

Alexander Hamilton

New York City and County

Party Lieutenant

Born: c. 1755, Nevis, British West Indies

one of your contemporaries has a life story quite like yours. You are Alexander Hamilton, born around 1755 on the island of Nevis in the British West Indies. You grew up on St. Croix, raised by your parents, James Hamilton, a descendant of Scottish and English nobility but himself a good-for-nothing drifter, and Rachel Faucette Lavien, a French runaway from an unhappy marriage. When you were ten, your drifter father drifted off, and when you were thirteen, your mother died of fever. Strangers looked after you, employed you, and then sponsored your education in America. You attended King's College (later renamed Columbia) in New York City (1774). With the approach of war, and while still a youth, you began writing political tracts denouncing British policy and urging your adopted country to strike for independence; and before finishing your studies and taking a degree, you enlisted in the New York militia with a commission of captain from the Provincial Congress. "Little Mars" the soldiers called you, because of your slight frame and penchant for combat.

You fought in the early campaigns in New York and its neighboring states, all of them losing affairs that saw the army chased from Brooklyn to Manhattan to New Jersey to Pennsylvania. But you also experienced triumph when General Washington surprised the Hessians at Trenton and the British at Princeton (Christmas 1776–January 1777). You served as an artillery commander, entirely self-taught. Either your weapons expertise or your political pamphlets came to the notice of Washington, who plucked you from duty on the line and made you his aide-de-camp. With this new assignment came a promotion to lieutenant colonel. For four years you served at Washington's side, as secretary and tactician, though all the while asking for the chance to return to the fighting. That chance finally came when at Yorktown you led a nighttime bayonet charge against Redoubt 10, the taking of which precipitated Cornwallis's surrender.

While still on Washington's staff, you married into New York money and high society (1780). Elizabeth Schuyler was your bride, daughter of General Philip Schuyler, later to be your chief political patron. Over the years, you and Elizabeth have eight children together.

After the war you studied law, passing the New York bar exam and opening a Wall Street legal practice in 1782–83. At or about the same time, you resumed your career as a pamphleteer, writing under the pseudonym "Continentalist." You also served a term in the Continental Congress (1782–83), where you assisted Robert Morris with the Confederation's woeful finances and where you met James Madison. You were lead counsel for the defense in *Rutgers v. Waddington* (1784), arguing that a New York law (the Trespass Act) was invalid for violating a treaty signed by Congress. Having witnessed firsthand the horrors of slavery while growing up in the Caribbean, you helped found the New York Manumission Society. The Annapolis Convention came to pass largely because of your efforts, as did New York's decision to participate in the Constitutional Convention. You won election to the New York legislature to ensure your election as a delegate to the Convention. Your attempts to do the same for other nationally minded figures failed, however, as your nemesis, Governor George Clinton, managed to saddle you with the arch-Antifederalists John Lansing and Robert Yates. You left the Convention early, as did they, you in frustration, they in eagerness to report back to the governor and help organize the opposition. Your efforts in that vein resulted in *The Federalist*, written in collaboration with James Madison and John Jay.

You now are a Federalist delegate to the state ratifying convention representing New York City and County. New York is a Federalist stronghold, and only Federalist candidates were elected. You received the third-most votes. In Poughkeepsie you are the party's convention lieutenant, second in command to Chancellor Robert Livingston, the party's head.