



THE BURR-HAMILTON DUEL

THE duel-ground at Weehawken has awful historical interest. Its location, now nearly destroyed by the construction of a railroad, was on the New Jersey shore, opposite New York, two and one-half miles above Hoboken, where the rocks rise almost perpendicularly about 150 feet above the Hudson. Under these frowning heights, about twenty feet above the water, on a grassy shelf about six

feet wide and eleven paces long, reached by an almost inaccessible flight of steps—was the duel ground. The old cedar which sheltered the plateau when Hamilton and Burr fought stood until 1870. The sandstone boulder against which Hamilton fell was about the same time removed to the top of the hill, where it was to be seen in 1874.

Fourteen duels were fought at

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Weehawken within fifty years—the first in 1799, the last in 1845, when two men fought whose names are now forgotten. It was a farce, for the seconds had loaded the pistols with cork.

Six of the fourteen were political duels.

Colonel Burr fought the first duel upon this spot, September 2, 1799, with John B. Church, who was a brother-in-law of General Hamilton, and sympathized with him in his dislike of Colonel Burr. It was the first political duel. Shots were exchanged, Church's ball passing through Burr's coat. Then Church made an apology acceptable to Burr's second. The principals shook hands and returned to New York.

The next was also a political duel between Eacker, sympathizer with Colonel Burr, and Price, a friend of General Hamilton. They exchanged, four shots without effect on Sunday, November 22, 1801, when a reconciliation took place, Price remarking that Eacker was "such a damned lath of a fellow that he might shoot all day to no purpose."

Price was also the companion and friend of Philip Hamilton, the oldest son of General Hamilton. The affair between Price and Eacker ended, the latter challenged Philip Hamilton. This duel grew out of the same transaction which gave origin to the one between Price and Eacker. They fought on Monday, November 23, 1801, at three o'clock in the afternoon.

At the command young Hamilton, in obedience to his father's request, reserved his fire, as did Eacker, who had determined to wait for Hamilton's fire. A minute or more elapsed. Both then leveled their pistols. Eacker's ball then entered Hamilton's side. He died the next morning.

De Witt Clinton, friend of Hamilton, and John Swartwout, friend of Burr, fought next. They exchanged five shots, two taking effect and slightly wounding Swartwout, both in the left leg below the knee. Swartwout insisted upon another round, but Clinton declined to fight longer.

"I am sorry I have hurt you so much," said Clinton to Mr. Swartwout, who was sitting upon a stone, bleeding. Then turning to Colonel Smith, his second, he said: "I don't want to hurt him, but I wish I had the principal here. I will meet him when he pleases." He had reference to Burr.

Then Richard Riker and Robert Swartwout met on this ground, November 21, 1803—the cause, a political quarrel—Riker being a firm adherent of Hamilton, and Swartwout a friend of Burr. Riker was severely wounded in the right leg.

All these meetings were but preliminary to the mortal combat, which soon followed between Burr and Hamilton, the two rival political chieftains of New York. For five years their followers had met and fought to settle their differences. The leaders at last met and then parted—

Hamilton to "the land of silence and reconciliation"—and Burr to become a wretched wanderer upon the earth until his death, which occurred at Port Richmond House, Staten Island, September 13, 1836.

At the time of his death General Hamilton was President of the So-



ALEXANDER HAMILTON.

ciety of the Cincinnati, and presided at the annual dinner given by that society on the Fourth of July, seven days before the duel. The hostile meeting, however, had been arranged for some days previous, but the fact was only known to a few friends of both parties. At the last friendly meeting between the then leaders of the political parties of New York the singularity of their conduct was observed by all, known as they were to be implacable political foes.

Burr was silent and gloomy while Hamilton entered with glee into all

the gayety of the convivial party. When requested to sing "The Drum," a favorite military song, he said: "Well, you shall have it," and then complied. This was the only feature of the evening that seemed to engage the attention of Burr. He raised his head and, placing himself in a position of attention, listened and thought:

"While his eyes had all the seeming
Of a demon that was dreaming."

Colonel Burr and Judge Van Ness, his second, arrived at half-past six o'clock in the morning of July 11, 1804, as had been arranged.

They were clearing away the underbrush with their coats off when Gen. Hamilton arrived a few minutes later, accompanied by his second, Judge Nathaniel Pendleton, and his surgeon, Dr. Hoosac. Burr and Hamilton and their seconds exchanged salutations. The principals were placed—Hamilton looking over the river and Burr at the rough and acclivitous rocks under which they stood. Judge Pendleton gave Hamilton his pistol and asked, "Will you have the hair spring set?" "Not this time," was the quiet reply. The word "Present" was given. Both presented and fired in succession—Burr first, his fire taking effect. General Hamilton almost instantly fell, his pistol going off involuntarily.

Judge Pendleton always claimed that Hamilton did not fire at Burr, and Hamilton's dying declaration was that he did not intend to fire at Burr the first round, and subsequent investigations as to the direction the

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ball took confirmed the statements of both Hamilton and Pendleton. Burr was considered a good shot—he had pursued a course of training for the event for weeks. He remarked on the afternoon of the same day, by way of excuse for firing a little below the breast, that had it not been for smoke, or a rising, momentary mist, or something of that nature, which intercepted his vision, he should have lodged the ball exactly in the center of Hamilton's heart. General Hamilton died the next day at two o'clock in the afternoon, in the forty-eighth year of his age.

While in England, in 1808, Burr gave Jeremy Bentham an account of the duel, to whom he said: "I was sure of being able to kill him."

Colonel Burr was indicted for murder by the Grand Jury of Bergen County, New Jersey, in 1804. The Supreme Court quashed the indictment, however, in 1807.

The Society of Cincinnati had charge of the funeral ceremonies of its President-General. The pall was supported by General Matthew Clarkson, Oliver Wolcott, Esq., Richard

Harrison, Esq., Abijah Hammond, Esq., Josiah Ogden Hoffman, Esq., Richard Varick, Esq., William Bayard, Esq., and Judge Lawrence. And thus his wounded body was committed to the grave with every possible testimony of regret and sorrow.

It need hardly be reiterated that these duels were the result of partisan strife. They were the first drops of that blood-shedding which had its natural sequence in the bold phlebotomy of Gettysburg and Chickamauga two generations later. The first was the result of political differences developed into personal animosity and an appeal to arms under the *code duello*; the last was the result of political differences developed into sectional hate and an appeal to the arbitrament of war, which convulsed, before it saved, the Nation. For our civil war was a duel on a tremendous scale between the North and South and on many a pitched field, during which the courage of both was demonstrated—the honor of both vindicated.

HENRY DUDLEY TEETOR.