

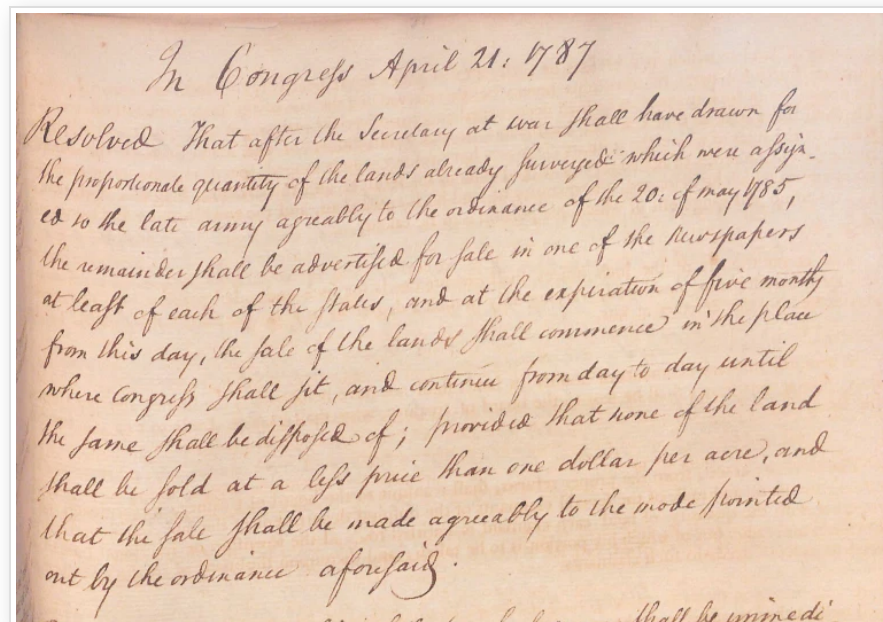
# Unique at penn

13  
Friday  
May 2016

## Alexander Hamilton's working papers

POSTED BY MITCH FRAAS IN POSTS

≈ 2 COMMENTS



— Copy in Alexander Hamilton's hand of a resolution of the Continental Congress on public lands. ([UPenn Folio HJ8105 1790, v.2](#))

### ✦ WELCOME

Welcome to Unique at Penn, part of the family of University of Pennsylvania Libraries blogs. Every week this space will feature descriptions and contextualization of items from the collections of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries. The site focuses on those materials held by Penn which are in some sense "unique" - drawn from both our special and circulating collections, whether a one-of-a-kind medieval manuscript or a twentieth-century popular novel with generations of student notes penciled inside. See the About page for more on the blog and to contact the editor.

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### ✦ ARCHIVES

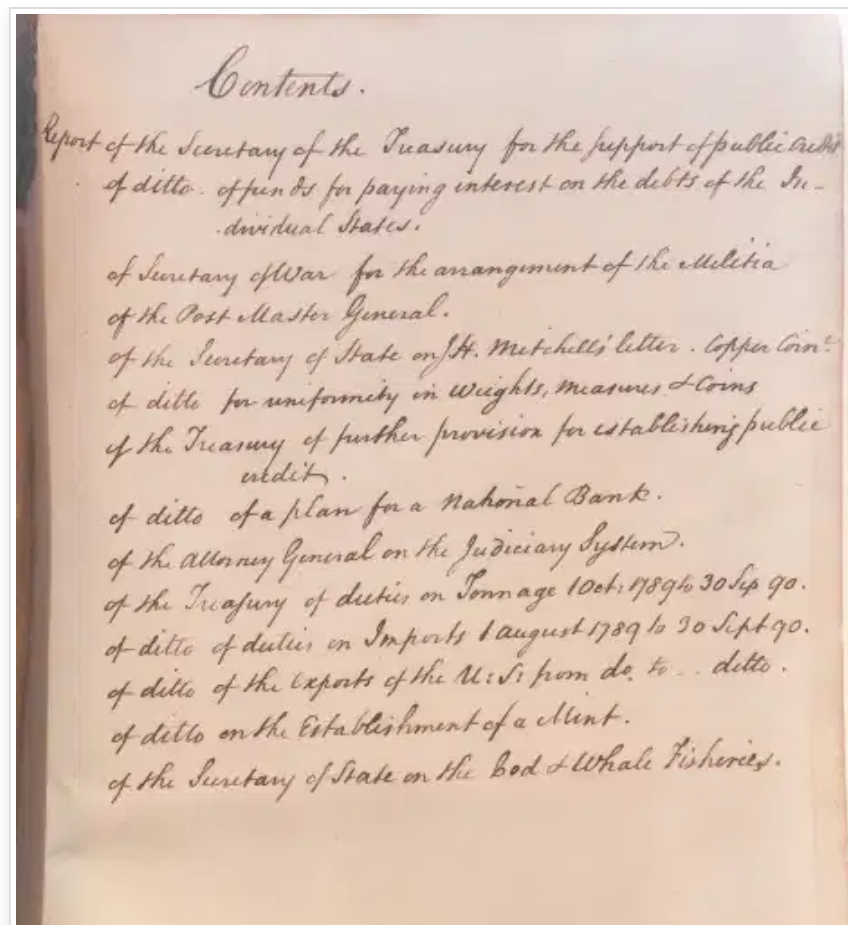
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On Monday, Penn hosts [Lin-Manuel Miranda who will be giving this year's commencement address](#). His acclaimed musical retelling of Alexander Hamilton's life has sparked enormous interest in the first Secretary of the Treasury. A few months ago, in reading through scholarship on our collections, I came across a [1941 article](#) describing a set of bound volumes here at Penn which seem to have once belonged to Hamilton himself [\[1\]](#). I quickly realized that the two volumes had become separated in our collection, housed in different places and not cataloged as a set or in any way associated with Hamilton.

Our excellent catalogers Liz Broadwell and Amey Hutchins got to work and now I'm happy to report that we know a lot more about these volumes. They consist of 48 printed documents from the young United States government dating from 1785 to 1794, as well as two manuscripts, including one possibly in Hamilton's hand (above), relating to the sale of land in the trans-Appalachian west. (For a full listing see [here](#)).

It might be tempting to snooze at the thought of a compilation of government documents, but we know from a table of contents which has been identified as being in Hamilton's hand by one scholar\* that these were likely part of his working library and as such reveal the documentary work of governing the new United States.

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— Manuscript table of contents of the first bound volume, Likely in Hamilton's hand. (UPenn Folio HJ8105 1790 v.1)

The volumes arrived at Penn sometime before 1899 when they were first inventoried. They were subsequently rebound in a modern library binding and the connection between the volumes was lost for a time.

The primary evidence for these having been owned by Hamilton are the table of contents written in what seems to be Hamilton's handwriting at the rear of the first compiled volume, as well as a manuscript copy of a government document also likely in Hamilton's handwriting in the second volume. The strongest association though for these documents is to one of Hamilton's assistants at the Treasury Department, Henry Kuhl (1764-1856), chief clerk of the comptroller's

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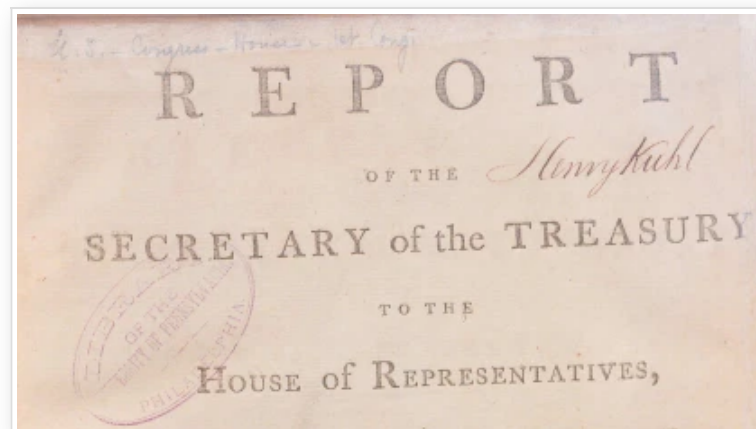
**Marissa Nicosia**

**Mitch Fraas**

office. His signature appears on the first document in the set and as he was involved with the [early University of Pennsylvania](#) it seems likely this set came to us from his family sometime before 1899.



— [Portrait of Henry Kuhl by Thomas Sully \(1829\)](#)



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- Title page of the first printed report in the first volume of the collected documents. Signed by Henry Kuhl. (UPenn Folio HJ8105 1790 v.1)

[illegible]

The statements of finances and lists of goods exported from each state highlight both the large debts carried by the new nation as well as a different scale of federal expenditure and governance than we might be used to. The main sources of revenue for the nation being customs and import duties which barely covered the salaries of government employees and the costs of the military, to say nothing of the country's debt obligations [2].



<p>ABSTRACT of GOODS, WARES Exported from each State from 1st to the 31st September, 17</p>									
STATES.		New-Hampshire	Massachusetts	Rhode-Island	Connecticut	New-York	New-Jersey	Pennsylvania	Delaware
Pot	tons	37 <sup>100</sup>	783.20	48.33	-	-	-	-	-
Pearl	bbls.	-	-	-	441	12,766	-	404	-
	tons	8	1,159.50	28.28	-	-	-	-	-
	bbls.	-	-	-	75	8,226	-	59	-
Apples	bbls.	-	1,131	1,450	440	6,504	209	1,833	150
Bricks	numb.	99,000	330,250	40,500	60,864	51,600	6,050	87,500	5
Smiths bellows	do.	-	2	-	-	-	-	3	-
boats	do.	20	75	2	-	1	-	1	-
Beer, ale & porter	gals.	-	15,532	20,800	-	-	-	644	32
casks, tierces & bbls.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	185	-
casks	-	-	-	-	-	14	-	-	-
bottled	doz.	-	-	-	20	48	-	72	-
Boots	casks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Boots	pairs	-	339	-	7	74	4	18	-
Boot-Legs	do.	-	-	-	17	-	-	-	-
Brimstone	lbs.	-	3,280	-	-	-	-	-	-
Blacking or lampblack	kegs	-	158	12	-	-	-	-	-

- *Abstract of goods, wares and merchandize exported from each state from 1st October 1790, to the 31st September, 1791.* (UPenn HJ8105 1790, v.2). Pennsylvania exporting an impressive 1,833 barrels of apples!

Many of these workaday documents printed for government use are quite rare with only a few copies surviving in libraries today, they would likely have been consulted by Kuhl and Hamilton in their daily business at the Treasury and for later reference. The collection stops conspicuously with documents from 1794 shortly before Hamilton's resignation as Secretary of the Treasury. How exactly Hamilton used his working library of such documents is unclear and tellingly the libraries at both Columbia and Yale universities have similar compilations of government documents that purport to have been owned by Hamilton [3]. The collection at Penn helps remind us of Hamilton the administrator and the material process of governing a new state.

\*[Ed. Note: Handwriting attribution is a tricky field and though Clifford Clapp was confident in 1941 that the manuscript selections above were in Hamilton's hand, after discussion with experts I find it difficult to entirely sustain. The hand does however match that used in some Treasury documents signed by Hamilton, suggesting perhaps the work of a departmental clerk. More research is necessary on this score]

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[1] See Clifford B. Clapp, "Alexander Hamilton's reports." *University of Pennsylvania library chronicle* v. 9, no. 2 (June 1941): 52-64.

[2] For more on fiscal policy, customs revenue, and the early administrative state in Hamilton's era see [Gautham Rao, \*National Duties: Custom Houses and the Making of the American State\* \(University of Chicago Press, 2016\).](#)

[3] The history and subsequent disposition of Hamilton's library is quite confusing. Jeremy Dibbell has done excellent work [reconstructing and listing books owned by Hamilton](#) as part of LibraryThing's "Libraries of Early America" series. This list includes a [range of government documents](#) listed as being held today at Columbia and Yale.

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#### About Mitch Fraas

Mitch Fraas is a curator at the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries.

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### THOUGHTS ON “ALEXANDER HAMILTON’S WORKING PAPERS”

Pingback: [What We’re Reading: May 21st-27th | JHIBlog](#)



Barbara A. Chernow *said:*

July 5, 2016 at 6:13 pm

As the associate editor of Harold C. Syrett, editor, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 26 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-1987, I enjoyed learning of this discovery. However, I compared these with several Hamilton documents, including one I own, and unfortunately, I do not find that they are in Hamilton’s handwriting.

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*The conclusions and views presented on posts within “Unique at Penn” reflect those of their writers and do not represent the official position of the University of Pennsylvania or the University of Pennsylvania Libraries.*

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