

Hamilton's Mom:

Said to be the son of a whore and a Scotsman belies the traditional oral history that Alexander Hamilton was the illegitimate son of an intelligent, educated woman and a rich West Indian married man who whored with her.

Rachel Hamilton's heritage is one of wealth, education and turmoil. Her father, John Faucett, was a prosperous French Huguenot who fled to the British West Indies Island of Nevis, became a physician, owned a sugar plantation with some seven slaves, and grew his fortunes. He previously fathered a child named Anne but records are unclear regarding a common-law, a civil marriage, or a brief encounter with a woman, Anne's mother. Any data about her is absent.

What is clear is that John, a single father with a four-year old daughter in 1718, married Mary Uppingham, a beautiful, discerning young woman, some twenty years younger. Three weeks before the marriage, their first child died at childbirth. Their second child fifteen years later would be Rachel. Five more offspring would follow - none would survive childhood. Rachel witnessed three of her siblings' deaths in one month's time when she was seven. Her childhood was filled with prosperity, sadness and the tension endemic in her parent's miserable marriage.

Mary, unwilling to remain subservient to a domineering man, after twenty-two years in a marriage full of stress and absent of love, wanted to separate. John refused her. But Mary was undeterred.

John knew his legal rights. Under British rule of the era, husband and wife were one in the law, and the one was the husband. The wife (*femme covert*-covered woman), did not exist in the eyes of the law. Mary knew this, too, and she knew more.

She knew the dowry a bride brings to the marriage becomes part of the couple's financial assets. Given the financial status of her marriage and size of her dowry, Rachel's mother correctly calculated she was entitled to a dowry settlement that would allow her to live comfortably on her own with her daughter. It would have amounted to about 1/3rd of their estate. This was rational and reflected what other separations of the common era, commonly provided.

John would not agree. It would be left to the court, a court of male adjudicators. The amount adjudicated was draconian, close to poverty level and required Mary to renounce all claims to her dowry. A self-reliant, resilient Mary accepted and was out of the marriage in 1740. John never again saw or spoke with Rachel.

After they left the Faucett family house on Nevis they moved to the island of St. Kitts where Mary worked as a seamstress and leased out three slaves she owned to support them as she crafted a new life for herself and Rachel. They lived peacefully for five years when, due to the death of John, who willed his estate and property on St. Croix, and a meager inheritance to Rachel, they returned to care for the property and manage Rachel's modest assets. The year was 1745.

On St. Croix, they became acquainted with John Lavien who portrayed himself to be a successful businessman. He showered attention on beautiful, young Rachel, who he assumed was wealthier than she was, and Mary, in like manner, assumed he was wealthier than he was.

With few acceptable work opportunities outside the home, and no legal status in place for independent women, women depended on marriage, or often the oldest profession of prostitution for survival. Thus, Mary strongly encouraged a marriage between Lavien and Rachel to secure her daughter's security. Rachel, sixteen, respected her mother and married Lavien, twelve years her senior in 1745.

Within a year they had a child named Peter and Lavien's demeanor as an abusive husband was revealed as was his true net worth. He was not as he portrayed himself. He had squandered Rachel's inheritance. Rachel found herself in an abusive marriage without finances, similar to what her mother experienced. An intelligent, astute, well-educated young woman, she knew she had options she needed to execute. To ward off poverty, she found earnings through encounters with men of means which she did not hide, and in 1750, Rachel left.

Lavien set out to teach Rachel a lesson to force her to do whatever he wanted her to do. As his property under the law, he pressed charges against Rachel, accusing her of adultery. The male court sentenced her to jail. John had Rachel put into Christiansvaern, a former fort with filthy dungeons where those who committed heinous crimes could be whipped, branded, and shackled with heavy leg irons. No other woman was ever imprisoned there for adultery. After three months in a cramped cell of ten by thirteen feet, believing she had learned her lesson, he had her released. But he miscalculated.

Rachel left him again, her future unknown. Facing unknown poverty, she left her son with his father where he would be better supported than with her. Mary joined Rachel on her move to the island of St. Kitts. It was there Rachel met James Hamilton.

They shared a common law marriage for fifteen years, raising two boys, James born 1755 and Alexander born 1757. Mary left St. Kitts, lost touch with Rachel, but willed her, her three slaves.

James' job required he move to St. Croix. Rachel resisted. Awaiting her there was the court's ruling she was not allowed to marry and that she would be subjected to further punishment if she or her two "illegitimate children" ever returned. But upon learning she would not be arrested, she agreed to move.

Soon after, however, James left Rachel. Some biographers suggest James abandoned his family possibly having learned one of his sons was not his. Others suggest Rachel initiated the separation hypothesizing that she agreed to return to St. Croix where she had family so she would have a support system when she separated from James.

Rachel, once again, displaying her fortitude, took out a loan, opened a grocery store and became an astute businesswoman. Alex eight, James ten, and her three slaves worked for

her. She bought goods on good credit, kept accurate books, and paid her creditors promptly. She purchased many of her supplies from Beckman and Cruger, a nearby firm with whom she had a good business relationship. After about two years, with her business stable, she thought it best Alexander work elsewhere to further increase the family income. He was hired by Beckman and Cruger. The year was 1767.

Life was improving for Rachel and her sons. The following year, Rachel and Alexander became ill with a dangerously high fever that took her life at age thirty-nine.

Upon Rachel's death, Alexander, but not his brother James, was taken in by the rich West Indian Thomas Stevens and raised as his own with the five children he fathered with his wife Ann. The physical resemblance of Alexander and Stevens' son Edward, one year older, was uncanny as were their parallel personalities, common to siblings. An observation documented by numerous, credible historians complies with the accepted, but not acknowledged, custom of illegitimate children frequently masquerading as orphaned relatives.

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