Greenwich Street, but in 1801 and 1802 he was back at 69 Stone Street.<sup>126</sup> The 1800 census was conducted during this time, but there

<sup>124</sup> Hamilton, William, *An Oration Delivered in the African Zion Church, on the Fourth of July, 1827*, Gray & Bunce, New York, 1827, pp. 6–9.

<sup>125</sup> [www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/](http://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/).

<sup>126</sup> *Longworth’s American Almanack, New-York Register, and City Directory*, New York, 1799, p. 242; 1800, p. 220; 1801, p. 185; 1802, p. 218;

Thus, Alexander Hamilton owned no enslaved persons in 1800, but he did have two additional white males, two extra white females, and four free Blacks in his household. The “2 Negro servants” that Philip Schuyler purchased for Hamilton must have either died, as happened to Dick but there is no evidence that Dick was one of the two enslaved persons purchased by Schuyler, or they were manumitted by Hamilton, as John C. Hamilton stated. Other servants, maids, or Blacks who are found in the record working for Hamilton apparently were free Blacks or even white people employed by him and perhaps among those unidentified people in his household.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Jan.</i>	<i>Feb.</i>	<i>Mar.</i>	<i>Apr.</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>June</i>	<i>July</i>	<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Sep.</i>	<i>Oct.</i>	<i>Nov.</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>John Stedell Junr.</i>	1	3	1		2		2				2	11
<i>John B Church</i>		3	4	1			3	6				20
<i>Daniel Ludlow</i>	1	1	2	1		1	1	2		4	1	14

Source: [www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/](http://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/)

0 white males under 10 yrs. / 0 white males 10 to 15 / 3 white males 16 thru 25 / 7 white males 26 thru 44 / 1 white male 45 and over / 0 white females under 10 / 0 white females 10 thru 15 / 3 white females 16 thru 25 / 6 white females 26 thru 44 / 0 white females 45 and over / 0 all other free persons / no slaves / 20 Household members

### Legal Cases Involving Slavery (1796–1803)

digitalcollections.nypl.org/search/index?filters%5Btopic\_mtxt\_s%5D%5B%5D=Directories&keywords=&layout=false&year\_begin=1799&year\_end=1802&.

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With such statements, one would think that Hamilton's caseload involving slave-related issues would have been overwhelming. In fact, out of hundreds of cases found in the extant records, only two show Hamilton arguing cases associated with the U.S. Slave Trade Acts of 1794 and 1800, two more have him providing legal opinions related to "negroes," and one was related to his work for the New York Manumission Society.

Only one case from his twenty-year legal career has been identified in which Hamilton possibly gave a legal opinion regarding the purchase or sale of slaves. In contrast, at least one case has Hamilton working with the Manumission Society on behalf of "Negroes sold." If Hamilton was indeed "an authority figure on the subject of slavery; an expert whose opinion was worthy and reliable enough to solicit," his work for the Manumission Society shows that he used his knowledge and talents to help enslaved or formerly enslaved persons rather than to help those who owned or traded enslaved persons.

The fact is that cases involving slavery represented a very small percentage of Hamilton's caseload, and the slave trade cases were more about the construction and ownership of ships rather than slavery itself.

"Received of L. Ogden for opinion concerning Negroes" (July 26, 1796). Hamilton's cash book has an entry stating that he "received" ten dollars from "L. Ogden for opinion concerning Negroes."<sup>128</sup> L. Ogden most likely was Lewis Ogden, the merchant of 78 Pearl Street, the only L. Ogden appearing in the New York City Directory.<sup>129</sup>

This "opinion concerning Negroes" may have been related to work Hamilton did the previous year for "executors of A. A. Rutgers as council in their suit against Lewis Ogden."<sup>130</sup> Lewis Ogden was an executor for the estate of Anthony A. Rutgers, who died in 1784. In the case of the "Executors of Anthony A. Rutgers v. Lewis Ogden," Rutgers's heirs filed "suit for an accounting and to surcharge executor Ogden for compromise of the testator's indebtedness to James Jauncey, a Loyalist and large land-holder in pre-Revolutionary New York." Robert Troup, friend of Hamilton, acted as Ogden's attorney, defending him from the charge of "casual conduct as executor."<sup>131</sup>

Considering Ogden was being sued for "casual conduct as executor," it is possible that Ogden asked Hamilton for his opinion on how he had dealt with the estate over the previous twelve years, specifically regarding the disposition of the estate's "Negroes," and how he could defend himself against the charges. It is also possible that Ogden asked Hamilton about how to manumit his slaves, on which Hamilton knew something because of his work for the Manumission Society. The idea that Ogden may have asked "Hamilton's opinion on the value of people he wanted to sell or pur-

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<sup>128</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, p. 437;

[www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0455\\_0542/?sp=23](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0455_0542/?sp=23).

<sup>129</sup> *The New-York Directory, and Register, for the Year 1796*, John Luel, New York, 1796, p. 136; [digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/06bd1de0-d75d-0134-7fcb-00505686d14e](http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/06bd1de0-d75d-0134-7fcb-00505686d14e).

<sup>130</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, p. 377; [www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0455\\_0542/?sp=11](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0455_0542/?sp=11).

<sup>131</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 4, pp. 23–24.

chase”<sup>132</sup> has no evidence to support it and makes little sense since the “value” of slaves was a matter for merchants, not for lawyers.

Vanderbilt v. M. Lann (February 15, 1797). Hamilton recorded in his cash book that he received six dollars, “for this sum received of Vanderbilt on the subject of negroes sold to Scalle — (Manumission Society).”<sup>133</sup> While it is not known what work Hamilton did here, his note makes it clear that it was related to Hamilton’s role as counsellor for the New York Manumission Society and therefore he must have been helping or trying to help the “negroes sold to Scalle” rather than helping the person buying or selling the enslaved persons.

John Juhel: “opinion concerning slave trade” (February 6, 1799). John Juhel was a French merchant in New York City specializing in the importation of wine. An entry in Hamilton’s cash book shows Hamilton charging him \$10 for an “opinion concerning slave trade.” On a separate line was a bill for \$20 for “ditto concerning intercourse Bill & Petition &c to Court.”<sup>134</sup> This case involved the ship *Germania*, which was charged with violating the law that prohibited trade with French territories. Hamilton won this case but it was more about the ownership of the ship rather than concerning the slave trade.<sup>135</sup>

John Juhel v. Rhinelander (February 2, 1799). Schuyler Mansion’s Jessie Serfilippi somehow links Hamilton’s opinion to John Juhel of February 6, 1799, concerning the “slave trade,” discussed previously, with another case, Juhel v. Rhinelander, which is noted in Hamilton’s cash book on February 2.<sup>136</sup> This case involved the plaintiff John Juhel and the brig *Jenny*, which was suspected of carrying contraband and seized by a British warship. The defendant, the insurance company of Rhinelander and Co., refused to pay the insurance policy because there was an issue of whether the contraband goods were “lawful” within the meaning of the policy. Jessie Serfilippi writes that Hamilton was the lawyer for Juhel when in fact he was the lawyer for the defendant Rhinelander and Co. Hamilton lost the case. Regardless, this case had nothing to do with the slave trade.<sup>137</sup>

The United States v. Robert Cumming and the *Young Ralph* (January 1802). This case was about a ship named the *Young Ralph*, which had previously been a slave ship, was recently sold without modification, and then seized by the government thinking it was still operating as a slave ship. They charged the owner with violation of the Slave Trade Act. This case was not so much about the slave trade as it was about the construction and usage of the ship. Hamilton proved that when the ship was seized, it was not being used in the slave trade.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, p. 11.

<sup>133</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, p. 477;

[www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0455\\_0542/?sp=31](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0455_0542/?sp=31). Serfilippi incorrectly records the name as Icoolle (Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, p. 2), but the name is difficult to read.

<sup>134</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, p. 573;

[www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0455\\_0542/?sp=50](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0455_0542/?sp=50).

<sup>135</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 22, pp.533–534; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-22-02-0325](http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-22-02-0325).

<sup>136</sup> Serfilippi, “*As Odious and Immoral a Thing*”, p. 12.

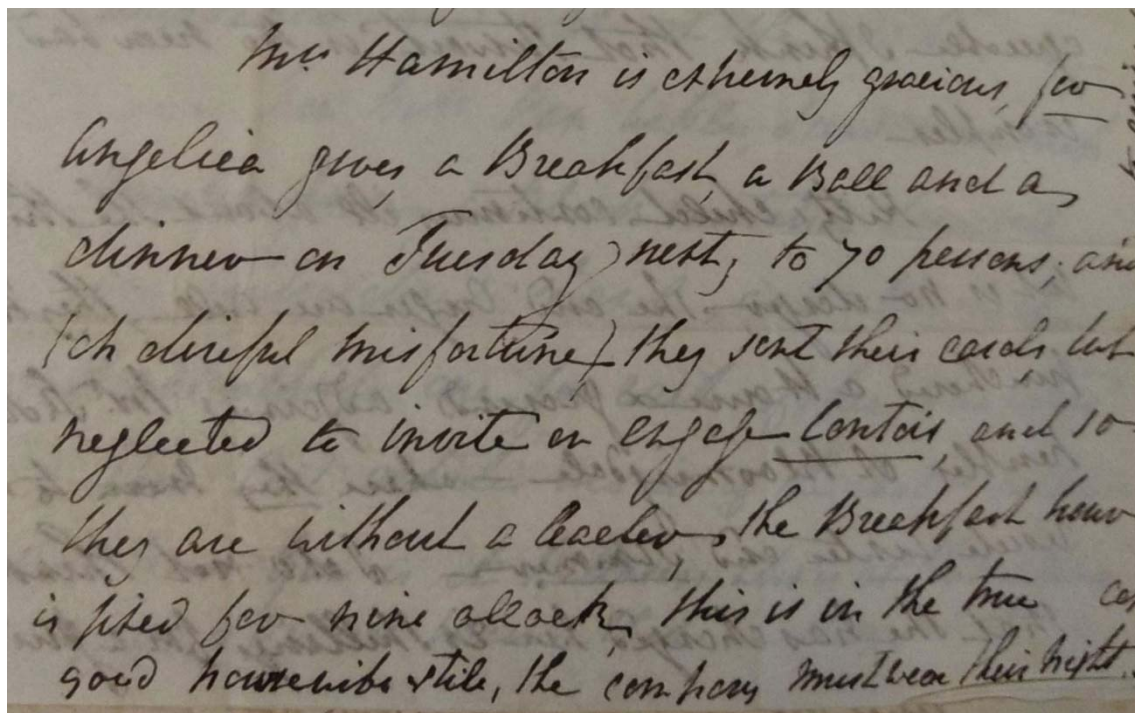
<sup>137</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, p. 657.

<sup>138</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, pp. 847–854.

The Isaac Sherman v. The Schooner Exchange (ca. September 1803). In the Slave Trade Act of 1800, U.S. citizens were prohibited from having any interest in a vessel employed in the transportation of slaves from a foreign country. In this case, Hamilton represented the defendant, the Schooner Exchange, and proved not only that the ship was not involved in the slave trade but also that it was not owned by an American. This case was argued under the Slave Trade Act but it had little to do with the slave trade and more to do with who owned the ship.<sup>139</sup>

### Letter by Angelica Church (1804)

Some Hamilton biographers have reported that on June 14, 1804, Angelica Schuyler Church wrote to her son Philip that the Hamiltons were throwing a party and “they are without a saelev [slave]” to help them.<sup>140</sup> In the first version of this essay, we pointed to this as “another piece of evidence showing that the Hamiltons did not own slaves.”<sup>141</sup> We have since obtained a copy of the letter and it reads, “Mrs. Hamilton is extremely gracious, for Angelica gives, a Breakfast, a Ball and a dinner on Tuesday next, to 70 persons, and (oh direful misfortune) they sent their cards, but neglected to invite or engage *Contois*, and so they are without a Caller. . . .”<sup>142</sup>



Angelica Church to Philip Church, June 14, 1804

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<sup>139</sup> *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, pp. 857–858.

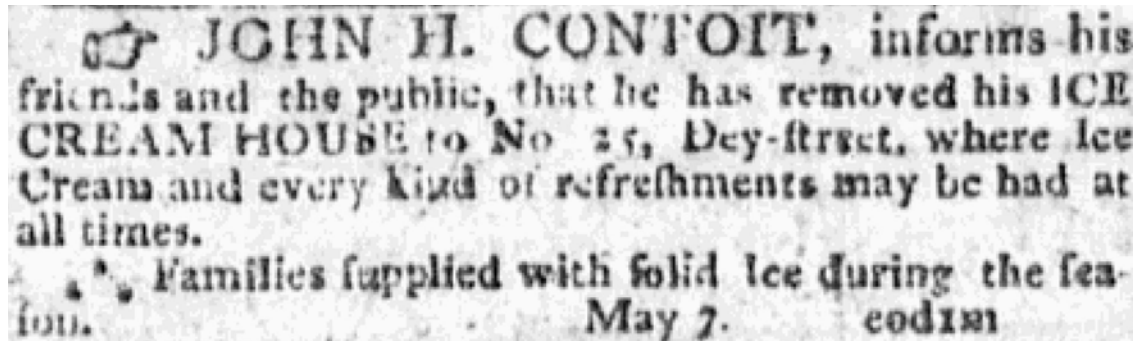
<sup>140</sup> Hendrickson, Robert, *Hamilton II (1789–1804)*, Mason/Charter, New York City, 1976, p. 625; Brookhiser, *Alexander Hamilton, American*, p. 176.

<sup>141</sup> [twitter.com/PhiloHamilton/status/1326021177215610881](https://twitter.com/PhiloHamilton/status/1326021177215610881).

<sup>142</sup> Angelica Church to Philip Church, June 14, 1804, New-York Historical Society.



A “caller” is a person who calls out dance moves for the partygoers. Contois or Contoix,<sup>143</sup> is actually John H. Contoit, the confectioner who sold ice cream and other desserts on Dey Street,<sup>144</sup> who also owned Montagnie’s Garden.<sup>145</sup> He must have also offered his services as a caller to friends or customers. So despite previous reports, this letter does not say anything about the Hamiltons being “without a slave.”<sup>146</sup>



*The Daily Advertiser, May 9, 1804, p2 c2.*

### **Papers Prepared by Hamilton Prior to His Death (1804)**

Prior to his fatal duel in July 1804, Hamilton provided lists and descriptions of his assets in a number of documents: (1) Statement of my property and Debts, (2) An Explanation of his Financial Situation, and (3) Deed of Trust to John B. Church, John Laurance, and Matthew Clarkson.<sup>147</sup> In these documents, Hamilton “listed no slaves as assets in the modest estate he left to Eliza and their children.”<sup>148</sup>

### **Debts Due to A. Hamilton and a List of Assets (1804)**

Among Hamilton’s final papers is a power of attorney to his brother-in-law John Barker Church to collect any outstanding debts owed to him. On October 13, 1804, Dominick T. Blake was engaged to assist in collecting these outstanding debts. Among the Alexander Hamilton Papers at the Library of Congress is a single sheet of paper, not part of the last documents left by Hamilton,

<sup>143</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 26. pp. 231–232; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0193](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0193).

<sup>144</sup> *Longworth’s American Almanack, New-York Register, and City Directory*, New York, 1804, p. 112; [digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/ca3261b0-017f-0137-06bb-00134b6c65e5](https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/ca3261b0-017f-0137-06bb-00134b6c65e5); *The Daily Advertiser*, May 9, 1804, p2 c2.

<sup>145</sup> MacAtamney, Hugh, *Cradle Days of New York*, Drew & Lewis, New York, 1909, p. 190; Stokes, I. N. Phelps, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island*, Robert H. Dodd, New York, 1926, vol. 5, p. 1388.

<sup>146</sup> In addition to misreading “Caller” as “saelev,” Robert Hendrickson also misread some other words in this letter (Hendrickson, Robert, *Hamilton II (1789–1804)*, Mason/Charter, New York City, 1976, p. 625).

<sup>147</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 26. pp. 283–284, 287–291, 297–300; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0243](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0243); [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0244](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0244); [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0254](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0254).

<sup>148</sup> Sylla, Richard, *Alexander Hamilton*, Sterling Publishing, New York, 2016, p. 150.

titled "Debts due to A. Hamilton," undated and unsigned.<sup>149</sup> It is not clear when this document was prepared and if it was prepared by John Church, Dominick Blake, Nathaniel Pendleton, or someone else entirely.

<i>Debts due to A Hamilton</i>	
2 Piece of Cortlandt	150
Bank of New York	300
William Duer of note	40
Philip Schuyler	200
Estate of J. Mott Jay	120
John Cortlandt Schuyler	170
Inspector of Waywayanda	150
Baron de Polnitz	230
Leffmans	40
Dominick Lynch	1050
Juan Mott	1958
Minister of Netherlands	40
	4448
Robert Troup	40
Nicholas Barmen	40
L. V. Duerfer	50
Catharine Bayard	74
Coffin	500
	5152
	6360
	1212
House	2200
Furniture & Library	300
Servants	200
	3900
	1212
	1888

*Debts owed to A Hamilton and personal assets [after 7/14/1804, authorship uncertain]*  
Source: Alexander Hamilton Papers, Library of Congress

<sup>149</sup> [www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029\\_0455\\_0542/?sp=76](http://www.loc.gov/resource/mss24612.029_0455_0542/?sp=76).

At the top of this page is a list of 17 people who owed money to Hamilton along with the amounts due, totaling £5,152. That sum is deducted from £6,360, the sum of Hamilton's debts to others coming from an unidentified source, giving Hamilton a net debt of £1,208 but mistakenly calculated on this sheet as £1,212. Below that is a simple calculation of Hamilton's personal assets comprising just three line items.

A handwritten document showing a calculation of personal assets. The items and their values are listed on the left, with the corresponding amounts on the right. The amounts are: House (£2200), Furniture & Library (300), and Servants (2400). These are summed to 3900. Then, 1212 is subtracted from 3900, resulting in 1888.

House	£ 2200 —
Furniture & Library	300
Servants	2400
	<hr/>
	3900
	1212
	<hr/>
	1888

*Hamilton's personal assets [after July 14, 1804, authorship uncertain]  
Source: Alexander Hamilton Papers, Library of Congress*

The first item is his house, the Grange, which on this document is valued at £2,200. In another record, Hamilton estimated the value of this house at \$25,000,<sup>150</sup> but Hamilton also had outstanding mortgages of over \$15,000,<sup>151</sup> leaving a net balance of just under \$10,000. At an exchange rate of about \$4.50 for each £1 sterling,<sup>152</sup> the £2,200 converts to just under \$10,000, so the numbers on the documents match. The next line item is Furniture and Library. In the other document, Hamilton estimated these items along with his horses and carriages at \$3,600.<sup>153</sup> Converting the dollars

<sup>150</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 26, p. 284; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0243](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0243).

<sup>151</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 26, p. 285 (Nos. 2 and 3); [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0243](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0243).

<sup>152</sup> [www.measuringworth.com/calculators/exchange/](http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/exchange/).

<sup>153</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 26, p. 284; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0243](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0243).

to pounds sterling gives a total of £800, as recorded on this brief list of assets. Finally, the line item for servants according to Hamilton's papers should be zero. In his last documents, he lists no servants as assets.<sup>154</sup> However, the individual who wrote this document must have thought the black workers in Hamilton's household were enslaved people. It appears that he first put a value on them of £1,000 but then crossed out the "1" and wrote a "1" on top of the first "0," making a new value of £100. The sum of these three assets as originally recorded would then have been £4,000 and indeed it looks like that was what was originally written, but then a "3" was written on top of the "4" and a "1" on top of the first "0," giving a new sum of £3,100. To finish the calculation, the amount of £1,212 from the top of this sheet, representing Hamiltons' remaining debt, is deducted, leaving a total net of £1,888.

Schuyler Mansion's Jessie Serfilippi uses this list as "proof enslaved servants were present at The Grange when Alexander Hamilton died in 1804." However, she reads the list a little differently. While she agrees that the value of the house is £2,200, she gives the amount for furniture and library as £300, likely because the "8" falls on a crease from a fold in the page and therefore is slightly damaged. In addition to reading the value of furniture and library incorrectly, she reads the amount for the servants as £400 instead of £100.<sup>155</sup> When the numbers Serfilippi uses are added together, the £2,200 + £300 + £400 totals £2,900 rather than the correct number £3,100 that is shown in the document. The £3,100 total, which is also difficult to read because of the changes made to it, as mentioned above, can be verified by adding the £1,888 and the £1,212.

In Hamilton's power of attorney to John Church, he left specific instructions that debts collected should be "applied first towards the payment of all and every debt and debts which I owe to my household and other servants and labourers, and to the Woman who washes for Mrs. Hamilton."<sup>156</sup> This statement indicates that Hamilton's servants and laborers were paid wages, not enslaved, and Hamilton honorably gave them first claim on his estate.

The lists of assets Hamilton himself prepared, in contrast to the list drawn up by an unknown source at an unknown date, make it clear that he owned no slaves. Moreover, his instructions to John Church shows that he wanted debts owed to his servants and laborers, which included the free Blacks who lived in his household, be paid prior to any others.

## Summary

A recent essay by Jessie Serfilippi published by the Schuyler Mansion State Historic Site claims to reveal, according to the work's subtitle, "Alexander Hamilton's Hidden History as an Enslaver." The errors, omissions, assumptions, speculations, and misrepresentations in that essay called for a more complete and accurate evaluation of Hamilton's history with slavery.

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<sup>154</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 26, p. 283–284; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0243](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0243).

<sup>155</sup> Serfilippi, "As Odious and Immoral a Thing", p. 26–27.

<sup>156</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 26, pp. 301–302; [founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0258-0001](https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0258-0001).

For the first third of his life, Alexander Hamilton was daily exposed to an environment in which slavery was practiced. One or both of Hamilton's parents inherited, purchased, owned, rented, and possibly sold slaves. Alexander Hamilton saw how slaves were treated both in the city and on the plantations. As a clerk at a mercantile company, he witnessed and perhaps was involved in the importation of slaves from Africa and their sale to planters. But at this point in his life, he had no choice in these matters and his opinions on the subject are not known. At the same time, Hamilton became a student of the Rev. Hugh Knox, who despite owning slaves, argued in his religious writings that slaves had just as much right to freedom as whites.

Hamilton's escape from the Caribbean did not mean an escape from the institution of slavery. New York was the largest slaveholding state in the North. Many of Hamilton's new friends owned slaves (see the Appendix below), but he also befriended many people who opposed the entire system of slavery. Even though Hamilton's attention in his early years in America was focused on education and the beginnings of the revolution, he found an opportunity to express his opinion in a political pamphlet about the right of every person to be free.

The next phase of Hamilton's life was focused on his military service and winning the War for Independence. Even here he found an outlet with fellow aide-de-camp John Laurens to promote the inclusion of Blacks in the army by asserting that "their natural faculties are probably as good as ours," by suggesting that with training they were every bit as capable as white soldiers, and arguing that these slaves should be given "their freedom with their muskets."

Hamilton's marriage into the Schuyler family in 1780 brought him closer to the enslaved person. His father-in-law Philip Schuyler owned slaves, as did his brother-in-law Stephen van Rensselaer. They had thirteen and fifteen slaves at their residences, respectively, according to the 1790 Census. They each had more slaves on their farms outside the city. Another brother-in-law, the Englishman John Barker Church, was a successful businessman. Hamilton became an attorney with banking skills and relationships and would often handle John Church's business in New York City, especially when the latter was in Europe. In 1784–85, Hamilton acted as banker for his sister-in-law Peggy Schuyler van Rensselaer after she sold a female slave. And in 1797, Hamilton acted as a banker for John Church when he purchased a woman and her child. We know of these two transactions (three people in total) because Hamilton recorded them in his cash books. At least one of these slaves was manumitted and it appears likely, based on census records, that others may have also been freed. There is no evidence in Hamilton's cash books that he was ever involved in a slave transaction for anyone except for his wife's relatives.

For Alexander and Elizabeth Hamilton, there are several instances where questions have been raised about slave ownership. In 1781, the Hamiltons set up a temporary, two-month residence opposite the Continental Army. They needed assistance cleaning a house and had help from a woman sent to them by Gov. Clinton's wife. Hamilton's language in a letter mentions they "had" this woman from Mrs. Clinton, implying that the woman was hired help and had already departed. There is no evidence regarding whether this woman was white, free Black, or an enslaved person, but the evidence shows that the Hamiltons hired this woman rather than having purchased her. In 1784–85, Hamilton debited an account for "a negro wench Peggy sold him." Some have read this

as Hamilton selling an enslaved person named Peggy, but the evidence suggests that it was Hamilton recording the sale of an enslaved person by Peggy Schuyler van Rensselaer. In 1796, Hamilton wrote in his cash book that his father-in-law Philip Schuyler purchased two servants for him valued at \$250. There is no evidence regarding Hamilton receiving or refusing to accept these enslaved persons, but in the 1800 census there are no slaves living with the Hamiltons, though there are four free black persons living with them. Hamilton's son and biographer, John Church Hamilton, said that his father "never owned a slave; but on the contrary, having learned that a domestic whom he had hired was about to be sold by her master, he immediately purchased her freedom."<sup>157</sup> It thus appears likely that Hamilton gave these two enslaved persons their freedom. In 1798, Hamilton received \$100 "for term of a Negro boy." Rather than being an enslaved person, this "Negro boy" was probably a free Black, as about half Blacks in New York City were by this time. In 1798, "the black man of" Hamilton, a servant named Dick, died during the yellow-fever epidemic. The record of his death says nothing about his status, but other evidence suggests he was a free Black. In 1798 and 1799, Philip Schuyler wrote about the Hamiltons' "servants" and "maids." Again, these people were probably hired help, not slaves. And finally, there is a document prepared after Hamilton's death listing his assets that included a line item for "servants," but the authorship of this document is unknown and Hamilton in three different places listed or described his assets just prior to his death and none of them included any slaves.

Schuyler Mansion's Jessie Serfilippi says that "Hamilton was an authority figure on the subject of slavery; an expert whose opinion was worthy and reliable enough to solicit."<sup>158</sup> She fails to mention that out of hundreds of legal cases found in the extant records, only two have Hamilton involved in cases regarding the Slave Trade Acts, neither of which was about slavery but rather were about ship construction and ownership, and that he offered legal opinions on "Negroes" to just two others, and was paid counsel for the Manumission Society once. If Hamilton was indeed "an authority figure on the subject of slavery," he apparently used his knowledge on this subject to help enslaved and free Blacks through his work with the Manumission Society, and evidently did much of this work pro bono.

The misrepresentations by Schuyler Mansion's Jessie Serfilippi is not limited to Hamilton's legal career. In several instances, Serfilippi presents a skewed history of Hamilton and then draws unsupportable conclusions, such as Hamilton being "expected" to purchase a slave for Eliza, missing entries in his cash book, the U.S. Census being unreliable, and that Hamilton was involved in transactions to buy and sell slaves that did not involve a Schuyler family member. There are misrepresentations of his 1781 rental of a person from the Clintons, his position on the 1783 Treaty of Peace, the 1784–85 sale of a slave by Peggy van Rensselaer, the 1783 purchase by John Church of the slave Sarah, the Hamilton household appearing in the 1790 U.S. Census, the 1797 purchase of a woman and child by John Church, her explanation of the 1799 manumission of Sarah, and her understanding of the numbers from the loose page of outstanding debts.

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<sup>157</sup> Hamilton, *The Life of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, p. 280.

<sup>158</sup> Serfilippi, "As Odious and Immoral a Thing", p. 13.

During his life, Hamilton was involved with a number of organizations that promoted the manumission of enslaved persons. As a legislator, he signed a memorial to abolish the slave trade. As a statesman, he supported the Jay Treaty and rejected the return of slaves taken by the British. As an individual, he was a leading member of the New York Manumission Society, where he promoted the manumission of slaves owned by Society members, helped set up a school for black children, and helped pass a law to gradually outlaw slavery in New York.

## Conclusion

In sum, the evidence showing that Hamilton owned slaves or was an “enslaver” is lacking. While there is evidence that he was linked to some slave transactions by his wife’s relatives, it appears that Hamilton in these transactions was acting merely as a banker. There is no indication he had any involvement in conducting the transactions themselves or in the physical transfer of ownership of the enslaved persons. Regarding Hamilton himself, there are a number of pieces of evidence—the 1800 census, the lists of assets Hamilton drew up just prior to his death, and a comment by John C. Hamilton in a biography about his father—indicating that Alexander Hamilton did not own any slaves. Not only is there no conclusive evidence in Hamilton’s writings or account books that he owned enslaved persons or was involved in their purchase or sale, there are also no eyewitness accounts showing Hamilton to be personally involved in slavery. Not one person of the hundreds who interacted with Hamilton, not one enemy or contemporary critic, of which he had many, ever mentioned Hamilton owning slaves or being involved in the slave trade.

Considering the era in which Hamilton lived, the challenges he faced, and his accomplishments, it is not difficult to understand why Hamilton did not make opposition to slavery his primary focus. His attention was on building a nation. Unfortunately, that meant neglecting other important matters, not just slavery but also his own financial well-being. Nevertheless, Alexander Hamilton was on the right side of the slavery issue. In addition to not owning slaves, he actively sought to abolish the evil institution in his own state. Rather than being an “enslaver,” Hamilton opposed slavery, advocated for manumission, emancipated one, two, or perhaps more enslaved people, and supported enslaved and freed Blacks to the extent that his limited means allowed.

## Appendix

**1790 U.S. Census:** Among some of Alexander Hamilton’s peers, the 1790 Census reveals free Blacks living in their households and their ownership of enslaved people.

*(Free Blacks counted in the fourth column, slaves counted in the fifth column. Source: [www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/](http://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/).)*

Anthony Caloune					
Aaron Burr	1	1	2		5
William Cammeyer	1	2	3		4
	43	36	75	18	37

Aaron Burr: 0 free Blacks, 5 slaves

Richard Varuck					
George Clinton	1	1	7	2	8
James Desbrosses	2	1	3		2

George Clinton: 2 free Blacks, 8 slaves

Wm Hood	Gen Man	75	2	1	1	2		
Ann Ford	Wm Hood	77	2	6		5	3	1
Doct Ben	Wm Hood	79	2	2		6		
Rev Wm Bend		81	2	1		3	1	

Alexander Hamilton: No count

Benjamin Rush: 0 free Blacks, 0 slaves

John Sidel		2	3	2	1	
John Jay		2	3	7		5
John Lamb		4		2		

John Jay: 0 free Blacks, 5 slaves

Bell Graham		1		16		1
Robert R Livingston		1		6	1	6
		75	52	140	26	70

Robert R. Livingston: 1 free Black, 6 slaves

David Gibson		4		7		
Rachel Willis			2	5		
Philip Schuyler		5		3		13
John Spiers		1	1	1		

Philip Schuyler: 0 free Blacks, 13 slaves



Lucas Van Beechen	1	0	3	0	6
Stephen Van Rensselaer	1	1	6	0	15
Thomas L. Wittbeck	2	-	2	-	1

Stephen Van Rensselaer: 0 free Blacks, 15 slaves

**1800 U.S. Census:** Among some of Alexander Hamilton's peers, the 1800 Census reveals free Blacks living in their households and their ownership of enslaved people.

(Free Blacks counted in the eleventh column, slaves counted in the twelfth column. Source: [www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/](http://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/).)

Walter Rutheford	1				1		1	2		1	8	13
Aaron Burr		1	1	1				1			2	8
John Delapieda	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	3		6	21
William Dennising		1			1	1	1	3		1	4	10

Aaron Burr: 2 free Blacks, 2 slaves

John Stidell Junr.	1		3	1			2		2		2	11
John B. Church			3	4	1			3	6			20
Daniel Ludlow	1	1	2		1		1	1	2		4	14
Thomas Ludlow	1		1		1			1		1	2	8
Catharine Mott	1		1				4		1	1	1	8

John B. Church: 0 free Blacks, 0 slaves

John Atkinson	1	1	1	1	1		1	2	2	2	1	13
Catharine Dow								1	2	1		5
George Clinton			1		1				2	1	2	11
Francis Lewis Junr.	2	1	1		2	2	1	2		2	3	16
Lorah Gallop				1						1		11

George Clinton: 2 free Blacks, 4 slaves

Peter Jay		1	1									2
Nicholas Low	2	3	2		1	1		1	3		1	14
Alexander Hamilton	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	14
Pascal Smith		1		1	1	1		2	2		2	10

Alexander Hamilton: 4 free Blacks, 0 slaves

Mary Postwick								1		1		2
John Jay	1			1				1				3
John Adams Junr.	1	1	4					1		1		8
Andrew Combs	1			1		1		1	1	1		6

John Jay: 0 free Blacks, 0 slaves

Heads of Families	to 10	10	20	25	25 to 50	50 to 100	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1000	Total
Robert R. Livingston		1	2	"	1	0	1	1	2	-1	1						12
Robert L. Livingston		"	1	"	"	1	"	1	"	"	"						"

Robert R. Livingston: 4 free Blacks, 12 slaves

James Lloyd		1	2	0				1	1								3
Isaac Bogart					1			1		1							3
Thomas Lansing					1					1							11
Philip Schuyler			1		1	1		2		2							
Wm Johnston	3			1		1		1		1							
Christopher Oley			1		1			1									0

Philip Schuyler: 0 free Blacks, 11 slaves

William Moor		1	1	1		1			3								1
William Root	1	1	1	1		1			2	1							14
Stephen Rensselaer		1		2					1	1							2
Robert Dunbar Jr.				1	1			1		1							5

Stephen Van Rensselaer: 0 free Blacks, 14 slaves