



**A brief
history of
why
Paterson, NJ
isn't known
as Hamilton.**

A National Manufactory

By Robert L. Cohen



The Hamilton House, Charlestown, Nevis. The current structure was rebuilt from the ruins of the house where Alexander Hamilton was born and lived as a young child.

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It was Alexander Hamilton's vision that created Paterson, N.J. He foresaw harnessing the energy of the Great Falls to power manufacturing in the surrounding area. So how did the place he established become known as Paterson?

Alexander Hamilton

This was just one of Hamilton's many achievements. Not only was he the "founding father" of Paterson, but he was also one of this nation's original "Founding Fathers." He was a man of genius and vision, but also a man of humble beginnings who became a first class achiever.

Born in Nevis in the British West Indies in 1755 out of wedlock to James Hamilton, from minor Scottish nobility, and Rachael Faucette, of French Huguenot and English stock.¹ After divorcing her first husband, Rachael went to St. Croix, then in the Danish West Indies, to be with James who worked for a tobacco firm. James, who had two sons with Rachael, soon after abandoned his family, never seen by Alexander again. Through these difficult times the youngster did receive tutoring and was an avid reader.



Young Hamilton

In 1768, both Alexander and his mother came down with a fever that would kill her, leaving Alexander an orphan.

Both he and his brother, James, Jr., were taken in by a cousin but soon after both his cousin and his cousin's father died. Alexander then went to work for Beekman and Cruger who were export import merchants from New York. He stayed in the home of another merchant, Thomas Stevens. Their son, Edward, became a close friend of Alexander's. Though his formal education up to that time was by tutor, he now became very well-trained in business

subjects, learning to write well and speak fluent French. This on the job training taught him all aspects of international trade.

While on St. Croix he also met and was befriended by Reverend Hugh Knox who gave the young man access to his library and encouraged him to increase his formal education.²

After a devastating hurricane struck St. Croix, the 18-year-old wrote about it. It was so well written Reverend Knox had it published in the widely-read local newspaper. This revealed Hamilton's literary ability and soon after a collection was taken on the island so the young Hamilton could emigrate to the British Colony of New York.

He went there to pursue his studies, first at a boarding school in Elizabeth Town, New Jersey, for a year, then wanted to enter the college of New Jersey (Princeton) with the goal of graduating in very swift order. The College, however, would have none of that, so he continued his higher education at King's College (Columbia) in New York. Revolutionary times were beginning and student Hamilton

quickly became committed to the Patriot cause.

As the shadows of war loomed—and actually touched—the students at Kings College, with the outbreak of



Alexander Hamilton in the Uniform of the New York Artillery by Alonzo Chappel (1828–1887).

By Alonzo Chappel, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4882072>



Surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown by John Trumbull, oil on canvas, 1820. Colonel Hamilton is depicted as the leftmost of the four standing men on the right edge of the painting.

By John Trumbull

http://www.aoc.gov/cc/photo-gallery/pgs_rotunda.cfm

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hostilities, Hamilton joined the army and was commissioned a Captain in an artillery company.³ From this time on Hamilton's career would crescendo both in the Revolutionary War and after.

Hamilton had an exemplary military career including a series of engagements with the British where he "stayed cool under fire"⁴ General Washington would "marvel" at Hamilton's military acumen during the retreat across New Jersey and admired his skill and courage.⁵

Hamilton, though ill, fought at the Battle of Trenton and his artillery company caused many enemy soldiers to surrender.⁶ After a short while General Washington asked Hamilton on January 20, 1777 to join him as an aide-de-camp.⁷ He joined Washington's military "Family" at Morristown with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.⁸ From then on Hamilton remained with Washington as aide-de-camp until a falling out in the later stages of the war. In the final major battle of the War at Yorktown in October of 1781, Hamilton took part in leading his men to capturing a redoubt.⁹

After the war Hamilton took a position in the upper echelons of society thanks to his marriage into the influential

Schuyler family of the landed gentry. He had met Elizabeth Schuyler, a daughter of Philip Schuyler and Catherine Van Rensselaer, while stationed at Morristown during the winter of 1779–1780. They were married on December 14, 1780, at the Schuyler Mansion in Albany, New York.

Hamilton became an attorney and one of the leading exponents of a strong federal government versus keeping the looser Articles of Confederation that preceded the Constitution. He helped organize the Constitutional Convention of 1787, and after the deliberations was a prime mover to get the State of New York to ratify the new stronger agreement.¹⁰ He wrote 51 of the 85 *Federalist Papers* to defend the proposed Constitution.

Hamilton's idea to create a Bank of the United States came to fruition with its establishment in 1792. It created a pool of money that entrepreneurs could use to found and expand their businesses. It set the United States on its path to industrialization and manufacturing.¹¹

Even though Hamilton called New York home, he had a national influence because of his writings and legal work. He lived in upper Manhattan in a home he called "The Grange," named after his paternal ancestral home in Scotland.

He also had influence in New Jersey, having spent considerable time there during the Revolution and probably seeing the Great Falls.

In Washington's first administration as President, Hamilton was appointed Secretary of the Treasury. In 1791 he submitted a "Report on Manufactures" to Congress in which he wanted industrial expansion via protective tariffs. Though it might raise prices for some goods overall it would encourage industrial development in the country. Agriculture had been the main economic engine of America, and its influence caused Congress to hesitate support for Hamilton's plans of industrial expansion. Recalling the potential of the Great Falls, he looked to New Jersey as the site for a new industrial city.

Once he was able to satisfy himself funding for this project was available, he asked the New Jersey legislature for a charter for this industrial site. The Assembly passed a bill on November 22, 1791 incorporating the Society for the Establishment of Useful Manufactures—known as SUM for short. The champions of the bill were Hamilton and Governor William Paterson, whose assistance secured the



Portrait of Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton by Ralph Earl, c. 1787.

By Ralph Earl - The Athenaeum, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=9686960>



Engraving after a drawing of the falls made by Thomas Pownall in the 1750s, first published 1761.
www.wikipedia.com

charter's passage. Hamilton had stressed that the site would be named "Paterson" in recognition of the Governor's signing and helping with the bill.¹²

While there would be issues with funding and Congress withheld support for the project as a national manufactory, the city of Paterson was officially established at Godwin's Tavern on July 4, 1792 with the appointment of William Duer as its first governor. So Paterson was established to be an industrial city at the Great Falls with seven-hundred acres purchased surrounding the falls. Hamilton himself declared "this is the finest site anywhere in the world for a manufactory."¹³

William Paterson

Hamilton may have had the vision for this "manufactory," but it was Governor William Paterson who supplied the critical political will.

William Paterson (1745–1806) was born in Northern Ireland near Belfast and like Hamilton was an immigrant to

the Colonies. He came here with his family at the age of two. First his family settled in Connecticut and then moved to Trenton, N.J. The young Paterson attended the College of New Jersey (Princeton) and after leaving college took up the practice of law. During the Revolution he served in the Congress. From 1776–1783 he was the State's Attorney General and he practiced law from 1783 to 1787. In 1787 he was chosen to attend the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, where he played an important role in championing the interests of smaller states like New Jersey in the make up of the federal government. Called the New Jersey plan,¹⁴ it called for a unicameral legislature with equal representation for all of the states. Later, a compromise was reached where a bicameral legislature was agreed upon with the House of Representatives having members based on population by district and the Senate where each state would have a fixed two members. Paterson signed the new Constitution as a representative from New Jersey.

Later, as Governor of New Jersey he signed legislation approving the incorporation of the SUM as mentioned. He also served as a U.S. Senator and from 1793 to 1806 he was an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.¹⁵



Portrait of William Paterson (1745–1806) when he was a Supreme Court Justice (1793–1806).

.By C. Gregory Stapko (1913–2006),original by James Sharples (1751–1811) - Oyez: William Paterson. Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=6015299>

Society for the Establishment of Useful Manufactures

Hamilton commissioned civil engineer Pierre Charles L'Enfant to design the raceways supplying the water to the watermills that would power the town. L'Enfant had also laid out the new federal capital, Washington D.C. As a private enterprise backed by the state, it provided a blueprint for similar cooperatives through the 19th century.

At first, S.U.M. was a failure. By 1796, poor management of the mills proved unable to generate enough profits to cover the start-up costs. So they shifted focus into real estate development, leasing mill properties to other private enterprises while maintaining control of the dams and raceways that converted the falls into the power they needed. By 1820, the population of Paterson had jumped from around 500 in 1790 to over 5,000. There was a thriving textile mill industry in the 1830s which had shifted into steel mills and even locomotive manufacturing by the time of the Civil War.

Today, Paterson's population density is second only to New York City in the U.S. It counts among its citizens new waves of immigrants, including the second-largest Muslim population in the country. Like most industrial cities in America, Paterson saw a decline with the deindustrialization of the 1960s and 1970s. The processes of reinventing its identity has reached back to its history—from the Great Falls Historic District to the restoration of Hinchliffe Stadium's Negro League glory to the museum at Lambert Castle.

In many ways, Paterson reflects the economic, social, and ethnic changes of the United States as a whole. And it all started with vision of Alexander Hamilton and the signature of William Paterson.



Author's Notes

To get more insights into Hamilton's impact on local history, please see the author's article, "Richard Varick of Hackensack, Patriot, Soldier, Founder" at lambertcastle.com, *Historically Speaking*. For another theory on the naming of Paterson please see Mary Bruno's "An American River, From Paradise to Superfund, Afloat on New Jersey's Passaic," DeWitt Press, Vashon Washington, 2012, p.195

Also see:

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For more information about Paterson's industrial heritage, visit: <http://www.millmile.com/>