

Professor James Hamilton

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There appear to have been three separate and distinct Hamilton families in Princeton in the eighteenth century. The head of one of these families was David Hamilton, of whose nothing further is known.

The head of another was John Hamilton, Sr., who married Sarah Manning, daughter of Ephraim Manning and Elizabeth Fitz Randolph, the latter being a daughter of Benjamin Fitz Randolph, the youngest son of Edward. John Hamilton had issue:

- i. John Hamilton, Jr.² born May 19, 1764; died June 24, 1824. He died intestate, and his widow and Peter Bogart were appointed administrators, who swore to the inventory of his estate, July 29, 1824, it being appraised by Joseph Bullock and John Joline at \$5,068.75. He married Phoebe Ross, born September 3, 1765, died February 22, 1851. She was a daughter of John Ross and Rhoda his wife. Rhoda Ross was born October 7, 1738, and died March 21, 1821, "late of the Borough of Elizabethtown, New Jersey."
- ii. Mary Hamilton, born 1760; married Major Stephen Morford, who, says his tombstone at Princeton, "in his youth took an active part in the struggle for American Independence." He died April 22, 1833, aged 77 years; she died September 28, 1831, in her 72d year. Their son, William Perry Morford, died December 23, 1824, aged 34 years.

John Hamilton, Jr., had issue

- i. William K. Hamilton,³ born December 18, 1792; died September 23, 1826. He died intestate, and his brother, Samuel R. Hamilton, was appointed administrator; Joseph Bullock and Peter Bogart took a partial appraisal of the estate Oct. 4, 1826, but the inventory was not sworn to until December 13, 1826. Among the assets was a judgment against his brother, John Ross Hamilton, which, however, was regarded as "desparat," although a fi. fa. was then in the hands of John Wikoff, late Sheriff of Somerset county.
- ii. John Ross Hamilton.
- iii. Samuel Fitz Randolph Hamilton, afterwards known as Samuel R. Hamilton, who graduated at Princeton in 1808, and was a prominent lawyer in Trenton. He was the father of the late Col. Morris Robeson Hamilton, for many years State Librarian. He died in 1856.

The third Hamilton family was descended from James Hamilton. Mr. Hageman, in his "History of Princeton and its Institutions," says:

James Hamilton was long a useful and respectable citizen of Princeton. His residence

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was a brick house which stood where Dr. Wikoff's and Dr. Schenck's houses now stand, with the ground extending from Philip Hendrickson's new store to the Press building. It was built in 1804, probably by Mr. Hamilton himself, and was taken down by Dr. Wikoff when he built his present residence on the same ground. Mr. Hamilton was a painter and chair-maker by trade. Some of his surviving acquaintances say that he was a Scotchman, and came here just before the Revolution, and that he acted as an assistant commissary in Princeton during the war. He was certainly here at the beginning of the war, for his name is among those who presented claims for damages to property in December, 1776, by the enemy. He was a liberal subscriber for repairing the church in 1754, and he served as a ruling elder in the church from 1786 to the time of his death in 1815, and also as trustee from 1793. He was elected trustee of the Academy in 1795. His wife survived him twenty-five years and upwards, and continued to occupy the brick house till her death.

They had five daughters and two sons:¹

- i. Henry Hamilton, died early, of consumption.
- ii. Mary A., married the Rev. Jared D. Fyler. He graduated at Princeton in 1810, and shortly after kept a classical school known as the Princeton Academy. Subsequently he removed to Trenton, where he conducted a school a short distance below the State House. There his wife died. Her tombstone at Princeton informs us that: "In humble hope and in pious resignation at her family seat on the banks of the Delaware, Trenton, N.J., she took her leave of this world on the 17th of April, 1825, aged 27 years," leaving three children, one of whom, her only daughter, Maria Louise Fyler, is buried beside her mother, having "meekly confiding in the perfect righteousness of Christ, died in Princeton on the 18th of November, 1841, aged 22 years."
- iii. A daughter, married the Rev. Mr. Burt.
- iv. A daughter, married the Rev. Mr. Huntington.
- v. A daughter, married the Rev. Mr. Fitch.
- vi. A daughter, who never married, but remained at home in Princeton, teaching school, until after her mother's death, when she went to live with her brother James, in Nashville, Tenn., and died there.
- vii. James, the subject of the following:

SKETCH OF JAMES HAMILTON.

He was born at Princeton, probably about 1796. Having graduated at Princeton College in 1814, he immediately became an assistant to his brother-in-law, Mr. Fyler, in the Princeton Academy. When the latter removed to Trenton he was succeeded in the management of the Princeton Academy by the Rev. James Carnahan, and he in turn by David Comfort, after whom came James Hamilton as Principal. He was distinguished as a classical and mathematical teacher at Princeton, Trenton and

¹ "History of Princeton and its Institutions," by John F. Hageman, I., 192-3.

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Burlington. He conducted the Princeton school with eminent success for several years. He then joined Mr. Fyler in the management of his school in Trenton, and succeeded to the control when Mr. Fyler removed to Mississippi. Among his pupils at Princeton were the three eldest sons of the Rev. Dr. Archibald Alexander, and the Rev. Edward N. Kirk. The Rev. Dr. George Burrows, some time professor at Lehigh University, Easton, Pa., said he often heard Hamilton speak with pride of his connection with the Rev. Joseph Addison Alexander, as his Latin teacher. The latter's biographer says: "Hamilton was a man of no ordinary ability, a ripe scholar, and a teacher of great merit."² His relations with his pupils were evidently of the kindest character, and they always affectionately called him "Jemmy Hamilton."

On the appointment of the Rev. Philip Lindsley, D.D., of Princeton, to the Presidency of the University of Nashville, in 1831, he took Mr. Hamilton with him as the Professor of Mathematics. After remaining at Nashville four years, he resigned his chair and returned to New Jersey, where he re-opened his school in Trenton, which he conducted from 1835 to 1838. In the latter year he was re-engaged by the Nashville University, and returned thither, spending the rest of his life in the service of that institution. He and two of his sisters fell victims of the cholera in June, 1849.

Professor James D. Porter, the eminent Chancellor and President of the University of Nashville, says in a letter to the writer of this memoir:

There is a handsome monument erected to Prof. James Hamilton, in Mt. Olivet Cemetery, near this city. It recites the fact that he was Professor of Mathematics in the University of Nashville, and that he died June 21, 1849. The date of his birth and the place where born are not given. I was very fond of him, and my recollection of him is distinct, and I think he was about fifty years of age. His service in this University dated from 1831 to his death, excepting an interval from 1835 to 1838, which was spent at Trenton, N.J.; during the last year he was re-elected and then resumed his professorship. Subjected to an epidemic of cholera in 1849, Prof. Hamilton and two maiden sisters were victims of it.

I repeat what I have said many times, that Prof. Hamilton was by far the ablest mathematician we have ever had in Tennessee; he would, in my judgment, have been eminent in any school or university on this continent. He made no publications except occasional communications to the press of this city. I have before me as I write, a work of his in MS., relating to meteorology, dating from April, 1834. In the interval between his resignation and reelection, this record of the weather was made at Trenton, New Jersey, and you may be able to find some data relating to his history at that place. He was, I doubt not, teaching mathematics at Trenton, but I have no information concerning him. If you would like to see the MS. Volume, I will send it to you by express, to be returned. I want the chief of the Weather bureau at Washington to see it. A brother-in-law, the Rev. Mr. Huntington, a Jerseyman, inherited through his wife the estate of Prof. Hamilton; he survived him for twenty years, but I can find nothing left by him.

² "Life of Joseph Addison Alexander, D.D.," by Henry Carrington Alexander, New York. 1870; Vol. I., pp. 30-37.

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In a discourse delivered a few days after his death Dr. Phillip Lindsley, the distinguished President of the University of Nashville, said of him:

A more exemplary, conscientious, modest, consistent, unobtrusive Christian gentleman has rarely been met with anywhere, than Prof. Hamilton; and a more faithful, patient, judicious, persevering and successful teacher could not be desired in any school or college. A thorough enthusiast in his professional studies and pursuits, it was his chief delight to acquire knowledge and to impart it to his pupils. Amiable, gentle, respectful - never abrupt, harsh or repulsive - always accessible and cheerfully communicative - meek, humble, sincere - abounding in works of charity and goodness - he calmly fell asleep, in the full assurance of a happy resurrection and a glorious immortality, through faith in the merits and atoning sacrifice of the Son of God, in whose name he had been baptized in infancy, and to whose service his life had been devoutly consecrated..

The Nashville "Gazette," of Saturday, June 23, 1849, contained the following editorial relating to Professor Hamilton:

With sorrowful pain and regret we announce to our readers the demise of our much esteemed and talented fellow citizen, James Hamilton, late Professor of Mathematics in the University of Nashville, which post he has filled with distinguished honor and credit for a quarter of a century.

The Professor died on Thursday evening at 10 o'clock, from a severe attack of cholera, after suffering for several days the most excruciating agony.

It is a most solemn task to chronicle the decease of one who is so identified with the intellectual rise and progress of our city as was Professor Hamilton. But yet it is still more unpleasant when in connection with this we are compelled to add that the death of this gentleman is the fourth one in the same family, and that too caused by the same disease. During the rage of cholera in our city, three of Prof. Hamilton's sisters have been taken from our midst to a home we trust where life is eternal happiness, a home too that both brother and sisters had for years so well prepared themselves.

Death has made them his victims - but there ends his victory.

God has given unto them the Christian hope and reward - eternal bliss in Heaven - and in receiving this how cheerfully can we resign earth with its embittered pleasures and heavy responsibilities.

First our pleasures die, and then
Our hopes and then our fears, and when
These are dead the debt is due,
Dust claims dust - and we die too.

All things that we have and cherish
Like ourselves must fade and perish!
Such is our rude mortal lot
Love itself would, did they not.

The students of the University met the day after his death, and adopted the following tribute of respect:

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We are met together under circumstances peculiarly and truly melancholy, to mourn the death of our respected and beloved Professor. In thus paying our last tribute of respect to the memory of him whom we so highly esteemed, it would be unnecessary or even vain to attempt to give a just delineation of the high and ennobling qualities that ever characterized him. But it may not be deemed inappropriate in us to allude to his literary attainments, and particularly to his superiority in the knowledge of that intricate, yet grand, beautiful, sublime science, to the conception of which his strong, energetic and discriminating mind seemed peculiarly adapted. To a full understanding and advancement of that science, which has deservedly been termed that of truth, he devoted a life of unremitting zeal and ardor, and we now proudly and unhesitatingly assert that he was not unrewarded. Not content to confine his researches to the tangible and visible things of this earth, he soared aloft into a grander and wider sphere of thought, and there, by the innate strength of his own mind, traced the beauty and sublimity of his loved science and made himself familiar with the divine laws which govern and regulate the universe. Though he may not have embodied in the form of a book, that profound knowledge he sought and received, those philosophical theories of his own, to be transmitted thus to posterity, yet, we feel the proud consciousness that in the minds, at least, of all whose good fortune it has been to receive his instructions, there upon their minds has been reflected that light which bore him onward through the dark, the intricate, the untried paths of scientific researches - that knowledge which was ever the pride and happiness of his earthly career.

But his moral and social character cannot pass unremembered and unnoticed. We may bow in submissive praise to the infinite strength of intellect, feel our own spirit of ambition awaken in contemplation of true genius, but it is an admiration of a different kind that swells our hearts in the remembrance of moral virtues - those virtues which ever threw over him an air of calmness and happiness, imparting their soft and goodly influence - those virtues which served as an amulet to his thoughts when wandering through the mystic shades of the future, so natural to everyone, to learn something of the destiny that awaited him. It was this soothing spirit of morality which tinged his every thought and action, and a full conviction and appreciation of which lessens our sorrow and deep regret at his departure, and leads us to hope and believe that when he breathed his last, it was only that he should then be transported to the bosom of his God, there through all eternity to rest with his three sisters, who a few days before, had alike been gently wafted to immortal life.³

The writer of the biography of Dr. Joseph Addison Alexander, already quoted, gives this estimate of Professor Hamilton:

Mr. Hamilton was, according to the standard of that day, a scholar of rare and varied attainments, and while thoroughly grounded in languages was eminently distinguished as a mathematician. He was by nature exceedingly diffident and retiring, and this prevented his filling that space in the public eye which was occupied by men of humbler talents and more slender acquirements.

Professor Hamilton was elected a corresponding member of the New Jersey Historical Society in 1846.

³ "Daily Union," Nashville, Tenn., Tuesday, June 26, 1849.