

WILLIAM S. HAMILTON  
PIONEER IN THE OLD NORTHWEST

by

Norman Lee Polhill  
Western Illinois University

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Thesis directed by William L. Burton, Ph. D.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been examined and approved.

September 26, 1964 Date

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An Abstract  
for  
William S. Hamilton, Pioneer in the Old Northwest

In 1958, while preparing a unit on local history for my American history class at Elmwood Community High School, Elmwood, Illinois, in Peoria County, I noted a reference to William S. Hamilton in early Peoria records and a statement that he was the son of Alexander Hamilton. I was cursorily attracted by the detail but did not pursue further research on the matter. A year later, when I began to consider possible projects for the master's thesis, I decided to explore the Black Hawk War subject. Dr. Hicken advised me that the Black Hawk War had been rather thoroughly filtered and sifted by many writers, and he recommended that I seek an original topic from my locale in northwestern Illinois.

During my browsing in the Black Hawk War materials, I had seen the name of William S. Hamilton again. I was intrigued by the possibility that this was the same person mentioned in the Peoria records. Finally, in 1962, after an interruption in my graduate studies, I again encountered a mention of William S. Hamilton in material on the Illinois and Michigan Canal which I consulted in preparing a term paper for Dr. Hicken in Illinois history. When research proved the Hamilton of Peoria, of the Black Hawk War, and of the Illinois and Michigan

Canal to be one and the same, I determined to trace the steps of the son of Alexander Hamilton. I had always preferred the study of a person to that of a period or a movement, and I felt certain that no one had undertaken the task of contributing to the truth that is history the account of William S. Hamilton's life; he had not even been accorded an article of his own in Dictionary of American Biography. In the fall of 1962 Dr. Bodine approved the subject and assigned me to Dr. Burton for the formal study. I began immediately to pursue the bits of information previously uncovered and shortly discovered that a biography of William S. Hamilton had been written by Sylvan J. Muldoon in 1930. Thoroughly discouraged, I secured a copy of the book through the Illinois State Library.

Muldoon's book, Alexander Hamilton's Pioneer Son, the Life and Times of Colonel William Stephen Hamilton, 1797-1850, skirts Hamilton's Illinois activities and is not, on the whole, a scholarly work even though Muldoon devoted considerable time to it. Dr. Burton and I agreed that the gaps and the undocumented statements in the Muldoon biography provided me with sufficient working opportunity, so the thesis topic remained generally unchanged. I began at once to concentrate on Hamilton's life in Illinois. The Illinois State Historical Library in Springfield proved a valuable source of materials, and its staff members, particularly Miss Flint, Mr. Weatherbee, and Mrs. Schultz, provided experienced guidance. Thus I was launched.

I sent letters to nearly every place in the United States where Hamilton had had any association, however slight. The results were not rewarding. The New York State Library and the New York Public Library could contribute nothing. Mr. Jay Monaghan, Wyles consultant, informed me that the Wyles collection in Santa Barbara (University of California) had nothing, and his personal information was only that he was aware of Hamilton's obscurity. Mr. Harold C. Syrett, editor of The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, Butler Library, Columbia University, informed me that the library could find no letters written by Alexander Hamilton to or about William Stephen Hamilton. Even a letter from one of the living descendants of Alexander Hamilton, the Rev. Alexander Hamilton of Kennebunkport, Maine, could not provide me with valuable information. The General Reference and Bibliography Division of the Library of Congress directed me to the National Archives and Records Service which was able to supply me with some United States Military Academy, Volunteer Militia, and surveying information. I became convinced that the bulk of my information must come from the area in the West where William S. Hamilton had been active.

The Missouri record is scanty, but valuable information did come from the State Historical Society Libraries in St. Louis and Columbia. A trip to the state capital to inspect the Land Office records proved disappointing.

In Illinois, besides the assistance of the State Historical Library, the State Archives, especially through

Miss McCree and Mr. Temple, provided much information and help. The Sangamon and Peoria County records were very rewarding. The Peoria Public Library had considerable material of value, and Mrs. Hilderbrand took a personal interest in the study. The Newberry Library and the Chicago Historical Society Library were useful for their very complete holdings. The Galena Public Library supplied several rare volumes, and the Dixon Public Library with an excellent local history room served as my workshop during the winter and spring of 1964. The personal libraries of Judge George C. Dixon and Rep. C. K. Willett and their knowledge of the history of Dixon and of northern Illinois proved very helpful. Mrs. Pease, of the Illinois History Survey in Urbana, provided encouragement as well as assistance in the time spent there.

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin has far more Hamilton material than any other repository. The Cyrus Woodman Collection accounts for most of the items. The staff of the Society in Madison were extremely cooperative.

The California State Library in Sacramento furnished a complete record of their Hamilton materials and made a trip, which I could not have managed to arrange, unnecessary.

As far as the overt record is concerned, I am convinced that I have traced the life of William S. Hamilton. The documentation, although lamentably scanty, is conclusive as to his movements, his activities, and even to some degree his personal relationships and standing as viewed by his contemporaries. Yet the book on Hamilton is not closed.

I cannot, as Muldoon seemingly could, say that as a result of the study I know a man.

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY



## CHAPTER I

### THE FAMILY AND EARLY LIFE OF WILLIAM S. HAMILTON AND HIS ARRIVAL IN THE WEST

On December 14, 1780, with the Revolutionary War now over five years in duration and definitely beginning to look like a colonial victory, a wedding took place in the Schuyler mansion in Albany, New York. United in marriage were a daughter of General Philip Schuyler,<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth, and a young officer on the staff of General George Washington, Alexander Hamilton.

Elizabeth Schuyler, the second child and daughter of Philip and Catherine Van Rensselaer Schuyler, was born on August 7, 1757.<sup>2</sup> Alexander Hamilton's birth was illegitimate and there is no record of the year. The earliest document which lists Hamilton indicates that he was born in 1755. He himself always contended that he was born on January 11, 1757, and a U. S. government commission has accepted as official the later date.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>General Schuyler had recently gained fame as one of the American heroes at the Battle of Saratoga where the British were dealt a blow from which they never fully recovered.

<sup>2</sup>Allan McLane Hamilton, The Intimate Life of Alexander Hamilton (London: Duckworth & Company, 1910), p. 210.

<sup>3</sup>"Bicentennial for a Founding Father," Life, XLII (January 14, 1957), 84.

The story behind the parentage of Alexander Hamilton is interesting.

The complicated love story of Hamilton's parents was enacted on the tiny tropical islands of St. Kitts, Nevis and St. Croix. His mother, Rachel Faucett, was married while a young girl to an older merchant of Danish St. Croix named John Michael Lavien. The marriage was unhappy and Rachel left her husband, who had her put in jail for desertion. After this harsh treatment, Rachel went to live with her mother on British St. Kitts. There she fell in love with James Hamilton, a wandering trader of noble Scottish birth.

Under 18th Century law a wife who had left her husband had no right to a divorce. But Rachel and James Hamilton lived as man and wife [on Nevis] and were apparently so regarded by their neighbors. They had two sons, James and Alexander. The father's business did not prosper and he moved his family back to St. Croix, where he deserted them in 1766. Rachel struggled to support her sons by running a small store. When she died in 1768 almost all of her property was seized by her former husband. James Hamilton lived on until 1799. In his old age he exchanged fond letters with his famous son, who begged him in vain to come to the U. S. and helped him with drafts of money.<sup>4</sup>

Alexander and Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton were the parents of eight children. The first-born was Philip, who arrived January 22, 1782. This child seems to have been the most beloved and popular of all the Hamilton children. Philip is described as having unusual talent, and he, like his father, graduated from Columbia University.<sup>5</sup> One year later, in 1801, he became involved in a political quarrel which resulted in a duel and his death. The site of this tragedy was the same Weehawken, New Jersey, opposite New York City, where his

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 86-87.

<sup>5</sup>When Alexander Hamilton attended this school it was known as King's College. The School was rechartered as Columbia University in 1784.

father would also fall in a duel three years later.<sup>6</sup>

Six months after Philip's death the last of the Hamilton children was born, a boy christened Philip to perpetuate the memory of the eldest son. Philip the second, or "little Phil," as he was commonly addressed, studied law in New York and was for a time assistant U. S. district attorney under his brother James.<sup>7</sup> He was also the last of the immediate offspring of Alexander and Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton to die; he lived until July, 1884.

The second child, Angelica, was born in 1784. She was probably named in honor of her mother's older sister. The only other daughter, Eliza, was born in 1799.

The remaining children, four boys, were born in succession, beginning with Alexander in 1786. He was graduated from Columbia in 1804, practiced law, went to Europe and was with the Duke of Wellington in Portugal prior to returning home and taking part in the War of 1812. He ended his service to his country as a U. S. district attorney in Florida.<sup>8</sup>

James Alexander was born on April 14, 1788. After graduating from Columbia, he was a major in the War of 1812 and later received an ad interim appointment by

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<sup>6</sup>Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography, eds. James Grant Wilson and John Fiske (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1888), III, 60.

<sup>7</sup>Hamilton, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>8</sup>Appleton's, loc. cit.

President Jackson as Secretary of State in 1829. He surrendered the office less than a month later when Martin Van Buren was regularly appointed. James A. died in New York in 1878 at the age of ninety.<sup>9</sup> The next son, John Church, continued the family tradition by also earning his degree at Columbia University. He studied and practiced law in New York and then spent a great deal of time preparing the memoirs of his father.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Hamilton family Bible the sixth child was born on August 4, 1797, and was named William Stephen Hamilton.<sup>11</sup> Here, then, is the subject of this study. Apparently the family intended that he follow a professional military career; his abortive experience at West Point vitiated this plan. William left New York about the time he became twenty-one and was a surveyor and pioneer in Illinois and Wisconsin before going to California during the Gold Rush. His later career showed plainly the lack of early family relationships and of his father's preoccupation with political and financial interests.

During the period directly after William's birth, his father was busily engaged for several months in preparations

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<sup>9</sup>Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), VIII, 188-189. (Hereinafter referred to as D. A. B.).

<sup>10</sup>Appleton's, loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup>John J. Latting, December 1877, letter to Cyrus Woodman, Cambridge, Mass., M, Box 1, Cyrus Woodman MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin

for the impending war with France in 1798.<sup>12</sup> Next, he was caught up in the presidential election of 1800 and a desperate attempt to further the interests of the Federalist Party. When most of his efforts failed and the Republican tie between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr reached the House of Representatives, Hamilton did not, as some Federalists did, attempt to shelve Jefferson in favor of Aaron Burr. In fact, he openly supported Jefferson. This was not to suggest that he would support Jefferson's administration, for Hamilton concentrated on bitterly attacking many of Jefferson's policies through the New York Evening Post, of which he was one of the founders.<sup>13</sup>

In this era, Hamilton's political activity reached a high pitch with the gubernatorial election of 1804 in New York. Burr hoped to win this election and if successful might have attempted to join other New England malcontents, to secede and form a Northern confederacy. Hamilton successfully foiled Burr, and his Federalist-supported Independent Party, and the Republican candidate, Morgan Lewis, won easily.<sup>14</sup> Seething from repeated attacks by Hamilton, Aaron Burr sought and gained revenge in what is well known history; Hamilton was mortally wounded by Burr's first shot.

William was a lad of seven when he and other members of

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<sup>12</sup>D. A. B., op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 178

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

his family were rushed on July 11, 1804, to the bedside where Alexander Hamilton lay dying. William was old enough to comprehend death, but what his reaction may have been we will probably never know. He apparently had no experience of intimate family companionship. John was seven years older and Philip five years younger than he. Eliza, his junior by two years, was his closest contemporary.

How greatly William was affected by the absence of boyhood playmates and a father's companionship is a topic for conjecture. That he did not follow the educational and professional pattern which by this time had been unmistakably established by his family is fact.

A pertinent fact may be that Alexander Hamilton did not leave a great estate for his wife and family.<sup>15</sup> On the contrary, his liabilities seem to have outnumbered his assets.<sup>16</sup> Mrs. Hamilton reluctantly left "The Grange" which Hamilton had built in 1802-1803. The burden of expense forced her to vacate this home, the only one expressly designed for her family.<sup>17</sup>

This financial stringency probably restricted the

<sup>15</sup>"Mrs. Hamilton received \$10,609.64 by an act of Congress of April 29, 1816, for back pay and interest for Hamilton's service in the Revolutionary War." (Hamilton, pp. 420-421).

<sup>16</sup>Sylvan Muldoon, Alexander Hamilton's Pioneer Son, The Life and Times of Colonel William Stephen Hamilton: 1797-1850 (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: The Auraland Press, 1930), p. 27.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

educational opportunities for William. That he benefited from his father's libraries has been indicated by several authors including Muldoon.<sup>18</sup> Muldoon infers that William virtually taught himself the use of the French language by using the extensive collection of French literature in his father's library; in addition, he supposedly became grounded in law by following the study plan laid down for Philip by his father. Research has failed to verify either claim.<sup>19</sup>

The study rules were intended for Philip's guidance after he graduated from Columbia. They are as follows:

From the first of April to the first of October he is to rise not later than six o'clock; the rest of the year not later than seven. If earlier, he will deserve commendation. Ten will be his hour of going to bed throughout the year.

From the time he is dressed in the morning till nine o'clock (the time for breakfast excepted), he is to read law. At nine he goes to the office, and continues there till dinner time. He will be occupied partly in writing and partly in reading law.

After dinner he reads law at home till five o'clock. From this time till seven he disposes of his time as he pleases. From seven to ten he reads and studies whatever he pleases.

From twelve on Saturday he is at liberty to amuse himself.

On Sunday he will attend the morning church. The rest of the day may be applied to innocent recreations.

He must not depart from any of these rules without my permission.<sup>20</sup>

The only part of William's formal education which can be documented took place at the struggling U. S. Military

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-31.

<sup>20</sup>Hamilton, op. cit., p. 215.

Academy at West Point, New York. William S. Hamilton was admitted as a Cadet at the United States Military Academy on June 15, 1814, at the age of seventeen. He later resigned or simply did not return for the fall term in September of 1817.<sup>21</sup> If the scanty early records of the Academy are correct, we may assume that he spent three full school years at West Point. Why he resigned or failed to return after vacation in 1817 is unknown.

The course of study at the Military Academy is a bit indefinite in these years of its infancy. Since its beginning in 1802, it had had a difficult time just trying to survive.<sup>22</sup> From the Superintendent's Annual Report we find the following:

On March 31, 1812, the Military Academy was without a single instructor.

In September, 1812, C. S. Merchant was the only Cadet at West Point.

During the winter five others reported but were furloughed till April 15, 1813.<sup>23</sup>

Another entry describing the courses and instruction during this early period states:

Engineering was less attended to than French or drawing, the greater number of cadets on graduating never having gone beyond the definitions to be found in Colonel William's little primer of 50 pages on the subject which was their only text book.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Kenneth W. Rapp, Archivist, U. S. M. A., letter, 27 April, 1964, to the author.

<sup>22</sup>Kenneth W. Rapp, Archivist, U. S. M. A., letter, 17 July, 1964, to the author.

<sup>23</sup>Superintendent's Annual Report, 1896 (U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York), p. 42. (Hereinafter referred to as S. A. R.).

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 160.



The fact that French was "attended to" at the Academy provides some basis for the belief that William gained considerable knowledge of the language there. Theodore Rodolf, a Swiss immigrant, who became acquainted with William S. Hamilton in 1834, said in a letter to Cyrus Woodman:

I was quite young at that time [19] and hardly able to speak or fully understand the English language and in my conversation with Col. Hamilton frequently used the French, of which he had a fair knowledge, though very unwilling to speak it.<sup>25</sup>

In the fields of drawing and surveying the early Academy provided inadequate instruction.

During the early period of the Academy -- from 1802 to 1810 -- the course in drawing, like that of other departments, appears to have been of a very elementary character, confined to the use of instruments such as they were, with a little topography and fortification drawing. The regulations of May 22, 1816, define the course as consisting of the drawing of figures, fortifications, and topographical plans, but the demoralization of the Academy during the two subsequent years made all instruction abortive until the period signalized by the appointment of Colonel Thayer to the superintendency of the institution. At the beginning of his administration instruction in the use of pen and ink, and color, and the use of surveying instruments in the field was nominally given by Mr. Zoeller, but under existing conditions must have been both crude and ineffectual.<sup>26</sup>

Prior to becoming a U. S. Deputy surveyor in the West, Hamilton probably supplemented his training by assisting in the field.

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<sup>25</sup>Theodore Rodolf, LaCrosse, Wisconsin, 8 March, 1880, letter to Cyrus Woodman, Cambridge, Mass., M, Box 1, Cyrus Woodman MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

<sup>26</sup>S. A. R., op. cit., pp. 24-25.

However he accomplished it, Hamilton was a man of considerable educational attainment. One gentleman in the lead mine region of Wisconsin said Hamilton was the " . . . smartest man in all these parts . . . ".<sup>27</sup> That he could adequately express himself and that he was a student of law and a surveyor of note will be indicated by his later activities.

There are varying descriptions of William S. Hamilton. Edgar Hamilton, son of John Church Hamilton, gives the following account based on his mother's memory: "Colonel Hamilton was a man of medium stature and spare form, his features were small, hair brown and complexion light."<sup>28</sup>

Theodore Rodolf related that "In stature Colonel Hamilton was of medium size, thickset and swarthy complexion."<sup>29</sup> Joseph Schafer spoke with an elderly man at Wiota, Wisconsin, who had become blind, but who claimed that he remembered William S. Hamilton. According to the old man, "He was a short, stout, dark man."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Charles Fenno Hoffman, A Winter in the West (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), p. 43.

<sup>28</sup>Edgar Hamilton, Deckertown, N. J., 2 June 1880, letter to Cyrus Woodman, Cambridge, Mass., M, Box 1, Cyrus Woodman MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>29</sup>Theodore Rodolf, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 8 March 1880, letter to Cyrus Woodman, Cambridge, Mass., M, Box 1, Cyrus Woodman MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>30</sup>Joseph Schafer, "William S. Hamilton," Radio Address, 16 March 1931 (Madison Public School Series, III), IL, Box 1, Joseph Schafer MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin

WILLIAM S. HAMILTON OR PHILIP HAMILTON

There is a portrait which has been widely circulated as that of William S. Hamilton, but the writer discovered that the same portrait is also identified as that of Philip Hamilton (The First). In 1880, when Cyrus Woodman, a friend of William S. Hamilton in Wisconsin and California, was collecting information on William, he received several small photographic copies of the portrait from Edgar Hamilton. Edgar had in turn received the portrait from Philip Hamilton (The Second) who identified it as that of William.<sup>31</sup>

In Allan McLane Hamilton's book, The Intimate Life of Alexander Hamilton, a copy of the portrait faces page 210 and is listed as that of Philip Hamilton (The First) at age twenty.<sup>32</sup> Edgar Hamilton wrote of a companion portrait of Eliza. If there were two studies, companion portraits, the indication would be that the one in controversy was of William since he and Eliza were only two years apart.<sup>33</sup>

It was impossible for the writer to resolve the confusion in identification of the portrait, and the impossibility of finding a wholly reliable likeness of the subject produces an unavoidable frustration.

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<sup>31</sup>Edgar Hamilton, Deckertown, N. J., 23 March 1880, letter to Cyrus Woodman, Cambridge, Mass., M, Box 1, Cyrus Woodman MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>32</sup>Op. cit.

<sup>33</sup>Edgar Hamilton, Deckertown, N. J., 1 April 1880, letter to Cyrus Woodman, Cambridge, Mass., M, Box 1, Cyrus Woodman MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

## Interval in Saint Louis

Exactly when William S. Hamilton left New York and arrived in the West cannot be determined. It is known that he failed to resume his studies at the U. S. Military Academy in 1817. The first positive date locating him in the West is November 1, 1819, when he pledged to support an Episcopal Church in Saint Louis. Forty-seven subscribers signed; the names of at least two carry an aura of more than local renown: Thomas H. Benton and William Clark. The contributions ranged from five to one hundred dollars; Hamilton promised twenty-five dollars.<sup>34</sup>

One month later, Hamilton was briefly a member of a small military group. In the Missouri Gazette of December 29, 1819, the following article<sup>35</sup> appeared:

A volunteer company of Light Infantry has been formed in this town. They are denominated the "St. Louis Guards." At a meeting of the company a few days since the following officers were elected.

Henry W. Conway, Esq.	Captain
George Kennerly,	1st Lieutenant
Amos J. Bruce,	2nd do
Josiah Bright,	3rd do
John B. Sarpy,	Ensign
Charles Wahrendorff,	Orderly Sergeant
Charles Keemle,	2nd do
David B. Hoffman,	3rd do
William S. Hamilton	1st Corporal
Henry Gulager,	2nd do
Wilson McGunneble	3rd do

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<sup>34</sup>John Thomas Scharf, History of St. Louis City and County (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts and Co., 1910), IV, 1713-1714.

<sup>35</sup>Missouri Gazette, 29 Dec. 1819, p. 3.

On January 5, 1820 (the following week), a note appeared in the same newspaper to the effect that David B. Hoffman was elected 1st Corporal in place of William S. Hamilton, Esq., resigned.

Thus the evidence of Hamilton's whereabouts at least by 1819 seems conclusive; one may speculate as to what prompted him to venture westward. He may have received or been assured of a job as surveyor while still in New York. His earliest recorded surveying contract, dated May 17, 1820, is for work to be done in central Illinois.<sup>36</sup> A check of the Missouri contracts in the Land Record vault at Jefferson City failed to show Hamilton's name in the book containing the records for the years 1815 to 1843.

Another possible explanation for his westward move deserves consideration. In the April 17, 1880 issue of The (Peoria) Freeman, one of the editors, J. A. Berry, states that

William S. Hamilton . . . found his way to St. Louis, where he met Burr, and determined to avenge his father's death or fall in the attempt. To this end he challenged Burr to mortal combat, but the challenge was declined by Burr on the ground of disparity of their ages, and the son was thus compelled to permit his father's murderer to go unpunished.<sup>37</sup>

Attempting to verify the Berry story, the writer found

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<sup>36</sup>The Territory of Louisiana - Missouri: 1815-1821 (cont.), ed. Edwin Carter (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1951), XV, 612-613.

<sup>37</sup>The Freeman (Peoria, Illinois), 17 April 1880.

no evidence that Burr was ever in Saint Louis after 1805.<sup>38</sup> He supposedly returned to the United States from France after the War of 1812 and re-established his law practice in New York City where he died in 1836.<sup>39</sup> Since the only evidence found is this single editorial, Hamilton's alleged mission to avenge his father's death seems highly doubtful.

Whatever the motivation that caused Hamilton to migrate, it is fact that he did secure a position on the staff of William Rector, Surveyor-General for Illinois, Missouri and Arkansas. Hamilton was a deputy surveyor when he signed the first contract in May of 1820, but the exact date of his commission cannot be ascertained.<sup>40</sup>

Hamilton was one of many surveyors who went to the Northwest Territory after Congress, under the Articles of Confederation, passed the Land Act of 1785. After his initial contract in 1820, he did additional work in Illinois from 1821 through 1824; after the end of the Black Hawk War in 1832, he contracted to divide into townships a large segment of land in northern Illinois.

The Act of 1785 specified that the land of the Territory was to be divided into townships six miles square by running

<sup>38</sup>Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Allen Johnson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), III.

<sup>39</sup>Samuel H. Wandell and Meade Minnegerode, Aaron Burr (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1925), 2 vols.

<sup>40</sup>The volume containing commissions for 1823 and later is available at Jefferson City, but the one containing earlier appointments is missing.

lines due north and south, with other lines crossing them at right angles.<sup>41</sup> All of Hamilton's contracts, with the exception of the one for northern Illinois, called for subdividing the land (dividing the townships into 36 one-mile-square sections of 640 acres each) after the township lines were laid out.

If the job was to be done accurately, it was at best tedious. Usually the deputy surveyor had several men working with him and on occasion two deputy surveyors shared a contract. In Field Notes of Illinois Surveys in the State Archives, Hamilton's list of hands for 1833 is as follows:

John Dixon	fore chairman
Lucious Belding	hind chairman
J. Perkle	
J. Summers	flagmen
H. Wescoat	
J. Maxwell	axemen
Smith	Camp Keeper
all at \$20 per month <sup>42</sup>	

One envisions evening campfire scenes during lonely nights on the rolling prairie of northern Illinois.

In his surveys in the Illinois area, Hamilton indicated to the Surveyor-General the value and condition of the land for future use. Two typical entries appear as follows:

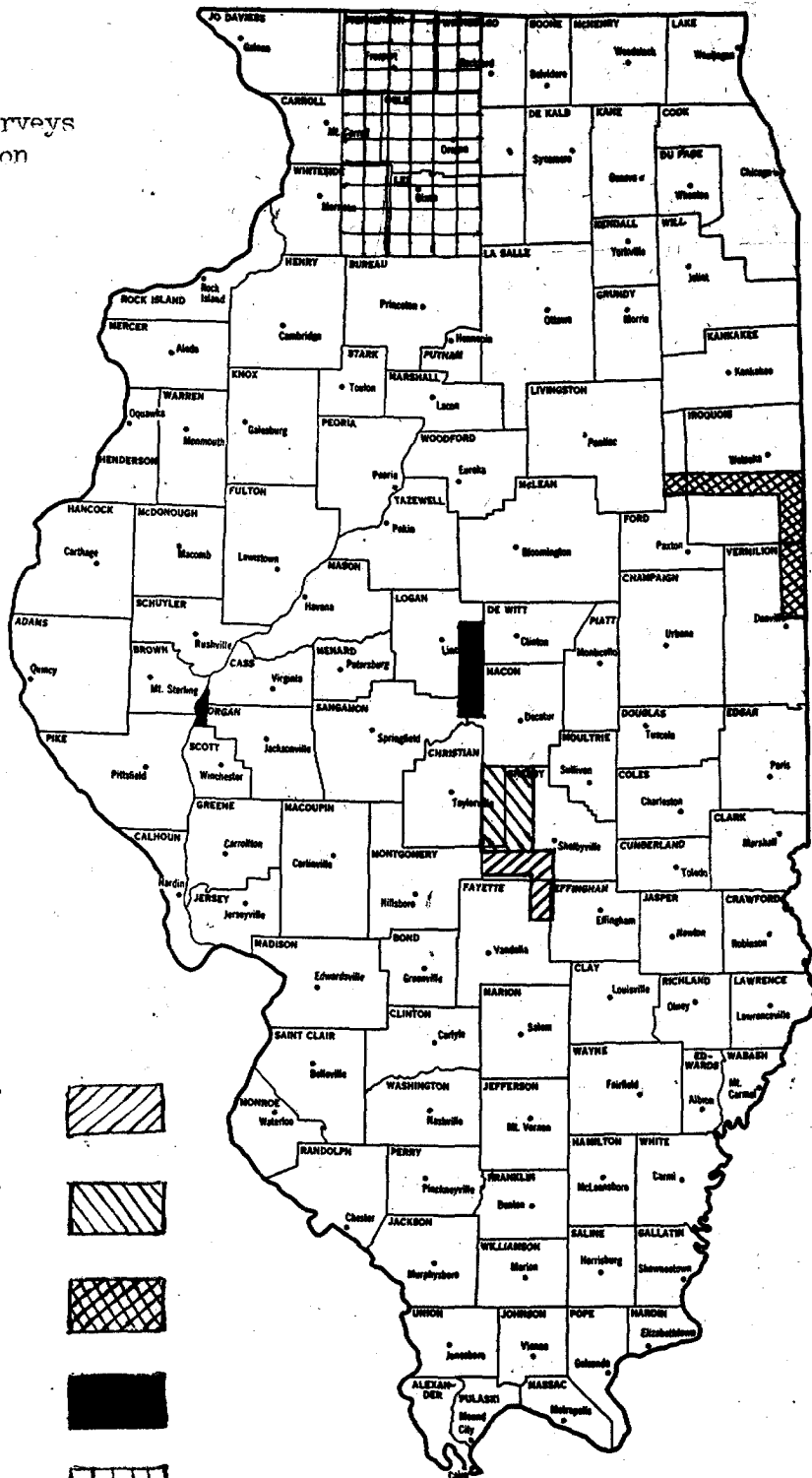
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<sup>41</sup>Theodore L. Carlson, Illinois: Government and Institutions (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1959), p. 68.

<sup>42</sup>pp. 3-4.



The record of the surveys  
of William S. Hamilton



Under the contract of  
May 17, 1820



Under the contract of  
February 20, 1821



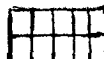
Under the contract of  
March 16, 1822



Under the contract of  
June 12, 1823



Under the contract of  
July 19, 1833



There are not more than a dozen trees on this township.<sup>43</sup> I should say the public interest would not require a subdivision of it. May 8th, 1834. Wm. S. Hamilton.<sup>44</sup>

About one third of this township is covered with timber. Well watered. I should say the public interest would be advanced by a subdivision of it. May 9th, 1834. Wm. S. Hamilton.<sup>45</sup>

An interesting practice insured accurate future identification of boundaries. Under instructions promulgated in 1831, surveyors were told to mark corners by making a mound, placing a stone in the center and enclosing a few handfulls [sic] of charcoal, then covering the mound with soil. The method was prescribed for all areas where there were few trees.<sup>46</sup> In his reports Hamilton repeatedly stated that he had placed two quarts of charcoal about three inches below the surface of the earth;<sup>47</sup> apparently he had his own method of carrying out the instructions.

During his Illinois operations Hamilton established a base in Sangamon County and apparently was never again permanently located in Saint Louis. He visited the city briefly on several occasions later; these will be dealt

<sup>43</sup>Because timber was so valuable a commodity, any area without an abundance of trees was considered unsuitable for habitation.

<sup>44</sup>Field Notes of Illinois Surveys, Vol. 366, p. 234, Illinois State Archives.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., Vol. 366, p. 234.

<sup>46</sup>Original Instructions Governing Public Land Surveys of Iowa, ed. J. S. Dodds (Ames: Iowa Engineering Society, 1943), p. 32.

<sup>47</sup>Field Notes of Illinois Surveys, Vol. 368, passim, Illinois State Archives.

with as they relate to other matters.

A puzzling aside to the Hamilton story involves a confusion of names. In the East he was William Stephen Hamilton. In the west he became William Schuyler Hamilton. Sufficient evidence can be cited to establish with very little doubt that William chose to change his middle name from Stephen to his mother's maiden name of Schuyler.

On October 6, 1820, Hamilton signed his field notes "Wm. Schuyler Hamilton."<sup>48</sup> In 1823, William Rector, in written testimony to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, stated that William Schuyler Hamilton was employed as a deputy surveyor.<sup>49</sup> Governor Coles of Illinois sent Hamilton to meet General Lafayette in 1825, and the letter which Hamilton carried referred to him as William Schuyler Hamilton.<sup>50</sup> Finally, Charles L. Stephenson wrote to Cyrus Woodman in 1877: "I am of the opinion that the Wm. Schuyler Hamilton we knew so well in his lifetime is one and the same Wm. Stephen Hamilton born August 4th 1797."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup>Field Notes of Illinois Surveys, Vol. 168, p. 138, Illinois State Archives.

<sup>49</sup>Copies of Sundry Documents Relative to Transactions between Surveyor General and General Land Office, 1813-1824 (Jefferson City: Hugh Stephens Printing Co.), p. 299.

<sup>50</sup>Governor Edward Coles, Edwardsville, Illinois, 28 April 1825, letter to General Lafayette, Chicago Historical Society Library (uncatalogued).

<sup>51</sup>Charles L. Stephenson, Galena, Illinois, 26 Dec. 1877, letter to Cyrus Woodman, Cambridge, Mass., M, Box 1, Cyrus Woodman MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

Although his signature was always "William S. Hamilton" (or sometimes with "William" abbreviated),<sup>52</sup> the "S.", beginning with the church subscription list in Saint Louis, must have represented Schuyler. He was undoubtedly proud of the Schuyler name and not totally unaware of the prestige it carried.

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<sup>52</sup>The only exception is in the field notes.

## CHAPTER II

## FIVE YEARS IN SANGAMON COUNTY

William S. Hamilton was in Sangamon County as early as 1823, if not before. In August of 1822 he purchased several tracts of land in the then Pike and St. Clair counties. In the transaction he was listed as an attorney at law in the state of Illinois.<sup>1</sup> John C. Henderson's Early History of the Sangamon Country lists Hamilton as one of several settlers in the area before 1823.<sup>2</sup> When the Morgan County Circuit Court met for the first time in the fall of 1823, William S. Hamilton of Sangamon County was one of the lawyers in attendance.<sup>3</sup>

In January of 1824 Governor Edward Coles asked Hamilton to oversee the Seminary lands in Sangamon County for the state of Illinois.<sup>4</sup> This seems to be the first of several

<sup>1</sup>Transcribed Record Pages 561-1196, Recorder's Office, Peoria County, Illinois. pp. 954-955.

<sup>2</sup>(Davenport, Iowa: Day, Egbert & Fidler, 1873), p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Charles M. Eames, Historic Morgan and Classic Jacksonville (Jacksonville, Illinois: Daily Journal Printing Office, 1885), pp. 15-16.

<sup>4</sup>Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Executive Series, I, The Governor's Letter-Books, 1818-1834, eds. Evarts Boutell Greene and Clarence Walworth Alvord (Danville: Illinois Printing Co., 1909), IV, 59.

associations between Coles and Hamilton and indicates that Hamilton had previously been a resident of Sangamon County and an acquaintance of Governor Coles. In closing one of his letters to Hamilton early in 1824, Coles subscribes himself, "I am with great respect your friend."<sup>5</sup>

A further indication of Hamilton's early presence in Sangamon County is found in the Sangamon County Commissioners Proceedings. On June 2, 1823, Hamilton was appointed guardian for the three children of the Hawley family; John Dixon, Stephen Stillman, Charles Boyd, James Stuart and Matthew Roger were listed as his security.<sup>6</sup>

In January of 1824, Hamilton surveyed several townships along the eastern edge of Sangamon County,<sup>7</sup> and in March he became treasurer of the county. John Taylor and John Dixon were approved by the Court as his security.<sup>8</sup> On the following day, March 3, 1824, Elijah Iles, James Adams and Hamilton were appointed by the Court to view (survey) and mark a road from Calhoun (Springfield) to Sangamo (town) and on to Richland.<sup>9</sup>

Remaining active in the Commissioners Court, Hamilton on May 11, 1824, presented a petition of fifty inhabitants of

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>6</sup>Sangamon County Commissioners Proceedings, I, 44, Illinois State Archives. (Hereinafter referred to as SCCP).

<sup>7</sup>Field Notes of Illinois Surveys, Vol. 130, Illinois State Archives.

<sup>8</sup>SCCP, I, 60.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

the northern part of the county for an election precinct, and it was granted.<sup>10</sup> The area of the new precinct, to be called the Peoria precinct, was the part of the county north of present-day Lincoln, along the third principal meridian to Peru, Illinois, then south nearly to Beardstown by way of the Illinois River.

Next Hamilton presented a petition of several inhabitants of the Peoria settlement that John Philips be nominated a justice of the peace, and that petition was granted.<sup>11</sup> On June 7, 1824, he again brought before the Court a petition from the Peoria area for a road to Fort Clark (Peoria). A committee was appointed to view and mark said road.<sup>12</sup> Hamilton definitely took an active interest in the welfare and progress of the people of central Illinois.

In the August, 1824 election of representatives to the Illinois General Assembly, Hamilton was elected by a slim plurality:<sup>13</sup>

William S. Hamilton	406
Jonathan H. Pugh	391
Bowling Green	47
David Davis	1
William Smith	1
Total	846

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 65

<sup>13</sup>Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Statistical Series, I, Illinois Election Returns 1818-1848, ed. Theodore Calvin Pease (Danville: Illinois Printing Co., 1923), XVIII, 210.

In the months preceding the election, a bitter struggle had developed over the location of the permanent seat of justice of Sangamon County. Hamilton was a central figure in the controversy over which of three sites should be designated. He was the advocate of a "paper town" called Centerville, located on the Sangamon River where the pumping station of the water works was later located. The people of Springfield were obviously supporting their tract and chose Jonathan H. Pugh to further their interests. Sangamo Town, a picturesque colony about seven miles northwest of Springfield, overlooking the Sangamon River, was the third possibility. After a canvass was made to determine the sentiment of the people of the county, Hamilton dropped the Centerville proposal and was thereupon solicited by the people of Sangamo Town to represent their cause.<sup>14</sup>

When the votes were tallied, Hamilton had won a narrow victory over Pugh and several other opponents. It appeared certain that the Fourth General Assembly at Vandalia would designate Sangamo the permanent county seat. Hamilton, now a legislator, resigned as treasurer of Sangamon County in September and attempted to arrange his personal affairs at Springfield in preparation for an indeterminate absence. At the same time, Pugh was also arranging to go to Vandalia for a last-ditch effort on behalf of Springfield's seemingly

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<sup>14</sup>Paul M. Angle, Here I Have Lived (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1935), pp. 13-16; Joseph Wallace, Past and Present at the City of Springfield and Sangamon County, Illinois (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1904), p. 7.



lost cause for which a considerable sum of lobbying money had been raised.<sup>15</sup>

Jonathan H. Pugh is described as a man of tact and talent, and he must have been at his best in Vandalia. Hamilton failed to secure passage of a bill to locate the seat at Sangamo, and a special commission was set up to view the sites in question and make a final decision. The commissioners - James Mason, Rowland P. Allen, Charles Gear and John R. Sloo - traveled to Sangamon County in March, 1825, following the adjournment of the regular session of the Assembly on January 18, 1825.<sup>16</sup>

The people of Sangamo remained confident that their attractive site would, without a doubt, be the choice of the commissioners. The season of the year and the cunning of several Springfield citizens, however, combined to dash their hopes. After examining the town of Springfield and failing to be favorably impressed, the commissioners proceeded to Sangamo under the guidance of Andrew Elliott, one of the earliest settlers in the Springfield area. He led the party painfully over the most unsatisfactory trail to the river site, through thickets and across streams, sloughs and marshes all swollen by the spring thaws. The commissioners were struck by the natural beauty of Sangamo

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

Town, but disappointed by its seeming inaccessibility.<sup>17</sup>

When the commissioners suggested that they return to Springfield by another route, the ingenuity of Elliott insured that the trail back was little if any better than the way out. Predictably, the commission concluded that Springfield, by default, would be their choice, and on March 18, 1825, so reported to the County Commissioners Court. Elijah Iles and Pascal P. Enos deeded a 35-acre tract to the county. Oddly enough, the Court appointed William S. Hamilton to make a plot of the site, but, disgusted with the final decision of the commissioners, he refused.<sup>18</sup>

Hamilton had sustained another defeat shortly before the General Assembly adjourned. On January 15, 1825, Morris Birkbeck, a personal friend of Governor Coles, resigned as Secretary of State. On the same day, Governor Coles nominated Hamilton for the position; the Senate refused confirmation by a thirteen to five vote.<sup>19</sup> Shortly thereafter, Coles made Hamilton his personal aide-de-camp with the rank of colonel.<sup>20</sup> One suspects that Governor Coles' action may have been motivated in part by a desire

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Journal of the Senate of the Fourth General Assembly of the State of Illinois at their First Session (Vandalia: Robert Blackwell & Co., 1824), p. 266.

<sup>20</sup>Governor Edward Coles, Edwardsville, Illinois, 28 April, 1825, letter to General Lafayette, Chicago Historical Society Library (uncatalogued).

to assuage Hamilton's disappointment.

Serving in the capacity of aide, Hamilton met one of the state's most distinguished visitors, General Lafayette. Governor Coles had become a personal friend of the General while on a diplomatic mission to Europe in 1815, when President Madison had delegated Coles, his private secretary for six years, to clear up a misunderstanding with Russia.<sup>21</sup> It is significant of their mutual regard that Coles, when he heard of Lafayette's visit to the United States, extended him an invitation to visit Illinois.

Lafayette and Alexander Hamilton had been very close during the American Revolution, when each played a significant role in the success of the infant nation. During the "Reign of Terror" in the French Revolution, when Lafayette sought a refuge for his young son, he chose the Hamilton home in New York City.<sup>22</sup> Although the stay of George Washington Lafayette in New York preceded the birth of William S. Hamilton, it seems fitting that a son of Alexander Hamilton should have been chosen to greet General Lafayette in the West.

Hamilton was appointed chairman of a committee of the House of Representatives of the Fourth General Assembly to

<sup>21</sup>Mary Burtschi, Vandalia: Wilderness Capital of Lincoln's Land (Decatur, Illinois: Huston-Patterson Corporation, 1963), pp. 18-19.

<sup>22</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, Alexander Hamilton's Pioneer Son, The Life and Times of Colonel William Stephen Hamilton: 1797-1850 (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: The Aurand Press, 1930), p. 46.

draw up a formal invitation to Lafayette. He read the address to the House on November 27, 1824, before it was sent on to Lafayette, who replied that he would be honored to be a guest of the state and of his friend, the governor.

Lafayette and his party arrived in Saint Louis on April 29, 1825. Both Coles and Hamilton were present and took part in the ceremonies planned by Governor Clark of Missouri. From Saint Louis they descended the Mississippi River to Kaskaskia where, without adequate notice, the Illinois reception was held. Coles had hoped that Lafayette would go overland in Illinois to Shawneetown, but he refused. Coles and the Illinois committee then accompanied Lafayette's party by boat to Nashville, Tennessee, to visit General Jackson. All returned by the Ohio River to Shawneetown, where the Illinois committee took final leave of their illustrious guest on May 8, 1825.<sup>23</sup> It is believed that Hamilton remained with the party to this point, but the writer has not been able to verify the fact.<sup>24</sup>

Later in the same month, May of 1825, Hamilton completed preparations for an unusual expedition to Green Bay,

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<sup>23</sup>A. Levasseur, Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825 (Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1829), II, 122-158; Missouri Intelligencer, 21 May 1825.

<sup>24</sup>In Alexander Davidson and Bernard Stuve, History of Illinois from 1673 to 1873 (Springfield: Illinois Journal Company, 1874), on page 333 is a statement that the party reached Shawneetown on May 14, 1825. If this is correct, Hamilton could not have been present as he was a party in a land transaction in Springfield on May 13, 1825.

Wisconsin. At this time the military garrison at Fort Howard was sorely in need of beef. Hamilton, who had secured a government contract to supply the fort with beef on the hoof, hired several men to drive a herd he had collected to Green Bay. He traveled to Rock Island on business as the herdsman left Springfield with the cattle. As the expedition crossed the Mackinaw River at Dillon's settlement, midway between Tremont and Delavan, Illinois, one of the hands was drowned. Hamilton, returning from Rock Island, and finding that the remaining men were hesitant to proceed, decided to accompany the party the rest of the way. He stated that there were four men and about 700 cattle<sup>25</sup> for which he had paid about ten dollars a head. Continuing northeastward, the party crossed the Illinois River above the mouth of the Fox River (Ottawa, Illinois). Upon arrival at Fort Dearborn, the present site of Chicago, Hamilton found Forsyth, the Indian agent, in charge.<sup>26</sup>

As they crossed the Chicago River at this point, one of the men of the garrison contrived to drown one of the animals so they would have some fresh meat. At Milwaukee the party found one man, Solomon Juneau, who was happy to share their companionship and provisions. They followed

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<sup>25</sup>200 cattle, according to Frank E. Stevens, The Black Hawk War (Chicago: Frank E. Stevens, 1903), p. 292.

<sup>26</sup>William R. Smith, History of Wisconsin (Madison: Beriah Brown, 1854), Part II, Documentary III, 339-342.

Lake Michigan to Manitowoc, then went overland to Fort Howard, where they arrived on the 27th or 28th of June, well before the contracted date of July 4. The only animal lost was the one purposely drowned at Fort Dearborn. It seems an incredible record for a journey over four hundred miles of Indian-infested wilderness. Hamilton remained at the fort for about a week before returning to Springfield.<sup>27</sup>

Between the regular session of the Fourth General Assembly, which adjourned on January 18, 1825, and the special session, which convened on January 2, 1826, Hamilton had obviously been very active. Of particular interest in his legislative period are his connection with the Illinois and Michigan Canal and his effort on behalf of taxation for the support of roads.

Many persons, including the early French explorers, had envisioned a canal between Lake Michigan and navigable rivers in northern Illinois. In fact, some dreamed of a continuous waterway from the East to the mouth of Mississippi at New Orleans. When Illinois became a state in 1818, plans were being formulated for a canal from Lake Michigan to a point where the Illinois River was consistently deep enough for water traffic at LaSalle, Illinois. An undertaking which at first seemed minor became involved in land grant, financial, labor, and other problems. On January 17, 1825, the General Assembly passed an incorporation act which made

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

the canal project a private venture. William S. Hamilton was one of the incorporators, along with Governor Coles, Shadrach Bond, Justus Post (one of the canal surveyors), Erasmus Brown, Joseph Duncan and John Warnock. The firm was practically inactive, and, on the recommendation of Governor Coles, the act was repealed by the special session on January 20, 1826, so the canal was once again public business. In later years, under state direction and control, the Illinois and Michigan Canal was finally finished and opened to traffic in 1848.<sup>28</sup>

During the regular session of 1824-25, Hamilton sponsored a bill to require a property tax to be used for the construction and repair of roads, and it was passed. Governor Thomas Ford, in A History of Illinois, said the measure ". . .worked remarkably well. . ." <sup>29</sup> The people must have differed with Governor Ford, because the act was repealed by the next General Assembly. It appears that the people preferred to work their five days a year on the roads (as the old law required) rather than to pay the tax.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>James William Putnam, The Illinois and Michigan Canal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1918), Chicago Historical Society Collection, X, 1-16; John H. Krenkel, Illinois Internal Improvements 1818-1848 (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1958), pp. 26-46.

<sup>29</sup>Thomas Ford, A History of Illinois, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Co., 1945), I, 70-71.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

Hamilton himself was a considerable landowner. He owned tracts in various parts of the state, including impressive holdings in downtown Springfield. On March 24, 1827, he paid \$500 for the land upon which the Governor and the St. Nicholas Hotels now stand.<sup>31</sup> He bought land facing Washington Street between Third and Fourth Avenues where the Revere House was later built.<sup>32</sup> He paid \$25 to John and Sarah Hooper on September 16, 1826, for a lot on Sixth Avenue one block north of the County Square; this property faced the Opera House for many years.<sup>33</sup>

It appears that Hamilton speculated on a small scale in Springfield as he bought and sold parcels of land freely. The records show that he realized a financial gain more often than not. He sold the last of his Sangamon County land in 1832 after he became a resident of present-day Wisconsin.<sup>34</sup>

#### Involvement in early Peoria County affairs

Hamilton had long been associated with and interested in the affairs of the people in the vicinity of Fort Clark. In 1823, as deputy surveyor of public lands in Sangamon

<sup>31</sup>Deed Record B, Recorder's Office, Sangamon County, Springfield, Illinois, pp. 280-281.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>34</sup>Deed Record F, Recorder's Office, Sangamon County, Springfield, Illinois, pp. 480-481.



County, of which the Peoria area was a part, he surveyed the French claims along the Illinois River.<sup>35</sup> The claims, however, were never accepted.<sup>36</sup>

In the Sangamon County Commissioners Court, session of 1824, Hamilton introduced petitions on behalf of the settlers of the Peoria area for a road and for a separate voting precinct.<sup>37</sup> In December of 1824, while in the state House of Representatives, Hamilton initiated the movement to establish a new County of Peoria. His bill became law on January 13, 1825.<sup>38</sup>

In November, 1825, Hamilton agreed to serve as counsel for the defense in the first murder trial in Peoria County history. On October 2, 1825, during a drunken brawl, Nomaque, an Indian, had stabbed Pierre Laundre (also Laundri or Londri) with a scalping knife. The trial began on November 15 in Joseph Ogee's cabin on the river bank near the present Toledo, Peoria and Western railroad bridge. Judge John York Sawyer was on the bench, and John Dixon was clerk. The trial was a gala event, and a capacity crowd pressed into the log cabin to witness it. Three days later

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<sup>35</sup>Peoria Journal-Transcript, 2 April 1933, Sec. 4, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup>Hull, Plaintiff in Error v. Papin, U. S. (24 How.) 132.

<sup>37</sup>SCCP, I, 64-65.

<sup>38</sup>Journal of the House of Representatives of the Fourth General Assembly of the State of Illinois at Their First Session (Vandalia: Robert Blackwell & Co., 1824).

Nomaque was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. Hamilton asked for a new trial but was denied by Judge Sawyer. Hamilton then asked and was granted leave to file a bill of exceptions to the opinion of the Court.<sup>39</sup>

Nomaque was scheduled to be hanged in January, but the case was appealed to the Supreme Court of Illinois, the first appeal to the high court from Peoria County.<sup>40</sup> The Supreme Court reversed the decision of the Circuit Court, and ordered the Indian retried. The litigation continued until May 15, 1828, when the case was stricken from the records. Nomaque, who had been allowed to roam at large and at will during the proceedings, was reported killed in the Battle of Stillman's Run in the Black Hawk War in 1832.<sup>41</sup>

In September of 1825, the Commissioners Court of Peoria ordered that a surveyor be employed to lay out the city of Peoria. Hamilton was hired, and he reported to the Court in July of 1826 that he had platted the city according to the Court's specifications. On July 12, 1826, the treasurer was ordered to pay Hamilton \$58.75 for his work.<sup>42</sup>

In December of 1826, attempting to secure title to the land on which the county seat is located, the Commissioners

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<sup>39</sup>Bill Moon, "The Story of Nom-a-que," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, V (July 1912), 246-255.

<sup>40</sup>Nomaque, an Indian v. the People, I Ill. 150.

<sup>41</sup>Bill Moon, loc. cit.

<sup>42</sup>Peoria Journal-Transcript, op. cit.

Court asked Hamilton to represent them as counsel. He was to be paid only if successful, but he was not successful. Clear title was obtained by later action in 1834, not by Hamilton.<sup>43</sup>

At one time Hamilton was the owner of a quarter section of land now (1964) owned by Peoria Airport, Inc. He sold the land for fifty dollars to Thomas Crocker of Adams County on July 29, 1833. Probably this transaction was made in Quincy when Hamilton was returning from Saint Louis to the lead mine region after signing the surveying contract for the northern Illinois area.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER III

## MIGRATION TO THE LEAD MINE REGION

After Hamilton finished his survey and plot of Peoria in July, 1826, he returned to Springfield on business concerning the seminary lands.<sup>1</sup> The population of the Springfield area had grown considerably in the past two years, and Sangamon County was now entitled to three members in the House of Representatives. Hamilton, although the incumbent, was not in popular favor, and he finished sixth in a field of twelve. Almost 3200 votes were cast as against 846 in 1824, when the county was geographically larger. Mordecai Mobley, Jonathan H. Pugh, and Job Fletcher were elected.<sup>2</sup> On August 26, 1826, Governor Coles once again softened the blow of defeat by granting Hamilton a commission as captain of a rifle company attached to the 20th Regiment in Sangamon County.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Biographical Series, I, Governor Edward Coles, ed. Clarence Walworth Alvord (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1920), XV, 194-195. (Hereinafter referred to as Governor Edward Coles).

<sup>2</sup>Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Statistical Series, I, Illinois Election Returns 1818-1848, ed. Theodore Calvin Pease (Danville: Illinois Printing Co., 1923), XVIII, 229.

<sup>3</sup>Executive Record, 1818-1832, I, 135, Illinois State Archives.

Hamilton purchased some land in downtown Springfield in September and October,<sup>4</sup> then returned to Peoria to act as attorney to secure title to the countyseat land<sup>5</sup> and to serve as judge of the probate court.<sup>6</sup>

In late winter he was again in Sangamon County where he purchased more land<sup>7</sup> and fitted out a keel boat, the Good Luck, for the Fever River. People had recently been pouring into the Galena lead mine country and apparently there were enough migrants from the Sangamon country to make such an undertaking profitable. An advertisement in the Sangamo Spectator of Wednesday, February 28, 1827, stated:<sup>8</sup>

For the Lead Mines  
the Keel Boat  
Good Luck  
will leave Sangamo town  
for the Lead Mines, as  
soon as the River opens. For freight  
or passage apply to

E. Brigham

Feb. 21, 1827

Then, in the Missouri Republican on April 12, 1827, a note taken from the Sangamo Spectator of April 4th reported:<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Deed Record B, Recorder's Office, Sangamon County, Springfield, Illinois, pp. 258-259.

<sup>5</sup>Peoria Journal-Transcript, 2 April 1933, Sec. 4, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Governor Edward Coles, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>7</sup>Deed Record B, Recorder's Office, Sangamon County, Springfield, Illinois, p. 259.

<sup>8</sup>p. 3, col. 3, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois.

<sup>9</sup>p. 3, col. 1, Missouri State Historical Library, Columbia, Missouri.

The keel boat Good Luck, owned by Col. William S. Hamilton, of this place, and freighted for the Fever River, on Wednesday last [March 28, 1827], struck a snag in descending the Sangamo, about thirty miles below this town; and in attempting to get her off, one of the bottom planks was sprung, and in a short time the water came in so that she turned on one side. The passengers, about 17, in number, made for the shore. . . Maj. M'Kibbin, his son, and a Mr. Kline were drowned . . . Dr. Philleo narrowly escaped . . . The boat has since been raised and repaired, and is on her way to Fever River.

Since Hamilton was a purchaser of land in Springfield on May 24, 1827,<sup>10</sup> it may be concluded that he was not one of the party on the ill-fated Good Luck.

The near-hysteria of the rush to valuable lead strikes in northwestern Illinois had definitely made an impression on Hamilton. Having no pressing obligations, he prepared himself to venture northward.

On July 4, 1827, Hamilton, Daniel M. Parkinson, James D. Brents, and two other men arrived at Galena. They entered this hillside boom town just in time to learn of an Indian uprising and attack on a keel boat from Prairie du Chien. A militia company was immediately formed, and Hamilton was commissioned lieutenant. The volunteers were placed under the command of Abner Fields of Vandalia and proceeded to make their way by keel boat to the site of the disturbance. Red Bird, a Winnebago chief, was the leader of the Indian attack which had aroused alarm throughout the lead mine region. After a short time in hiding, Red Bird agreed to sign a treaty with Governor Cass of the

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<sup>10</sup>Deed Record B, op. cit., p. 261.

This tract of country upon the high lands is gently rolling, but as you approach the larger water courses it becomes more and more hilly, terminating in high calcareous bluffs along their margins. About one third is first rate farming land. Not more than a tenth is covered with timber which grows in detached groups, the balance prairie. Springs of the purest water are to be found in abundance. The interior is healthy; no local causes of fever exist except immediately on the Mississippi. The climate is pleasant & desirable except during the spring months. Snow seldom exceeds 12 inches in depth during winter. All the fruits, vegetables and grain which grow in the same latitude in our Eastern States would succeed equally well here.

The mountains delineated on the map are natural formations rising several hundred feet above the level of the country, some one of which may be seen from almost every part of the mines, serving as natural beacons to direct the traveller in his course.

Amount of Lead manufactured  
 In 1825 229 173  
 " 1826 1,600 830  
 " 1827 6,571 330  
 " 1828 22,577 100  
 (Page 29) " 294 141

Estimated number of inhabitants.  
 In 1825 270  
 " 1826 1,000  
 " 1827 1,000  
 " 1828 1,000

About 50 are females & 20 are free blacks.

The United States have the River Simple in part, and the right to occupy the whole of the country between the Wisconsin and the surveyed lands south of Rock river, and the line marked along sugar creek, to the Mississippi. Commissioners are appointed for the purpose of extinguishing the Indian title to the whole in the name of the sum now for the sale of which the Government has modern provision except a section upon which stands the town of Galena.

The mines are worked by private individuals, who pay the Government for such privilege a tenth of all the lead manufactured. The Superintendent has the power of prescribing such rules as will prevent disputes, and secure the Government against waste and fraud, to which all who engage in mining are bound to subscribe.

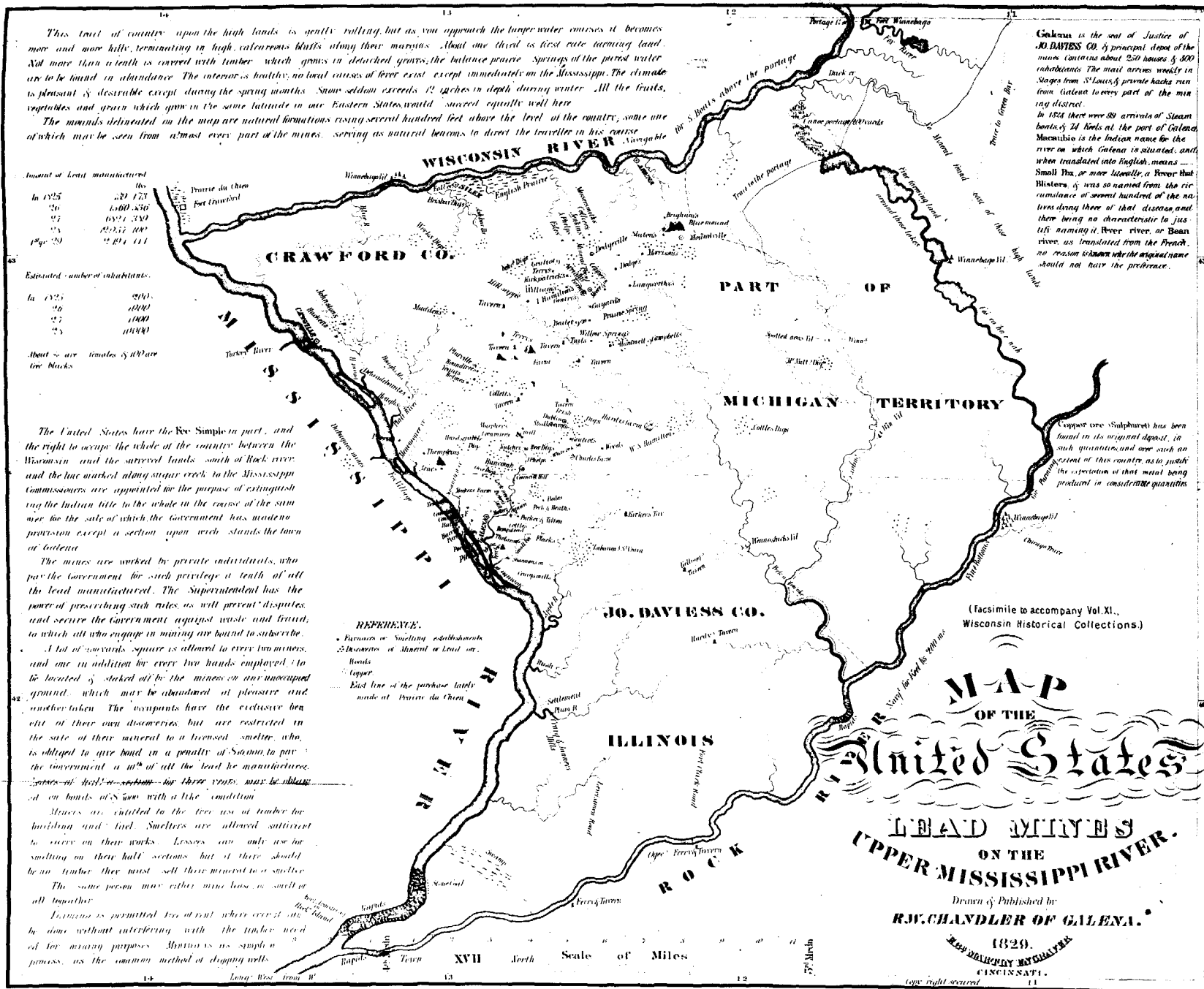
A lot of upwards of square is allowed to every two miners, and one in addition for every two hands employed, to be located & staked off by the miners on any unoccupied ground which may be abandoned at pleasure and another taken. The occupants have the exclusive benefit of their own discoveries but are restricted in the sale of their mineral to a licensed smelter, who is obliged to give bond in a penalty of \$10,000 to pay the Government a 10% of all the lead he manufactures. miners of lead in section for three years may be allowed to work on bonds of \$5,000 with a like condition.

Miners are entitled to the free use of timber for building and fuel. Smelters are allowed sufficient to carry on their works. Lessees can only use for smelting on their half sections but if there should be no timber they must sell their mineral to a smelter.

The same person may either mine lead or smelt or all together.

Leaving is permitted free at night where ever it can be done without interfering with the timber need for mining purposes. Mining is as simple a process, as the common method of digging wells.

REFERENCE.  
 • Furnaces or Smelting establishments.  
 • Discoveries of Mineral or Lead ore.  
 • Roads.  
 • Copper.  
 • East line of the purchase lately made at Prairie du Chein.



Galena is the seat of Justice of JO. DAVIES CO. Its principal depot of the river contains about 250 houses & 800 inhabitants. The mail arrives weekly in stages from St. Louis & private hacks run from Galena to every part of the mining district.

In 1824 there were 80 arrivals of Steam boats of 24 tons at the port of Galena. Miamibus is the Indian name for the river on which Galena is situated, and when translated into English, means Small Fox, or more literally, a River that hislers, & was so named from the circumstance of several hundred of the natives dying there of that disease, and there being no characteristic to justify naming it River, or Bean river, as translated from the French, no reason known why the original name should not have the preference.

Copper ore (Sulphuret) has been found in its original deposit, in such quantities, and over such an extent of this country, as to justify the expectation of that metal being produced in considerable quantities.

(Facsimile to accompany Vol. XI., Wisconsin Historical Collections.)

MAP OF THE  
 United States  
 LEAD MINES  
 ON THE  
 UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER.  
 Drawn & Published by  
 R.W. CHANDLER OF GALENA.

1829.  
 NEW ORLEANS: BY THE  
 CINCINNATI.

type right secured

Michigan Territory (of which present-day Wisconsin was a part) at Portage. Thus ended the Winnebago War or Red Bird Disturbance of 1827; Hamilton had played only a minor part.<sup>11</sup>

After returning to Galena, Hamilton wrote a letter to Governor Ninian Edwards expressing his concern over the disorganized state of the militia in that area.<sup>12</sup> This letter of August 28, 1827, carries the second earliest date of all the Hamilton letters found by the writer.<sup>13</sup>

For the next few months Hamilton searched the lead mine district for a claim site. He succeeded in locating a valuable deposit of lead ore about fifty miles northeast of Galena. The claim he registered with the Superintendent of Mines at Galena totaled nearly one thousand acres in the immediate vicinity of what is now Wiota, Wisconsin. He surveyed his own claim and then set out to establish the necessary structures to make the site a livable place for himself as well as a suitable locale for other settlers.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Daniel M. Parkinson, "Pioneer Life in Wisconsin," Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, ed. L. C. Draper, II (1903 reprint of original issue of 1859), 326-364.

<sup>12</sup>Governor's Correspondence, II, 771, Illinois State Archives.

<sup>13</sup>The earliest letter written by Hamilton was dated July 3, 1826, and sent to the Receiver of Public Monies of Springfield, P. P. Enos. It is in the General Land Office Records of the National Archives.

<sup>14</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, Alexander Hamilton's Pioneer Son, The Life and Times of Colonel William Stephen Hamilton: 1797-1850 (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: The Aurdand Press, 1930), pp. 62-65.



There are several colorful descriptions of Hamilton's crude settlement, known as Hamilton's Diggings.

In March of 1831, the John Kinzies (he was the Indian Agent at Fort Winnebago in Portage and the first white settler at Chicago) were on their way to Illinois from the Fort when they were besieged by a heavy snow storm in the area of Hamilton's Diggings. The party was at the point of despair when they stumbled on a fence indicating a white settlement. "We came upon a group of log cabins, low, shabby, and unpromising, in their appearance, but a most welcome shelter from the pelting storm."<sup>15</sup> Shortly after, they were directed to the most comfortable looking building, the cabin of Hamilton. "A large fire was burning in the clay chimney and the room was of genial warmth, notwithstanding the apertures, many inches in width, beside the doors and windows."<sup>16</sup> After spending a pleasant evening with Hamilton, they pushed on to Kellogg's Grove the next day. Hamilton acted as their guide for the 25-mile journey.<sup>17</sup>

After the Black Hawk War, Charles Fenno Hoffman visited the Diggings in February, 1834. He gives a precise description of one of the mines:<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Mrs. John H. (Juliette) Kinzie, Wau-Bun, The Early Day in the Northwest (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Co., 1856), p. 149.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 142-155.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Charles Fenno Hoffman, A Winter in the West (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), II, 47-49.

. . . we came at last to a spot where a huge mound of earth, with piles of lead-ore scattered here and there on the adjacent ground, showed that a mine was very successfully worked beneath; and giving our horses to an accommodating fellow that stood by, we threw off our overcoats and prepared to descend into it. The orifice on the top of the mound, over which a windlass was placed, was about three feet square, being lined with split logs crossing each other at the angles down to the original surface of the soil, below which point the adhesiveness of the earth seemed to be all that kept the sides of the pit together. It was so dark, however, at this part of the passage down, that other precautions may have escaped me. Taking the rope from above in my hands, and placing my foot in a wooden hook attached to the end of it, I swung myself from the top, and in a few moments descended seventy or eighty feet below the surface. The narrow chamber was of course excessively dark to one just coming from the light of day; and landing upon the edge of a tub immediately beneath the aperture through which I had descended, I lost my foothold and pitched head over heels in the water with which the bottom of the mine was flooded. 'Any one hurt?' cried a voice behind me; and looking round [sic] as I sprang to my feet, I found myself in a long horizontal passage or narrow gallery, with a grim looking miner approaching me with a lantern in one hand and a pickaxe in the other. The next moment the form of my companion darkened the opening above, and then, after landing by my side, he introduced me to the miner, who proceeded to show us about these subterranean premises. They consisted of three or four galleries, generally terminating in a common centre, though one or two short ones, just commenced, appeared to run off at right angles to the rest; and the lead-ore, which glitters like frosted silver in its native bed, appeared to lie in thick horizontal strata along their side. The masses were readily separated by the pickaxes from the neighboring clay, and we remained long enough to see several tubsful hauled up by the conveyance which had admitted us to these dusky regions.

In April of the same year, Theodore Rodolf was seeking a homestead in the area, and Charles Gratiot proposed that he visit Hamilton's Diggings.

. . . I expected to find, if not as fine a Country Seat as occupied by the gentry of England, yet a comfortable & pleasant home. I had not yet had time to divest myself of European notions of elegance & refinement in connection with distinguished names & was therefore considerably disappointed at the appearance of Fort

Hamilton, or, 'Hamilton's settlement' as the residence of the Colonel was called. This residence consisted of a double loghouse, that means a log house or cabin, containing two rooms, & was of the most primitive construction. It was situated about a mile South of the present village of Wiota, in Lafayette County. One room was occupied by Col. Hamilton, & was at once his parlor, bed room & sitting room. The furniture consisted of a bed, a table & a few wooden chairs. In one corner was his library, consisting of a few law Books & a splendid quarto edition of Voltaire's works of 12 volumes, I think, printed at Paris at the time of Louis XVI. The other room was occupied by Mr. Baldwin & his family, the superintendent of his smelting works. The roof was covered with clapboards, shingles being a luxury which at that time had not yet reached the settlements along the Peck-a-tonika; there were no locks on the door, but the latchstring hung out for any visitor or traveller.<sup>19</sup>

During this same early period, Hamilton often ventured to Galena by oxteam, hauling the lead to the smelters and returning to the mines with supplies for the settlement.

S. W. McMaster relates the following anecdote:<sup>20</sup>

William S. Hamilton . . . frequently came into town and usually would find lodging in a room over Little and Wann's Store. He usually came to town in a suit of buckskin, and whenever he wanted to visit the ladies he would forage in the wardrobe of the clerks in the store for whatever he wanted. One night he came in rather late and found George Mitchell, a new clerk, a gentlemanly young Irishman in the bed he usually occupied. George rather resented the intrusion, and said, who are you sir? Hamilton answered, I am Col. William S. Hamilton, a son of Alexander Hamilton, and now who the h\_\_l are you? I am George Mitchell of Baltimore, and I think you are making yourself d\_\_d familiar for a stranger. They passed the night peaceably and were fast friends ever after.

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<sup>19</sup>Theodore Rodolf, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 8 March 1880, letter to Cyrus Woodman, Cambridge, Mass., M, Box 1, Cyrus Woodman MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>20</sup>S. W. McMaster, Sixty Years on the Upper Mississippi, My Life and Experiences (Rock Island, Illinois: 1893), p. 9.

Another amusing incident concerned a wager on the amount of lead ore to be processed at Galena. John Atchison, a lead miner, storekeeper, and steamboatman, made a bet with Hamilton:<sup>21</sup>

A Bett between J. A. & W. S. H. of a suit of Cloaths for Head to foot that there will not be 6,000,000 of Lead at Fever River Lead mines.

J. A. affirmative

The market had recently been flooded with ore, and the passage of the Tariff of Abominations of 1829 contributed to cast some gloom on the mining enterprises of the area. The record does not show if Hamilton bought the "Cloaths" for Atchison, but, despite existing conditions, lead production in 1829 and 1830 far exceeded the amount of the wager.<sup>22</sup>

Hamilton's mining operation at the time seemed to contribute considerably to the lead production statistics for the district. A serious burden which he hoped to avoid, however, was the use of cumbersome ox-drawn carts to haul the lead to Galena. The terrain was rough, and the fifty-mile trip must have been toilsome. Seeking a more suitable route, Hamilton planned to take advantage of the nearness of the Pecatonica River. His mines were approximately three miles north of the Pecatonica and four miles west of the East Pecatonica. The confluence of these two rivers was

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<sup>21</sup>William F. Peterson, Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi, The Way to Iowa (Iowa City, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1937), p. 208.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 207-208.

located about six miles southeast of the Diggings, in section one of Wayne Township, Lafayette County, Wisconsin. Near this point Hamilton desired to establish another settlement for his own shipping company. He surveyed the land, and several cabins were built on the site.<sup>23</sup> From this point he could ship lead by flat boats down the main branch of the Pecatonica to the Rock River and on to Saint Louis by way of the Mississippi. He did, in fact, ship lead by this all-river course. Moses M. Strong, in History of the Territory of Wisconsin, 1836-1848, states:<sup>24</sup>

On the 24th of June, 1830, John Dixon, the founder of the town of Dixon, Ill., wrote to the editor of the Miner's Journal at Galena, 'The first flat boat built on the Pickatolica passed here this day, bound to St. Louis, with one thousand pigs of lead (70,000 lbs.) for Col. William S. Hamilton.

Shipping on the Pecatonica was later abandoned as was the settlement at the fork of the river. Hamilton had chosen the name Wiota for the second village. According to L. B. Neighbour in the "Some-Time Back" series in the Dixon Evening Telegraph, Wiota is an Indian word meaning the fork of a river.<sup>25</sup> After Wiota was deserted, Hamilton changed the name of Hamilton's Diggings to Wiota.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>24</sup>Moses M. Strong, History of the Territory of Wisconsin, 1836-1848 (Madison, Wisconsin: Democrat Printing Co., 1885), p. 596.

<sup>25</sup>Dixon (Illinois) Evening Telegraph, 14-17 March, 1932.

<sup>26</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, op. cit., p. 187.

Another note concerning lead shipments on the Pecatonica comes from an extract of a letter written by John K. Brewster to the editor of the Alert, published in Orangeville, Illinois. Brewster says that the

. . .first attempt to navigate the Pecatonica with a steamboat was in 1836. Col. Hamilton was mining and smelting at H. Diggins and had on hand a considerable quantity of Lead which he sold to Capt. H. H. Gear of Galena, delivered at the fork of the Pecatonica. The Harris brothers built in Cinn. a light draft boat especially for the Rock and Pecatonica Rivers named the 'Frontier.'<sup>27</sup>

James Turnbull, Gear's agent, was to receive the lead at the fork and then ship it to Saint Louis. The "Frontier", however, got no farther than the rapids on the Rock River (near Byron, Illinois), and the lead had to be hauled overland to Galena. Subsequently, some light-draft stern wheelers did ascend the Rock River as far as the mouth of the Pecatonica, but they never did represent a highly profitable venture.<sup>28</sup>

Hamilton's Diggings was never a thriving community, but the activity during the height of the lead mining did establish the foundations upon which the present village of Wiota, Wisconsin was built. Hamilton, rarely passing up any endeavor which might result in capital gain, established a store and a smelting furnace, and he was

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<sup>27</sup>James Turnbull, Winslow, Illinois, October 1887, letter to Cyrus Woodman, Cambridge, Mass., M, Box 1, Cyrus Woodman MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin (extract of a letter written by John K. Brewster to the editor of the Alert, Orangeville, Illinois).

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

instrumental in getting a school and a post office for the tiny colony.<sup>29</sup> His work seems largely responsible for the lasting hamlet, which, though small today, perpetuates the memories of a bygone era.

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<sup>29</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, op. cit., pp. 67, 72, 111.

## CHAPTER IV

## PARTICIPATION IN THE BLACK HAWK WAR

In the spring of 1832, Hamilton's Diggings, as well as the entire lead mining district, was thrown into panic by warnings of renewed Indian aggression. The Sauk (Sac) and Fox Indians, led by an able warrior, Black Hawk, were becoming very discontented at being pushed across the Mississippi River to the west in the face of advancing white settlers. The Rock River valley had long been their stronghold, and some of them were now reluctant to vacate it for a less desirable area. So it was that Black Hawk rallied his braves to keep the white man out of the land which, by treaty, the Indians were privileged to occupy until it should be sold by the United State government.<sup>1</sup>

Indian depredations against the settlers had actually begun in 1829, and the situation had been seething until Black Hawk recrossed the Mississippi River and moved back into the Illinois country in April, 1832.<sup>2</sup> Governor Reynolds had been closely following the course of events,

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<sup>1</sup>Theodore Calvin Pease, The Story of Illinois (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>Frank E. Stevens, The Black Hawk War (Chicago: Frank E. Stevens, 1903), pp. 92-111.



and on April 16 he issued a call for the militia.<sup>3</sup>

William S. Hamilton was an early entrant in the conflict, for on May 2, before any hostile action had taken place, he arrived at Dixon's Ferry, where his friend, John Dixon, had succeeded Joseph Ogee in the Ferrying operation.<sup>4</sup>

Hamilton was commissioned a captain, served until August 20, 1832, and was listed as a member of the Iowa County Regiment of the Michigan Volunteers, even though the mustering in took place in Illinois.<sup>5</sup>

Hamilton's role in the Black Hawk War was relatively minor but nevertheless of some significance. Many of the campaigns were plagued by series of blunders, and Hamilton himself was involved in several tactical errors. His services appear to have included both aid in the procurement and direction of Indian allies and spying duties. His scouting missions seem to have been more productive than his activities with the Indians.

After seeing that a fort was built<sup>6</sup> for the protection of the people at the mining settlement and establishing some

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>5</sup>The small fort and stockade were probably constructed in late April of 1832. The fort site was about one mile south of Wiota, near the line which separates section 19 from section 24 in Lafayette County, Wisconsin.

<sup>6</sup>"Dodge's Volunteers in the Black Hawk War," Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, ed. L. C. Draper, V, (1907 reprint of the original issue of 1868), p. 285.

military organization for the garrison, Hamilton reported to General Atkinson's headquarters at Dixon's Ferry.<sup>7</sup> Atkinson had been in command of Jefferson Barracks, Saint Louis, and, when the Indians' scheme became apparent, he was placed in charge of the forces to rid northwestern Illinois of the menace.<sup>8</sup>

General Atkinson quickly took 220 men on two steamboats to the rapids of the Des Moines, only to learn that Black Hawk and his war party had, on April 6 (four days earlier), crossed to the east bank of the Mississippi River. Black Hawk then advanced to the village of the Prophet (Prophetstown, Illinois), where he remained until the end of the month. During his stay in the village, efforts were made to dissuade Black Hawk from his undertaking, but all failed.<sup>9</sup>

The Indians moved on up the Rock River late in April without violence. In fact, they camped near Dixon's Ferry, and Black Hawk, the Prophet, and another warrior ate dinner with the Dixon Family. At this point, the military leaders gave orders to pursue rather than to try to head off the Indians. Governor Reynolds himself was in the field at Beardstown; he was rushing 2000 militiamen to Dixon when he received a dispatch on May 6 indicating that Black

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<sup>7</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, Alexander Hamilton's Pioneer Son, The Life and Times of Colonel William Stephen Hamilton: 1797-1850 (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: The Aurand Press, 1930), pp. 91-95.

<sup>8</sup>Frank E. Stevens, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 110-115.

Hawk was descending the Rock River. Believing that volunteers would be needed at the mouth of the river, Reynolds hurried the troops to Fort Armstrong (Rock Island). The dispatch proved untrue and significantly delayed the arrival of his men at Dixon's Ferry. The early confusion seemed to set the stage for the entire conflict.<sup>10</sup>

On May 14, Major Isaiah Stillman and 200 men encamped after a 30-mile march from Dixon on the Rock River. Three Indians appeared, carrying a flag of truce. When several of Stillman's command mounted their horses to inspect the position of five other Indians nearby, the five braves turned their ponies and fled; they were immediately fired upon. The camp was pitched into complete disorder, and Black Hawk took advantage of the moment to score the now famous victory in the Battle of Stillman's Run (Stillman Valley, Illinois). Although there were few casualties, the undisciplined volunteers broke ranks and dragged themselves, thoroughly exhausted, into headquarters at Dixon several hours later.<sup>11</sup>

Governor Reynolds and General Atkinson were stunned by the results of the first encounter, and the governor immediately put out a call for more volunteers. The romance of military life quickly ebbed, and many recruits dispersed to their homes.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 116-119, 130.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 131-139.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

Black Hawk, although encouraged by the unexpected victory, knew that he could not chance an all-out assault against the large force being amassed by Reynolds. He hurriedly left his exposed position in the central Rock River valley, set decoys, and made his way to the safer confines of the swamps and marshes of the Rock River headwaters. From a position near Lake Koshkonong, Black Hawk "began immediately despatching his raiding parties down into Northern Illinois to harass the more exposed settlements with all the atrocities of border warfare."<sup>13</sup> He continued these tactics until late in June.<sup>14</sup>

By this time, despite the state of terror in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, it was evident that Black Hawk was slowly pulling back to his hiding place and would soon have to effect an escape or meet the growing volunteer army head on. Early in July he began moving westward to the Mississippi. After several skirmishes with the enemy, he reached the river and was preparing to cross when Atkinson's troops finally overtook the starving band and routed them on August 2, 1832. This final engagement took place where Bad Axe Creek empties into the Mississippi River.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Randall Parrish, Historic Illinois, The Romance of the Earlier Days (4th ed.; Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1914), p. 262.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 261-265.

<sup>15</sup>Frank E. Stevens, op. cit., pp. 223-224.

Hamilton's services began just before the Battle of Stillman's Run. He had been sent out to try to locate the position of the enemy, when, on May 15, he came upon a party of nineteen Indians, mostly women and children. Not knowing that the war had actually begun, he held them for questioning, but on the second day they escaped.<sup>16</sup> After Stillman's humiliating defeat, on May 18, 1832, Hamilton was dispatched to the site of the disaster with a small party of spies to find Black Hawk's trail. On May 21, Atkinson's forces met Hamilton at noon about six miles below the Kishwaukee River, and Hamilton reported that the Indians had passed up the Kishwaukee.<sup>17</sup>

On May 26, General Atkinson sent Hamilton to Prairie du Chien to recruit and take command of any Indian allies which could be secured in that quarter.<sup>18</sup> On June 13, 1832, Hamilton arrived at Buffalo Grove (about one mile west of Polo, Illinois) with the Indians and wrote to his commanding officer:

Gen. Henry Atkinson

sir

pursuant to your order  
I proceeded to Prairie du Chiens and have brought with

<sup>16</sup>Galenian, 30 May 1832, Chicago Historical Society Library.

<sup>17</sup>Lincoln Day by Day, A Chronology, 1809-1865, ed. William E. Baringer (Washington: Lincoln Sesquicentennial Commission, 1960), I, 21-22.

<sup>18</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, op. cit., p. 105.

me 170 Indians composed of Souixs-Menominees and some few Winnebagoes who are intermarried with the Souix and Menominees - they are now generally armed and I think may be relied upon to annoy the enemy - by instruction from Col [Zachary] Taylor I shall proceed to some position east of my place where I can watch the enemy and cut off some of the small parties who are committing depredations on our settlements. From information received this day from the portage of Wisconsin it would seem that Sacks are advancing still higher up Rock River. To prevent them from getting down Wisconsin River I shall advise and make some considerable exertion to have the forces that can be collected in the mining district between the Blue Mound and Fort Winnebago so as to prevent any further advance of the enemy - . . . as fast I procure any information you shall be informed of it. Any movement that the enemy may make I will communicate to you through the command at Dixon ferry-

Yours with much respect

Wm S. Hamilton

June 13, 1832  
Buffalo Grove, Joe Daviess ct.<sup>19</sup>

Hamilton's early prediction of the escape route of Black Hawk (there were others who believed as he did)<sup>20</sup> seemed to go unheeded, and the practice of pursuing the enemy instead of trying to intercept him continued. Colonel Henry Dodge led a charge against the enemy at Horse Shoe Bend on the East Pecatonica River, one mile northwest of Woodford, Wisconsin, and four miles northeast of Fort Hamilton.<sup>21</sup> Dodge lost three men in the assault, which ended in the death of seventeen Indians who were

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<sup>19</sup>Black Hawk War MSS, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois.

<sup>20</sup>Galenian, 27 June 1832, Chicago Historical Society Library.

<sup>21</sup>Frank E. Stevens, op. cit., p. 182.

attempting to escape after killing a white resident of the area. Hamilton, accompanied by his Indian allies, reached Fort Hamilton just after the Battle of Pecatonica had ended.<sup>22</sup>

On June 24, Hamilton again wrote to General Atkinson and reiterated his concern over the advance of the Indians up the Rock River. He stated that if a large force was not immediately moved into the mining region to head off the Indians, the entire campaign would be lost.<sup>23</sup> Whether Atkinson was impelled by Hamilton's letter or whether he even received it in time, he did leave for the North on June 28 and made preparations for a strong offensive against the forces of Black Hawk.<sup>24</sup>

A large body of men had rendezvoused at Fort Hamilton, and on July 2, they left to join Atkinson's troops moving northward.<sup>25</sup> Hamilton, early in July, with a small group of Indians and white rangers, performed reconnaissance services for the command in the Lake Koshkonong region. They, along with other scouting parties, detected that Black Hawk had abandoned his encampment there and

<sup>22</sup>Galenian, 20 June 1832, Chicago Historical Society Library.

<sup>23</sup>William S. Hamilton, Hamilton's Digging, Iowa Ct., M. T., 24 June 1832, letter to Brig. General Henry Atkinson, Ottawa, Illinois, Black Hawk War MSS, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois.

<sup>24</sup>Lincoln Day by Day, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>25</sup>Frank E. Stevens, op. cit., p. 209.

moved westward.<sup>26</sup>

On July 12, 1832, Hamilton began his final mission in the Black Hawk War. He was entrusted with a letter from General Atkinson, then at Whitewater on the Rock River, to Colonel George Boyd, the Indian Agent for the Menominees, at Green Bay. Boyd had offered the services of the Indians at his agency, and Atkinson was now making application for their aid. There were more than 200 Menominees, and, when they were finally rounded up, Hamilton aided in directing them to the Fort Crawford (Prairie du Chien) area where they were of little service as the war ended very shortly.<sup>27</sup>

Two provocative references to Hamilton during the course of the Black Hawk War provide some insight into his character and his relations with others. Some disagreement seems to have arisen between Colonel Dodge and Hamilton at about the time of the Battle of Pecatonica (June 16, 1832). Some angry words passed between them, and Dodge, handing a pistol to Hamilton, told him to defend himself. Hamilton responded, "My country needs my services now, but as soon as the war is over I will be at your service."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Charles Whittlesey, "Incidents of the Black Hawk War," Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, ed. L. C. Draper, X (reprint of the original issue of 1888 done in 1909), 207.

<sup>27</sup>Frank E. Stevens, op. cit., pp. 234-237.

<sup>28</sup>S. W. McMaster, Sixty Years on the Upper Mississippi, My Life and Experiences (Rock Island, Illinois: 1893), p. 11.



The hostile meeting never occurred.<sup>29</sup> An event which must have had a sequential connection took place in Galena during the following Fourth of July celebration. In the office on the second floor above the Galenian, a number of toasts were offered, among them one by the postmaster, Samuel Smoker: "Col. Hamilton. The conclusion of this war will prove that the good of his country has been his only aim. No bullying can change his purposes."<sup>30</sup> Inferentially, one suspects that the toast alluded to the Dodge-Hamilton episode.

In another connection, Hamilton's services were extolled by a company of women with the alliterative title, "the Ladies of the Lead Mines," and he gracefully acknowledged the honor.

As a mark of their respect, for the valor and patriotism of Col. Wm. S. Hamilton, the Ladies of the Lead Mines have presented him, through the hands of Maj. Coons, a National Flag. Col. H. thus acknowledges the obligation:

Hamilton's Fort, M. T.  
June 23, 1832.

Mr. John Coons.

Sir: - The flattering notice of the Ladies of the Lead Mines, by their presenting me with the National Standard, as an acknowledgment of thanks for the small services rendered to my country, is to me highly gratifying. - As yet I have scarcely been placed in a situation to show myself worthy of so marked attention; but should it be my lot to meet our common enemy, it is

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Galenian, 11 July 1832, Chicago Historical Society Library.

my earnest hope that I may so behave, as to equal the expectations of my country, and prove worthy of their flattering attention. The standard presented by you, in behalf of the "Ladies of the Lead Mines," shall float over my head to remind me of their hopes and respect, and the duty they have called me to perform.

After my thanks, they may here secure my pledge, that my utmost exertion shall be used to relieve, with all possible speed, our unhappy country, and bring the war to such an issue as will insure lasting peace.

With much respect and esteem,  
I remain yours,

Wm. S. Hamilton.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Galenian, 4 July 1832, Chicago Historical Society Library.

## CHAPTER V

## ACTIVITIES IN WISCONSIN AND REMOVAL TO CALIFORNIA

The Indian menace had been removed, but the residents of the lead mine country would not soon forget the short conflict. After William S. Hamilton was discharged from the militia on August 20, 1832, he must have returned to the Diggings to survey the damages and put the mines back in operation. He was then thirty-five years old.

With the warring Indians back across the Mississippi, the government was anxious to have the Rock River region surveyed and officially opened to settlers. As previously noted, Hamilton was contracted to survey a large segment of this area. He went to Springfield early in the winter of 1832, and on New Year's Eve he sold the last of his land there to John Moore.<sup>1</sup> He may have spent the remainder of the winter there, or he may have been in Saint Louis, where he signed the surveying contract on July 19, 1833.

Hamilton began his field work on September 20, 1833, and surveyed until November 10, 1833, when he discharged his men for the winter. The following May he undertook to

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<sup>1</sup>Deed Record F, Recorder's Office, Sangamon County, Springfield, Illinois, pp. 480-481.

finish the job, and did, late in August of 1834.<sup>2</sup> For some reason he failed to turn in his field notes until checked upon in 1839. The long delay by Hamilton and other surveyors held up immigration to the region. Lands were finally ready for parceling out in 1840.<sup>3</sup>

After Hamilton completed the northern survey, his interest seemed to switch from Illinois to Wisconsin (still a part of the Michigan Territory). His visits to Galena became more rare, in favor of the growing settlement at Mineral point, thirty miles from Hamilton's Diggings. Daniel Parkinson, with whom Hamilton had come to the mining region from Sangamon County, had established an inn at Mineral Point, and Hamilton was a frequent customer.<sup>4</sup>

Mineral Point was the metropolis of the area, and the future of Michigan Territory was discussed here after the Black Hawk War. The Territory embraced the present states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. By 1834, the section east of Lake Michigan was pressing for statehood, and those residents in the area other than the peninsula were anxious to prevent a void

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<sup>2</sup>Field Notes of Illinois Surveys, Vols. 366, 367, 368, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

<sup>3</sup>Edward L. Burchard, "Early Trails and Tides of Travel in the Lead Mines and Blackhawk Country," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1925), XVII (January), 595-596.

<sup>4</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, The Pioneer Son of Alexander Hamilton, The Life and Times of Colonel William Stephen Hamilton: 1797-1850 (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: The Aurand Press, 1930), p. 143.

in the processes of government should statehood be granted.<sup>5</sup>

In August of 1835, provision was made for the region outside the limits of the state of Michigan to elect members to a Legislative Council. Hamilton was one of three men elected from Iowa County. The Council was to meet in January of 1836 at Green Bay. The new governor appointed by President Jackson, John S. Horner, moved the time of the meeting up to December, 1835. The change was made so late that several members were not notified in time, and they were late in arriving at Green Bay. Finally on January 1, 1836, a quorum of the members-elect was present. The new governor did not appear at the meetings, and the members severely criticized him for his absence.<sup>6</sup>

Hamilton was chosen president of the Council, the most important work of which involved the application to Congress that a separate territory be established for the land west of Lake Michigan, which was commonly called Wisconsin. Congress passed an act setting up the new Wisconsin Territory on April 20, 1836; it included besides the present limits of the state, Iowa, Minnesota, and parts of the Dakotas. After a history of being "attached" to another governing unit, Wisconsin was now in a position of leadership.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Michigan became a state in January of 1837.

<sup>6</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, op. cit., pp. 151-152.

<sup>7</sup>The Wisconsin area had previously been part of the Northwest, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan Territories.

Hamilton thought that the future state would include land on both sides of the Mississippi River, and he asked that the capital be located at Cassville on the east bank of the river.<sup>8</sup>

The Council adjourned on January 15, 1836, and Hamilton carried an express to President Jackson in Washington attempting to persuade him to appoint someone other than John S. Horner as acting governor of Michigan Territory.<sup>9</sup> His efforts were unsuccessful, but the trip afforded Hamilton the opportunity to visit members of his family.

In the presidential election of 1840, Hamilton was solidly behind the Whig candidate, William Henry Harrison. Hamilton, a strong Whig, hoped to be appointed governor of the Wisconsin Territory if Harrison were elected President. After the hero of Tippecanoe Creek and John Tyler were elected, it appeared only a matter of time before Hamilton would replace Henry Dodge as governor. President Harrison, however, was so ill that he could not conduct the business of the high office, and he died one month after taking the oath as President. Hamilton was discouraged, but he believed that he might still have a chance to become governor if Dodge, who was the Democratic candidate for delegate to Congress from the Wisconsin Territory, should be elected. Hamilton had just been defeated in an attempt to become the

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<sup>8</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, op. cit., pp. 152-157.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

Whig candidate for the same position. Dodge was elected in September of 1841, but President Tyler, a Democrat, appointed another member of his party, James Doty, to succeed Dodge as governor.<sup>10</sup>

Hamilton was elected to the House of Representatives of the Fourth Legislative Assembly of 1842-1843. He spent much of his time and energy opposing the leadership and policies of Governor Doty. One constructive endeavor of the Assembly was to pass a resolution to submit the question of adopting a State government to a vote of the people.<sup>11</sup> Another well-intentioned action of the assembly is reported by Joseph Schafer in "The Yankee and the Teuton in Wisconsin;" he says that in March of 1843 a legislative temperance society was organized with twenty-four of thirty-nine members of the legislative body as signers. Moses M. Strong was chosen president and "much interest was aroused by the adherence of William S. Hamilton, who is reported to have addressed one of the society's meetings." Schafer added a footnote to the article which stated that neither Strong nor Hamilton was reputed to be a total abstainer.<sup>12</sup>

At the Whig convention in July of 1843, Hamilton again was defeated for candidate as delegate to Congress.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 182-185.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>12</sup>Joseph Schafer, "The Yankee and the Teuton in Wisconsin," The Wisconsin Magazine of History, ed. Joseph Schafer, VI (1922-1923), 397.

He thereupon resigned his seat in the House of Representatives and remained out of politics until 1847.<sup>13</sup>

Early in 1847, Iowa County was divided into several new counties; on Hamilton's suggestion, the area which included Hamilton's settlement was named Lafayette County. Later that year, Hamilton was a candidate for the State Constitutional Convention. John O'Connor defeated him in Lafayette County by three votes. Hamilton discovered that several men had voted illegally for his opponent, and he finally persuaded ten of them to testify at the convention. Daniel G. Fenton presented Hamilton's petition contesting O'Connor's seat. A special committee assigned to resolve the controversy reported in favor of O'Connor. Several days later, Hamilton appeared before the entire convention and argued his case with an able and exhaustive performance. The rebuttal was delivered by Hon. Samuel Crawford, and, when the deciding vote was taken, Hamilton lost his plea, sixty-three to two.<sup>14</sup>

In the meantime, Hamilton had been carrying on correspondence with the Hon. John H. Tweedy, Delegate to Congress

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<sup>13</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, op. cit., p. 187.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 188; Moses M. Strong, The History of the Territory of Wisconsin, 1836-1848 (Madison, Wisconsin: Democrat Printing Co., 1885), p. 567; Charles Bracken, Mineral Point, Wisconsin, 4 January 1848, letter to Hon. John Tweedy, Washington, D. C., DT, Box 2, John H. Tweedy, MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.



from the Wisconsin Territory, and these letters represent the largest single collection of Hamilton letters located by the writer.<sup>15</sup> Hamilton's defeat in January of 1848 ended his political activity in what was soon to become (May 29, 1848) the state of Wisconsin.

Hamilton had been kept active with other interests during the territorial period of Wisconsin history. In 1836, he was one of the original stockholders of a bank at Mineral Point. The First Territorial Legislature had approved the incorporation of a bank in Green Bay as well. As a result of the nationwide depression of 1837, both banks failed shortly after beginning operations. The double fiasco tended to create a poor impression of banking in the minds of the people of Wisconsin.<sup>16</sup> Hamilton, however, continued to work for new banking legislation. In 1839, the Territorial Legislature sought to create a State Bank of Wisconsin with five authorized branches. It was to have a capital of \$1,000,000, and half the stock was to be owned by the Territory. Hamilton was the chief sponsor of the movement, which came to nothing because Congress withheld approval.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup>John H. Tweedy MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin. (Even these were unknown to Hamilton's biographer, Sylvan J. Muldoon, who found only two original Hamilton letters).

<sup>16</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, op. cit., p. 174.

<sup>17</sup>Carlyle R. Buley, The Old Northwest, Pioneer Period, 1815-1840 (Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana Historical Society, 1950), II, 311.

In 1836 or 1837, Hamilton erected another smelting furnace at Muscoda or English Prairie on the Wisconsin River. The furnace was the first known structure at this site. Hamilton had visions of taking a large segment of the smelting trade in the north away from Galena. It is easy to see why he believed the project feasible. He could buy low-grade ore cheaply at the northern mines. The distance from the mines to Muscoda was much shorter than the comparative mileage to Galena, and the haul would be all down grade. There was a ready supply of timber for the furnace, and steamboats could tie up within a short distance to take on the bars of pure lead. There seemed to be no major drawbacks. Hamilton placed Charles L. Stephenson in charge of the enterprise and hired Vincent Dzienanowski to operate the furnace. The business did not flourish as Hamilton had hoped it would, and a short time later he sold the operation to Thomas Jefferson Parrish and turned back to Wlota. Muscoda, however, remains an active<sup>18</sup> community today.

Two other sidelines of Hamilton's Wisconsin years deserve mention. In 1837, he became the owner of the Miner's Free Press at Mineral Point. The newspaper was a weekly, and Hamilton appears to have guided its operation

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<sup>18</sup>Joseph Schafer, "William Stephen Hamilton," Radio Address, 16 March 1931 (Madison Public School Series, III), IL, Box 1, Joseph Schafer MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin; Sylvan J. Muldoon, op. cit., pp. 170-173.

from September of 1837 to March of 1838. The venture then failed, and he sold the printing equipment to the Galena Democrat.<sup>19</sup> Hamilton was also a member of the bar in Wisconsin, although he never engaged in practice there as a business as he did in Illinois. " . . .his practice as a lawyer in Wisconsin was entirely of an amateur character, and it is probable that he never consented to accept a retainer or fee . . ." <sup>20</sup>

A final word on Hamilton's life in Wisconsin involves an unusual event in the spring and summer of 1837. Mrs. Alexander Hamilton, at eighty years of age, came west to visit her son in the mining country and was well received in all sections of the area. She traveled with her daughter Eliza and Eliza's husband, Sidney Holly. Most of the trip was by river boat; they came down the Ohio to the Mississippi and then up the Fever to Galena. While on board, Mrs. Hamilton wrote several letters to her youngest son in the East, Philip Hamilton. One, dated May 19, 1837, was written below Pittsburgh. She noted, "Pittsburg is a considerable town on the junction of three rivers, no beauty, but good buildings, gloomy from the use of coal."

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<sup>19</sup>Douglas C. McMurtrie, Early Printing in Wisconsin (Seattle, Washington: Frank McCaffrey, 1931), p. 120; Guide to Wisconsin Newspapers, ed. Donald E. Oehlerts (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1958), p. 108, entry 825.

<sup>20</sup>Report of Proceedings, I, 1878, 1881, 1885, Wisconsin State Bar Association (Madison, Wisconsin: Taylor and Gleason, 1905), p. 168.

Another was written after they left the Ohio River and began battling the current of the Mississippi: " . . .the river is very spacious, but very difficult of navigation, the shores beautiful, and the vessel approaching the shore at the distance of one dozen feet; no warf, the water is so mixed with clay that it is not drinkable without wine. This evening we shall be at St. Louis on the Mississippi."<sup>21</sup>

On the first of June, they arrived at Galena and were probably escorted to Hamilton's Diggings by its founder. Mrs. Hamilton remained there only a short time before she returned to Galena and stayed with the Jean Pierre Bion Gratiot family. Mr. Gratiot had built a "mansion house" in typical French style, and it provided the cultural surroundings more in keeping with Mrs. Hamilton's tastes.<sup>22</sup> Even though elderly, she insisted on traveling throughout the frontier country. About two weeks after arriving in Galena, she boarded the steamboat "Burlington" for the Falls of Saint Anthony.<sup>23</sup> The "Burlington" was a new vessel owned and captained by Joseph Throckmorton. While the steamboat was tied up at the wharf at Prairie du Chien, the English geologist, Featherstonhaugh, came aboard

<sup>21</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, op. cit., pp. 177-178.

<sup>22</sup>Alice L. Snyder, Galena Looking Back (Chicago: 1939), pp. 5-7.

<sup>23</sup>A fifty-foot waterfall on the Mississippi River in the middle of Minneapolis.

to visit Mrs. Hamilton. He said that he had recently slept in her son's hut at English Prairie. She told Featherstonhaugh that

. . . knowing she might not have a long time to see things of this world in, she had determined to avail herself of the great facilities for traveling, and pay a visit to her son; and having an inclination to see all she could, was determined to ascend the Mississippi to the St. Peter's.<sup>24</sup>

At Fort Snelling (Minneapolis), Colonel Campbell used his barouche and a Jersey wagon to transport the party to the falls eight miles away. After viewing the phenomenon, they returned to the fort where the distinguished guest was entertained by a military parade.<sup>25</sup>

Mrs. Hamilton remained in the mining country until September, 1837, when she was accompanied to Saint Louis by her son. On the way they passed through Jacksonville, Illinois, and stayed in the home of William's friend and former colleague in the General Assembly, Joseph Duncan,<sup>26</sup> who was at this time Governor of Illinois. The Hamiltons and the Hollys arrived in Saint Louis early in October and lodged in the City Hotel as they awaited a southbound steamboat.<sup>27</sup> A short time later William bade farewell

<sup>24</sup>Featherstonhaugh, G. W., A Canoe Voyage Up the Minnay Sotor (London: 1847), II, 130-131, in Wisconsin Magazine of History, ed. Joseph Schafer, XX (1936-1937), 450.

<sup>25</sup>Mrs. Adele Gratiot, "Recollections," Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, ed. L. C. Draper, X (1909 reprint of original issue of 1888), 275.

<sup>26</sup>Josephine Craven Chandler, "Dr. Charles Chandler," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1932), XXIV (October), 449.

<sup>27</sup>Missouri Republican, 12 October 1837, p. 2, col. 2.

to his sister and to his aging mother, not knowing that this would be the last time he would see them.

#### California venture and tragic outcome

William Schuyler Hamilton left Wisconsin in 1849 at the age of fifty-one, and like thousands of others journeyed to the newly-discovered gold fields of California. He was abandoning an environment which had been his home for over twenty years, and the motive must have been strong. The attraction of gold with the possibility of amassing a fortune surely was the prime consideration. And yet there may have been other principal reasons.

Hamilton had experienced several disappointments in politics in Wisconsin. He appears to have been held in high esteem at Hamilton's Diggings and the surrounding area, but not on the state-wide level. He suffered repeated failures in business undertakings, and the lead mines were either playing out or becoming filled with water. (He did express the idea of finding enough gold to be able to install steam-driven water pumps to clear the flooded lead mines).<sup>28</sup> By 1848 he must have believed he had exhausted his potentialities in Wisconsin, and, when news of Sutter's Creek reached the area, Hamilton probably was in a receptive mood for any new opportunity. In addition he had no wife

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<sup>28</sup>James Howe, "An Old Controversy", Sacramento Union, 25 June 1900, p. 3, col. 4, California State Library, Sacramento.

or family or any other responsibility to tie him to the lead mining district.

Thus, he spent the winter of 1848-1849 in preparation for the long and arduous journey to California and left his small settlement in the spring of 1849.<sup>29</sup> The exact date of his departure is lost to history. He had two prairie schooners which he had built during the winter and what was described as a "spanking black team"<sup>30</sup> hitched to the first wagon which he himself drove. The second schooner was reportedly handled by a free Negro from Galena, Barney Norris,<sup>31</sup> and probably was pulled by mules; oxen would not have been able to keep pace with the horses. If the accounts of Hamilton's leaving with horses are true, he must have found that they could not stand the torture of the long expedition because he appears to have arrived in California with oxen.<sup>32</sup> The duration of the trip can be estimated by noting recorded trips to the gold fields from southwestern Wisconsin. A. A. Townsend left the area for California on April 16, 1849, with twelve wagons drawn by oxen. He arrived there on September 9, 1849. The next year he

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<sup>29</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, op. cit., p. 196.

<sup>30</sup>Joseph Schafer, "William Stephen Hamilton," Radio Address, 16 March 1931 (Madison Public School Series, III), IL, Box 1, Joseph Schafer MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>31</sup>J. A. Berry, "The Hamiltons," The Freeman (Peoria, Illinois), 17 April 1880.

<sup>32</sup>James Howe, loc. cit.

returned to Wisconsin, fitted out a company of thirty-two men with horses and mules, and was en route from May 23, 1850 to September 8, 1850.<sup>33</sup> From three to five months seemed to be the average time spent in passage.

The site of Hamilton's prospecting operations can be located rather specifically. Reference to several settlements, creeks, and rivers supplies the reliable evidence. His work was concentrated in northwestern California above Sacramento on the Sacramento River, its tributaries, and other small streams. The most precise description states that he settled on the south side of Weaver Creek in the Weaver Basin, in Trinity County. Here he panned for gold and in approximately one year accumulated over \$10,000 in dust. He then established a small store at his claim site and sold miners' supplies as he continued to pan for more gold.<sup>34</sup>

James Howe of Weaverville, Trinity County, California, wrote to the editor of the Sacramento Record-Union, and his comments appeared in the June 25, 1900, issue of that paper. Howe stated that he first met Hamilton at his store on Weaver Creek in July of 1850. He proposed to Hamilton that they combine their efforts to divert the waters of the West Weaver Creek into the main diggings. Hamilton

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<sup>33</sup>Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, ed. L. C. Draper, III. (1904 reprint of original issue of 1857), 61.

<sup>34</sup>James Howe, loc. cit.



said he would aid in the diversion project if another business venture which was pending did not materialize. He told Howe that he had \$13,000 in gold dust, and that he had been offered a share of a wholesale store in Sacramento City and was awaiting a reply to his bid. When Howe returned several days later, Hamilton expressed his regrets and said his proposal had been accepted in Sacramento. He ventured to that city although it was infested with cholera. After only brief residence there, he contracted the disease and died at the age of fifty-three, in August, 1850.<sup>35</sup>

Barney Norris returned to Galena from California and was interviewed by Charles L. Stephenson for Cyrus Woodman in 1877. Woodman wanted to determine the date and incidentals of Hamilton's death so that a stone might be placed to mark his grave. Norris said that he visited Hamilton often during his sickness, and that Hamilton's room was in the second story of Gratiot's and Childs' store on J. Street, Sacramento. Hamilton, sick with what he called mountain fever, told Norris that he regretted coming to California and that "he would rather have been hung in the lead mines than to have died in this miserable hole".<sup>36</sup> He died on a mattress which, in the absence of a bedstead, had been

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Charles L. Stephenson, Galena, Illinois, 26 December 1877, letter to Cyrus Woodman, Cambridge, Mass., M, Box 1, Cyrus Woodman MSS, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

placed on the floor. Norris said that Hamilton died October 7, 1850, and that Jack Barton, a negro also from Galena, had cared for him during his illness. Barton was serving as porter for Gratiot and Childs at that time. Norris completed the narrative of Hamilton's death by saying that his body was nicely prepared for burial. He was cleanly washed and shaved and dressed in a new black suit. His body was placed in a handsome coffin and hauled to the public grave yard in a furniture wagon. Barney Norris could lend no information on the disposition of the effects of Hamilton, the payment of the funeral expenses, or anything about his financial condition.<sup>37</sup> The remains of William Schuyler Hamilton have twice been moved and now rest in Hamilton's Square, a section of the City Cemetery in Sacramento specifically set aside to commemorate the lives of William S. Hamilton and his father, Alexander Hamilton.<sup>38</sup>

Although there is an obvious confusion on the date of William S. Hamilton's death, the accepted date is in October of 1850. In the Sacramento Transcript of October 8, 1850, an obituary notice for Hamilton appeared:

Died. In this city, yesterday, the 7th inst., William S. Hamilton, late of Wisconsin. The funeral will take place this afternoon, at 2 o'clock from the room over the store adjoining the Burnett House, on J. Street.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Sylvan J. Muldoon, op. cit., pp. 214-217.

<sup>39</sup>p. 3, col. 4, California State Library, Sacramento.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

The lives of the children of the great and famous present a varying kaleidoscope of success and failure. Some have seemed to find the burden of their inheritance too heavy; circumstances and personality traits have combined to create an unreachable expectation and at the same time to render its realization difficult, even impossible. This in general seems to be the pattern of the life of William S. Hamilton.

The factual record of the life of the fifth son of the great Alexander Hamilton is traceable mostly in cold and impersonal public documents; there is available very little of warm, personal reminiscence; there are few personal letters, no diary by him or about him. Yet, in spite of the meager documentation, the pattern emerges. The circumstances included: membership in a family whose head was obviously immersed in political and financial affairs involving pressures which preempted his time and attention; the tragic and trying conditions of the father's early death; the stresses of financial stringencies for a widowed mother unprepared to cope with them; the vague and perhaps only implicit, but inescapable sense of the

responsibility of living up to a great name; and the added factor for this son of the duty to avenge his father's cruel end. The personality traits are impossible to pinpoint, but pregnant suggestions emerge as one reviews the vicissitudes of Hamilton's unsettled life: the evident drive for financial success shown by his real estate and business deals; the conflicting estimates of his qualities by his associates; the repeated instances of undertakings auspiciously begun but turning sour.

Over and above the factual record of Hamilton's life and the personality traits that one can only vaguely assess, unanswerable questions remain. Why did he not conform to the pattern of his family, an education followed by a professional or business career among conservative associations in the East? What was the appeal of the frontier for him? Why did he never marry? What was the explanation for his repeated failure to win political preferment? Why were the attitudes of his associates toward him so ambivalent and so contradictory?

The answers may have been lost when others failed to preserve his personal effects after his death in California. A man in the vigor of his early fifties, struck down by a sudden and unexpected fatal illness may have had no time to arrange for a record he did not so soon anticipate he would need. A man whose life had been one of action rather than of intellectual concerns would perforce have only a scanty written history by or about himself. Answers to the

questions today could be only guesses or approximations.

One recognizes that the bald outlines of any ordinary life present a mosaic of minor tragedy, that "the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation".<sup>1</sup> Yet the impression of minor tragedy is accentuated in a life begun in a home of wealth and distinction and ended in a strange country on a note of discouragement and frustration. So, in William Stephen Hamilton or William Schuyler Hamilton, the unreachable expectation and the hopeless realization combine in tragic futility. In the end, the son's life repeated on a minor level the pattern of Greek tragedy exemplified by the fate of his father on a grander scale.

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<sup>1</sup>Walden and other writings of Henry David Thoreau, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1937), p. 7.

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