6-1-1941

Alexander Hamilton's Reports

Clifford B. Clapp

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. http://repository.upenn.edu/librarychronicle/vol9/iss2/4
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.
The memory of no American statesman has been better served by his official writings than was Hamilton's. In September, 1789, he became Secretary of the Treasury, and in January, 1795, he relinquished the office. Between these dates there appeared in rapid succession the reports that contributed largely to his contemporary fame and toward an encomium sometimes so ardent as to make Henry Cabot Lodge seem conservative in saying, "We look in vain for a man who, in an equal space of time, has produced such direct and lasting effects upon our institutions and our history." While Adams and Jefferson were still living, the anonymous compiler of Hamilton's most important official reports wrote, in 1821, "The 'official reports' of the first Secretary of the Treasury will form a sort of text-book for his successors through distant ages."

The National Archives possess no set of original printed editions of Hamilton's reports. The New York Public Library and other libraries have good sets of varying completeness. In the Library of the New York Historical Society is the collection of them owned by Oliver Wolcott, Hamilton's successor in office. And now in the University of Pennsylvania Library there has been uncovered what appears to be Hamilton's own collection of his reports. These are contained in two volumes, which include also a few of the significant contemporary reports of Jefferson, Knox, and Randolph, and, more important, the manuscript of a lost report by Thomas
Scott on the public lands. This report was submitted to Hamilton and never thereafter saw the light of day.

There can be little doubt that these volumes constitute Hamilton's official collection. At the end of the first volume is a list of Contents of that volume in Hamilton's hand. In the other volume there is, in addition to the manuscript report submitted to him, a copy in his hand of certain resolutions of the Continental Congress concerning the public lands.

Oliver Wolcott's set of the reports was probably among the materials he rescued from the fire at the Treasury Department. Hamilton's may have been preserved from destruction by Henry Kuhl in his offices of Chief Clerk in the Comptroller's Office under Hamilton, Assistant Cashier of the Bank of the United States, and Cashier of the Farmers' and Mechanics' Bank of Philadelphia; for Kuhl's name, probably an autograph, appears at the head of the first volume, on the title-page of the famous Report on the Public Credit. It is not known how the volumes came to the University of Pennsylvania Library. Of the printed material in the collection more than half of the pieces can reasonably be designated as either outstanding or important documents of our early national administration.

The manuscript of Scott's Report provides the first official statement to the Congress of the United States under the Constitution concerning the land claims and unclaimed lands in the Northwest Territory. It was made by Thomas Scott of Pennsylvania on June 15, 1789. The present writer knows of no other manuscript copy nor any printed edition. While apparently of no great import in itself it gave rise to the report by Hamilton on a public land office, which in turn was a direct incitement of the request of Congress for the report by Jefferson on southwestern and northwestern lands, a printed copy of which is in this collection.
II.

SCOTT'S AND JEFFERSON'S REPORTS

The reports of Scott and Jefferson in these volumes present a view of the northwestern lands that for authority, adequacy, and conciseness will not be surpassed.

The manuscript of Scott's Report bears the caption: "The Committee appointed to consider the State of the unappropriated lands in the Western Territory, and report thereupon, Report . . ." It is written on thirteen pages of English book paper, folded upward at the bottom to fit the volume, and interleaved with blanks. The hand, flourishing like that of a scribe, is yet to be identified. The document is at least presque unique. A copy may yet appear among Hamilton, Jefferson, Sherman, or Huntington papers, or somewhere among land company material, but there is no copy among the papers of the first Congress in the custody of the Clerk of the House, nor in the National Archives; nor is any indexed in the Mere-ness index of 85,000 cards at the University of Illinois for documents in Washington archives on the Northwest Territory, nor in the smaller collection of related cards in the Library of Congress. The text does not appear in American State Papers nor in the Annals of Congress nor the Journals of the House of Representatives. Above all, it does not appear in Carter's Territorial Papers. It has been cited as appearing in the Annals of Congress, but it is not there.

In Annals1, 1st Congress, volume 1 (1834), column 453, under date of Monday, June 15, 1789, the reference reads as follows: "Western Lands. Mr. Scott, from the committee to consider the state of the unappropriated lands in the Western territory, reported. This report contained a very particular

---

1 Debates and Proceedings; compiled by Joseph Gales. Washington, Gales and Seaton, 1834.
geographical account of that country. Ordered, That this report be referred to a Committee of the Whole upon the state of the Union." Under date of Monday, July 13, 1789, columns 622-632 contain the debate of the Committee of the Whole House upon the report, or rather, apparently, on a resolution, previously debated in May, of Thomas Scott of Pennsylvania for the Committee on the western territory: "Resolved, That it is the opinion of this committee, that an act of Congress should pass for establishment of a Land Office, and to regulate the terms of granting vacant and unappropriated lands in the Western territory." And finally came the disposition of the Report which cast it into our Hamilton Treasury Volumes. On January 20, 1790, the resolution was laid on the table, but Alexander Hamilton was directed to report a plan for a land office and the report of the Scott committee was referred to him for his consideration. The net results were the report of Hamilton, July 20, 1790, on a plan for disposing of the public lands (a plan that like the earlier one of Jefferson failed of final accomplishment) and the report of Jefferson, November 8, 1791.

Jefferson's Report consists of eight printed pages. It was mutilated in the Ford and Memorial editions of his works, the portion on the northwestern lands being omitted entirely, al-

2 For Thomas Scott, consult Biographical Dictionary of Congress, and the several publications written under the direction of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey. The other members of Scott's committee making the report were Benjamin Huntington and Roger Sherman. A different committee headed by Scott, was appointed for consideration of Scott's resolution on a land office.


though the entire text was available to the editors. It has since been printed in full in Carter’s *Territorial Papers*.

Scott was ordered “to consider the state of the unappropriated lands in the Western territory”; Jefferson was ordered to report an *estimate* “of the quantity and situation of the lands not claimed by the Indians, nor granted to, nor claimed by, any citizens of the United States, within the territory ceded to the United States by the State of North Carolina, and within the territory of the United States northwest of the River Ohio.” In Jefferson’s Report as originally separately printed and contained in the Hamilton Treasury Volumes pages 3-5 concern the southwestern lands ceded by North Carolina, and pages 5-8 are on the northwestern lands.

Scott devoted himself to a formal, impersonal, detailed description, mainly in chronological order, of the several rights and grants contained in the territory, with their stipulated acreage, together with the actual sums derived by the United States or due to it from each. Jefferson, writing a personalized, wordy, more readable, but less precise statement, treated of the boundaries and supposed acreage of the several claims, reservations and grants, “from which results the residuary unclaimed mass, whereupon any land law the Legislature may think proper to pass may operate immediately, and without obstruction.” But Jefferson was not concerned with the income derived from the land. Following the terms of the Congressional resolution he defined first the Indian claims, then those of citizens, first those reserved by States and then those of individual citizens, an entirely logical sequence. There is nothing in Jefferson’s Report to indicate that he made any use of Scott’s Report; how could he, since it was buried by Hamilton? But there is a probable allusion to Hamilton’s Report when he speaks of “Some of these claims, being already under a special reference, by order of Congress . . .”
A detailed comparison of the two reports would be too extensive for the present article. It is sufficient to say that Scott begins with the cession by New York in 1781, delineates the boundaries of the United States set by the Treaty of Paris, treats of the cession by Virginia in 1784 with the reservation in favor of Clarke and his soldiers, a contingent reservation for the Virginia troops, and a reservation in favor of "the Kaskaskias," mentions the Massachusetts cession of 1785 and outlines that of Connecticut, goes on to treat of the Indian treaties of 1784 and 1785 in relation to the Connecticut cession, and takes up the sale of the Seven Ranges, the Cutler and Sargent grant, the Symmes grant, that to Flint and Parker, the sale to Pennsylvania, the Congressional reservations of 1788 in favor of "the Kaskaskias," and the Morgan contract. Jefferson treats of many, but not all, of these; and he supplies various details and reservations not cited by Scott.

Summing up, Scott reports that sales have been made "to the amount of 4,936,864 15/90 Dollars," and Jefferson says that "there remain at the disposal of the United States upwards of twenty-one millions of acres, in this north-western quarter."

III.

CONTENTS OF THE VOLUMES

The collection comprises 46 pieces, 13 in volume I, 33 in volume II. They date from May, 1785, to April, 1794. The arrangement of the documents in the volumes is not perfectly chronological, although aside from those on the public lands there was a tendency to make it so. In the following list, aimed at identification of the issues rather than clarification of the works, the pieces are given in the order of occurrence. Each title is much abbreviated, showing the first and the significant words, sometimes from the caption or the epistolary intro-
duction. The imprint is given in full when on the page bearing
the title but is abbreviated in curves if printed elsewhere in the
publication; in this case (C & S) indicates Childs and Swaine,
the usual printers. Imprints or portions supplied from Evans's
_American Bibliography_ or other outside source are given, usu-
ally abbreviated, in square brackets. The Evans citation
numbers are in brackets when identification of the issues is in
doubt. Seven of the printed pieces have not been found in
Evans, but some of these are known elsewhere.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1   | Hamilton: Report of the Secretary of the Treasury relative to a provi-
|     | sion for the support of the Public Credit. Presented to the House on 
|     | Thursday the 14th day of January, 1790. New-York: Printed by Francis 
| 2   | Hamilton: Treasury Department, March 4, 1790. In obedience to the or-
|     | der of the House. The Secretary of the Treasury respectfully reports,
|     | That the funds... payment of interest on the debts of the individual 
|     | States... (N. Y., C & S) 1790, 3p. Evans 23003.                    |
| 3   | Knox: A plan for the general arrangement of the Militia of the United 
|     | States... New-York: Printed by Francis Childs and John Swaine. M,DCC,
|     | XC. 26p. Evans 22988.                                               |
| 4   | Osgood: General Post-Office, New-York, January 20, 1790. Sir, In obedi-
|     | ence to the orders of the Supreme Executive, I have the honor of lay-
|     | ing before you such remarks... the department of the post-office... 
| 5   | Jefferson: The Secretary of State, to whom was referred... the letter 
|     | of John H. Mitchell... for supplying the United States with Copper 
| 6   | Jefferson: Report of the Secretary of State, on the subject of estab-
|     | lishing a Uniformity in the Weights, Measures and Coins of the United 
|     | States... New-York: Printed by Francis                             |
Childs and John Swaine. MDCCXC. 22p. Postscript on page 22 is dated January 10, 1791. "Errata" list of 7 lines follows. [Evans 22994 to 22997, and 23910]

No. 7. Hamilton. Treasury Department, December 13, 1790. In obedience to the order of the House . . . requiring the Secretary of the Treasury . . . such further provision . . . for establishing the Public Credit—the said Secretary respectfully reports . . . N. Y. (C & S) 1790 7p. Evans 23005.

No. 8. Hamilton. Treasury Department, December 13, 1790. In obedience to the order of the House . . . requiring the Secretary of the Treasury . . . such further provision . . . for establishing the Public Credit—the said Secretary further respectfully reports. That from a conviction (as suggested in his Report No. 1, herewith presented) that a National Bank . . . N-Y. (C & S) [1790] 22p. Evans 23006.


No. 10. Hamilton. Treasury Department, January 6, 1791. Sir, I have the honor to inform you . . . the formation of several returns . . . had been commenced at the Treasury . . . One of those returns, being a general Abstract of the Duties on the Tonnage . . . is herein transmitted . . . Second title: Treasury department, January 7, 1791. Sir, in addition to the papers transmitted yesterday, I have the honor to enclose you two Abstracts of the duties on Imports . . . Phila? C & S, 1791 2 leaves & inserted leaf (the latter oblong & folded). Evans 23926. Although Hamilton lists no. 10 as two items, as does Ford, it was numbered for the binder as one piece, and a pristine copy in the New York Public Library proves it to be a bibliographical unit.

No. 11. Hamilton. Treasury Department, February 15, 1791. Sir, I do myself the honor to transmit through you . . . a general return of the Exports . . . ending on the 30th of September last . . . Phila, John Fenno, 1791 4p. Evans 23927.

No. 12. Hamilton: Jan. 28, 1791. The Secretary of the Treasury having attentively considered the Subject . . . relatively to the Establishment of a Mint . . . Phila (C & S) 1791 22p. [Evans 23920]
No. 13. Jefferson Report of the Secretary of State, on the subject of the Cod and Whale Fisheries, made conformably to an order of the House... referring to him the representation of the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on those subjects; February 1st, 1791... Philadelphia: Printed by John Fenno... M.DCC.XCI. 34p. Evans 23912.


No. 3. Hamilton Treasury Department, March 16, 1792. The Secretary of the Treasury, pursuant to a resolution of the House... the best mode of raising the Additional Supplies requisite for the ensuing year, respectfully submits the following Report... Phila. (C & S) 1792 8p. Evans 24940.

No. 4. Hamilton: Feb. 6, 1792 Report of the Secretary of the Treasury, on the subject of the Public Debt... Phila. Printed by Childs and Swaine 1792 15p. Evans 24926.


The Committee appointed to prepare and report a plan for the reduction of the Public Debt, Report ... Phila? 1794? 2 leaves & oblong folded leaf. The latter leaf, "Table exhibiting . . .", is dated December 27th, 1794. Not in Evans.

No. 9. Hamilton, Treasury Department, January 6, 1791. Sir, I have the honor to transmit to you a Report ... relative to Appropriations of Money ... Phila? C & S 1791 12p. Evans 23925.

No. 10. Hamilton: Nov. 4, 1791, Estimate of the Expenditures for the Civil List of the United States ... for the year 1792 ... Phila (C & S) 1791 20p. Evans 23895.

No. 11. Hamilton: Nov. 14, 1792, Estimate of the Expenditures for the Civil List of the United States ... for the year 1793 ... Phila 1793 26p. (including folded or double leaf as p. 21). Evans 26349.

No. 12. Hamilton, Treasury Department, January 23, 1792. Sir, I have the honor to send herewith a Report ... Phila C & S 1792 4p. Evans 24937.


No. 15. Jefferson, Philadelphia, January 8th, 1793. Sir, I have the honor to inclose you a Report of the assays and experiments made on the Gold and Silver Coins of France, Spain, England, and Portugal ... C & S? 1793 2 leaves, each printed on recto only. Evans 26338.

No. 16. Hamilton: March 28, 1792, Return of Duties on Imports and Tonnage; also on Exports ... Phila? Printed by Childs and Swaine 1792 1 leaf, 9p., & 4 folded tables. Last table, signed by Tench Coxe, is dated April 12th, 1792. Evans 24928

No. 18. In the House of Representatives of the United States, Tuesday the 8th of May, 1792. Mr. Fitzsimons, from the Committee appointed to enquire into . . . Major General St. Clair, reported . . . Phila C & S 1792. 13p. Evans 24909.


No. 23. Congress of the United States. In Senate, February 10th, 1794. The Committee of elections to whom was referred the petition of / 2 Conrad Laub and others against the election of the Honorable / 3 Albert Gallatin as a Senator of the United States for the State of Penn- / 4 sylvania—report, that they have . . . Phila (Printed by John Fenno). 1794. 4p. Not in Evans.


No. 26. Hamilton: Nov. 19, 1792. The Secretary of the Treasury, to whom was referred the several petitions in the list hereunto annexed specified—Respectfully makes the following report thereupon. Phila. C & S 1792 2jp. Evans 24931.


No. 30. Hamilton. Treasury Department, July 20th, 1790. In Obedience to the Order of the House . . . of the Twentieth of January last, The Secretary of the Treasury Respectfully Reports, That in the formation of a plan for the Disposition of the Vacant Lands of the


64