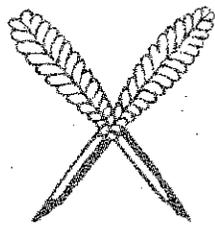
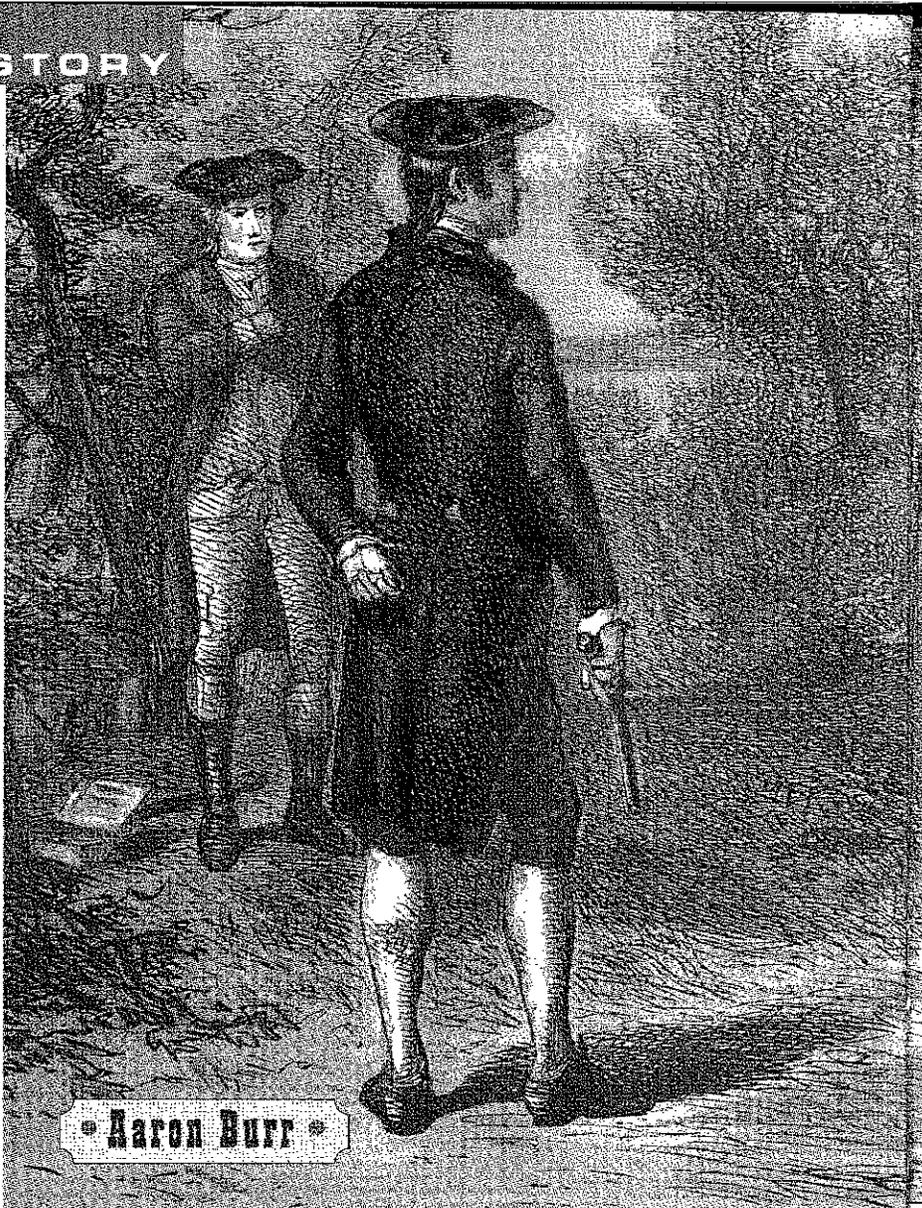


An Affair of Honor



In the summer of 1804, Vice President **Aaron Burr** challenged **Alexander Hamilton** to a duel. To this day, no one knows who fired the first shot.

By Victor Landauro



Imagine Vice President Dick Cheney and Senator Joseph Lieberman debating on the Senate floor. The debate becomes heated, and tempers flare. Finally, one man challenges the other to a duel. Both step outside, load their pistols, and await the command to fire.

Until the mid-1800s, duels, or "affairs of honor," were common. They arose from disputes, false claims, and insults. Men issued such challenges as a way to restore personal honor.

On July 11, 1804, U.S. Vice

President Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, a former delegate to the Constitutional Convention, faced off in an **infamous** (notorious) duel. By the next day, a bullet had ended the life of one man and tarnished the reputation of the other.

Great Statesmen

Aaron Burr, a Revolutionary War officer, served as U.S. Vice President (1801-1805) under President Thomas Jefferson. Alexander Hamilton, the nation's first Secretary of the Treasury, had also distinguished himself as a lawyer and an

adviser to George Washington.

Both men rivaled each other in service and political ambition. They were also bitter enemies.

In 1800, Hamilton protested Burr's ambition to become Vice President. "Mr. Burr is determined . . . to climb to the highest honors of the [government]," Hamilton wrote to a friend. "He is bold, enterprising, and **intriguing** [scheming], and I feel it is a religious duty to oppose his career."

In the election, Jefferson ran for President and Burr for Vice President on the Democratic-Republican ticket. Back then, voting procedures

Day of Restoring

On the morning of July 11, 1804, Burr and his second, William Van Ness, rowed across the Hudson. They reached the clearing first.

Hamilton arrived a few moments later, accompanied by Pendleton. Dr. David Hosack, Hamilton's personal physician, stayed behind with the rowboats.

Hamilton and Burr bowed formally. Van Ness and Pendleton measured off 10 paces and loaded the pistols. The duelists took their spots, armed and ready. Hamilton faced east, toward New York City. Burr faced west, toward the frontier. Pendleton looked at his watch. Seconds later he shouted: "Present!"

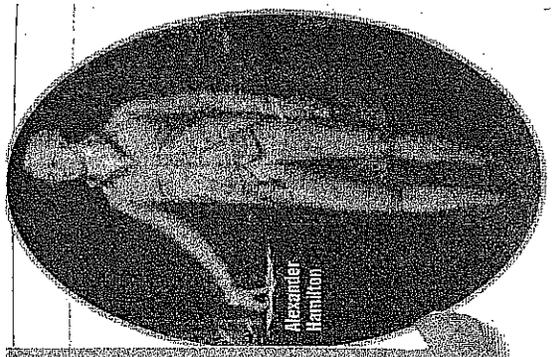
Both men fired, smoke billowing. Burr stood tall, still as a statue. Hamilton swayed, stood up on his toes, and then fell on his face. Burr took a step toward his fallen rival. But Van Ness grabbed him and led the way back to their boat.

Dr. Hosack raced to the dying and cradled Hamilton, who ranted: "This is a mortal wound, Doctor." Blood rushed from his side. The bullet had torn through Hamilton's stomach and was lodged in his spine. Pendleton and Hosack carried Hamilton to the boat. They rowed furiously back to New York, but nothing could be done: The wound was too grave (serious). Hamilton died the next day at the age of 47.

A Hero and a Villain

News of Hamilton's death sparked sadness and anger, as the nation mourned a great man. Many people directed their anger at Burr.

One of the first duelists ever to be charged with murder, Burr fled south to avoid arrest. In the fall, when the contumacious had died down, he returned to Washington, D.C., and finished his term as Vice President.



Alexander Hamilton

Burr fired immediately after." According to Pendleton, Hamilton had decided that shooting Burr would be morally wrong: "He had made up his mind not to fire at Burr, but to fire in the air." Pendleton supported his account by releasing Hamilton's letter. In it, Hamilton wrote: "It pleases God to give me the opportunity to reserve and throw away my first fire, and I have thought even of reserving my second fire."

Whatever the truth, Burr's own actions hurt his reputation far more than any insult Hamilton had ever hurled. JS

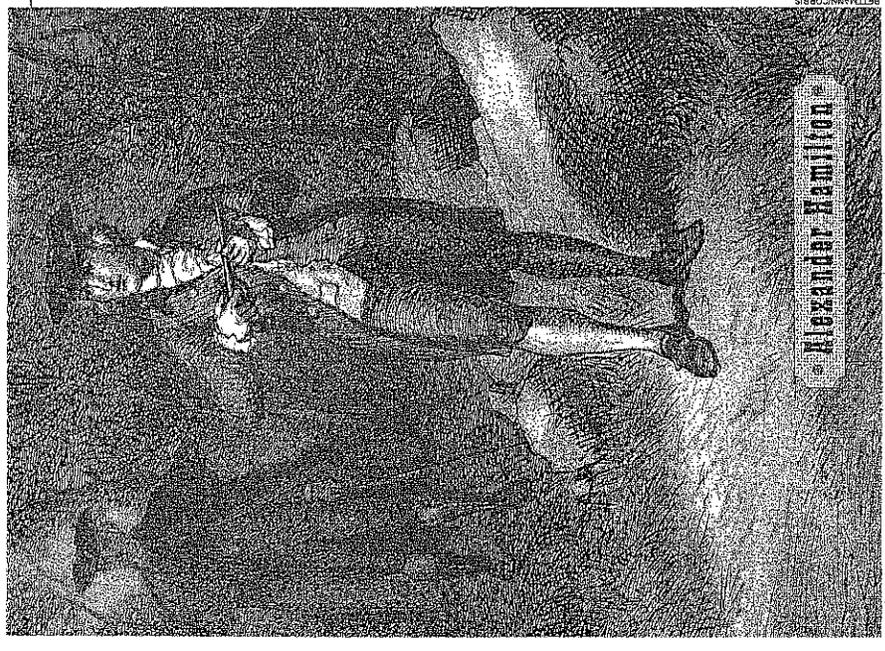
Your Turn

WORD MATCH

- 1. infamous A. criticized
- 2. intriguing B. influence
- 3. prestige C. serious
- 4. maligned D. notorious
- 5. grave E. scheming

THINK ABOUT IT

Why did Hamilton believe the duel was unavoidable?



Alexander Hamilton

called for the person who got the most Electoral College votes to become President and the person who came in second to become Vice President. Jefferson and Burr tied, so the election was thrown into the House of Representatives. It took 36 ballots to break the tie, with Hamilton helping to defeat Burr.

Hamilton's critics of Burr were well-founded. Many people said that Burr entered politics solely to pursue power and prestige (influence). To which Burr responded: "Great souls have little use for small morals."

The comments got back to Burr. After losing the election, Burr wrote to Hamilton, demanding an apology for his insults. Hamilton refused, and Burr challenged him to a duel. The matter would be set

War of Words

In the summer of 1804, Hamilton again maligned (criticized) Burr. His term as Vice President about to expire, Burr was then running for Governor of New York. At a dinner party, Hamilton called Burr a "dangerous man and one who ought not to be trusted with the reins of government."

Hamilton also wrote a letter to Nathaniel Pendleton, his "second" at the duel. Traditionally, each duelist had a supporter, or second, to give commands and serve as a witness. Hamilton told Pendleton to share the letter with others after the duel. Burr wrote to his daughter, "I am indebted to you, my dearest Theodosia," the letter reads, "for a very great portion of the happiness which I have enjoyed. . . . Adieu-Adieu."

ded with bullets, not words. Both men had homes in New York City, where duels were illegal. They agreed to meet at a clearing in the woods in Weehawken, New Jersey, overlooking the Hudson River.

Final Farewells

On the eve of their duel, Burr and Hamilton prepared for death. Each wrote to his loved ones.

"If it had been possible for me to have avoided this duel," Hamilton wrote to his wife, Eliza, "my love for you and my precious children would have been alone decisive. But it was not possible without sacrifices which would have rendered me unworthy of your esteem."

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Hamilton's wife Eliza wrote to him from the truth. Burr was often accused of being the enemy of the people. He was a man of great talents, but he was also a man of great pride. He was a man of great talents, but he was also a man of great pride.