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**“AS ODIOUS AND IMMORAL A THING”**

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Alexander Hamilton’s Hidden History as  
an Enslaver



**BY JESSIE SERFILIPPI**  
SCHUYLER MANSION STATE HISTORIC SITE

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In the 21st century, Alexander Hamilton is almost universally depicted as an abolitionist. From Ron Chernow's *Hamilton* to Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton: An American Musical*, there is little room in modern discourse for questioning the founder's thoughts and feelings on slavery. Hamilton's efforts to aid friend and military comrade, John Laurens, in starting a battalion comprised solely of men of African descent and Hamilton's status as a member of the New York Manumission Society—an organization founded in 1785 by John Jay to encourage New Yorkers to manumit the people they enslaved—are often used as proof of his staunch abolitionism. Occasionally, Hamilton did express abolitionist sympathies. As a lawyer, Hamilton gave his opinion to “Vanderbilt” in early 1797 on “the subject of negroes sold to Icoolle—(Manumission Society}.”<sup>1</sup> While there are no known records of the case, his note “Manumission Society” suggests that he took on, or at least reviewed, the case for the New York Manumission Society.

However, some of Hamilton's writings often believed to express abolitionist sympathies or the evolution of such feelings are more in line with his politics than his morals. In 1783, Hamilton wrote to George Clinton after the signing of the Treaty of Paris. Part of the treaty stipulated that all property—including formerly-enslaved people who sought their freedom behind British lines—be returned. Hamilton writes “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 [sic] construction of the treaty, not a denial of its immediate operation?”<sup>2</sup>

In 1795, he presented a completely different view. Writing under the pen name Camillus in “Defence #3” of the Jay Treaty, he claims the proposed plan to force England to return any formerly enslaved people made free after the war in accordance with England's promise to grant freedom to anyone who fought for the British was wrong: “The abandonment of negroes, who had been induced to quit their masters on the faith of official proclamation, promising them liberty, to fall again under the yoke of their masters, and into slavery, is as odious 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>3</sup>

In both 1783 and 1795, Hamilton's thinking fell in place with his political party's stances. After the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, he 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. In 1795, he and his party, the Federalist Party, worked hard to defend the Jay Treaty because their fellow Federalist, John Jay, had negotiated it. Hamilton was encouraged

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<sup>1</sup> Hamilton, Alexander. *Cash Book 1795-1801*, (Library of Congress, Washington D.C.), 44.

<sup>2</sup>“From Alexander Hamilton to George Clinton, 1 June 1783,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0244>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, 1782–1786, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1962, pp. 367–372.]

<sup>3</sup> Hamilton, Alexander, *Catullus No. III*, (Philadelphia, Gazette of the United States, 1792).

by President Washington in a private letter to continue writing his defences of the treaty: “[...] in my opinion, too much pains cannot be taken by those who speak, or write, in favor of the treaty, to place this matter in its true light. I have seen with pleasure, that a writer in one of the New York papers under the Signature of Camillus, has promised to answer—or rather to defend the treaty which has been made with G. Britain. To judge of this work from the first number, which I have seen, I auger well of the performance; & shall expect to see the subject handled in a clear, distinct and satisfactory manner”<sup>4</sup>

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. Hamilton had his political party’s interests in mind, not those of the formerly-enslaved.

This incident makes it clear Hamilton was not an abolitionist from the beginning of his political career. Instead, it speaks to the far more complicated relationship he had with the institution of slavery throughout his life.

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Some Hamilton biographers, such as Ron Chernow, have acknowledged that slavery was part of Hamilton’s professional life, admitting Hamilton often placed himself in the role of the middleman when family and clients wanted to purchase an enslaved person. Most biographers, however, are unwilling to discuss the presence of slavery in Hamilton’s personal life. Starting with the first published biography of Hamilton, written by his son, John Church Hamilton, Alexander Hamilton has been almost exclusively portrayed as an abolitionist. In volume II of the biography he wrote about his father, John C. Hamilton writes “[Alexander Hamilton] never owned a slave, but on the contrary, having heard that a domestic whom he had hired was about to be sold by her master, he immediately purchased her freedom.”<sup>5</sup> No evidence of such a sale has been found.

This valiant view of Hamilton has been adopted by nearly every biographer since John C. Hamilton’s seven volume biography on his father was completed in 1864 and has gained increased traction in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. One of the few historians to have contested John C. Hamilton’s portrayal of Hamilton as an abolitionist published a book titled *The Intimate Life of Alexander Hamilton* in 1910. This biographer was none other than Allan McLane Hamilton—Alexander Hamilton’s grandson and John C. Hamilton’s nephew.

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<sup>4</sup> “To Alexander Hamilton from George Washington, 29 July 1795,” Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-18-02-0318>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 18, January 1795–July 1795, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1973, pp. 524–526.]

<sup>5</sup> Hamilton, John Church, *The Life of Alexander Hamilton, Volume 2*, (New York, D. Appleton & Co., 1841), 280.

Allan McLane Hamilton admits “It has been stated that Hamilton never owned a negro slave, but this is untrue. We find that in his books there are entries showing that he purchased them for himself and for others.<sup>6</sup> Since Allan McLane Hamilton, only a handful of biographers have come close to such a candid admittance of the truth and acceptance of these facts. John C. Miller in *Alexander Hamilton and the Growth of the New Nation*, Nathan Schachner in *Alexander Hamilton*, and Sylvan Joseph Muldoon in *Alexander Hamilton's Pioneer Son; the Life and Times of Colonel William Stephen Hamilton* all depict Alexander Hamilton as a slaveholder, but typically confine this revelation to the footnotes or a single sentence. While these works do acknowledge Hamilton’s status as an enslaver, they have had little to no influence on public interpretations of Hamilton’s life and have been ignored or dismissed by subsequent biographers.

A thorough study of the depths of Hamilton’s involvement in the institution of slavery has yet to be done through a close examination of Alexander Hamilton’s cash books, various letters to and from Hamilton, letters to Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton from her father, Philip Schuyler, and other related primary accounts. When those sources are fully considered, a rarely acknowledged truth becomes inescapably apparent: not only did Alexander Hamilton enslave people, but his involvement in the institution of slavery was essential to his identity, both personally and professionally. The denial and obscuration of these facts in nearly every major biography written about him over the past two centuries has erased the people he enslaved from history. It has also created and perpetuated a false and incomplete picture of Hamilton as a man and Founding Father.

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<sup>6</sup> Hamilton, Allan McLane, *The Intimate Life of Alexander Hamilton*, (New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911), 268.

## Slavery in Alexander Hamilton's Childhood

Alexander Hamilton's involvement in the institution of slavery was seeded in his childhood experiences. Hamilton grew up on the island of St. Croix, where the economy and agriculture were completely centered around sugar plantations. Slavery was not only a part of the European culture of St. Croix—it was what sustained the colonizing Europeans' economy. Instead of growing wheat for the enslaved men, women, and children working the plantations in the Caribbean to eat, much of New York's wheat crop was exported to the Caribbean, thus dedicating even more Caribbean acreage to sugar plantations. The sugar plantations were owned by the wealthy elites of European descent, while thousands of people of African descent were enslaved and forced to labor on the plantations in grueling, deadly conditions. Enslaved men, women, and children not only worked the sugar plantations, but also labored on docks and in households, performing domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing, and attended to their enslavers in public and during social calls.

Not only was slavery rampant in St. Croix, but it was also present in the Hamilton household. Chernow writes that there were nine enslaved people—five adults and four children—in the Hamilton household<sup>7</sup> while Robert Hendrickson, author of *Hamilton I: 1757-1789*, argues the tax poll indicates there were three enslaved adults and four enslaved children living in the household along with Alexander, his older brother James, and their mother.<sup>8</sup> Chernow claims that one of the enslaved children, a boy named Ajax, was given to Hamilton.<sup>9</sup> While it is almost certain that Hamilton was attended to by one of the enslaved children, as was customary, from where the name “Ajax” was obtained is unclear. The presence of enslaved servants in the Hamilton household indicates slavery was a fundamental part of the family's life, as it was for nearly every white person and family on St. Croix.

When Hamilton's mother died in 1768, all her property—including the people she enslaved—was seized by her estranged husband, John Lavien. Hamilton was effectively orphaned at this point (his father having abandoned the family roughly two years prior). During this time, he worked as a clerk at Beekman and Cruger's trading post. This job directly involved him in the slave trade, as Beekman and Cruger imported and sold slaves on multiple occasions. One of the most glaring examples is from January 23, 1771, when an announcement was placed in the *Royal Danish American Gazette* declaring that 300 hundred slaves had arrived from Africa and would be for sale in Cruger's yard the following Monday. This sale occurred during Hamilton's time working there as a clerk, suggesting he was almost certainly involved with it on some level.

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<sup>7</sup> Chernow, Ron, *Alexander Hamilton*, (New York, Penguin Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>8</sup> Hendrickson, Robert, *Hamilton I: 1757-1789*, (New York, Mason/Charter, 1976), 16.

<sup>9</sup> Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 23.

Slavery was an aspect of everyday life for Hamilton. Past biographers, such as Chernow and Hendrickson, have argued that witnessing slavery as a young boy turned Hamilton into an abolitionist later in life. Chernow claims “memories of [Hamilton’s] West Indian childhood left Hamilton with a settled antipathy to slavery.”<sup>10</sup> In *Alexander Hamilton: American*, Richard Brookhiser writes “Some combination of temperament, principle, and marginality caused [Hamilton] to dislike the institution [of slavery] rather than support it.”<sup>11</sup> Of his time working at Beekman and Cruger’s trading post, Robert Hendrickson in *Hamilton I: 1757-1789* writes “No alert but poor orphan boy who had grown up with slaves in the slaves’ quarters<sup>12</sup> on a white-minority-ruled, one-crop colonial island could write orders [for the purchase of two or three enslaved boys] for such a deal without comparing his own fate—working late, but unbound, in Cruger’s store—with that of those other poor boys who were fated to slash sharp-edged cane under the blazing sun for the rest of their lives—for no better reason, seemingly, than that their skins were darker than his.”<sup>13</sup>

There is no indication, either in documents from Hamilton’s childhood or adulthood, that the horrors of slavery he witnessed on St. Croix turned him into an abolitionist. While working at Beekman and Cruger’s, Hamilton was more likely concerned with elevating his own station than that of the many enslaved people he encountered daily. As a teenager, Hamilton writes to his friend Ned Stevens that he “would willingly risk my life tho’ not my Character to exalt my Station,” showing that his major concern was improving his own situation, not the ones of the enslaved people around him.<sup>14</sup> 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. He would carry that lesson with him as he began a new life in New York, and its impact would much later be revealed on the pages of his cash books.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>11</sup> Brookhiser, Richard, *Alexander Hamilton, American*, (New York, Simon & Schuster Inc., 1999), 178.

<sup>12</sup> There is no evidence that Hamilton lived in slaves’ quarters. It has been well-documented that he lived with the wealthy Stevens family.

<sup>13</sup> Hendrickson, *Hamilton I: 1757-1789*, 23.

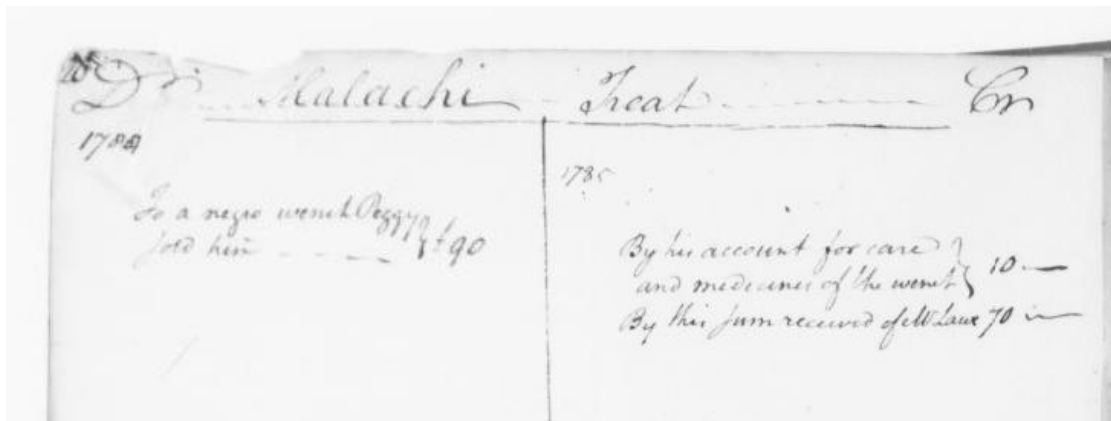
<sup>14</sup> “From Alexander Hamilton to Edward Stevens, 11 November 1769,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0002>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 1, 1768–1778, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961, pp. 4–5.]

## Hamilton as a Middleman for Family and Friends

Two of Alexander Hamilton's cash books, dating from 1782-1791 and 1795-1801,<sup>15</sup> have been preserved and digitized by the Library of Congress. The cash books offer an interesting foray into Hamilton's life, detailing payments he received for legal cases, donations he made to charities and churches, money given to Mrs. Hamilton for household expenses, and larger domestic purchases, such as a dinner table and bed. Sources such as these provide a window into a person's every day and professional life, including the owner's involvement, or lack thereof, in the institution of slavery. Hamilton's books expose participation at multiple levels. Especially when paired with letters, these cash books make it evident that the enslavement of men, women, and children of African descent was part of both Hamilton's professional and personal life.

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The first pertinent record in Hamilton's cash books is from 1784, when he documented the sale of a woman named Peggy.<sup>16</sup>



*Image provided by the Library of Congress.*

The left-hand column shows that Malachi Treat, a physician who served as a Physician and Surgeon General during the Revolutionary War and was involved with Hamilton's alma mater, Columbia University, owed Hamilton ninety pounds "Dr.," or "debit," for Peggy, a woman Hamilton sold to Treat.<sup>17</sup> The right-hand column labeled "Cr." or "credit," indicates how Treat repaid Hamilton in 1785. Based on how Treat did so, it seems as if ten of the paid pounds

<sup>15</sup> Although the cash book is dated 1795-1801 by the Library of Congress, there are later entries, both in Hamilton's hand and in an anonymous hand, that date as late as 1804.

<sup>16</sup> Hamilton, Alexander, *Cash Book 1782-1791*, (Library of Congress, Washington D.C.), 20.

<sup>17</sup> Nolosco, Marynita Anderson, *Physician Heal Thyself: Medical Practitioners of Eighteenth-century New York*, (Switzerland, Peter Lang, 2004), 185.



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 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—a position he continued in over the following two decades.

Hamilton most often acted as a slave trader while conducting business for his brother-in-law, John Barker Church. Church was abroad in Europe with his wife, Angelica Schuyler Church,<sup>18</sup> for much of that time. In 1784, the same year Hamilton sold Peggy to Dr. Treat, he penned a letter to John Chaloner—a Philadelphia merchant to whom John Barker Church entrusted his accounts and affairs in that city while abroad in France and England. In the letter, Hamilton requests that Chaloner find an enslaved servant, Ben, “formerly belonging to Mrs. Carter [Angelica Schuyler Church]<sup>19</sup> who was sold for a term of years to Major Jackson.”<sup>20</sup> Angelica was returning to New York with her husband in June of 1785.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, she would stay for less than two months.<sup>22</sup> Regardless of the brevity of her upcoming visit, Angelica was “very desirous” of having Ben back. Hamilton informed Chaloner that Angelica would pay off the remainder of the two years to Major Jackson. Whether Ben was sold back to Angelica—and what happened to him after that short term of time if he was—is unknown.

Twelve years later, the Churches again turned to Hamilton to purchase enslaved servants. On May 29, 1797—only a week after the Churches arrived in New York from England<sup>23</sup>—Hamilton recorded in his cash book that he spent \$225 purchasing a “negro woman and child” for John B. Church.<sup>24</sup> (The “X” over the entry in the image below means the debt was paid.

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<sup>18</sup> Angelica was Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton's older sister.

<sup>19</sup> Angelica Schuyler Church and her husband, John Barker Church, were using the false last name “Carter.”

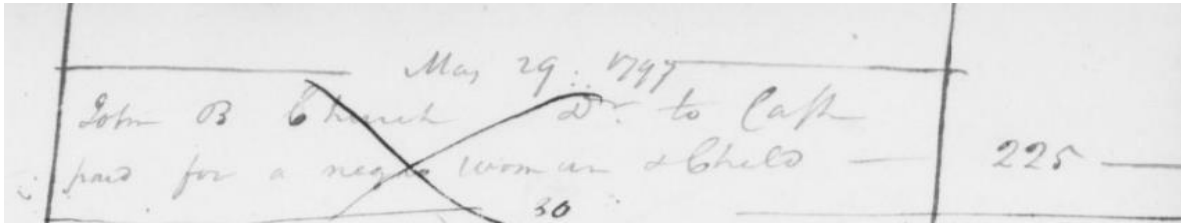
<sup>20</sup> “Alexander Hamilton to John Chaloner, [11 November 1784],” *Founders Online*, National Archives, version of January 18, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0390>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, 1782–1786, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1962, pp. 584–585.]

<sup>21</sup> “Robert Morris to Alexander Hamilton, 23 May 1797,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, version of January 18, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0049>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 21, *April 1797–July 1798*, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1974, pp. 89–91.]

<sup>22</sup> “Alexander Hamilton to Angelica Church, [3 August 1785],” *Founders Online*, National Archives, version of January 18, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-03-02-0448>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 3, 1782–1786, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1962, pp. 619–620.]

<sup>23</sup> “Robert Morris to Alexander Hamilton, 23 May 1797.”

<sup>24</sup> “Hamilton, Alexander, *Cash Book 1795-1801*, 47.



*Image provided by the Library of Congress.*

Also on May 29, 1797, Hamilton recorded the purchase of “Negro woman” for 90.00£.<sup>25</sup> This record does not appear in his cash book along with the purchase of the woman and child on that same date, but on a separate bill written for John Barker Church at the later date of June 15, 1797.

In 1797, the Churches were not making a temporary visit like they had in the 1780s. They had returned to America for good and would remain in New York until Angelica’s death in 1814. Hamilton’s purchase of two women and a child is indicative of their longer stay. During their 1785 sojourn to New York, Angelica was concerned with finding Ben, who may have acted as an attendant and/or coachman to her and her husband for their short social stay. This time women, who could cook and perform other household tasks such as cleaning the house, doing the laundry, and attending to Angelica and her children each day, were considered necessary. The enslaved child, depending on their age and gender, would likely have helped their mother with those tasks and/or served the family at mealtimes, as was common practice in the Schuyler household.

While the woman and child remain anonymous to history—the only mention of them appearing on a page in Hamilton’s cash book—it is possible that the single woman purchased for 90£ was a woman named Sarah, who was briefly mentioned in the New York Manumission Society Minutes from March of 1799.

The New York Manumission Society was founded in 1785 by John Jay with the goal of gradually ending slavery in New York State by encouraging citizens to manumit by choice the people they enslaved. Many of the members, including John Jay and Aaron Burr, enslaved people at the time the Society was founded and throughout their years of involvement.

At some point in 1799, Sarah brought her situation to the Society’s attention. It was recorded during their March 1799 meeting in the Notes of the Standing Committee: “[...] a black woman by the name of Sarah was brought here from the state of Maryland about six years since

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<sup>25</sup> “Account with John Barker Church, [15 June 1797],” *Founders Online*, National Archives, version of January 18, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0067>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 21, *April 1797–July 1798*, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1974, pp. 109–112.]

by a Hohn Salmon who sold her to John B. Church, A. Hamilton was agent for Church in the business—”<sup>26</sup>

Sarah, originally enslaved in Maryland, was brought to New York around 1793 by a man who eventually sold her to the Church family, probably in 1797, when they returned to the United States. Like the other times the Church family purchased enslaved people, it was Hamilton who acted as the financier and purchased Sarah. How or why Sarah’s case was brought to the attention of the Standing Committee is not mentioned in any known documents.

During the next meeting of the Society, it was recorded in the notes that “The Chairman also informed the Committee that Sarah with Church is liberated through the intercession [sic] of the Standing Committee.”<sup>27</sup> Chernow calls this incident an “embarrassment” for Hamilton because Sarah was enslaved by the Churches, and refers to Hamilton’s involvement in the matter as an “awkward circumstance.”<sup>28</sup> Chernow claims this “incident strengthens the hunch that one or both of the apparent references to slave purchases in Hamilton’s cashbook from 1796 and 1797 referred to purchases for the Churches, not for himself.”<sup>29</sup> Yet when Hamilton purchased an enslaved person for a friend or family member, he always recorded who the transaction was carried out for. Hamilton’s cash book reveals that the transaction made in 1796 was carried out for himself.

The New York Manumission Society incident 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 by sometimes recording them on separate bills as he did for John Barker Church.

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<sup>26</sup> *Minutes, May 18, 1791-February 19, 1807*, New York Manumission Society Records 1785-1849, Manuscript Collections Relating to Slavery, New York Historical Society, Manhattan, 113.

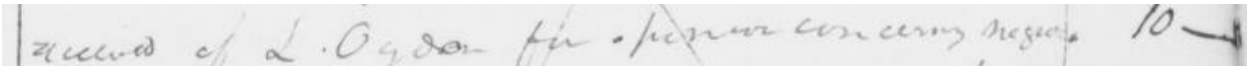
<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>28</sup> Chernow, 581.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 581.

## Hamilton as a Middleman for Legal Clients

In addition to serving as a middleman for family and clients looking to purchase enslaved servants, Hamilton served as a consultant for legal clients on legal issues involving enslaved people. The first such consultation occurred in 1796, when Hamilton recorded that “L. Ogden” paid him \$10 for his “opinion concerning negroes.”<sup>30</sup>



*Image provided by the Library of Congress.*

The Ogdens were a prominent family in the New York City area, and it is likely that the “L. Ogden” referred to was Lewis Ogden, a Princeton graduate and lawyer who had moved to New York City in 1786. Ogden’s status as a slaveholder is documented in the 1790 census, which shows that he enslaved three people at that time.<sup>31</sup> What, exactly, it was that Ogden wanted Hamilton’s opinion regarding the people in question is unclear, as Hamilton rarely recorded notes about the specifics of the opinions he gave in his cash book. It is most likely that Ogden sought Hamilton’s opinion on the value of people he wanted to sell or purchase, or on a legal case involving the value of enslaved people.

Ogden was not the only person to seek Hamilton’s opinion regarding slavery. In 1799, Jean (John) Juhel, a prominent merchant who lived and conducted business in Manhattan, sought Hamilton’s opinion specifically regarding the slave trade. Juhel, a Frenchman by birth, had married Cornelia Livingston—daughter of one of the most prominent New York families and a relative of the Schuylers.<sup>32</sup> Juhel, who had an office at 15 Gold Street in Manhattan,<sup>33</sup> imported a wide variety of goods such as sugar, coffee, cocoa,<sup>34</sup> flour,<sup>35</sup> tobacco,<sup>36</sup> and nails.<sup>37</sup> Hamilton likely knew Juhel through his marriage to Cornelia Livingston.

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<sup>30</sup> Hamilton, Alexander, *Cash Book, 1795-1801*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> McLachlan, James, *Princetonians, 1748-1768: A Biographical Dictionary*, (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1976), 79-80.

<sup>32</sup> Reichel, William Cornelius and Joseph Mortimer Levering, *A History of the Moravian Seminary for Young Ladies: At Bethlehem, PA*, (Bethlehem, PA, 1901), 348.

<sup>33</sup> Richter, Kurt and Nghiem Ta, “Pirates, Prizes, and Profits: Cocoa and Early American East Coast Trade,” *Chocolate: History, Culture, and Heritage*, ed. by Lois Evan Grivetti, (California, Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009), 213.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 883.

<sup>35</sup> Bierck, Harold. Tobacco Marketing in Venezuela: 1798-1799, *The Business History Review*, 1965, 499.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 496.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, Edwin Burritt and Ernest Hitchcock, *Reports of Cases Adjudged and Determined in the Supreme Court of Judicature and Court for the Trial of Impeachments and Correction of Errors of the State of New York. Volume One*, (New York, Lawyers’ Cooperative Publishing Company, 1883) 119.

In 1799, he was Juhel's lawyer in *Juhel v. Rhineland*, which concerned maritime insurance as some of Juhel's cargo—two casks of nails—had been seized in the Caribbean as contraband of war by a British cruiser.<sup>38</sup> Based on the timing of the entry, this case may be the one referred to on February 6, 1799, when Hamilton recorded a payment of \$20 for a case “concerning intercourse bill and petition in court.”<sup>39</sup> Directly above that entry, Hamilton recorded another fee for \$10 for giving Juhel his “opinion concerning Slave Trade.”<sup>40</sup> These two subjects were likely connected. Juhel's ships were making voyages to Venezuela, the route of which passed through the Caribbean, past Haiti, where the Haitian Revolt was underway (this is possibly where his nails were seized as “contraband of war”).<sup>41</sup>

While the specific opinion Juhel sought from Hamilton on the slave trade is undocumented, as a merchant entrenched in the Caribbean trade, Juhel would have been aware of the potential payoff from the slave trade, as well as the legal issues such involvement could create for him. Such legal issues could have stemmed from the Slave Trade Act of 1794. As historian Julius Gobel describes, the Slave Trade Act of 1794 “prohibited any citizen or foreigner residing within the United States from fitting out or in any way preparing a ship to sail from an American port for the purpose of carrying on any trade in slaves in any foreign country or between foreign ports. The penalty for violation was forfeiture of the vessel and her tackle; the vessel was to be ‘seized, prosecuted and condemned’ in the circuit or district court, wherever the vessel was taken.”<sup>42</sup> This first Slave Trade Act was strengthened by the passage of a second one in 1800, which additionally “prohibited any United States citizen or other person residing within the United States from holding property interest in a vessel employed in transporting slaves from a foreign country.”<sup>43</sup>

Over the next few years, Hamilton served on two cases concerned with such laws (*The United States v. The Ship Young Ralph* in 1802 and *Isaac Sherman v. The Schooner Exchange* in 1803). In the first case, the owner of the Young Ralph, Mr. Cummings, was accused of outfitting his vessel for the slave trade, but Hamilton argued that the ship had already been outfitted for the slave trade when Mr. Cummings purchased it and was not outfitted with such equipment in the United States, so it did not violate either of the Slave Trade Acts.<sup>44</sup> Hamilton also argued that it would have lowered the value of the ship to remove such outfittings, stating that “leaving them on board was no proof of intention to employ them in the prohibited Trade; because they added to the value of the ship and would have secured a better price for her, which was *sufficient*

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>39</sup> Hamilton, Alexander, *Cash Book: 1795-1801*, 82.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>41</sup> Bierck, Harold, 496.

<sup>42</sup> Gobel, Julius, *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton Volume II*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1969), 829-830.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 830.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 852.

*reason* for keeping them on board.”<sup>45</sup> He also argued that Young Ralph “continued to want some material Equipment for the Trade which were never given her” and that although the captain of the ship purchased handcuffs in Senegal, it was done without Mr. Cumming’s knowledge.<sup>46</sup> The case of *Isaac Sherman v. The Schooner Exchange* was circumstantially similar. In both cases, Hamilton defended the ship owner and won.

In each case Hamilton took on, his clients trusted he would know enough about the institution of slavery, and the laws and finances surrounding it, to win the case for them. His clients’ desire to seek Hamilton’s opinion indicates that Hamilton was an authority figure on the subject of slavery; an expert whose opinion was worthy and reliable enough to solicit. It is likely Hamilton would not have been selected by merchants involved in international trade centered in the Caribbean if he were known amongst his peers as having only abolitionist leanings.

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 852-853.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 853.

## Hamilton as an Enslaver

Many biographers have, at least to some degree, acknowledged Hamilton's role as middleman for family and legal clients looking to purchase enslaved servants. However, this acknowledgement is often undermined by unsupported assertions that Hamilton only did so begrudgingly. Chernow writes that such transactions were "undertaken reluctantly by Hamilton."<sup>47</sup>

While Hamilton's work as a slave trader has been previously examined, the discussion of slavery in his personal life has been carefully avoided or outright denied. Joseph A. Murray in *Alexander Hamilton: America's Forgotten Founder* writes "For Alexander Hamilton the question of slavery had been settled in his early childhood. [...] To him no economically based rationalization or pseudo-humanitarian concern for the welfare of 'wretches incapable of caring for themselves' could make right the inherent evil of the trade."<sup>48</sup> To date, no primary sources have been found to corroborate these claims.

Current evidence shows Hamilton never gave any written indication of reluctance when purchasing enslaved servants for the Churches or any other clients. If he had truly been irreversibly impacted by the enslavement of men, women, and children of African descent he witnessed on St. Croix as a young boy, he would not have purchased enslaved servants for other people—let alone himself—and would not have first argued that the British should return freed people to their former enslavers. If Hamilton was truly opposed to slavery, it would be evident. Not only is that evidence lacking, but primary sources prove Hamilton purchased enslaved people for himself.

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Starting in 1781, less than six months after Alexander Hamilton married Elizabeth Schuyler, one of Hamilton's letters reveals he purchased an enslaved woman. On May 22, 1781, Hamilton wrote a letter to George Clinton from De Peyster's Point<sup>49</sup> informing him that "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. I am told it has lately risen something, and I expect by Col Hay's return to receive a sufficient sum to pay the value of the

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<sup>47</sup> Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 211.

<sup>48</sup> Murray, Joseph A., *Alexander Hamilton: America's Forgotten Founder*, (New York, Algora Publishing, 2007), 85.

<sup>49</sup> De Peyster's Point was located in southern New York. Alexander and Eliza Hamilton resided there in a house across the river from Washington's headquarters at New Windsor for some time after their wedding.

woman Mrs. H[amilton] had of Mrs. Clinton. I hope the delay may be attended with no inconvenience to you.”<sup>50</sup>

“To pay the value of the woman” 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. Hamilton was exchanging money for the woman herself.

The timing of the letter is also relevant. Eliza was running her own household for the first time. She 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 that it would have been unremarkable to them.

Eliza grew up on one of the largest slave-holding estates in Albany County. According to the 1790 Albany census, the Schuylers, who enslaved thirteen people at their Albany estate at the time, were the third largest slaveholders in Albany and Watervliet.<sup>51</sup> The second largest slave holding family was that of Stephen van Rensselaer III, husband of the Schuylers’ third daughter, Margaret (Peggy), and a much younger cousin to Eliza’s mother, Catharine van Rensselaer Schuyler.

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 or of any clash between him and his new slaveholding in-laws, but there is documentation of him purchasing enslaved servants for his in-laws and own family throughout his decades-long marriage. While it is impossible to know Hamilton’s thoughts, that knowledge is unnecessary. His actions, recorded in his own hand, provide more proof than thoughts ever could.

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As we further explore Hamilton’s papers, it is important to note the type of language he and other enslavers used when describing the people they enslaved. Philip Schuyler’s letters provide a good example of the various ways enslavers referred to the enslaved. Throughout his correspondence, Schuyler’s use of the word “servant” almost always applies to enslaved men, women, or children. He was not the only person to use the word in this manner—it was common practice during the 18th century. Philip Schuyler almost never refers to an enslaved person as a “slave,” but rather by name or as a “servant,” “Negro,” “wench,” “man,” or by the title of the job they performed, such as “Coachman” or “Nurse.” This can be seen in many of his own documents, including correspondence with Eliza and her husband.

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<sup>50</sup> “Alexander Hamilton to George Clinton, [22 May 1781],” *Founders Online*, National Archives, version of January 18, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-1174>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 2, 1779–1781, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961, pp. 642–643.]

<sup>51</sup> 1790 US Census, Albany Ward One, Albany, Albany County, New York, digital image, accessed 1 Feb. 2019, *People of Colonial Albany*.



In a letter written to Hamilton on January 2, 1802, Schuyler states that his “Coachman Toby is very Much Indisposed. My other Servants abroad on their holyday [sic] frolick [sic], that I can only send Anthony tomorrow morning.”<sup>52</sup> Schuyler twice refers to two enslaved men (Toby and Anthony) by name in the opening of the letter and mentions his other “servants” between them. Through other letters and documents, it is evident that the people Schuyler refers to are enslaved. As the term “servant” was commonly used to refer to enslaved servants in Hamilton’s familial and social circle, he had no reason to differ in his employment of the phrase and used it and phrases similar to those Schuyler used in his own letters and writings.

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On August 31, 1795, Philip Schuyler writes a letter to Hamilton about the family and a recent land purchase. He closes the letter by mentioning that “The Negro boy & woman are engaged for you. I understand Mr. Witbeck has written you on the Subject and that he waits Your Answer finally to conclude the bargain.”<sup>53</sup>

While the letter itself does not specifically state if Hamilton was acting as a middleman, hiring the woman and child as laborers, or purchasing the woman and boy for himself, Hamilton’s record of the deal’s conclusion provides an answer. On March 23, 1796, Hamilton recorded in his cash book a payment of \$250 to Philip Schuyler for “2 Negro servants purchased by him for me.”<sup>54</sup>

March 23		
Cash Dr. to Philip Schuyler	for this sum received of Widow	128.55
Stock Dr. to D.	for 2 Negro servants purchased by her for me	250
		378.55

Image provided by the Library of Congress.

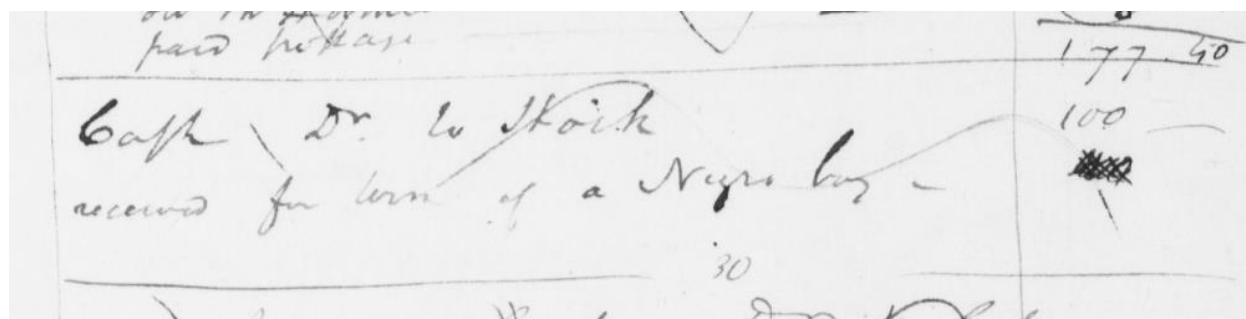
<sup>52</sup> “To Alexander Hamilton from Philip Schuyler, 2 January 1802,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, version of January 18, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-25-02-0278>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 25, *July 1800–April 1802*, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, pp. 489–490.]

<sup>53</sup> “To Alexander Hamilton from Philip Schuyler, [31 August 1795],” *Founders Online*, National Archives, version of January 18, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-19-02-0027-0002>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 19, *July 1795–December 1795*, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1973, pp. 203–204.]

<sup>54</sup> Hamilton, Alexander, *Cash Book 1795-1801*, 7.

The seven-month-long gap between the letter and the entry in the cash book is not unusual for the 18th century. Debts sometimes went unpaid for years—Malachi Treat’s payment for the enslaved woman Hamilton purchased for him went unpaid for roughly a year. A lag of several months would have been within the typical timeframe for a transaction of this sort. After writing to Hamilton, informing him that the woman and child were “engaged” for him, it seems Schuyler was ultimately the one to purchase the woman and child for Hamilton, who here records reimbursing not Whitbeck, but Schuyler for the purchase. While the genders of the people purchased are not mentioned in the cash book, the number of people recorded matches that of the letter, and the fact that the deal was arranged and concluded by Philip Schuyler, all in under a year, makes it undeniable that the letter and entry are about the same enslaved people.

A 1798 entry in Hamilton’s cash book further indicates that the “two servants” purchased in 1796 were indeed the woman and boy Philip Schuyler wrote to Hamilton about. On June 25, 1798, Hamilton recorded that he’d received \$100.00 for the “term” of a “negro boy.”<sup>55</sup> He rented the boy to someone else—who that person was is not mentioned—and collected money for the child’s labor. The fact that he was able to lease the boy to another person absolutely indicates that Hamilton enslaved the child.



*Image provided by the Library of Congress.*

As with the purchase of the woman for Eliza in 1781, or the women and child purchased for Angelica Schuyler Church upon her return to New York in 1797, the purchase of a woman and child fit into the Hamiltons’ lifestyle demands and desired public appearance. While Hamilton was never noted as being attended by enslaved servants in public, this was likely because it was so common to see enslaved domestic servants in New York that it was unremarkable to people of his social class.

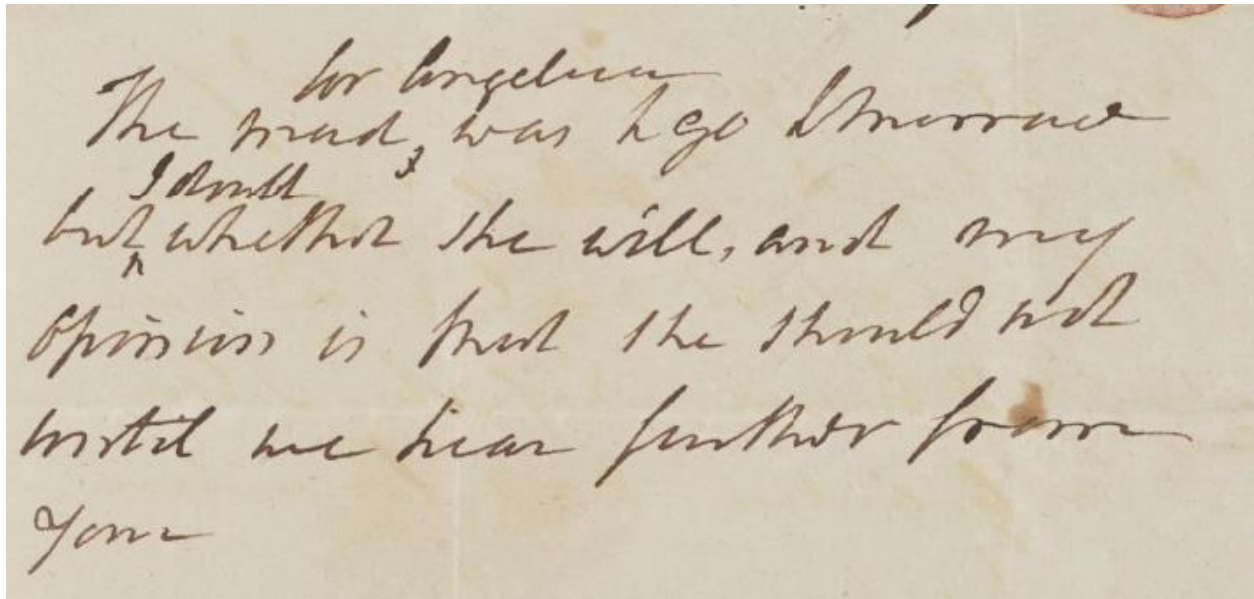
Two months after Hamilton recorded “the term of a Negro boy” in his cash book, on August 21, 1798, Schuyler writes a letter imploring Eliza to “bring the Children, the General, & the Servants” with herself to Albany to escape the outbreak of Yellow Fever in New York City.<sup>56</sup> The plural of *Servants* implies at least the boy and woman, and possibly the woman purchased in

<sup>55</sup> Hamilton, Alexander, *Cash Book 1795-1801*, 75.

<sup>56</sup> Hamilton, A. (1782) *Alexander Hamilton Papers: Family Papers, -1917; 1782 to 1799. - 1799.*

[Manuscript/Mixed Material] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120769/>.

1781. On August 31, 1798, Philip Schuyler again writes Eliza about his fear for her family's health and entreats them to come to Albany. At the end of the letter, Schuyler writes "The maid for Angelica<sup>57</sup> was to go tomorrow but I doubt whether she will, and my opinion is that she should not until we hear from you."<sup>58</sup>



The <sup>for Angelica</sup> maid, was to go tomorrow  
but <sup>I doubt</sup> whether she will, and my  
opinion is that she should not  
until we hear further from  
you

*Image provided by the Library of Congress.*

Schuyler seems to be waiting to hear if Eliza will come to Albany, in which case the maid will await her there, or whether he should send the maid to Manhattan if the Hamiltons are to remain there longer. 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. The Angelica mentioned is Angelica Hamilton, as is made evident in a later letter from Philip Schuyler.

The purchase of a girl or woman is not recorded in Hamilton's cashbook, but as seen earlier through the incident with John Barker Church's enslaved servant, Sarah, and the New York Manumission Society, not every purchase made its way onto the pages of his accounting books. It is also possible that Schuyler "gifted" the enslaved girl to his granddaughter, who was fourteen at the time. In November of 1798, there were "3 Negro Women 3 Negro Girls,"<sup>59</sup> with two of those girls noted as under the age of twelve, enslaved by the Schuylers at the Schuyler

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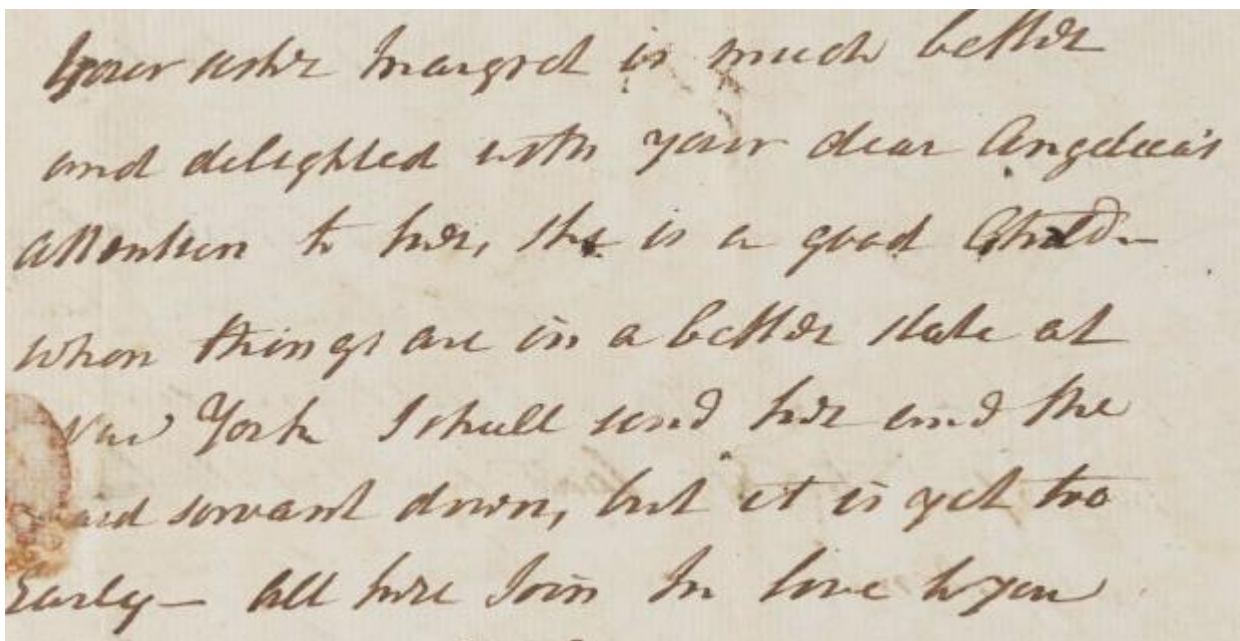
<sup>57</sup> Angelica Hamilton (b. 1784) was Eliza and Alexander Hamilton's second child.

<sup>58</sup> Hamilton, A. (1790) Alexander Hamilton Papers: Addition, 1790 to 1804; Schuyler, Philip, to Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, 1790 to 1799. - 1799. [Manuscript/Mixed Material] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120873/>.

<sup>59</sup> "Philip Schuyler Papers" NYPL; Land Papers- Local- Albany.

Mansion. It is possible the enslaved maid was the daughter of a woman Schuyler enslaved, now forced to leave her mother and siblings behind. 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.

The enslaved maid also returns to the Schuyler Mansion with Angelica Hamilton a year later. On September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1799, Schuyler writes to Eliza that Margaret (sometimes called Peggy), Eliza's younger sister, is "delighted with your dear Angelica's attention to her, she is a good Child. When things are in a better state at New York I shall send her and the maid servant down, but it is yet too Early."<sup>60</sup> "The maid servant," as Schuyler refers to her, is clearly bound to Angelica—traveling with her and attending to her needs.



*Image provided by the Library of Congress.*

Also in 1799, more enslaved people are mentioned in a letter from Philip Schuyler to Hamilton. Schuyler informs Hamilton on September 13, 1799, that he "had the pleasure at Seven this morning to embrace my Dear Grand Children who with the Maids arrived in good health."<sup>61</sup>

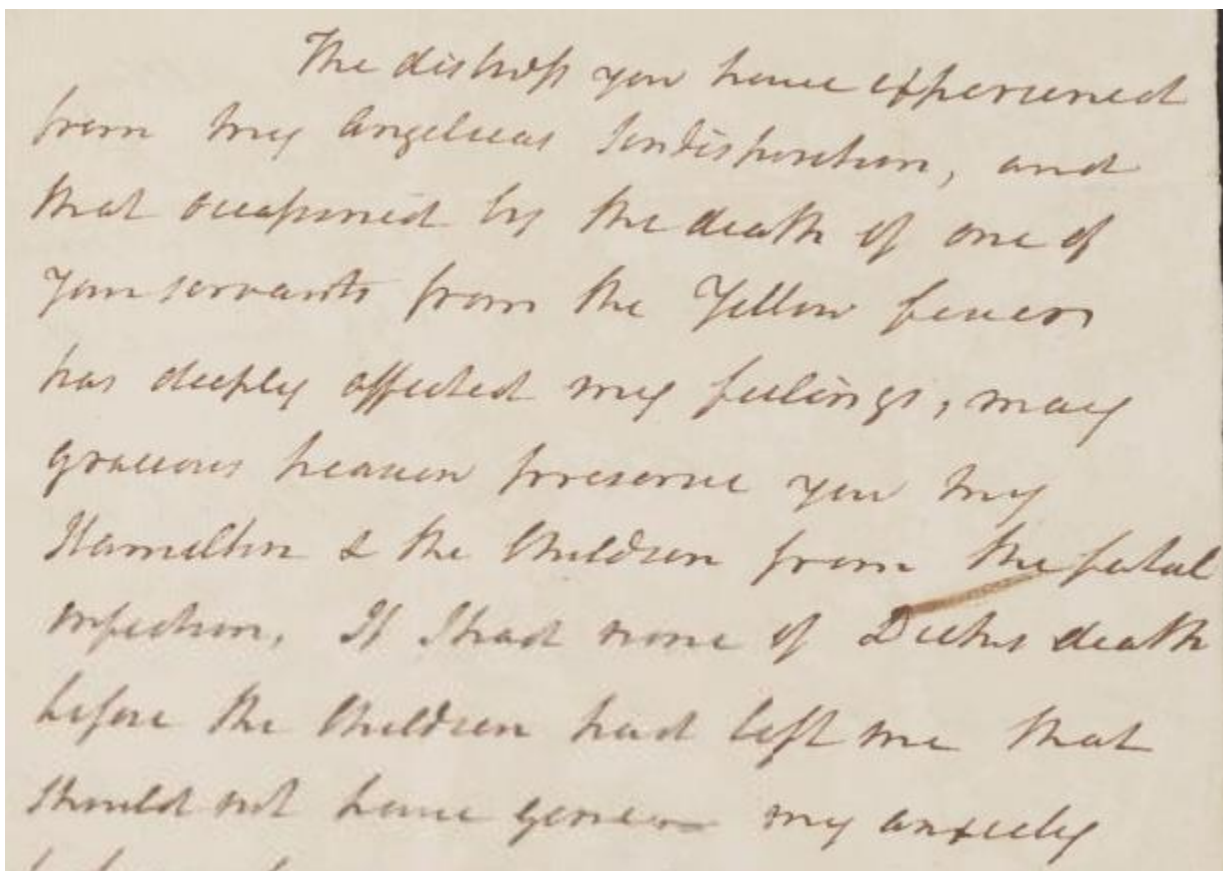
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<sup>60</sup> Hamilton, Alexander. *Alexander Hamilton Papers: Addition, 1790 to 1804; Schuyler, Philip, to Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, 1790 to 1799. - 1799, 1790. Manuscript/Mixed Material.* <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120873/>.

<sup>61</sup> "To Alexander Hamilton from Philip Schuyler, 13 September 1799," *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-23-02-0396>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 23, *April 1799–October 1799*, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976, p. 413.]

One of the maids was the girl bound to Angelica, as she and her maid were specifically mentioned in the letter above, but this letter implies that there was more than one maid who traveled with the Hamilton children. Maybe she was the mother of the young boy or the woman purchased in 1781, or maybe she was someone completely different. As of now, her identity is unknown.

Returning to the year 1798, just two months after Angelica Hamilton's enslaved maid is first mentioned, there is another mention of a "servant" in a letter from Philip Schuyler to Eliza. On November 5<sup>th</sup>, Schuyler writes "The distress you have experienced from my Angelica [Hamilton]'s indisposition, and that accompanied by the death of one of your servants from Yellow fever has deeply affected my feelings, may gracious heaven preserve you my Hamilton and the children from the fatal infection, If I had known of Dick's death before the children had left me they should not have gone."<sup>62</sup>



The distress you have experienced from my Angelica's indisposition, and that accompanied by the death of one of your servants from the Yellow fever has deeply affected my feelings, may gracious heaven preserve you my Hamilton & the children from the fatal infection, If I had known of Dick's death before the children had left me that should not have gone my anxiety

*Image provided by the Library of Congress.*

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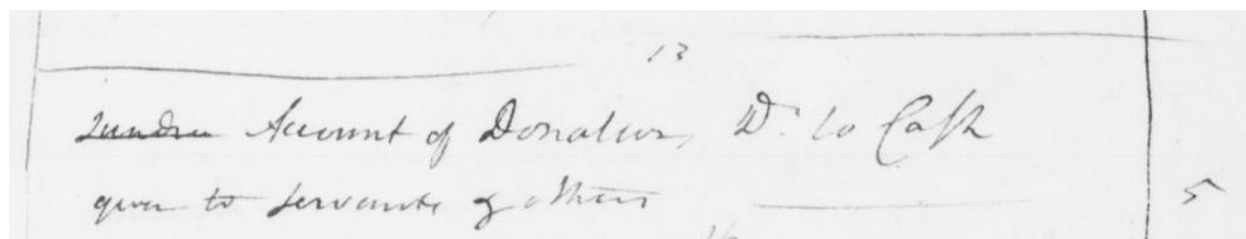
<sup>62</sup> Hamilton, A. (1790) *Alexander Hamilton Papers: Addition, 1790 to 1804*; Schuyler, Philip, to Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, 1790 to 1799. - 1799. [Manuscript/Mixed Material] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss246120873/>.

This letter marks the first time the name of a person enslaved by the Hamiltons is recorded in a document. While his name is now known, who Dick was and what role he played within the household is unclear. The only documented boy or man within the Hamilton household in 1798 was the boy Hamilton purchased from Schuyler along with his mother in 1795. Just months before Dick’s death, Hamilton collected money for the “term” of a “negro boy.” Without the known presence of another male servant in the Hamilton household, it is possible that Dick was the child Hamilton enslaved.

If Dick was the boy referred to earlier in 1798, his mother was faced with the unimaginable loss of her son to Yellow Fever. He and his mother did not have the luxury of going to Albany, as did the Hamiltons, where such illnesses could be avoided. They traveled and stayed where the Hamiltons dictated. In this instance, enslavement resulted in the death of young Dick and overwhelming grief for his mother. To Philip Schuyler, Dick’s death was seen as a stress to his daughter and threat to his grandchildren—not as the loss of a young human life.

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The practice of slavery in the Hamilton household is further indicated in an entry in Hamilton’s cash book made on May 12, 1796, less than two months after the entry regarding the purchase of the enslaved servants. On that date, Hamilton recorded that he had “given to servants & others” an amount totaling \$5.00.<sup>63</sup>



*Image provided by the Library of Congress.*

While \$5.00 was not a small sum of money, it did not amount to much when divided amongst multiple people. For perspective, Hamilton recorded being paid \$5 to \$10 for giving a legal opinion. It is unknown how many people the amount was split between, or who the “others” were, but the use of plural for both *servants* and *others* gives a minimum of four people. \$5.00 is too small a sum to be a wage when divided amongst four people, coming out \$1.25 each, especially when compared to the \$6.00 that Hamilton later paid a hired white woman, as will be seen below. Hamilton also recorded this money given to “servants & others” under the category of *Donations*, which confirms the money was not intended as wages. Why Hamilton gave

<sup>63</sup> Hamilton, Alexander, *Cash Book 1795-1801*, 22.



“servants & others” this money is unknown, but a possibility is that it was to celebrate the upcoming holiday of Pinkster.

Pinkster was originally the Dutch celebration of the Pentecost but began to be celebrated by enslaved and free people of African descent in New York during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was a three-to-four-day long festival that allowed families and friends to be temporarily reunited. In 1796, Easter was on March 27, meaning the Pentecost and Pinkster celebration fell on May 15<sup>th</sup>, just three days after Hamilton records the money given to “servants and others.” While not explicitly described as related to Pinkster, the amount combined with the date of the payment provides possible evidence that the “servants and others” in this case were of African descent.

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In addition to enslaving people, sometimes Hamilton hired enslaved servants as temporary laborers. This was a common practice and was often done when an extra hand was needed for a short amount of time. When Hamilton did so, it was made clear in his records.

The one known example of Hamilton partaking in this practice is from June 25, 1795, when Hamilton paid a woman<sup>64</sup> \$12.50 for labor she had performed for him at some point during the past several years.<sup>65</sup> At the time he originally paid her, she was enslaved by Major Furne, who withheld her wages and took them for himself, claiming they were “his wages as [she was] his servant.”<sup>66</sup> Somehow, this woman notified Hamilton that her payment had gone to her former enslaver, and Hamilton then paid her directly for her work. This is the only verifiable instance of Hamilton hiring an enslaved person to work for his family and paying them for their labor.

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<sup>64</sup> It is unclear if the woman’s name was Judy Perkins or if that was the name of her enslaver at the time of the cash book entry.

<sup>65</sup> Hamilton, Alexander, *Cash Book 1795-1801*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

3 June 25. 1797

Account of Expenses / Do to Cash  
 for the sum paid Judy Perkins Negro Woman  
 for her wages several years ago, which she  
 alleged was detained from her in consequence  
 of a claim by Major Furness who demanded  
 his wages as his servant (see Recd in Receipt Bk. 12.50  
 Book)

for the sum paid for keeping of horse Barnaby - 8-

Image provided by the Library of Congress.

Yet not every person who served the Hamiltons was of African descent. On March 28, 1802, Hamilton recorded paying “White Peggy” \$6.00 for her wages.<sup>67</sup>

Dr.	Wages	
March paid White Peggy	Dr. 6	6-
28 paid Labourer	1.50	
April 9	3-	

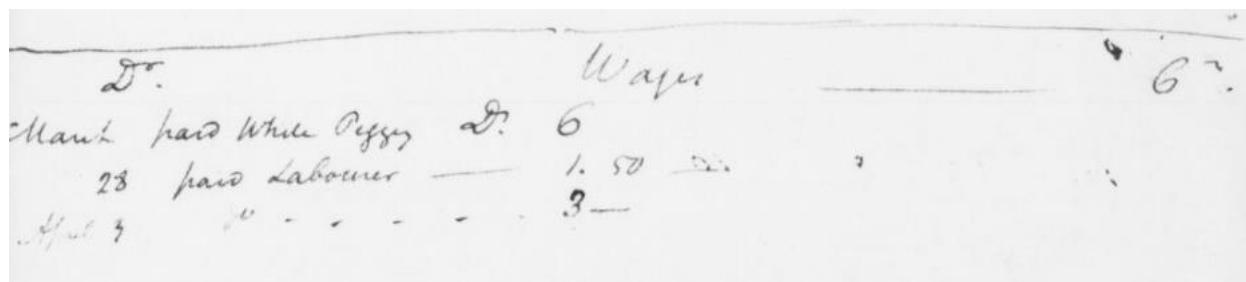
Image provided by the Library of Congress.

This account of Peggy’s payment indicates that Hamilton specifically recorded when he paid a hired servant for their work. Another important difference between the entry concerning Peggy’s payment and that of the “servants and others” is the use of *paid* versus *given*. Peggy is *paid* her wages and the money she is paid is labeled as wages, while the “servants and others” are *given* their money, and that money doesn’t fall under the category of wages, but of *donations*. *Donations* makes it explicit that Hamilton saw the money he gave the servants as a charitable act—not wages they were due. This further separates the “servants and others” from hired servants such as Peggy. The necessity of the distinction of a “white” Peggy also suggests there

<sup>67</sup> Hamilton, Alexander, *Cash Book 1795-1801*, page unnumbered (image 70).



being another Peggy in the Hamilton household who was neither white nor paid—possibly the woman Hamilton purchased in 1796.



*Image provided by the Library of Congress.*

Directly below the aforementioned entry, Hamilton recorded paying a “Laborer” \$1.50 on that same day and \$3 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April.<sup>68</sup> In 1803, Hamilton recorded paying a coachman named William Wood for his work and in 1802 a gardener for the Grange was paid, as well.<sup>69</sup> The fact that Hamilton recorded payments given to workers here makes the lack of such payments throughout the account book—especially after the purchase of the woman and child, and multiple mentions of maids—all the more notable and noticeable.

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One other thing to note is that in the 1790 and 1800 censuses, there are no enslaved servants listed in the Hamilton household, but the censuses themselves are not accurate. The 1790 census lists the Hamilton family as having two free white men over the age of 16, one free white boy under the age of 16, one free white woman, no “others,” and no enslaved servants.<sup>70</sup> In 1790, the Hamilton family consisted of Alexander and Elizabeth, and four of their children: Philip, Angelica, Alexander Jr., and James Alexander. Philip was not yet sixteen, so he could not be listed under that category. On this census, there are three members of the Hamilton family who are missing. The census was taken between 1790 and 1792,<sup>71</sup> allowing for the possibility that Philip was not present, as he went to boarding school in Trenton, New Jersey in 1791.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Hamilton, Alexander, *Cash Book 1795-1801*, page unnumbered (image 70).

<sup>69</sup> Hamilton, Alexander, *Cash Book 1795-1801*, page unnumbered (image 65) & page unnumbered (image 57).

<sup>70</sup> Sutton, Philip “Stories from the U.S. Federal Census,”(New York Public Library)

<https://www.nypl.org/blog/2020/04/13/federal-census-history-and-uses>

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> “From Alexander Hamilton to Philip A. Hamilton, 5 December 1791,” Founders Online, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-09-02-0419>. [Original source: The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, vol. 9, August 1791–December 1791, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965, pp. 560–561.]

Even with Philip's absence, there are still two members of the family who are not recorded. They could have been traveling, staying with the Schuylers at Albany, or were simply elsewhere when the census was recorded. Their absence heightens the likelihood that the people the Hamiltons enslaved were not recorded on the census as well. If part of the family was gone at the time, any enslaved servants may have travelled with them. The incorrectly recorded numbers were likely not intentional, but rather errors or miscalculations based on who was and was not home at the time the census was taken.

In the 1800 census, all the family members appear to be accounted for.<sup>73</sup> There are extra people listed on the census whose identities are unclear. There are also four people listed under "All other persons except Indians not taxed." This category could include any free servants or temporarily hired enslaved servants at the Hamilton property. There are no enslaved servants listed on this census, but like on the 1790 census, this does not mean the Hamiltons did not enslave people. There are references to enslaved servants within the family as recently as 1799, and there are people enslaved by the family at the time of Hamilton's death. Hamilton owned multiple properties, so it's possible they were not present at the townhouse the Hamiltons lived in when the census was taken. They, like Schuyler's enslaved servants, may have been traveling for the family, or the census may be mistakenly recorded. The absence of enslaved servants on the census does not necessarily mean there were no people enslaved by the Hamiltons in 1800.

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It would be easy to jump to the conclusion that Hamilton stopped enslaving people during the early 19th century based on the payments to hired servants recorded in his cash book and the 1800 census, but an entry in the back of Hamilton's account book negates this theory. Written on what appears to be a loose sheet of paper included near the end of Hamilton's cash book is a list titled "Debts Due to A. Hamilton."<sup>74</sup> This list was likely made by John Barker Church, who Hamilton had assigned to take care of all his financial matters upon his death. The handwriting is also very similar to Church's handwriting.

Many names—including Philip Schuyler's—appear on the list. When the debts are added together, the total amount Hamilton was owed upon his death comes to £5152. This number is subtracted from £6360, which is presumably one of the many debts Hamilton owed at the time of his death, and the Hamiltons are left with £1212 to pay on that debt. The auditor, possibly Church, then calculates the value of Hamilton's estate, which he estimates as follows:

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<sup>73</sup> "United States Census, 1800," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XH5T-5PK> : accessed 10 July 2020), Alexander Hamilton, New York Ward 1, New York, New York, United States; citing p. 661, NARA microfilm publication M32, (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 23; FHL microfilm 193,711.

<sup>74</sup> Hamilton, Alexander, *Cash Book 1795-1801*, page unnumbered (image 76).

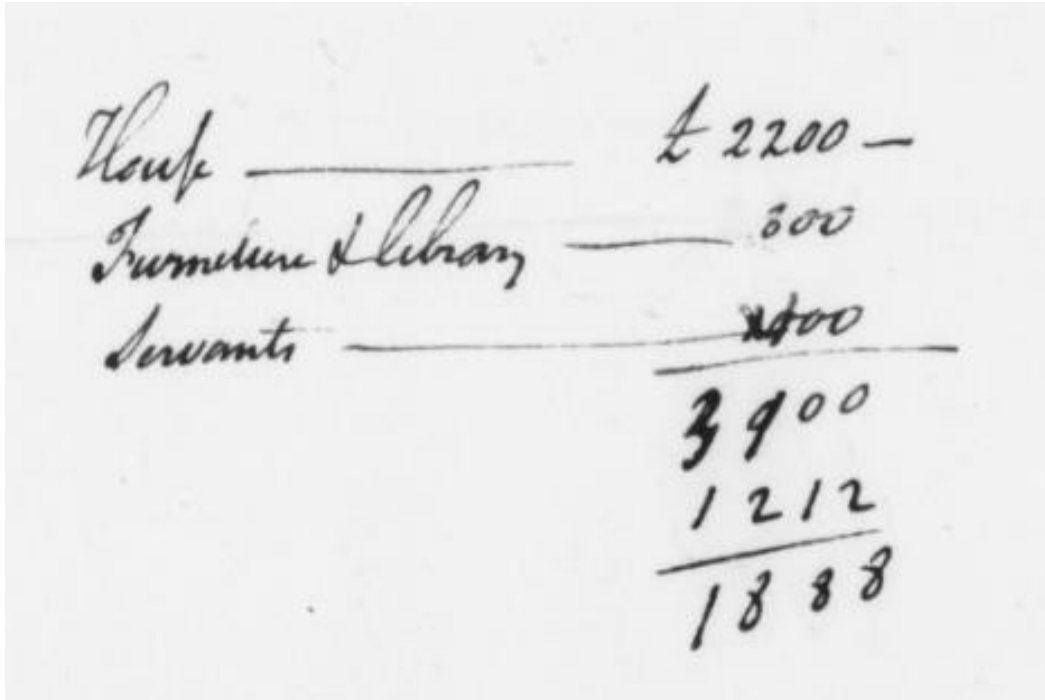


Image provided by the Library of Congress.

House ----- £2200  
Furniture & library ---- 300  
Servants ----- 400

After using some money derived from the value of Hamilton's estate to pay off the remaining £1212 of Hamilton's debt, £1888 was left for Eliza and the children, or to pay off other debts.

This assessment of Hamilton's estate is different from that which Hamilton calculated on July 1, 1804, in his "Statement of my property and Debts."<sup>75</sup> Hamilton valued his "Furniture and Library" at \$3,000 and his "Horses and Carriages" at \$600. He did not mention any "servants," as the other assessment does. Why Hamilton did not mention "servants" in his own assessment of his property is unclear. He may have assumed Eliza would want or need to keep their enslaved servants if he died, especially since she likely would not be able to keep paying any servants they had previously hired. For Eliza's sake, Hamilton had reason to conceal the enslaved servants from his estate inventory so she could retain them.

<sup>75</sup> "Statement of my Property and Debts July 1, 1804," *Founders Online*, National Archives, version of January 18, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0243>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 26, 1 May 1802–23 October 1804, *Additional Documents 1774–1799, Addenda and Errata*, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979, pp. 283–287.]

In the assessment likely drawn by Church, the “servants” are valued at £400. Monetary value ascribed to a human being as property is an inherent aspect of slavery. Valuing servants in such a way, as part of the estate on par with furniture, simply cannot refer to hired servants, such as the coachman, gardener, or “White Peggy,” who were hired, paid, and not considered to be the property of the Hamiltons.

In 1804, it is possible there were four servants at The Grange. The first would be the woman Hamilton purchased for Eliza in 1781, the woman and boy, and the maid for Angelica. It is known that a man or boy named Dick died, meaning it is more likely that there were three enslaved servants in 1804: the two women and the girl, who may have been a young woman by that point. There may also have been another maid, as multiple maids were mentioned in relation to the Hamilton children in Schuyler’s 1799 letter and who those maids were—whether they were one of the two women already purchased by Hamilton or not—is unclear.

The auditor does specifically write *servants*, using the plural of the word, implying there was more than one servant present. Who they were may never be known, but the presence of “servants” on the inventory of Hamilton’s estate is proof enslaved servants were present at The Grange when Alexander Hamilton died in 1804.

As is also clear from Hamilton’s cash books, he did at times hire free servants to work for him and the family. In another document titled “Assignment of Debts and Grant of Power of Attorney to John B. Church,” written on July 9, 1804, Hamilton directs Church to collect on debts owed to Hamilton to pay debts Hamilton himself owed “other servants and labourers, and to the Woman who washes for Mrs. Hamilton.”<sup>76</sup> This correlates with the entries in Hamilton’s cash book wherein he pays certain laborers—such as the coachman and gardener—for their work. This is the first reference to a hired washwoman for Eliza, who could be “White Peggy.” The usage of both terms—servants and laborers—creates yet another differentiation between the two terms. In the past cash book entries, *laborers* are hired workers who are *paid* whereas *servants* appear to be enslaved workers who are *given* money. The mention of “servants” as separate from “laborers” and from the washwoman could indicate that Hamilton owed other enslaved servants money—much like he did with the woman once enslaved by Major Furne—or that he wanted his enslaved servants to be given a certain amount of money upon his death, similar to the 1796 “donation.” Without more information, it is impossible to come to a definitive conclusion.

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<sup>76</sup> “Assignment of Debts and Grant of Power of Attorney to John B. Church, [9 July 1804],” *Founders Online*, National Archives, version of January 18, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-26-02-0001-0258-0001>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 26, 1 May 1802–23 October 1804, *Additional Documents 1774–1799, Addenda and Errata*, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979, pp. 301–302.]

The identity of the “servants” mentioned in the inventory of Hamilton’s estate is currently not established. So far, the record is silent on the fates of the people enslaved by the family after Alexander Hamilton’s death. While it is possible they were manumitted, no manumission records have been identified at this time. The 1810 census, in which “Elizabeth Hamilton” appears as the head of household, indicates there were no enslaved servants in the household at that time, but there was one person listed under “other,” which does lead to the possibility of a hired worker or formerly enslaved worker, possibly a cook or Angelica’s<sup>77</sup> maid, living at the Grange.<sup>78</sup> It is also possible the enslaved servants were sold to pay off the debts Hamilton left in wake of his sudden and unexpected death. Whatever the circumstances, one fact is evident: slavery in the Hamilton family ended with Alexander Hamilton’s death.

We may never know what became of the people the Hamiltons enslaved, but we know they existed. Alexander Hamilton’s cash books offer a history of his connections to and relationship with the institution of slavery. He was trusted by legal clients to know the ins and outs of the slave trade for certain cases. He was selected by friends and family to act as a financier and to purchase enslaved people for them. He purchased multiple enslaved people for his own family and did not leave instructions for them to be freed upon his death. The presence of these enslaved servants at his estate, The Grange, is confirmed by the value of Hamilton’s estate, calculated after his death, likely by John Barker Church.

In light of these primary sources, the majority of which are in Hamilton’s own hand, it is vital that the myth of Hamilton as the “Abolitionist Founding Father” end. These documents, especially when placed in context with each other, make it evident that Alexander Hamilton was an enslaver. The truth revealed in Hamilton’s cash books and letters must be acknowledged in order to honor the people he enslaved. Through understanding and accepting Hamilton’s status as an enslaver, the stories of the people he enslaved can finally take their rightful place in history.

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<sup>77</sup> Angelica Hamilton was noted by several family members as suffering from what was likely a mental illness, which may have prompted Schuyler’s purchase of the enslaved maid and may have provided sufficient reason for Eliza to retain her as a free servant.

<sup>78</sup> “United States Census, 1810,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XH2S-WW8> : accessed 1 March 2019), Elizth Hamilton, New York Ward 9, New York, New York, United States; citing p. 785, NARA microfilm publication M252 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 32; FHL microfilm 181,386.