

Image

Background: The image shows the duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr. Hamilton is the man firing a gun on the left. Burr is the man firing a gun on the right.



Date: Unknown, but probably drawn between 1900 and 1930

Artist: Unknown

Document A: Dr. Hosack (Modified)

This is from a letter written by David Hosack, who was Alexander Hamilton's family doctor. Hosack was writing to William Coleman, who was the editor of Hamilton's newspaper in New York City. Hosack was at the duel and cared for Hamilton after he was shot, but he didn't directly see the duel because he had turned his back to avoid being a witness. In the letter, Hosack tells Coleman what happened right after the duel.

I was called to help Mr. Hamilton after he received the **fatal** wound. He only had enough strength to say, "This is a **mortal** wound, doctor," and then he looked lifeless.

When we had traveled fifty yards from the shore in our boat, he made some efforts to breathe. His pulse became more **perceptible**, his **respiration** more regular, his sight returned.

Soon after recovering his sight, he looked at the case of pistols, and when he saw the pistol he had held in the duel, he said, "Take care of that pistol; it is **undischarged**, and still **cocked**; it may go off and do harm. My assistant, Nathaniel Pendleton, knows that I did not intend to fire at him." He then closed his eyes and remained calm, without any efforts to speak; nor did he say much afterward, except in reply to my questions.

Source: Letter from Dr. David Hosack to William Coleman, August 17, 1804.

Vocabulary

fatal: deadly

perceptible: noticeable

undischarged: not fired

mortal: deadly

respiration: breathing

cocked: ready to fire

Document B: Pendleton (Modified)

This article appeared in the New-York Evening Post, a newspaper Alexander Hamilton had started. The article summarizes a statement released to the newspaper by Nathaniel Pendleton eight days after the duel. Pendleton had been Hamilton's assistant at the duel, and he was one of only two people who had witnessed the duel (other than Hamilton and Burr).

Mr. Pendleton was confident that General Hamilton did not fire first and that he did not fire at **Colonel** Burr.

General Hamilton's friend thinks he has a duty to that great man, to his country, and his friends, to publish to the world such facts.

On the night before the duel, Mr. Hamilton informed Mr. Pendleton he had made up his mind not to fire at Colonel Burr first, but to wait to receive his fire, and then fire into the air.

He decided to go back to the spot where the duel took place the day after General Hamilton died. He took a friend with him, and after some examination, they **ascertained** that the **ball** passed through the limb of a cedar tree about twelve and a half feet high and about four feet to the right of where Colonel Burr was standing.

Source: *New-York Evening Post*, July 19, 1804.

Vocabulary

colonel: a rank in the military

ascertained: figured out

ball: bullet

Document C: Van Ness (Modified)

William Van Ness released this statement in the Morning Chronicle, a New York City newspaper, three days after Nathaniel Pendleton released his statement (Document B). Van Ness was a well-known judge from New York, and he served as Burr's assistant at the duel. Like Pendleton, he was an eyewitness to the duel.

I witnessed the duel, and I disagree with some points Mr. Pendleton made. I do not intend for this statement to be disrespectful to the memory of Mr. Hamilton.

Mr. Burr and Mr. Hamilton took their **stations** as directed: the pistols were then handed to them by their **seconds**. General Hamilton **elevated** his, as if to check the lighting. He lowered it and said, "I am sorry for delaying you, but the direction of the light **renders** it necessary." at the same time feeling his pockets with his left hand, and **drawing forth** his **spectacles**, he put them on. After both men agreed they were ready, both parties took aim. The pistol of General Hamilton was first **discharged**, and Colonel Burr fired immediately after, only five or six seconds later. On this point I have full and perfect **recollection**.

Source: Statement by William Van Ness, July 21, 1804.

Vocabulary

stations: spots

elevated: lifted

drawing forth: taking out

discharged: fired

second: assistant at a duel

renders: makes

spectacles: eyeglasses

recollection: memory

The Duel: Image Analysis

Drawing of the Duel

What does this drawing show?

If the drawing is accurate, what happened at the duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr?

If the drawing is accurate, did Hamilton intend to shoot Burr?

How good is this source for understanding what happened? Explain your reasoning.

The Duel: Guiding Questions

Document A

Sourcing (Answer these questions before reading the document.)

1) Who was David Hosack?

2) When was the document written?

3) What do you predict this document will say about the duel?

Close Reading

4) According to Dr. Hosack, what did Alexander Hamilton say when he saw his pistol on the boat ride after the duel?

5) What might this tell us about whether Hamilton intended to shoot Burr?

Corroboration

6) How is this account similar or different from the image?

Reliability

7) Why might Dr. Hosack's account be a good source of information about what happened at the duel?

8) Why might Dr. Hosack's account NOT be a good source of information about what happened at the duel?

9) Even if Dr. Hosack's story is completely accurate, why might you doubt whether Hamilton's words in the boat were good evidence of what happened?

Sourcing (Answer these questions before reading the document)

2) What is the purpose of this document?

3) When was this document created?

4) What do you predict this document will say?

5) According to Pendleton, what did Hamilton say the night before the duel?

6) Pendleton returned to the scene of the duel the day after Hamilton died. What did he find there?

7) What might that tell us about whether Hamilton intended to shoot Burr?

Corroboration

8) What details about the duel do Documents A and B have in common?

9) What details about the event are different?

10) How is this account similar or different from the accounts provided by the image?

Reliability

11) Why might Pendleton's account be a good source of information about what happened at the duel?

12) Why might Pendleton's account NOT be a good source of information about what happened at the duel?

Document C

Sourcing (Answer these questions before reading the document)

- 1) Who was William Van Ness?
- 2) What is the purpose of this document?
- 3) When was this document created?
- 4) What do you predict this document will say?

Close Reading

5) Van Ness said that Hamilton lifted his gun to check the lighting and then paused to put on his glasses. What might this tell us about whether Hamilton intended to shoot Burr?

Corroboration

- 6) How does the account in this document compare to Documents A and B?
- 7) How is this account similar or different from the accounts provided by the image?

Reliability

8) Why might Van Ness's account be a good source of information about what happened at the duel?

9) Why might Van Ness's account NOT be a good source of information about what happened at the duel?