

‘Hamilton House’, Charlestown, Nevis
Is it connected with Alexander Hamilton’s family?



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Introduction

From the long history of the island of Nevis in the West Indies two major figures have been afforded special recognition by the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society (NHCS): Vice-Admiral Lord Nelson and Alexander Hamilton, politician, statesman, Secretary of the US Treasury and one of the Founding Fathers of the USA.

They both had connections to the island: as a captain in the Royal Navy Nelson married a local woman, Frances Nisbet, in 1787 and Alexander Hamilton's son stated that his father was born on the island. Undoubtedly, the two figures were important in the histories of their respective countries - in Hamilton's case his adopted country.

For various complex reasons, the NHCS has sought a close attachment to both. This process has extended to naming museums after them. In the case of Alexander Hamilton, it has mostly identified 'Hamilton House', the reconstructed site of their main museum and the building in which the Nevis Assembly meets, as Hamilton's 'birthplace' and home on the island. However, Hamilton House sits in a yard with another building called variously Trott House or, at times in the past and sometimes (confusingly) in the present, Hamilton House.

The story which is told regularly on Nevis is that Hamilton's mother had inherited land and a house on the outskirts of Charlestown from her father. She is said to have retreated there after the death of her mother, Mary Faucett, and that is where Hamilton was born.

Hamilton, himself, was silent on the subject of where specifically on the island this all took place but in terms of tourism, which is the most significant contributor to the island's economy, these claimed connections are extremely beneficial. They draw in many visitors to the island who contribute to the funds of the NHCS through tour visits, individual entrance fees and shop sales. There is also, undoubtedly, pride among some members of the island community in this connection.

Aim and summary conclusion of the report

This is an amended version of a report originally submitted to the board of the NHCS in May 2020. The report has sought to identify what documentary evidence there is mainly on the narrow question of whether, or not, there is a link between 'Hamilton House', Trott House and the yard in which they both sit and the family of Alexander Hamilton. However, in examining the context of this straightforward question the report cannot ignore other issues. For instance, recent research has raised serious questions about previous explanations for when and on which island Hamilton was born. What reasons there might be for people and organisations on the island to believe any given account is another relevant issue.

In the past, no documentary evidence had been presented linking the whole yard with its associated buildings to *Alexander* Hamilton or his family. In recent discussions about the

first version of this report, presented privately to the NHCS, it has become clear that the story on Nevis has relied entirely on 'oral history' or 'local lore'.

The report, largely based on documents now available online¹ from the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court records in Nevis (ECSCRN), has concluded that there is no such connection between the house (and the wider yard in which it sits) and Alexander Hamilton's family.

Rather, it shows that the name and reputation of the site probably arises from its connection with the family of *Andrew* Hamilton. From 1772 to 1802 he was the owner of land and at least one storehouse by the sea on the northern edge of Charlestown. These he bought from Sir Ralph Payne, together with the estates which make up 'Hamilton Estate'. Andrew Hamilton's son sold the land and storehouse in 1807 to Edward Huggins senior from whom part of it, at least, descended eventually to his granddaughter Julia Huggins.

Nowhere does this research show that the land belonged to any Faucett² or any other member of the family of Alexander Hamilton.

The report also shows how it was possible that the ownership of the land could have been misunderstood over time.

It should be stressed that the purpose of this report has been to alert those interested in establishing a reasonably accurate account of Hamilton's early life to the existence of new evidence in the recently available Court Records and elsewhere. It does provide details of all the sources used and is thus an open invitation to academics and others interested in Hamilton to investigate these sources and the report's conclusions further.

Avoiding confusion

Before looking at the location of the site, the confusion over the names of buildings must be dealt with. Today, apart from the Café des Arts, there are two significant buildings in the yard. One is the large, 'reconstructed' stone building, housing the Assembly meetings and the main NHCS museum. This was the house referred to as 'Hamilton House' in 1957 when the commemoration of the bicentennial of Hamilton's birth took place on Nevis.³ The name has been used for that building, sometimes replaced by 'The Hamilton Birthplace', ever since. However, the NHCS confuses the matter frequently by calling the adjacent wooden house 'Hamilton House'. This was what the Trott family called their home from 1950, and some early twentieth-century photographs described below identified their house as the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton.

The report will separate the two by calling the stone building 'Hamilton House' or 'Museum/Assembly building' and the other (wooden) building 'Trott House'. This follows

¹ <https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP794/search>

² The family name is spelt variously Faucett and Fawcett, with other variations in different sources

³ Mary Pomeroy *The Island of Nevis: The Birthplace of Alexander Hamilton* 1956, courtesy of Suzanne Gordon

the convention used, for instance, in September 2010 when the NHCS announced its intention to purchase Trott House, to identify one of many examples.⁴

Both the claims made about the site and the confusion over the names of buildings are neatly illustrated by the NHCS's own website which showed in early 2020 the following text, attached to a photo of the stone Museum/Assembly building which it labelled 'The Hamilton's Birthplace':

'The building known as Hamilton House was thought to be the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton, as it is located on the property owned by Rachel Fawcett, Hamilton's mother. However, it is now thought that Hamilton was born in a different structure on the property. "Hamilton House" was built later to replace an earlier structure, thought to be a stable that was destroyed by a hurricane in 1840.'

⁴ *The Gathering* NHCS Journal Issue 89 2010, also Issue 82 2008

Location

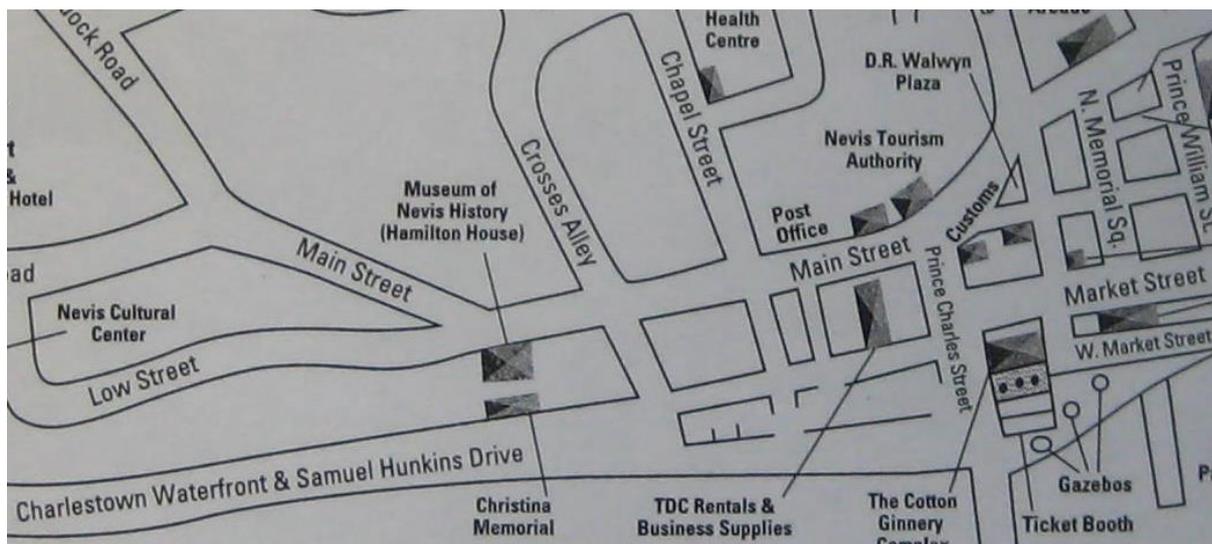
In order to understand the documentary evidence it is necessary to understand the location, size and shape of the site now and in the past.

Both the stone Museum/Assembly building and the Trott House sit on land that, in the early nineteenth century, was (and still is effectively) one plot roughly 186 ft long north to south, and between 73 ft and 93 ft wide from east to west. So, it is narrower at the northern end than at the southern.

The land is in a distinctive location on the northern edge of Charlestown between Main Street and the seashore (or 'bay' or 'beach'). However, it is narrower at the northern end because the yard, on its eastern side, sits on the junction of Main Street and Low Street, the latter of which heads a little northwest and is understood to have been the path down to Black Rock Fort. In effect, it is in the crook of that junction. The details of this are found in the historic records.

One last identifying feature to mention here is that to the south of the present site lies a stream or small ghut with an outflow to the sea. This, almost certainly, would have had a pond in the past.

Effectively the land is so described, with the same measurements and boundaries, in an 1807 sale of premises by William Vaughan Hamilton, son of Andrew Hamilton, to Edward Huggins senior. That land can be traced back from 1807 through Andrew Hamilton and Sir Ralph Payne to his father Ralph Payne in the 1760s and perhaps into the 1750s. The land has also been traced forward from 1807 to the present day through the Huggins, Evelyn and Trott families.



*Location of the Museum of Nevis History, Charlestown
Courtesy of the Nevis Tourism Authority*

Timeline: 'Hamilton House'

- 1706 An estate of John Faucett was destroyed in the parish of St George Gingerland by the French
- 1747 Ralph Payne of St Kitts (d.1763) bought or owned land on Nevis in St James, St John Figtree and St Paul's; active on Nevis through 1750s to 1763
- Feb – Aug 1754? Alexander Hamilton probably born; his son said he was born on Nevis in 1757 but not where
- Late 1756-1758 Alexander Hamilton's parents were living on St Eustatius
- 1763 Ralph Payne died and his son Ralph Payne inherited land on Nevis including Walker's, Morgan's (together later Hamilton's) and *land with a storehouse near the beach* in Charlestown
- Ca. April 1765 Alexander Hamilton and his mother left for St Croix, probably from St Eustatius, having lived there from 1763 at least
- 1771 Ralph Payne, the son, knighted and became Governor of the Leeward Islands
- May 1772 Sir Ralph Payne sold, to Andrew Hamilton, Walker's and Morgan's Estates *and the land and storehouse near the beach in Charlestown inherited from his father* together with 250 enslaved people
- Feb 1785 Andrew Hamilton mortgaged Walker's, Morgan's *and the land with storehouse near the beach* in Charlestown, all previously mortgaged to Allen and Marlar (1777) and Benjamin Vaughan and others (1784)
- Jan 1792 JL Scarborough sold to Andrew Hamilton land in Charlestown on the shore *along the path to Black Rock Fort*, bordering on other land of Andrew Hamilton to the south, previously of Ralph Payne dec'd
- July 1802 Andrew Hamilton sold to his son, Rev. William Vaughan Hamilton, Walker's and Morgan's Estate. Separately he sold to his son and William Slater the property in Charlestown on the foreshore *bounded east by the street and a lane and south by the path close by the pond*
- Dec 1807 WV Hamilton and Slater split the land in Charlestown bought from Andrew Hamilton and sold to Edward Huggins senior the southern part, 186 ft long with storehouses, bordering on the pond
- 1 May 1827 Huggins senior willed to his son Peter Thomas Huggins 'my lot of land' in Charlestown, bought from WV Hamilton and Slater with stores and buildings
- 1847-1852 Peter Thomas Huggins split the site and gifted the two parts, with three storehouses, to his sons Edward John Huggins and Charles Pinney Huggins

1869	Thomas Huggins died in possession of his brother Charles's <i>northern</i> part of the plot
1878	Edward John Huggins died
1880	'Ruins of Alexander Hamilton's birthplace' - photo by JH Horsey
1900-1910	Variously titled photos, supposedly of the house where Alexander Hamilton was born, by AM Losada, Jose Anjo, Keystone View Company and others
June 1895	Julia Huggins was the proprietor of land on which the NHCS Museum/ Assembly building and Trott House stood in 2020
July 1895	Julia Huggins sold or transferred the land to Rosetta Hodge
Nov 1901	Rosetta Hodge sold or transferred the land to Robert Hutton
1902	Gertrude Atherton published <i>The Conqueror</i> , a fictionalised biography of Alexander Hamilton, claiming he was born at a particular location on the shorefront in Charlestown
June 1907	Robert Hutton sold or transferred the land to John O Maloney
Aug 1918	John Maloney sold or transferred the land to Merritt Evelyn
Dec 1935	Merritt Evelyn died intestate and the land was transferred Sept 1936 to John Reginald Yearwood
1950	The Evelyn family sold the land to the Trott family
Early 1950s	Trott House became an unofficial museum, called 'Hamilton House'
1950s	Bertram Baker and Laurens Hamilton visited Nevis aiming to 'verify the site's authentication' as the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton
1956	Nevis government bought the northern half of the Trott property; built a block wall to separate the properties
1956	Mary Pomeroy published <i>Island of Nevis: The Birthplace of Alexander Hamilton</i> with Eva Wilkins's imagined drawing of 'Hamilton House'
1957	200 th anniversary of the 'birth' of Alexander Hamilton; plaque unveiled
1980	NHCS formed with an early aim to get 'Hamilton's birthplace' restored
1983	'Hamilton House' rebuilding completed with USAID funding
Sept 1983	Independence for St Kitts and Nevis

- Ca. 2010 Black Rock Fort demolished to the north of the NHCS Museum/Assembly building
- 2011 Trott family sold Trott House to NHCS
- 2018 Nevis World Heritage Committee claimed 'Hamilton House stands on the original site where Alexander Hamilton ... is believed to have been born and spent his childhood'. ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, did not examine this claim



*Land partially owned by the Trott family, until recently,
with 'Hamilton House' (left) and Trott House (right)
Photo courtesy of John Guilbert, 2020*

A documentary history of the 'Hamilton House' site

Ralph Payne

It is possible to start to investigate the history of the land on which 'Hamilton House' stands by looking at elements of land ownership on Nevis in the 1740s. Ralph Payne of St Kitts (died 1763) was actively buying or owning both small and large plots of land or estates on Nevis from *at least* 1747.⁵ He also owned several estates on St Kitts, as well as being Chief Justice of that island.

In 1755 Payne paid a tax called the General Tax on 212 enslaved people he 'owned' in the parish of St Paul's.⁶ It is not known to which plantation/s this referred but it may have been Walker's and Morgan's which lay across the parish border between St Paul's and St John Figtree. These estates were owned by Ralph Payne before (perhaps long before) his death in January 1763. Together they came to be called 'Hamilton's' over subsequent years. In the same round of taxation 'Payne and Morgan' also paid tax on 128 slaves.

Sir Ralph Payne

There are a number of other references in the Nevis Common Record Books for the late 1750s and early 1760s for Ralph Payne either owning plots of land, or having land which bordered on the estates of other planters. Payne died in early 1763. His eldest surviving son, Ralph Payne (1739-1807), inherited from his father at least two of the major Nevis estates. One of them was 'Walker's or 'the Windmill' estate (occasionally called 'Lower' estate) of 324 acres in the parishes of St Paul's and St John Figtree which had formerly belonged to Thomas Walker of Nevis. The other main estate of 234 acres in the parish of St John Figtree was Morgan's which came to be called 'Payne's Upper' and was sometimes called 'DeWitt's'. Part of its border on the north side joined on to Walker's.⁷ Together with these, Payne inherited from his father a piece of land with a storehouse in Charlestown near the beach. Conveniently this was downhill and not very far from the bottom of his land. Planters and merchants often had storehouses near the locations from where their products were shipped out and into which their supplies came. Some of these were on the outskirts of Charlestown. Mr Lupinacci, current President of the NHCS, has pointed out that there are, for instance, foundations of 'warehouses' under the wooden buildings on the piece of land just to the north of the NHCS Museum/Assembly building yard.⁸ Other locations on Nevis included Morton's Bay/Jamestown and Indian Castle.

⁵ See, for instance, Sweeten's (30 acres), Mountain (20 acres) in St John Figtree and 25 acres belonging to Joseph Scarborough in St James Windward in 1747: Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court Records Nevis (ECSCRN), Common Deed Record Book (CDRB) 1741-1749 ff222-28 Indentures 4 and 30 December 1747; also Yale University Library, Collection Contents, Series III. Land and Plantation Records (online).

⁶ Bristol University Library Special Collections (BULSC), Pinney Papers (PP), Domestic Box P

⁷ The fact that these estates were inherited from his father Ralph Payne (who purchased them from Thomas Walker) is explained in a settlement dated 4 March 1768. See VL Oliver *History of the Island of Antigua* vol 3 p10 'Pedigree of Payne' which summarises from Close Roll, 8 Geo III, pt 13 No.s 1 and 2.

⁸ Email communication from Mr Lupinacci to the authors and the Board of the NHCS 14 July 2020

It is not clear from the records in Nevis when, specifically, Ralph Payne, the father, came to own the two estates and the storehouse. Two documents in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University may provide clues. In 1752 Ralph Payne and Samuel Martin granted an annuity to Thomas Walker.⁹ This annuity may have been part of the deal concluding the sale of Walker's to Payne. Also, in 1757 the Crown granted land in 'Charles Town' to Ralph Payne.¹⁰

It is possible that Ralph Payne, the father, bought Walker's Estate in 1752 and either the storehouse near the beach in Charlestown came with it or, perhaps, the storehouse and land came separately in the grant of land from the Crown in 1757.

Ralph Payne's will cannot be found in the appropriate Book of Wills in the Nevis Court Records¹¹ but it seems that the estates were 'entailed'. This meant that they were subject to a limitation over generations on who could succeed to them. As early as June 1763 Ralph Payne set out to break or 'bar' the entail in law.¹² In 1768 he was getting married to Frances Kolbel and, via trustees, in the marriage settlement Payne agreed an annuity for her of £1,000 a year should she outlive him. This was secured on Walker's plantation.¹³ In 1771 Ralph Payne was knighted and appointed Governor of the Leeward Islands to which he set off in the latter part of the year.

Sir Ralph Payne was a popular governor with planters and remained in place until 1775 for the first of his two stints in charge.¹⁴ He was more connected by family ties to St Kitts and Antigua and, with his duties as Governor, he was probably not seen much on Nevis. Almost as soon as he arrived in the Leeward Islands he set about divesting himself of his estates on Nevis. In May 1772 he sold to Andrew Hamilton 'Walker's or the Windmill plantation' (324 acres),

'which said plantation or parcell of land formerly belonged to Thomas Walker of the said island of Nevis deceased and was by him sold and conveyed to Ralph Payne Esquire since deceased (who was the father of the said Sir Ralph Payne)... and was by the last will and testament of the said Ralph Payne devised to the said Sir Ralph Payne his son'.

⁹ Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 'Ralph Payne, Baron Lavington Papers' OSB MSS 138 Series iii Land and Plantation Records, Nevis, Box 18 folder 542 dated 16 December 1752. The catalogue entry states 'Thomas Walter' but this is almost certainly an error for 'Walker' – document not accessible during 2020/1 Covid lockdown.

¹⁰ Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 'Ralph Payne, Baron Lavington Papers' OSB MSS 138 Series iii Land and Plantation Records, Nevis, Box 18 folder 445 dated 7 March 1757 - document not accessible during 2020/1 Covid lockdown

¹¹ Ralph Payne's will, dated 25 July 1759, can be found at Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 'Ralph Payne, Baron Lavington Papers' OSB MSS 138 Series iv 'Ralph Payne' Box 9 folder 231 – not accessible

¹² VL Oliver *History of the Island of Antigua* vol 3 pp7-13, quoting from Close Roll, 3 George III Pt 2 No.s 4 and 5

¹³ The settlement was dated 31 August 1767; see CDRB 1767-1769 ff135-47. A summary and confirmation, dated 4 March 1768, is found in VL Oliver *History of the Island of Antigua* vol 3 p10 'Pedigree of Payne' which summarises from Close Roll, 8 Geo III, pt 13 No.s 1 and 2.

¹⁴ For an account of his parliamentary career see <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/payne-sir-ralph-1739-1807> or WP Courtney, revised by Andrew J O'Shaughnessy 'Payne, Ralph, Baron Lavington' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

He also sold to Andrew Hamilton 'Payne's Upper or Morgan's' (234 acres), 250 enslaved people who were attached to the two estates, 65 acres at Long Point, 12 acres in St Thomas Lowland, and

'... all that Messuage Tenement or store house of him the said Sir Ralph Payne situate standing and being in the Town of Charles Town in the Island of Nevis near the Beach which said plantation and several pieces or parcels of land messuage tenement or store house were heretofore also the Estate of and belonged to the said Ralph Payne the Father of the said Sir Ralph Payne and were in and by his last Will and Testament devised unto him ...'¹⁵

Therefore, the two estates, which became known later as Hamilton Estate, passed from Thomas Walker to Ralph Payne, to Sir Ralph Payne. These were sold by Sir Ralph to Andrew Hamilton, along with a storehouse near the beach which had also come down from Ralph Payne. Thus far no evidence has been found to relate in any way these properties to the immediate family of Alexander Hamilton and his mother, Rachel Faucett.

David Robinson, past Director of the NHCS, wrote an article for the NHCS on the history of Hamilton Estate in 1992 after doing research in the Common Deed Record Books and came to the same conclusions about the origins of Hamilton Estate and its name. His concern seems to have been about Hamilton Estate itself, and he made no particular mention of a storehouse near the beach.¹⁶ Since it was physically difficult and time-consuming to trace the location of the storehouse back through the Common Records in the Courthouse, involving the carrying back and forth of many volumes, it is unlikely that he would have seen and understood the location of the storehouse in relation to the NHCS Museum/Assembly building.

To be clear, with access to the digitised online Courthouse records, it is possible, as will be shown, to trace a storehouse near the beach from the death of Ralph Payne in January 1763 through Andrew Hamilton and his family to the Huggins family and on to the Trott family in the 1950s. The location of the land and the storehouse/s will, later in this report, be clearly identified by the descriptions of their location, on the edge of a small stream and across the junction between Low Street and Main Street, as the site of the Museum/Assembly building and Trott House. What cannot yet be established for certain, because of the current inaccessibility of the records in the Beinecke Collection at Yale, is how far back into the 1750s (and potentially the 1740s) the land was owned by the Payne family. It is likely, however, that Ralph Payne did not just acquire the land a year or two before he died. Almost certainly he owned it for some while in the 1750s - as he did the two related estates.

¹⁵ CDRB 1771-1773 ff283-300 Indentures of Lease and Release 21 and 22 May 1772

¹⁶ David Robinson 'A Short History of Hamilton Plantation' in *NHCS Newsletter*, May 1992. He stated that there was a third part of Hamilton Estate called 'Jerusalem' but it is not among the names commonly used. In the Iles map of 1871 there is a village or location named Jerusalem at the eastern end of Stoney Grove estate, close to the church of St John Figtree.

The Faucett family and the birth of Alexander Hamilton

Alexander Hamilton's mother was Rachel Faucett. Her parents were John Faucett and Mary Faucett (nee Uppington) who were living in the Caribbean. Michael E Newton, a leading Hamilton scholar, is one of the few people who have done detailed research on the early days of Alexander Hamilton and the Faucett family. Drawing extensively on sources in the UK National Archives, Newton notes in his recent book *Discovering Hamilton* that the sugar estate of John Faucett was burnt down during the French invasion of the island in 1706, together with those of his neighbours John Choppin and Isaac Evans. The damage on the island was so extensive that the government in London paid some compensation to the planters. Faucett submitted a claim for the destruction of his house, the boiling house, ancillary buildings and sugar lost, together with the houses of his enslaved people. The amount he claimed, £1088, indicated a substantial estate.¹⁷ From the papers of the Pinney family, fellow planters on Nevis, it is known that Choppin's estate was situated in the parish of St George Gingerland, not far from Cressey's or Clay Ghut estate.¹⁸ John Faucett and his wife, in a dispute with the widow Margaret Cressey, won a case over a half share in Clay Ghut estate in 1723/4.¹⁹ Together with Seltington Bowden, Faucett also owned land that lay on the east side of 200 acres which were being sold in 1734 by Philip DeWitt in the parish of St John Figtree.²⁰

Prior to 1740, after a period of marital disharmony, John and Mary Faucett had agreed to live separately. In return for Mary surrendering her right to a dower (or third) of John's property in the event of his death, he had agreed to pay her an annuity. In 1740 he agreed to 'quit' making any claims against property to which she was entitled. A counterpart to this agreement was that William Maynard (for reasons unknown) undertook to make the annual payment to her trustees.²¹ In February 1755 Mary Faucett quit any claim against William Maynard. At that time she was described as *late of Nevis but then living in St Eustatius*.²² So, in early 1755 (and perhaps late 1754) Rachel Faucett's mother was living neither in Nevis nor St Kitts but in St Eustatius.

Over 80 years there has been a lot of debate as to when and where Alexander Hamilton was born, and the absence of firm evidence has allowed considerable confusion between potential locations. There is very little solid evidence from Hamilton himself. In *Discovering Hamilton* Newton has summarised the relevant occasions on which Hamilton or friends and family are said to have spoken or written about Hamilton's origins.²³ He seems to have given his age to friends and family in a small number of letters in a way which suggested he was

¹⁷ Michael E Newton *Discovering Hamilton: New Discoveries in the Lives of Alexander Hamilton, his Friends, Family...* Eleftheria Publishing 2019 pp24-30

¹⁸ See for instance C. Eickelmann *The Mountravers Plantation Community 1734-1834 Pt 2 Ch 2* <https://seis.bristol.ac.uk/~emceee/mountravers~part2chapter2.pdf>

¹⁹ *Acts of the Privy Council 1720-1740* p565

²⁰ CDRB 1728-1746 from f228 Lease and Release 27 and 28 January 1734

²¹ CDRB 1727-1746 ff429-30

²² CDRB 1754-1758 f79

²³ For the details see Michael E Newton *Discovering Hamilton: New Discoveries ...* 2019 pp4-23; Michael E Newton *Alexander Hamilton: The Formative Years* Eleftheria Publishing 2015; <http://discoveringhamilton.com/>; see also the lecture given to the Alexander Hamilton Awareness Society, July 2019 'Alexander Hamilton's Birthdate, Early Biography and More' https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=95&v=gPJKlCvj8tA&feature=emb_title

born in 1756 or 1757. His son John Church Hamilton stated, without any contextual information or supporting evidence, that 'Alexander Hamilton was born in the island of Nevis on the eleventh of January, seventeen hundred and fifty seven'.²⁴ Some scholars have argued for 1757, others for 1755.

The latest research by Michael Newton suggests, on the basis of documentary evidence found in 2019 in the State Archives of Denmark in Copenhagen, that the birthdate was probably sometime between February and August 1754. Based on current research and in the absence of conclusive proof otherwise, Newton suggests that there seems to be no firm reason to doubt Hamilton's claim to friends and family that he was born on Nevis.

Newton shows that James Hamilton and Rachel Faucett were living on St Eustatius in early 1753 and also from the end of 1756 to at least October 1758. As seen earlier, Hamilton's grandmother was living in St Eustatius in 1755. Recently published research relating to St Eustatius in the archive of the Second Dutch West India Company shows that Hamilton's father, James Hamilton, was registered in the island's annual census from 1759 to 1767. It also shows that his 'wife', two sons and five enslaved people, were registered with him from 1763 to 1765 when it is known that the family departed for the island of St Croix.²⁵

Alexander Hamilton did not make any statement about where on Nevis he was born, and no documentary evidence of any kind has been found to date to support the suggestion that he was born in Charlestown - let alone on a particular plot of land there.

To be clear about the relevance of all of this:

- it is quite possible that Alexander Hamilton was born in 1754
- his son said that Hamilton was born on Nevis but, on the basis of current research (as new evidence has come to light) the amount of time he could have lived on the island was more limited than first thought
- there is no evidence that Rachel Faucett inherited any land on Nevis
- there is no evidence that she owned a house or land in Charlestown, or on the edge of it
- there is no evidence linking Rachel Faucett, or her son Alexander Hamilton, to the land owned by the Paynes, father and son, which was sold to Andrew Hamilton and which became known as Hamilton Estate.

Sale to Andrew Hamilton

Andrew Hamilton, after whom Hamilton's Estate on Nevis is named, was christened on St Kitts in the parish of St George Basseterre on 11 June 1743, the son of Dr William

²⁴ John C Hamilton *The Life of Alexander Hamilton* vol 1 New York 1834 p1, courtesy of the Hathi Trust. See also John C Hamilton *History of the Republic of the United States of America* vol 1 New York 1857 pp40-2

²⁵ Ruud Stelten and Alexandre Hinton 'Alexander Hamilton's Missing Years: New Discoveries And Insights Into The Little Lion's Caribbean Childhood' *Journal of the American Revolution* 27 October 2020
<https://allthingsliberty.com/2020/10/alexander-hamiltons-missing-years-new-discoveries-and-insights-into-the-little-lions-caribbean-childhood/>

Hamilton.²⁶ It has been suggested in various sources that there was a family relationship between Andrew Hamilton and his father and Alexander Hamilton, and also that this might have resulted in the Faucett family renting from Andrew Hamilton. It has even been suggested, very occasionally, that Dr William Hamilton was Alexander's father. Detailed genealogical work on Alexander Hamilton's family tree by Michael Newton has shown that James Hamilton, Alexander's actual father, did have two brothers called William. One of them died young and the other William was not a medical doctor but a tobacco merchant.²⁷ This William had a son called Alexander but the son was an Orientalist and scholar, born in Greenock, near Glasgow in Scotland, in 1762.²⁸ So it seems that neither Dr William Hamilton, nor his son Andrew, were related to Alexander Hamilton the statesman. Even if they had been, that relationship would have been irrelevant since Andrew Hamilton was only involved in the land concerned from 1772, and he bought it from the Payne family.

Andrew Hamilton was a merchant and not a good one, judging by the partners he worked with and the number of times he mortgaged his estate on Nevis. He spent his time between London, St Kitts and Nevis. He married Hannah Vaughan, the daughter of Benjamin Vaughan, a prize-broker, with whom he had several sons.²⁹ One of the sons was William Vaughan Hamilton who was born in the London district of Holborn in April 1775.³⁰ Hannah Hamilton died in March 1782 in England, and in May 1787 Andrew married Martha Williams Herbert. She was the daughter of John Richardson Herbert, the President of the Council of Nevis. When in London, the couple led an expensive life and 'kept a fine house'.³¹

Hamilton's frequent mortgages are recorded in the Common Deed Record Books. A record in February 1785 notes previous mortgages on the estates he bought from Sir Ralph Payne, together with the enslaved people and the storehouse near the beach in Charlestown. One such mortgage was from Robert Allen and John Marlar in 1777, another from Benjamin Vaughan and other people in 1784.³² There were other entries but some of them concerned the estates of John Richardson Herbert which Martha Williams Hamilton inherited under the instruction that Hamilton was to have nothing to do with them.

In connection with the storehouse 'near the beach' there was an interesting purchase for £500 Nevis currency by Hamilton from JL Scarborough in January 1792. This was of land with buildings in Charlestown which had the following borders: to the east the street leading to Black Rock Fort, to the west the bay, to the north land belonging to John Jermeý and 'to the South with lands and tenements of the said Andrew Hamilton heretofore of Ralph Payne

²⁶ VL Oliver *Caribbeana* vol 1 p359; 'Pedigree of Hamilton of St Christophers' in VL Oliver *History of the Island of Antigua* vol 2 p50

²⁷ See Michael E Newton <http://discoveringhamilton.com/james-hamilton-birth-father-of-alexander-hamilton/>

²⁸ Rosane Rocher 'Hamilton, Alexander (1762-1824) Orientalist' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

²⁹ See 'Pedigree of Hamilton of St Christophers' in VL Oliver *History of the Island of Antigua* vol 2 p50 and further references to Vaughan and Hamilton pp52-6. Oliver did not relate Alexander Hamilton to the Hamiltons of St Christopher.

³⁰ Lambeth Palace Library vol XXX: Ordination Papers, 1774-1819 Ref 1805 184-96. In January 1805 he was appointed an assistant rector of St Paul's in Nevis.

³¹ For more on Andrew Hamilton and Martha Williams Hamilton see D Small *Montpelier Estate, St John Figtree, Nevis: Contrasting Legacies on a Sugar Plantation*, May 2010 <https://seis.bristol.ac.uk/~emceee/montpelierhistory.pdf>

³² CDRB 1783-1785 ff596-640

funded by a mortgage of £10,000, financed by Dennistouns of Glasgow secured on the two estates, and ten bonds of £2,000 each. No other land was mentioned.³⁵

However, for £2,000 the following day Andrew Hamilton sold to William Vaughan Hamilton and William Slater (acting as the firm Slater, [Thomas] Mounsey & Co) the plot of land on the seashore or bay. It had the following boundaries: to the north it was bounded by land of Mary Laurence deceased, to the east (or 'front') by the street and a lane, to the west (or 'back') by the seashore or bay and to the south '*by a path from the street to the bay being close to the pond by the bridge*'.³⁶ There is no specific mention of a 'storehouse' except in a generalised description of buildings.

The plot was 317 ft long north to south at the front or east side, and 334 ft long along the back or seashore. The measurements suggest it included some of the land that Hamilton had bought from Scarborough in 1792. They show similar *differences* between the lengths on the east and west sides as the current plot of land owned by the government and the NHCS. The boundaries indicate a longer version of the current property, with the east side running along both Main Street and a lane, which presumably led to Black Rock Fort.

For the first time the description mentions on the south side the path down to the bay being close to the pond by the bridge. As has been noted before, today just outside the south wall of the government/NHCS plot there is a small ghyll or stream with a bridge and an outflow to the sea; presumably there used to be a pond as well.

Although the plot was clearly associated in previous sales with the two estates, this time it was sold separately, probably because it involved William Slater³⁷ and Thomas Mounsey as additional participants.

Sale to Edward Huggins senior

In a smart piece of business in 1807, just five years after they bought the land, William Vaughan Hamilton³⁸ and William Slater split their 334 ft plot on the seashore and sold its southern portion to Edward Huggins senior who was fast becoming a major planter on the island. They sold it for £2,000, the sum they had paid for the whole plot in 1802. It was described as being part of a piece of land bought by them from Andrew Hamilton. Its boundaries were similar: on the north side the land belonged to Hamilton and Slater, on the east side it was bounded 'with the street and a lane leading to Black Rock Fort', on the west by the seashore and 'to the southward with a pond by the bridge'.

³⁵ CDRB 1801-1803 ff300-13 and ff313-26 Indentures of Lease and Release 21 and 22 July 1802

³⁶ CDRB 1801-1803 ff338-43 Indentures of Lease and Release 22 and 23 July 1802

³⁷ For details of William Slater, Custom House Clerk of Nevis, and his family see the website of St Mary's, Saltford where there are Slater memorials <https://stmaryssaltford.org.uk/SAL%20Memorials%20Issue%201.pdf>. He died in November 1821 and his will is found in ECSCRN, Book of Wills 1819-1830 ff124-26 dated 26 December 1816.

³⁸ He is noted as having been a Rector in Jamaica in 1818 - see VL Oliver *Caribbeana* vol 3 p210. In 1821 he was effectively foreclosed on in relation to Hamilton Estate by the heirs of the merchant Thomas Latham to whom he owed very large sums of money - see CDRB 1838-1847 ff497-510. The estate had been given up by at least 1817 when Latham was noted as the proprietor, or in possession, in the slave register (UKNA, T71/364). Rev. Hamilton died, or was buried, in London 6 October 1823 - see Rhodes House Library, Oxford, Box MSS. W. Ind. S. 24 (b) Typed Manuscript.

It measured along the east side by the street and lane 176 ft north to south, and on the west/seashore 186 ft. The latter figure is exactly the length of the seashore side of the current government/NHCS/ Trott House property, as shown on an undated blue site plan from a 1997 report located in the NHCS Archive.³⁹ The plot was 73 ft broad (from east to west) at the northern end and 93 ft at the southern end - similar to today's property. This was measured at 90 ft by John Guilbert in May 2020.

The sale in 1807 also included on the property three storehouses: a storehouse in which Slater ran his 'counting house' and another on the southern side. Significantly, it also included a *lofted storehouse* on the northern side, '*which last mentioned storehouse and the foundation thereof form the northern limit or boundary of the land and premises*'. This separated the land to be sold to Huggins from that retained (to the north) by Hamilton and Slater.⁴⁰ Today, the boundary of the current property is formed on the northern side by the Assembly building which is constructed on an old foundation.

The documents do not mention any domestic accommodation. The storehouse on the northern side was lofted but beyond that it is not clear how any of the buildings were constructed.

Inherited Huggins property

Edward Huggins senior died in June 1829. In his will he left a great many estates. Included was his 'lot of land in Charlestown which I bought of the Reverend William Vaughan Hamilton and the late William Slater *with the stores and buildings thereon*'. This plot he left to his son Peter Thomas Huggins, as well as confirming the previous transfer of Mountravers/Pinney's Estate and their enslaved people to him and cancelling any remaining debts.⁴¹

The NHCS on its website in 2020, under 'Heritage Sites', suggested that the main building on the site, which it called 'Hamilton's Birthplace', was destroyed in a hurricane in 1840. By implication it remained a wreck until reconstructed in 1982/3. No source is given. Another possibility, not mentioned by the NHCS, could have been the major earthquake on 8 February 1843 which destroyed many of the stone buildings in Charlestown, including the Courthouse - an event much reported on in colonial dispatches.

The President of the Council reported the following to the Governor, Sir Charles Fitzroy on the evening of the earthquake:

'Mr Graeme found 'the west end of the Court-House had fallen in, burying [his] own office, and that of the Colonial Secretary, in its ruins ... The unsafe and dilapidated state of the Court-House left standing rendered it dangerous to employ workmen in searching the ruins for the public correspondence and records of the Island. [He]

³⁹ Kindly shown to the authors by Professor Neal Ferris, Department of Anthropology, University of Western Ontario. Probably associated with '*Condition Report: Trott House, Charlestown, Nevis*' Caribbean Volunteer Expeditions November 1997

⁴⁰ CDRB 1805-1808 ff475-82 Indentures dated 30 and 31 December 1807

⁴¹ UK National Archives, PROB 11/1770 Will of Edward Huggins dated 1 May 1827

therefore decided to have it levelled to the ground, a service which was promptly executed by the seamen of the merchant vessels in the harbour.’ The Jail was so unsafe that the prisoners had to be removed; the four-foot-thick walls of the Bath House [hotel] split in every direction leaving gaps large enough to fit a man’s hand in.’⁴²

Another account noted the following more generally about Charlestown: As well as houses destroyed in town it noted the destruction of the stores of Walter Maynard and W Miles. ‘The building used as a custom-house is also much injured and very many of the walls of smaller buildings, and the enclosures of the various premises, in a great measure thrown down.’ The account then went on to list the damage done to many estates. The extent of the destruction on any one estate seemed to vary from the works on Butler’s and Powell’s ‘almost totally destroyed’ to those at Hamilton’s ‘damaged but triflingly’.⁴³

An excellent eye-witness account of the aftermath of the disaster by a sailor, quoted in the *Times* and dated 7 March 1843 from Falmouth, noted amongst other details ‘a stack of chimnies of Mr P Huggins fallen’, presumably at one of his works.⁴⁴ It is clear from correspondence of the firm of Pinney & Case that they had heard that the works at Mr Huggins’s estate (Pinney’s Estate/Mountravers) had been substantially spared but there is no mention of the storehouses on the edge of town.⁴⁵

The property on the shore was held by Peter Thomas Huggins until 1847 when he split the site. He gave the northern part with one storehouse to his son Charles Pinney Huggins; the larger southern part, with two storehouses, he gave to his eldest son Edward John Huggins. These were, in effect, verbal agreements without conveyance and were only confirmed legally by indentures in 1852 at the request of the sons. The documents recording the transfer do not mention any earthquake damage to the buildings.

The southern part, given to Edward and corresponding to the land around Trott House, measured 103 ft north to south on the east, or street, side. On the west, or beach side, it measured 114 ft, and from east to west it was 93 ft broad.

Included in the gift to Edward were ‘*all those two storehouses messuages or buildings...on the said piece of land...and the cistern and well within the same*’. Both a well and a cistern were a part of the modern description of the Trott House on the NHCS website and might be the same structures.

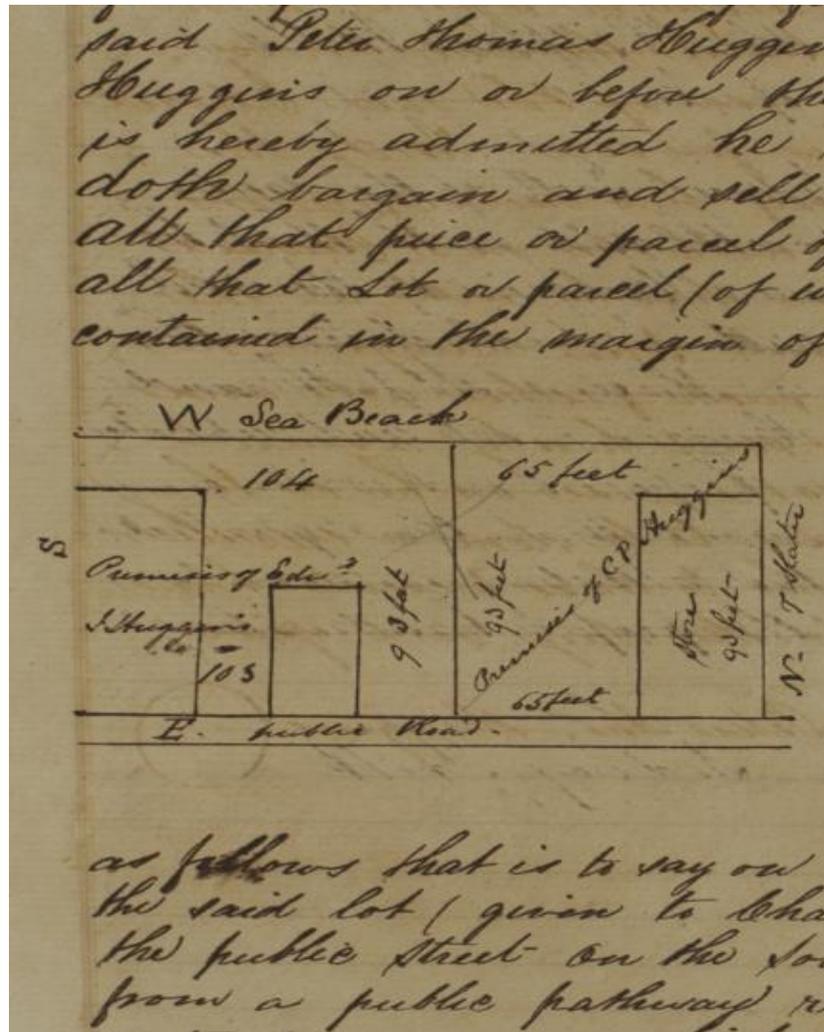
⁴² Parliamentary Papers: Accounts and Papers – Colonies vol. 33 (1843) ‘Papers relative to the earthquake in the West Indies’, Enclosure No. 9 in Dispatch No. 2 from Governor Fitzroy 13 February 1843, enclosing a description by L Graeme, President of the Council dated 8 February 1843

⁴³ Parliamentary Papers: Accounts and Papers – Colonies vol. 33 (1843) ‘Papers relative to the earthquake in the West Indies’, Enclosure No. 5 in Dispatch No. 2 from Governor Fitzroy 13 February 1843. The list of damaged estates is useful for dating rebuilding. See also sources identified by the Nevis Disaster Management Agency www.nevisdm.com/past_disasters.html

⁴⁴ Reprinted in the *Southern Australian* 22 August 1843 <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/71617734>

⁴⁵ See BULSC, PP Letterbook 68, letters Pinney & Case to Peter Thomas Huggins, dated 15 March and 1 April 1843. The collection only has copies of the letters sent out by the firm. The firm sent generalised condolences without details and, anxious to secure the monies owed to them, hoped that the plantations would be able to make temporary arrangements to take off their crops.

The property was bounded on the north by the land given to his brother Charles Pinney Huggins, on the east by the street, on the west by a wall separating it from the sea and 'on the South by a wall separating the same from a public pathway running along the margin of a water course over which stands the bridge'. This is entirely consistent with the description of the land and storehouse sold by Andrew Hamilton in 1802 which he had bought from Sir Ralph Payne.



Plan of the plots of land given to Edward John Huggins and his brother Charles Pinney Huggins in 1847 and shown in an indenture of 1852

The schematic plan included in the 1852 indenture gives the measurement north to south on the beach side incorrectly as 104 ft, not the 114 ft written in the text; presumably this was simply a copying error. The difference between the correct length of 114 ft and 103 ft on the street side implies a kink in the beach side boundary, rather than the straight line and rectangle shown in the plan.⁴⁶

The two plots had three buildings or stores between them in 1852. What is not known is when the Trott House was built. It may, perhaps, have been built on the foundation of the

⁴⁶ CDRB 1847-1858 ff373-75 dated 15 December 1852

middle building shown on the first 1852 plan. Only archaeological investigation will tell. The NHCS has suggested variously that the house was built in the 1850s⁴⁷ and that it was 'in the 1850's style'. What we do know is that there was a middle building on the site in 1852 - whether it was the Trott House or not is unclear.

A similar indenture confirmed Charles Pinney Huggins in his northern lot with the one storehouse. The measurements were given as 65 ft north to south, and 93 ft east to west. It is worth noting that the two lots together measure north to south 179 ft which is only 7 ft short of the length in 1807 and in the modern 1997 plan. The breadth at the southern end at 93 ft is exactly the same as in the other plans. The plan on his indenture only shows one building on the southern plot. This was presumably simply a mistake since both the indentures were drawn up at the same time.

The boundaries of the northern lot made due reference to the relevant owners. They noted brother Edward's property to the south and the land and premises of T Slater to the north. It will be remembered that William Vaughan Hamilton was in business with a William Slater in 1807 and that together they had retained the remaining land to the north.⁴⁸ It has already been noted that in 1807 the building on the northern side was a lofted storehouse whose foundation formed the northern boundary of the property just as the Museum/Assembly building does today.

Charles Pinney Huggins died in 1859 and no copy of his will has been found to date. However, his part of the lot and the one storehouse are included in the will of his brother Thomas Huggins when he died in 1869: 'I give devise and bequeath my land and premises situate in the town of Charlestown with the store and buildings thereon erected...to my eldest son Edward Melville Huggins.'⁴⁹

These premises were the subject of subsequent negotiations by Thomas's executors Robert Gordon and Peter Thomas Huggins (the younger). While the property was left to Edward Melville Huggins, he died intestate, unmarried and without 'lawful issue' a month after his father.⁵⁰ Thomas had directed that all his own debts should be paid. Only one debt remained - £1,750 was owed to James Ewing & Co of Glasgow. Rather than selling off the property to liquidate the debt, the executors raised a mortgage of £1,000 from Claude Neilson & Co for one year, secured on the land.

This land, once owned by Charles Pinney Huggins, was described as all those buildings and stores 'situate near St Paul's Church, Charlestown ... late the estate of Thomas Huggins deceased *and known as the Town Stores ...*' It was bounded to the north by the land of Thomas Slater deceased, to the south by the land of Edward John Huggins, to east by the street and to the west by the sea. No measurements were given and there was no plan but it is clearly the same plot of land.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *The Nevis Heritage Centre: A Proposal ...* NHCS 2008

⁴⁸ CDRB 1847-1858 ff376-78 dated 15 December 1852. This has a similar plan but it shows only one store on the southern plot and includes a similar confusion over one of the measurements.

⁴⁹ ECSCRN, Book of Wills 1866-1872 ff67-72 dated 21 November 1867. Thomas Huggins died 14 September 1869.

⁵⁰ Edward Melville Huggins died 1 October 1869. See Letters of Administration granted to Robert Gordon in November 1869 in ECSCRN, Book of Wills 1866-1880 from f77.

⁵¹ CDRB 1877-1899 ff153-54 and ff155-60 dated 8 and 9 December 1871

Edward John Huggins died in 1878 and presumably had held on to his southern plot and storehouses. His will has not come to light either. However, we know that his sister Julia Huggins was his sole executrix and devisee.⁵²

Into the twentieth century

In about 2005 Suzanne Gordon of the NHCS and the organisation's Executive Director, John Guilbert, together with the Court staff, tried to locate in the Nevis Court Records documentary evidence of a link between the Museum's site and the family of Alexander Hamilton. They worked back in time from the known to the unknown. They got to 1895 before the condition of the older records defeated their attempt. This current report has followed in their footsteps to recreate what they located.

The entries these early researchers found were in the Land Title Register Books, the first three of which were digitally photographed as part of the British Library *Endangered Archives* project on Nevis, EAP 794.⁵³

Julia Huggins was recorded as the registered proprietor of 'all those lands situate in Main Street...Charlestown' on 15 June 1895. The lands were delineated in a plan by Charles Cocksage Greaves.⁵⁴ Julia Huggins transferred the land to Rosetta Josephine Hodge in July 1895.⁵⁵ Six years later, on 25 November 1901, Hodge's ownership was transferred to Robert Bruce Hutton; this time Greaves's plan was attached.⁵⁶ John O'Donald Maloney, the owner of Tower Hill and Clifton in the 1920s, acquired the land in June 1907.⁵⁷

From Maloney the land went to Merritt Evelyn in August 1918, and for the next 18 years ownership of the land rested in the Evelyn family. However, two endorsements on the 1918 certificate noted that Merritt Evelyn died intestate on 2 December 1935 and that the land was transferred to John Reginald Yearwood in September 1936.⁵⁸ It is known that ownership of the land was vested in the Evelyn family in 1950, when the Trott family bought the land from them.⁵⁹ So, the transfer to John Yearwood may have been some temporary or 'trust' arrangement. This can only be checked by the Court staff in Nevis in the subsequent entries in Land Title Register Books which were not digitised by the British Library Endangered Archives Programme.

Greaves's plan of 1895 is quite difficult to read because of its scale. The land was bounded on the east by the 'Public Street' and measured 120 ft, including a diversion for 32 ft to the northwest. This kink seems to indicate the 'lane' to Black Rock Fort or, in modern terms,

⁵² Julia Huggins is described as his sole executor and devisee in an indenture concerning Long Point estate, dated 29 April 1881. See CDRB 1877-1899 Item 16

⁵³ <https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP794/search>

⁵⁴ ECSCRN, Land Title Register Book (LTRB) 1 f72

⁵⁵ LTRB 1 f73 9 July 1895, no plan attached but the accompanying 'Instrument' with the details was filed in 'Nevis H'

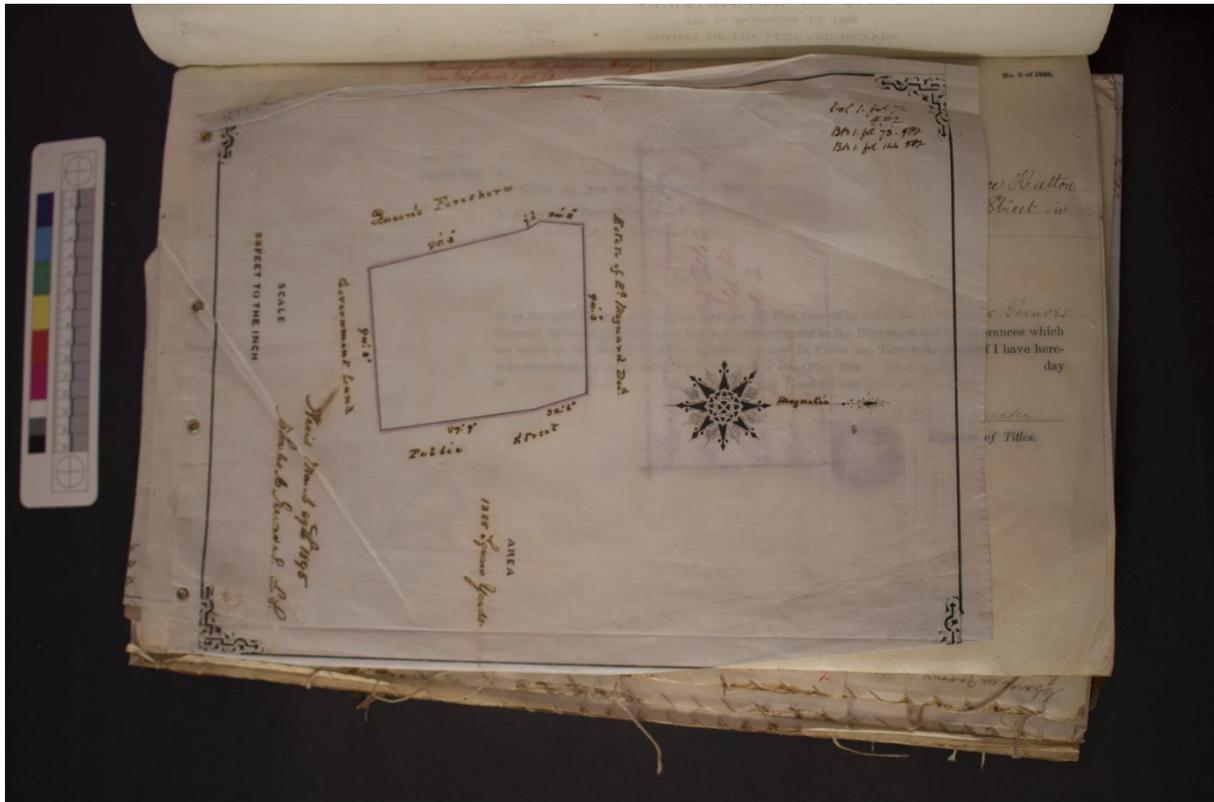
⁵⁶ LTRB 1 f144 dated 25 November 1901, with plan by Charles Cocksage Greaves attached dated 29 March 1895

⁵⁷ LTRB 2 f16 dated 24 June 1907, with a smaller scale plan drawn on the registration certificate

⁵⁸ LTRB 3 f35 8 August 1918. Endorsements noted the following: about the transfer to John Yearwood 'Date of request 15th Sept 1935; Date of death of Intestate 2nd Dec 1935 Letters of Administration recorded in Book of Wills 1B folio 223; Instrument filed 'Y' 'Cancelled 15 September 1936, certificate in favour of John Reginald Yearwood Book 5 fol. 5'

⁵⁹ Evelyn Henville and Amba Trott 'NHCS Acquires Historic Trott House' in *The Gathering*, August 2011

Low Street. The western boundary was the 'Queen's Foreshore' totalling 126 ft, but here there were two kinks. These kinks are replicated in the modern plan of the site from 1997. To the north the plot was bounded by land of Edward Maynard deceased. The length (east to west) of this northern boundary was 94 ft, equalled by the southern boundary onto 'Government Land'.⁶⁰



*Plan of the land transferred from Rosetta Hodge to Robert Hutton in 1901 (plan dated 1895)
Courtesy of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court Registrar, Nevis*

The Greaves plan agrees with the modern 1997 plan in various respects. The land is roughly the same breadth east to west, the boundary to the east is the street (and the lane), and to the west the foreshore, and both boundaries have the same kinks in them. The length north to south is different at 126 ft. On the 1997 plan it is 186 ft as it was in 1807, so there is a difference of 60 ft.

A possible explanation for this lies in the fact that the difference is almost the length north to south of Charles Pinney Huggins's 65 ft plot with the one storehouse in 1852, the site on which the Museum/Assembly building now stands. Greaves's plan of 1895 may only cover the land with the two storehouses, in other words the land on which Trott House stood. This southern lot had been owned by Edward John Huggins in the 1850s and was then probably descended to Julia Huggins who sold it eventually in 1895.

⁶⁰ LTRB 1 f144, with Greaves's plan dated 29 March 1895

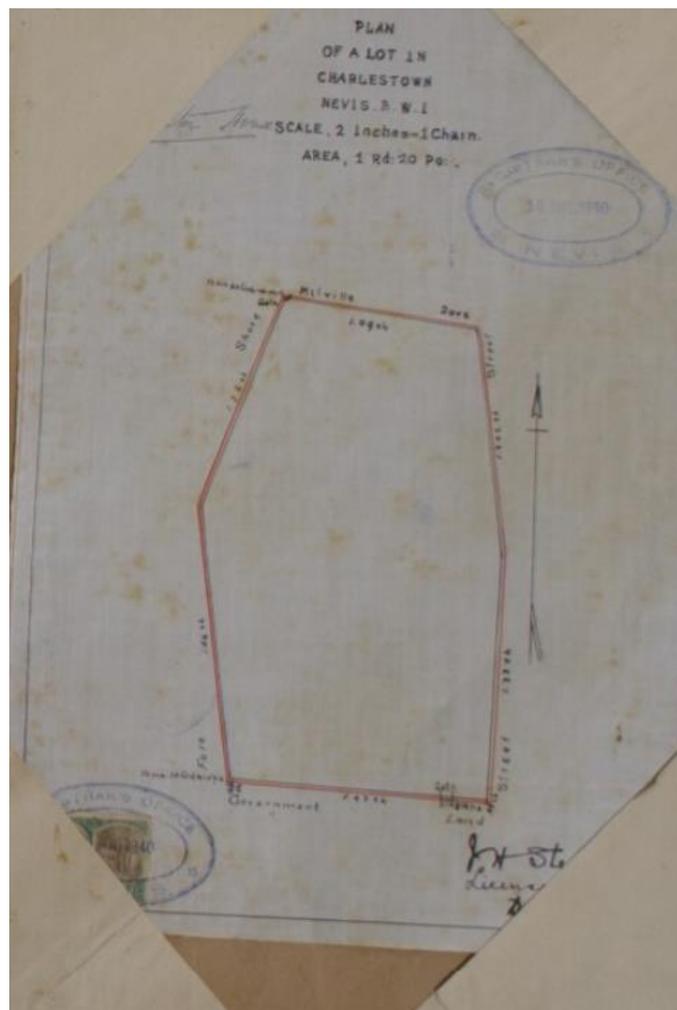
The Greaves plan shows that beyond its northern boundary the land – which may be the old Charles Pinney Huggins lot - was owned by the heirs of Edward Maynard deceased. An Edward Maynard was a member of the Nevis Assembly for St George Gingerland in the 1850s,⁶¹ and there are references to him in connection with at least three estates in St George Gingerland. Unfortunately, none of the references seem obviously to refer to a transfer of land from Charles Pinney Huggins to Maynard in Charlestown, nor has a relevant Maynard will been located to date.⁶²

⁶¹ UKNA, CO 187/32 and /33 Blue Books Nevis 1858 and 1859

⁶² CDRB 1877-1899

Reunification

However it happened, the whole plot was unified before 1940. A plan of the whole site can be found among the loose plans copied by the EAP 794 project.⁶³ A stamp shows that it was entered into the Registrar's Office in 1940, though it may have been surveyed earlier. Titled 'Plan of a lot in Charlestown Nevis' and measured in chains, it shows the following boundaries and measurements: west along the foreshore 191 ft, of which 83 ft is a kink to the northeast narrowing the lot at the northern end, east along the street 176 ft including a similar kink of 88 ft to the north west (along Low Street), south onto Government land for 94 ft and north onto land owned by Melville Dore for 72 ft. The measurements are very similar to the 1997 plan.



'Plan of a lot in Charlestown, Nevis', 1940
Courtesy of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court Registrar, Nevis

The plan shows a gate in the northwest corner, a gate and steps in the southeast corner and what may be a gate in the southwest corner. Next to this is a label which suggests a ford and therefore the small ghut or pond. Partially obscured someone has written in pencil '...ton House'. This looks like it has been added more recently, as if someone had been searching

⁶³ <https://eap.bl.uk/item/EAP794-1-10-1-139#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=138&xywh=1799%2C799%2C1041%2C815> The plan is bottom right

for a plan for the location which they called 'Hamilton House'. It may have been done in the 1950s, the 1980s or perhaps for the 1997 plan.

The details relating to this plan and subsequent transfers are only going to be found in the Courthouse in the more recent Common Deed Record Books and Land Title Register Books, with their supporting Memoranda of Transfer, which were not digitally copied by the Endangered Archives Programme.

In summary, during a period of 55 years the land which had belonged to Edward John Huggins and in 1895 belonged to Julia Huggins, was transferred at least six times before it was owned by the Trott family in 1950. Several more changes of ownership were to come. The piece of land which Edward Maynard and his heirs owned was probably the northern lot with the single storehouse which had belonged to Charles Pinney Huggins. By about 1950 it had been reunited with its neighbour to the south, either by the Evelyn, or the Trott family.

The documentary evidence shows that in the two hundred years since the 1750s the whole plot of land, on which the Museum/Assembly building and Trott House stand, had been owned by a succession of owners who included two Hamiltons but not members of the family of Alexander Hamilton.

A case of creative writing, misremembering and wishful thinking?

Given the above evidence drawn from the Court records, it is impossible to associate the land at the Museum/Assembly building (claimed to be 'Hamilton House') and Trott House with Alexander Hamilton and his family. So how did that association come about?

Photographs

There are at least four late nineteenth/early twentieth-century photos which claim to show the house, or its ruins, where Alexander Hamilton was born. Two of these photos superficially look similar.

One, an albumen print by JH Horsey, which has been dated to 1880 and is labelled 'Ruins of Alexander Hamilton's Birthplace in Charlestown, Nevis', is to be found in the 'Caribbean Photo Archive'.⁶⁴ The photo shows the robbed-out remains of the ground floor of a building somewhere on the island; it is not clear where. Horsey took other photos in the Leeward Islands which have been dated to the 1870s/1880s.

The 1880 site seems to relate to another photo, by AM Losada, entitled 'Ruins of the house where Alexander Hamilton was born, Nevis', held in an album in the UK National Archives.⁶⁵ Losada was the principal photographer of St Kitts and Nevis whose photos appear on postcards around 1900/1910. This Losada photo is also found on a postcard. It has been dated to between 1900 and 1907 by Phil Dunning, a retired material culture researcher in archaeology with Parks Canada and a collector of old photos and postcards with experience in dating early images. This shot also shows the ruins of a robbed-out ground floor, but the photo is taken from further away than Horsey's albumen print and includes part of a boundary wall. There is little context in either shot, and their location cannot be identified – even whether, or not, they were taken in Charlestown. The location could have been somewhere out in the country and cannot be linked particularly with the Museum site. What they do suggest is that the general story about a Hamilton birthplace somewhere on Nevis was current in that period.

Other photos include another postcard by Losada. This is of Trott House but it is labelled 'Hamilton House, Nevis, WI. Where Alexander Hamilton was born'.⁶⁶ Phil Dunning suggests that the card can be dated to between 1907 and 1914. He points out that Losada had thus photographed two different sites and claimed that both were Hamilton's birthplace. This confusion is somewhat typical of the claims made about the site. However, the 1907-1914 card does suggest that the story linking his birthplace to Trott House was current forty to fifty years before the Trott family moved in.

⁶⁴ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/caribbeanphotoarchive/5654907933/in/album-72157614870797205/>

⁶⁵ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/nationalarchives/7644030792/in/album-72157630743695994/> Phil Dunning has a copy of this on a postcard which can be dated to 1900-1907.

⁶⁶ <https://www.cardcow.com/514594/hamilton-house-where-alexander-was-born-nevis-caribbean-islands/>

Another postcard is a photo of the Trott House, by Jose Anjo and can be dated to before 1908. Its title is 'Nevis W.I. The House where Alexander Hamilton (The Conqueror) was born'.⁶⁷ The photo is taken from the northwest (shore side) just outside the garden of the house but inside the curtain wall of the yard. It also shows a long, hipped roof of a single storey building, possibly a storehouse, running east/west located just to the south of Trott House. Phil Dunning has pointed out that it looks as though we are seeing the northern wall of that storehouse, so therefore the edge of the yard is further to the south than appears in the photo.

Trott House is also seen in a Keystone View Company photo. A stereo view, it is labelled '20514 Birthplace of Hamilton, Island of Nevis B.W.I.'. This time it is taken from the southwest and shows less detail of the yard. The Library of Congress dates this to ca. 1905.⁶⁸

Another photo, copyrighted 1903, produced in stereoview, is captioned '24472 – Birthplace of Hamilton B.W.I.'.⁶⁹ Looking from the southwest/beach side it shows children sitting on, and standing around, the steps of a roofless, windowless, single-storey stone building that has been left to ruin, with scrub covering some of the steps. A rear wall can be seen through a window. Looking east, in the background is a yard wall and beyond it what may be the street with houses on the far side. The site looks as though it could have been the ground floor of the building whose steps and foundations later were 'reconstructed' as those of the two-storey Museum/Assembly building. One suggestion is that the relative soundness of the top course of stones might indicate a wooden, rather than stone, upper storey. In any case, if it is that building, it raises the question of what happened to the rest of the ground floor walls, shown in this photo, between 1903 and the photo of the steps from the 1980s prior to rebuilding.

There is another crucial photo of the yard taken from the southwest from a boat offshore, perhaps by a traveller in, or before, 1903 identifying the yard as the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton. Further details of this are discussed below.

Taken in the round one can separate the photos mentioned so far into two groups. There are two photos of indeterminate ruins with robbed-out walls which could be almost anywhere on Nevis or anywhere in Charlestown. The other group of photos can be dated to the period 1903 – ca. 1914. These are the Losada, Anjo and Keystone photos which identify and associate with Alexander Hamilton two different buildings, though mostly the Trott House. One of them appears to be of the ruins of the Museum/Assembly building.

The photos suggest that the story linking the yard with Alexander Hamilton had some kind of hold in local lore from about 1903. However, given that the documentary evidence links the yard with *Andrew* Hamilton and his family, the labelling of the photos is only evidence of that oral tradition. As will be seen, there is at least one other competing oral tradition about where Alexander Hamilton was born. In other cases on Nevis such pieces of oral history have proved to be inaccurate.

⁶⁷ <https://www.caribbeanmemoryproject.com/st-kitts-and-nevis-archives.html> Phil Dunning kindly pointed out and dated this photo.

⁶⁸ See Library of Congress website <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003681163/> Phil Dunning brought this stereoview to our attention.

⁶⁹ Keystone View Company, Meadville Pa, 1903 courtesy of Phil Dunning

A fictionalised biography

One of the drivers of the story about where Hamilton was born is a fictionalised biography of him called *The Conqueror* by Gertrude Atherton, an American novelist and essayist. She described it in the subtitle as 'A dramatized biography of Alexander Hamilton'. She took much trouble, in the days before air travel, to get to St Kitts, Nevis and St Croix to do research in the local court records.⁷⁰ She located some very useful information, although in snippets. But, in relation to Nevis, quite a lot of her narrative is fictional.

About the supposed house in Charlestown, to which it is alleged Rachel moved just after the death of her mother Mary Faucett, Atherton wrote:

'They sailed over to Nevis, accompanied by a dozen slaves, and took possession of Rachael's house in Main Street. It stood at the very end of the town, beyond the point where the street ceased and the road round the Island began. The high wall of the garden surrounded a grove of palms and cocoanut trees. Only sojourners from England had occupied the big comfortable house, and it was in good repair.'⁷¹

She provided no evidence for the existence of this house, for its location or ownership - neither in *The Conqueror* nor in an explanatory article in the *North American Review* entitled *The Hunt for Hamilton's Mother*.⁷² But what she did say about her motivation for writing *The Conqueror* is extremely revealing:

'Those who profess such anxiety to have the truth and nothing but the truth about Alexander Hamilton, have had the successive works of half a century to draw upon. It seemed to me that the work of the next biographer was, not to do the same old thing in the same old way, but to give the man; furthermore, to write a life that would stand a chance of being read. (My humble ambition was to give Hamilton back to the American people.)'

She wrote further in this vein about deciding 'to turn from the honoured forms of biography and the novel, and to use the form of Life' and 'writing, in fact, as if I had stood beside Hamilton throughout his life, discarding only those wearisome details we all turn to books to forget'.

Having thought originally that a Mr Stevens might have been Hamilton's father she wrote:

'But the story, indeed, took a strong hold upon my imagination, and in the four long nights on Nevis, when less romantic invaders kept me awake, I wove a tale which was very much to my taste. The Miss Hamilton was a daughter of one of the great planters and had loved a certain Mr. Stevens of St. Croix. *Her father presented her with a house down by the sea and enough to keep her alive. Here she lived until*

⁷⁰ Gertrude Atherton 'The Hunt for Hamilton's Mother' in *North American Review* 1902 p232
<https://archive.org/details/jstor-25119289>

⁷¹ Gertrude Atherton *The Conqueror* Bk 1 ch 13 <https://archive.org/details/conquerordramati00athe/page/50/mode/2up>

⁷² Gertrude Atherton 'The Hunt for Hamilton's Mother' in *North American Review* 1902 pp229-42
<https://archive.org/details/jstor-25119289>

Alexander was five years old, disinherited and deserted by all but Stevens, who came over occasionally....So tremendous a hold did this story and the personality of the woman take on my mind during those long nights and days and several that succeeded, that I identified myself with her, and I had the maternal passion in all its primitive simplicity. I told this story over and over to myself always in the first person, be it remembered always expanding and embellishing, until I was as much a figure in that bygone time as Alexander was himself. The consequence was that when the discoveries of the future compelled me to relinquish this elaborate piece of fiction, my mental attitude remained, and although obliged to forego the pleasure of telling the story in the first person, yet I almost unconsciously told it much as, during that memorable interval, I had expected to tell it.'

Two particular points emerge from this. Clearly, there was a fevered imagination at work which affected what she wrote about the location of a house.

Secondly, there is no question that, if she had been told about a specific location with connections to a Hamilton in Charlestown, or had found any actual evidence in the documents about the existence of such a house or its location, she would have said so in that article. She was, for instance, told about the existence of a village called 'Fawcett' in Gingerland. She was told about the rumour that Hamilton had been of mixed race - a story she dismissed.⁷³ Both those parts of the story were remembered but not the house.

It is possible that Gertrude Atherton, after her troubled ruminations at night, would have wandered along the lane towards Black Rock Fort, out of Charlestown towards Pinney's Beach, and come across Trott House and some ruins in a walled yard and seen the site as a possible setting for her account.

A further difficulty with Atherton and the idea that she might have identified the location of Hamilton's birthplace appears in her other works. In her novel about Nevis *The Gorgeous Isle* she identified a house of one of the protagonists situated in Charlestown as the house in which Alexander Hamilton was born. She described it in the following terms:

'The old house, a fine piece of masonry, was built about three sides of a court....A gallery traversed the second story, its pillars covered with dusty vines. All of the rooms of this story evidently opened upon the gallery...'.⁷⁴

Oddly, a similar description appears in Atherton's account of her stay, with a companion, in a hotel in St Kitts while researching Alexander Hamilton. 'The hotel was built round three sides of a court, all doors opening on an inner gallery...Miss Lounsbury's was at the far end of the right gallery'. She then went on to explain how her companion became disturbed after she had seen the ghost of a girl standing at the bottom of her bed.⁷⁵ It seems her experience in St Kitts was used as the basis for a creative description of the house Alexander Hamilton was born in. However, it bears no relation to the

⁷³ For her attitude to this possibility see p232.

⁷⁴ Gertrude Atherton *The Gorgeous Isle – A Romance* Ch. 4 Doubleday, Page and Company 1908

⁷⁵ Gertrude Atherton *Adventures of a Novelist* Ch. 8 Jonathan Cape 1932

Museum/Assembly building that was reconstructed as Hamilton's birthplace in the 1980s or to the Trott building.

It is worth noting that the military historian Harold Larson in an article in the *William and Mary Quarterly* entitled 'Alexander Hamilton: The Facts and Fiction of His Early Years', written more than 70 years ago, challenged Gertrude Atherton's fanciful account although he gave her credit for going to St Kitts and Nevis to try and investigate primary source material. Larson's own research relied frequently on material produced earlier by Danish Major-General Ramsing.⁷⁶ Larson pointed out that when Ramsing revealed 'unpleasant facts about Rachel', Gertrude Atherton 'the novelist was glad that they came too late to upset her ideal'.⁷⁷

Although Gertrude Atherton did some original and useful research in the Court Records in Nevis and St Kitts, clearly her output, taken as a whole, is not a reliable source of information for identifying whether or not Alexander Hamilton was born in a particular house in Charlestown, or born on Nevis at all.

Travel writing, more photographs and official accounts

Although the evidence is circumstantial, we may get some idea of how the story of the ruins of Hamilton's 'birthplace' grew from looking at travel writing in the years before and after Atherton. In the late 1880s the American William Agnew Paton travelled through the Caribbean on the steamer *Barracouta*, calling at Nevis for a day on the way home. He visited the ruin of the Bath Hotel, bathed in the hot spring and visited St John Figtree church where he saw the entry in the parish register for Nelson's marriage.

On the theme of great men associated with Nevis he wrote about Alexander Hamilton:

'Beyond all peradventure, this native of Nevis was one of the greatest men who ever first saw the light in the western hemisphere....Is it any wonder then that when Americans set foot on the shores of Nevis they are inspired with feelings of reverence?'

He went on: 'Most interesting to me, of all the places in the West Indies, was the fair land that gave my great compatriot birth.'⁷⁸ Nevertheless there was no mention of Paton visiting a site where Hamilton was born, nor any talk of it by his island guide. This perhaps suggests that the local lore was not yet widely told.

Another visitor to Nevis (for the first time in February 1895) was Alfred Mason Williams. He wrote in detail about the Bath Hotel but he mentioned no specific site for the birthplace of

⁷⁶ HU Ramsing, "Alexander Hamilton og Hans M0drene Slaegt," *Personal- historisk Tidsskrift*, 6ode Aargang, io. R., 6 Bd., 3-4 H. (Copenhagen, 1939)

⁷⁷ Harold Larson: Alexander Hamilton: The Fact and Fiction of his Early Years *The William and Mary Quarterly*, April 1952, Vol 9, No 2, pp139-152 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1925345>

Larson also challenged claims that Hamilton had a mixed-race heritage, that Rachel Faucett's husband Lavien was Danish-Jewish and various other tropes.

⁷⁸ WA Paton *Down the Islands* Scribners & Sons 1890 pp281-92

<https://archive.org/details/downislandsavoy01patogooq/page/n346/mode/2up/search/Hamilton>

Alexander Hamilton. All he said was: 'everyone will tell you that it [the island] was the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton'.⁷⁹

By contrast Amy Oakley, when she visited Nevis sometime between 1939 and 1941, noted the following: 'As we entered the bay the ruins of the house where Alexander Hamilton was born on January 11 1757 were pointed out.'⁸⁰

There are other contenders for the site that was pointed out to Oakley, such as Hamilton Estate or Mountravers which are prominent features as you arrive by sea. However, the site Oakley was probably referring to is the yard which now holds the Museum/Assembly building and Trott House. This had been identified in a photo that appears to date to about 1903 and was included in a travel guide published that year. An account of Henry Stark's travel to Barbados through the Caribbean on a steamship, calling at Nevis briefly, was first published in *Stark's History and Guide to Barbados and the Caribbee Islands* of 1893 which ran to a subsequent edition in 1903.⁸¹

The 1893 version stated that 'Nevis is the birthplace of one of the greatest men of the Revolution...Alexander Hamilton', went on to praise his many skills and accomplishments and talked about the reverence with which he was viewed by Americans. However, the guide did not identify any particular site of his birthplace. Stark preferred to concentrate on the Bath Hotel and the Bath House.

The 1903 edition of the guide included a photo taken from the sea captioned 'Birthplace of Alexander Hamilton. The Wall in the Center Marks the Spot'.⁸² It is clearly a view of the Museum/Assembly building/Trott House yard. The top floor of Trott House can be seen, as well as a single-storey building - perhaps the storehouse - running east to west bordering on the stream to the south of the yard. To the north of Trott House can be seen the galvanised roofs of a number of more temporary (perhaps wooden) single-storey yard buildings. The southern wall of the yard runs west at a height above the eaves of the single-storey building along the stream. However, about halfway along, this wall is itself enclosed by a protective, freestanding wall with a large gate in it. This turns a corner and runs north along the edge of the beach towards a grove of coconut palms in which there is a large two-storey building, probably in the yard belonging to the Dore family. That wall was probably built to stop the site being inundated by the sea.⁸³

Again, apart from the caption, there is no accompanying text providing an explanation of the link made between the photo and Alexander Hamilton. The text of the 1903 edition instead is substantially a copy of the 1893 edition. The photo seems to have been added as an afterthought since it is not included in the list of illustrations in the 1903 version. The fact that Stark does not elaborate in the text on the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton in the

⁷⁹ Alfred Mason Williams *Under the Trade Winds* Providence R.I. 1898. Mason's description of his first visit to Nevis was repeated by Charles Augustus Stoddard in *Cruising among the Caribbees – Summer Days in Winter Months* Scribners & Sons 1895

⁸⁰ Amy Oakley *Behold the West Indies* 1941 p259. She seems not to have visited the site.

⁸¹ James Henry Stark *Stark's History and Guide to Barbados and the Caribbee Islands* Boston 1893 and 1903. We are grateful to Phil Dunning for pointing out the existence of the guides and the photo to us.

⁸² https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/_/PWnJDwAAQBAJ?hl=

⁸³ The protecting wall is also seen in a postcard of the shoreline taken from further north. The photo was taken by Rev. D Thomas and the card was dated 14 October 1910, courtesy of Phil Dunning.

1893 edition suggests he did not know where it was. It seems odd that there was no explanation in the 1903 version if there was anything more to the story than the photo.

This photo may have been taken as evidence of the connection between the site and Alexander Hamilton but does not prove it, given the evidence that the site was owned by *Andrew* Hamilton. However, it is evidence of the local story or oral tradition that the site was connected to Alexander Hamilton. It may be significant that it appeared the year after Atherton had published her fictionalised biography.

Other descriptions from the first quarter of the twentieth century are further evidence of the confusion over sites that might be linked to Alexander Hamilton. In 1908 the distinguished surgeon Sir Frederick Treves published an account of his trip to the West Indies during which he visited Nevis:

‘On the slope of the hill immediately behind Charlestown are a few ruined walls and some remains of a terraced garden. These are the sole relics of the mansion in which Alexander Hamilton was born on January 11th, 1757. His father was a Scots merchant who had married a French lady.’⁸⁴

It is unclear where these ruined walls are. They may be the ruins photographed by Horsey in the 1880s, or perhaps they were up at Hamilton Estate, or they may have been somewhere entirely different.

Very interesting is the account published in 1920 by Katherine Burdon, the wife of the colonial administrator Sir John Burdon. This comes in an official and authoritative account of the islands published by the Crown Agents for the Government of St Kitts and Nevis. It notes the following difficulty in identifying the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton:

‘A generous American citizen has offered to erect a tablet in Nevis to the memory of that great American, Alexander Hamilton. As the site of the house in which Hamilton was born cannot be fixed with certainty, the tablet is to be erected in the Court House, as soon as the conclusion of Peace permits its completion... Beyond this [the Wesleyan Church] there is a turning to the left, at the corner of which are the ruins commonly believed to be those of the house where Alexander Hamilton was born.’⁸⁵

This was written before, or around, the end of the First World War and describes the location of the Museum/Assembly building/Trott House yard and the local belief that this was where Alexander Hamilton was born. It clearly demonstrates that the Colonial Administration of that era did not know where Alexander Hamilton was actually born and were sufficiently cautious to place any memorial to him in a prominent, but neutral, location.

⁸⁴ Sir Frederick Treves *The Cradle of the Deep: An Account of a Voyage to the West Indies* 1913 edition p195, courtesy of Phil Dunning

⁸⁵ Katherine Janet Burdon *A Handbook of St Kitts-Nevis* Crown Agents 1920 Chapter on ‘Excursions’, courtesy of Phil Dunning

To add to the confusion, this official handbook then went on to say that Hamilton Estate belonged to Alexander Hamilton's father, thus muddling James Hamilton with Andrew Hamilton and William Vaughan Hamilton.

Other drivers of the story in the twentieth century

Bertram Baker, the first black person elected to any political office in Brooklyn and a New York State Assemblyman, was born on Nevis in 1898 and emigrated to the USA in 1915. He married Irene Baker, his first cousin, whose parents had also emigrated from Nevis to the USA. He was very proud to have been born on the same island as Alexander Hamilton. He used to tell the story of how, as a young man, he had worked in a store on Main Street in Charlestown called the 'Scotch House' which was a stone's throw from where Alexander Hamilton was born.⁸⁶

Stories get muddled with the passage of time, and it is perfectly possible that in the early years of the twentieth century people remembered the fact that the site had belonged to a Hamilton family and naturally associated it with Alexander Hamilton. In addition, they may have thought they had Gertrude Atherton's *The Conqueror* to back it up. Without easy access to the records in the Courthouse, the story would then have had a certain amount of credibility.

In 1950 the American William (Bill) Trott and his Nevisian wife Marion bought the whole site, including the northern part, from the Merritt family. According to his son Amba, Bill Trott was very engaged in the story 'and kept bringing strangers to see the site "where Alexander Hamilton was born"'. As a result, it became an unofficial museum and tourists would call. Marion Trott and others in the local community called the building 'Hamilton House'. Bill Trott meanwhile 'kept trying to interest the local authorities' in the importance of the site. He succeeded in getting a group of interested people, including Bertram Baker, Laurens Hamilton (a descendant of Alexander Hamilton), and some US 'officials', to 'come to Nevis and verify the site's authentication'.⁸⁷

It would be interesting to know on what basis they authenticated the site. Presumably Bertram Baker was only able to say, 200 years after the event, that the site was the one he had heard was Hamilton's birthplace; Laurens Hamilton may just have been an interested by-stander. If there had been any documentary, or other, evidence it is assumed that they would have presented it at the time, though none seems to be available now. With the bicentennial coming up of Hamilton's claimed birthdate in 1757, there was, of course, an added incentive to identify a particular site.

A number of events followed. The local authorities bought the northern half of the site from the Trott family and put up a block wall to separate the two parts.⁸⁸ That wall has only recently been taken down.

In 1957 preparations were made to celebrate the bicentennial of Hamilton's birth on Nevis. The Governor of the Leeward Islands, clearly with an eye on boosting the local economy

⁸⁶ For a summary of Baker's political origins see 'How Alexander Hamilton inspired Bertram Baker...' *New York Times* <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/02/nyregion/how-alexander-hamilton-inspired-bertram-baker-brooklyns-first-black-elected-official.html> 2.11.2018; also Ambassador Everson Hull on *The Boss of Black Brooklyn* (Ron Howell, 2020) <https://www.bossofblackbrooklyn.com/ambassador-everson-hull.html>

⁸⁷ Evelyn Henville and Amba Trott 'NHCS Acquires Historic Trott House' in *The Gathering*, August 2011

⁸⁸ Evelyn Henville and Amba Trott 'NHCS Acquires Historic Trott House' in *The Gathering*, August 2011. The Scotch House building is known as Evelyn's Drug Store in 2020, according to John Guilbert.

with increased numbers of visitors, thought it would be a good idea to produce a short guide to Nevis to 'help make the island better known throughout the world'. An introductory letter by Laurens Hamilton, a distant great grandson of Alexander Hamilton and 'Chairman (of the) Committee on Birthplace and Boyhood Home', talked about how gratifying it was that Hamilton was so 'revered on the island'. The booklet was written by Mary Pomeroy and imaginatively illustrated by the artist Eva Wilkin. According to the Preface, Wilkin's family estate, Clay Ghut in Gingerland, 'borders on Fawcett's, once the home of Hamilton 's grand-parents'.⁸⁹ Whether or not this latter claim is true in detail, it seems to have been the story about 'Fawcett's' estate which was believed at the time. However, as told in the booklet, the story of the house in Charlestown seems to have come straight from Atherton's *The Conqueror*.

There is clearly a piece of local lore linking the Fawcett family with the parish of Gingerland, with some foundation in documentary evidence, in which some of the details directly contradict the other piece of local lore which links Alexander's Hamilton's birth to Charlestown and which, to date, has no documentary support. It raises questions about why the local historical society would choose the local lore with no documentary support over the other and whether, in fact, sufficient scrutiny has been given to either.

To mark the bicentennial, a commemorative plaque was installed on the appropriate day by the 'Alexander Hamilton Bicentennial Commission on behalf of the people of the United States of America'. It stated that Alexander Hamilton was born on 11 January 1757 'at this site'. Mary Pomeroy, among others, had identified a two-storey stone building as the birthplace of Hamilton, endorsed by Laurens Hamilton and the 'Alexander Hamilton Bicentennial Commission'. It is worth emphasising that collectively they were referring to an earlier incarnation of what we now know as the Museum/Assembly building, not Trott House, as has been claimed by the NHCS recently.

Interestingly, on the outside wall of the yard there is also a plaque commemorating a visit of six days in March 1607 by the settlers who went on to found the settlement of Jamestown in Virginia. This plaque was given by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1957 on the 350th anniversary. So, elements of the early history of the USA were central to the concerns of the colonial administration on Nevis in the 1950s. As with the story of Nelson's involvement in Nevis, it is not clear how central they were to the people of Nevis.

In 1980 the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society was founded by a group of farsighted Nevisians and expatriates, some of them Americans. According to an anniversary edition of the society's *Newsletter* in 2000, 'The first undertaking was convincing the Nevis Island Administration and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that the derelict Hamilton birthplace needed to be restored.' The society got approval and funding, and the project was completed in time for Independence Day celebrations on 19 September 1983.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Mary Pomeroy *The Island of Nevis: The Birthplace of Alexander Hamilton* 1956

⁹⁰ *NHCS Newsletter* No. 58, November 2000 and *The Gathering* No. 83, June – August 2008. The process was assisted by US Ambassador Bish. The building was dedicated by the actress Cicely Tyson, the daughter of emigrants from Nevis to New York.

There is an obvious interest in where significant historical figures were born. However, it is likely that there were geo-political issues in play as well. The US government would have been interested in supporting a prestige project on a small island and in having a potential ally in the Eastern Caribbean that was about to shake off its colonial masters. It may be no coincidence that all this was happening at a time when there were also increasing tensions over political developments on the island of Grenada in the months before the US invasion on 25 October 1983.⁹¹ It would be interesting to know whether or not the local administration, the British colonial government, the NHCS or USAID did, at the time, try to check the documentary sources for evidence of a link between the site and Alexander Hamilton.

Tourism potential

In passing, it is illustrative to look at the case of Nelson and his links with Nevis. Focussing on significant historical figures certainly has potential for drawing in tourist revenue - both to the island and the NHCS - but it also has drawbacks.

In addition to Hamilton, Nevis can draw on the figure of Vice-Admiral Lord Nelson. Horatio Nelson, then a captain of the frigate *HMS Boreas*, was a frequent visitor to Nevis in the mid-1780s as he patrolled the Leeward Islands from his base in Antigua. During this time, he married Frances (Fanny) Nisbet, niece of the President of the Council of Nevis, the slave-owning sugar planter John Richardson Herbert. An important part of the Royal Navy's duty in this period was to defend Britain's significant role in the whole transatlantic slavery economy, including the supply of enslaved people from Africa.

Expatriate and local members of the NHCS in 1987 spotted an opportunity to generate tourist interest in the island by celebrating the 200th anniversary of Nelson's marriage to Fanny Nisbet. There was a re-enactment of the wedding, a horse-race, a swimming competition and other festivities which seem to have been a success. The process was observed by Joseph B Treaster, the Caribbean Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*, who, in an article for the paper, noted some local disquiet.

'Some Nevisians grumbled, however, that a black island that had endured slavery and colonialism should not be lionizing a couple of white colonials. Others contended that Nelson, like Alexander Hamilton who was born here in 1757, had never done anything for Nevis and that therefore there was no reason for Nevis to do anything for Nelson.' Simeon Daniel, Nevis's 52-year-old Premier, took part in many of the Nelson events, but he, too, seemed lukewarm to the anniversary. "We cannot change the history we have," he said. "We have to accept it. If it can be used to our benefit I see no reason we shouldn't exploit it."⁹²

This neatly illustrates both the dilemma and the temptations facing the NHCS.

⁹¹ In October 1983, about a month after St Kitts and Nevis became independent, the US government launched the invasion of Grenada after a formal appeal for help from the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States.

⁹² Joseph B Treaster 'Here's to Nelson and his Bride and to Nevis Too' *New York Times* 13 March 1987

‘Reconstruction’

A photo of the remains of the stone building, taken sometime before 1983 and labelled ‘Hamilton House prior to rebuilding’, shows just the double set of stone steps of the present Museum/Assembly building rising above the entrance on the ground floor, with the northern boundary wall in the background. The site had clearly been tidied up.⁹³

It was claimed in 2011 by the NHCS that Eva Wilkin’s drawing of ‘Hamilton House’ from 1956 formed the basis for the reconstruction.⁹⁴ However, it was always unlikely that those involved in ‘reconstructing’ such a supposedly important building would simply have based their work on an imagined drawing by a local artist.

Richard Lupinacci, the current President of the NHCS, was involved with the ‘Hamilton House’ project at the time and noted the following around 2017:

‘The only above-ground building remains present in that area was a two-sided exterior set of cut stone stairs, and an adjacent rectangular foundation footprint. The stairs were incorporated into the reconstruction design, and the foundation footprint served as the basis for a two-storey structural reconstruction’.

In terms of finding below ground any of the lost structures on the site in future, Mr Lupinacci noted that the ground level in the yard around the reconstructed building was raised about a foot.⁹⁵

Mr Lupinacci, who is a determined advocate of the link between the site and Alexander Hamilton, has been kind enough to add more detail to his account. This is a most useful record of the thinking behind the ‘reconstruction’. Since it is unclear how much of this information has been recorded in the NHCS Archive, it has been included here in some detail. He called it ‘a careful replica of the original late 17th century building in terms of its outward appearance as it was built on the original foundations and incorporating the surviving external steps and some of the surviving walls.’

‘Very little of the loose cut stones from the original building were on the site. They would have been salvaged and used elsewhere in the reconstruction of Charlestown after the earthquake. In 1983 cut stones were sourced from a collapsed mill tower on Government land at Indian Castle estate. The stones were cut from the same style and period as the original stones...Because excavations of the footings showed a width of 28 inches the height of the masonry walls was established. It was a two-storey masonry building. The excavations revealed the lower floor was used for storing barrels of molasses for shipping. The plastered floor sloped to a central drain which held an iron copper to collect the drippings.

⁹³ NHCS Newsletter No. 58, November 2000

⁹⁴ Evelyn Henville and Amba Trott ‘NHCS Acquires Historic Trott House’ in *The Gathering*, August 2011

⁹⁵ Neal Ferris and Edward Eastaugh ‘Report of the Ground Penetrating Radar Survey at the Museum of Nevis History, Charlestown Nevis, March 2017’

The upper storey was obviously occasional domestic space not storerooms as the steps were too narrow for moving barrels of rum, sugar or muscovado.

Also the elevated space would have provided natural ventilation for residential use. Since the site had already proven vulnerable to earth movement it was decided to make it earthquake proof internally. And resistant to tsunamis. The excavations revealed that the site had been inundated from the sea in the not too distant past.

Accordingly a reinforced concrete slab resting on two massive reinforced columns was incorporated. The rebuilt walls are mass masonry as was the original, however, the slab and upper storey can now stand on their own. The walls could fall or wash away and the slab would remain.⁹⁶

Some of this is extremely useful, for instance the decision to create a concrete slab on two reinforced pillars to try and cope with the threat from earthquakes and tsunamis and the fact that there seems to have been evidence of the site having been inundated from the sea.

Also interesting is the evidence confirming that the lower floor, at least, was used as a storehouse. This had also been identified in the documents recording ownership in the eighteenth century by the family of Andrew Hamilton and, particularly, the Huggins family in the 1840s.

It is possible that the upper storey was used as domestic accommodation, occasional or more permanent. It is demonstrable in the documentary evidence that residents of Charlestown did live above what were called stores, though whether in individual cases these were shops or storehouses is not always clear from the description. Lawrence Nicolson's house, for instance, was situated above his stores and the Bank at the time of the earthquake in 1843.⁹⁷ Alternatively, it is possible that the upper floor was used as storage for imports for both plantation and town life, such as cloth, clothing, foodstuffs, barrel staves, medical supplies and the many other lighter, more perishable items which could be carried up the double staircase.

Whether or not the upper floor of the Museum/Assembly building was a timber structure, as in a 'blouse and skirt' arrangement, or built of stone, seems, according to Mr Lupinacci, to rest on the width of the footings. The fact that very little of the original stone was left on the site in the mid-twentieth century might possibly be attributable to both recycling of stone from the ground floor and the presence of a wooden upper floor. These and other structural questions are for others more qualified to determine.

Given the previously identified muddle over the naming of buildings, it is not quite clear what the NHCS is claiming about the original stone building, i.e. when and why it fell into a state of near total collapse.

⁹⁶ Email communication from President Lupinacci to the authors and the Board of the NHCS 14 July 2020 amid the debate prompted by the circulation to the Board of the first version of this report.

⁹⁷ http://www.nevisdm.com/earthquake_account_nevis_1843.html

Since the turn of the Millennium

One particular loss to the cultural heritage of the island (and to the process of locating the land belonging to Andrew Hamilton) should be noted. Around 2010 Black Rock Fort was demolished, and it is possible that some of its stone was incorporated into a part of the southern wall of the 'Hamilton House' yard. According to John Guilbert, the fort stood about 40 yards north of the Museum yard. The land on which it stood had once belonged to the family of Ira Dore and had incorporated a livery stable.⁹⁸

It will be remembered that the government of Nevis owned the northern half of the site on which stood the reconstructed Museum/Assembly building. Amba Trott's family were keen to sell their house on the southern side of the block wall, and the NHCS were equally keen to buy it. In an act of great generosity, the family were willing to sell the site at a 'very favourable price' and on equally favourable payment terms. The NHCS took ownership of the property in 2011 and recently the block wall was removed. So, the two halves of the original site have been re-united in fact, if not in ownership.⁹⁹

In addition, much closer links have been established between the NHCS and the Alexander Hamilton Awareness Society (AHA) which benefit the NHCS in terms of financial support, publicity, mutual visits and AHA support for scholarships. Together with the phenomenal success of 'Hamilton: An American Musical' this has resulted in, what must be to the NHCS and to the Nevis Island Administration, a very welcome increase in visitor numbers. This may, of course, bring a certain psychological dependency on what is essentially a pressure group, and make it much more difficult for the NHCS to re-evaluate the evidence in relation to a site that it has already declared to be 'Hamilton's Birthplace'.

UNESCO bid

One other development should be noted. From about 2016 there was a very energetic campaign by the Nevis World Heritage Committee (NWHC) to get a particular area of historic Charlestown added to UNESCO's World Heritage list. 'Hamilton House' was part of this application, and the supposed link with Alexander Hamilton was considered to be an important selling point. This first application to UNESCO was evaluated by ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites.

Writing about 'Hamilton House', the presentation by the Nevis World Heritage Committee to ICOMOS stated:

'Hamilton House stands on the original site where Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, and architect of its economy, is believed to have been born and spent his childhood. Elements of the original structure have been preserved.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ John Guilbert pers. comm. May 2020

⁹⁹ The government in 2020 owns the northern part and the NHCS the southern.

¹⁰⁰ 'City of Charlestown – Briefing Report prepared for the ICOMOS Upstream Advisory Mission...' p12 - Annex 6 'Report of the ICOMOS Upstream Process for the City of Charlestown, Nevis Final Report' 2018

ICOMOS recited the many reasons why Hamilton is considered both locally and internationally to be a very important figure. It went on to say:

‘For those reasons the physical site on which he was born is profoundly recognized by the local, national and international communities. Although the State Party attributes high value to the fact that Alexander Hamilton was born in Charlestown and that his birthplace is still in existence, Hamilton House was considerably reconstructed in the 1980s and its authenticity and integrity cannot be seen to be intact.’¹⁰¹

Firstly, it should be noted that the submission of the Nevis World Heritage Committee to ICOMOS identified the stone building in a photo as the ‘Alexander Hamilton House and Nevis Museum of Natural History’, not Trott House.¹⁰²

Secondly, the documentary evidence linking the ‘Hamilton House’ site to Alexander Hamilton presented by the Nevis World Heritage Committee to ICOMOS was almost non-existent. If the NHCS had had firm evidence of a link, presumably it would have presented it to ICOMOS through the NWHC. It is entirely unclear why ICOMOS did not challenge the underlying assumption of a link between the yard and the family of Alexander Hamilton. Apparently ICOMOS did not examine this question but instead asked whether there was any documentation supporting the details of the rebuilding of Hamilton House.

Local Lore

The case for Alexander Hamilton having been born on Nevis at all seems to rest among Hamilton scholars on the few snippets of information that he divulged to members of his family at various times. Historians have on different occasions changed their minds about when this event took place. None of them can provide evidence about where he was born. Most accept, in the absence of firm information to the contrary, that he knew on which island he was born. Recently there has also been discussion about how much time the family of Alexander Hamilton spent on Nevis and when.

The first version of this report prompted an animated discussion within the NHCS, and it has become clear that the case for identifying the Museum/Assembly building/Trott House yard as the birthplace of Alexander Hamilton has rested almost solely on oral tradition. This tradition has also been called ‘local lore’, or ‘legend’.

It is interesting that the Hamilton scholar Ron Chernow has a single sentence about where specifically on Nevis Hamilton was born and lived his early life. He described the story as ‘legend’:

‘From her father, Rachel had inherited a waterfront property on the main street in Charlestown, the Nevis capital, where legend proclaims that Alexander was born and lived. If so, he would have seen off to the left the town anchorage.’¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ ‘Report of the ICOMOS Upstream Process for the City of Charlestown, Nevis Final Report’ 2018 p16, 3.2 criterion vi

¹⁰² See image A22 ‘City of Charlestown – Briefing Report prepared for the ICOMOS Upstream Advisory Mission...’ p29 - Annex 6 in ‘Report of the ICOMOS Upstream Process for the City of Charlestown, Nevis Final Report’ 2018

¹⁰³ Ron Chernow *Alexander Hamilton* Ch 1 Head of Zeus 2016

The NHCS has become the main proponent of this tradition of linking Alexander Hamilton's birthplace with the Museum/Assembly building/Trott House yard, but has been in an almost perpetual state of motion and confusion about which of the buildings is the one on which to focus. There has been strong support for this oral tradition from early twentieth-century photos and postcards, though no clarity about which building was involved. Probably the photos and local lore were mutually supportive. Some of the other drivers, such as the creative biography of Hamilton by Gertrude Atherton can be dismissed as imaginative fiction in relation to events in his early life on Nevis.

Local lore can produce many stories. In the case of Hamilton there have been a number. Gertrude Atherton heard tell that Hamilton was of mixed-race. It is clear that she wanted not to believe this, but it is a story that has had a long run and has been repeated to the authors recently.

Another local story recycled by travellers to the island is that Alexander Hamilton's family owned Hamilton's Estate. However, the estate was owned by Andrew Hamilton and his family in the late eighteenth century, and it seems they were not related to the statesman.

There is another piece of competing local lore about the Hamilton family. It is one of the reasons why some people do not believe the local legend linking the yard in Charlestown with Alexander Hamilton. This account suggests that Hamilton was born and lived his early life in Gingerland where the Faucetts had an estate. There is documentary support in the Court Records for their having had an estate in Gingerland. Added to this is the story which Atherton heard that there was a village called Fawcett's. Both stories need further investigation.

There is another, more fundamental point which relates to the accuracy of these tales on Nevis. A number of them have proved to be simply untrue and/or muddled. However, they have a long shelf life because they are retold by the NHCS and the Nevis Tourism Authority in their publicity material. Two cases will illustrate how these stories mutate.

The estate of Eden Browne is on the tourist route because of a duel in 1822. Local legend has it that, on the night before a wedding, the groom shot the best man, who was a brother of the bride. According to one version of the story, this was over a beautiful, mixed-race 'slave girl'. The grieving bride is supposed to haunt Eden Browne. In fact, there was a duel in which one man, John Huggins, was shot dead. The cause of the duel was not an enslaved woman but two quarrelsome slave-owning families squaring up to each other over the loan of a blacksmith.¹⁰⁴ The NHCS has, in the past, organised a 'Moonlight Picnic' to promote and perpetuate 'the legend of the tragic wedding of Julia Huggins'.¹⁰⁵

Another piece of local lore circulating on the island has it that Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the renowned romantic poet, visited Nevis and stayed at the Bath Hotel. Two Coleridges did, in fact, visit Nevis but not the poet. In 1825 the Lord Bishop of Barbados, William Hart

¹⁰⁴ D Small and C Eickelmann 'A Nevis "Legend" Revisited: the Huggins-Maynard Duel of 1822' <https://seis.bristol.ac.uk/~emceee/hugginsmaynardduel.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ *Activities for the Year 2009-2010*: 28 March 2010

Coleridge, and his nephew Henry Nelson Coleridge, visited the island to consecrate the Cottle Chapel at Round Hill. They did not stay in the Bath Hotel but at Government House.¹⁰⁶

One of the parallels with the Alexander Hamilton story is that it is a simple, and initially harmless, confusion over names. Another is that the Samuel Taylor Coleridge story is still recycled 200 years after the event, just as the Hamilton birthplace story is 250 years on.

It should be added that muddled tales about Hamilton, or locations connected with him, relying solely on local lore or legend are not the sole prerogative of Nevis. Larson points out that Cruger's store in Christiansted on St Croix, where the young Hamilton worked for a while, had disappeared. Local people identified the site as being on a particular corner of King's Street when, in fact, it was on the other side of the road.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

The date of Alexander Hamilton's birth has been argued over for at least 80 years, and more evidence is coming to light all the time. It may be that, for a while, 1754 will become the accepted year of birth, rather than 1755 or 1757. Hamilton's son said that his father was born on Nevis and, while there may be an absence of much supporting evidence, most Hamilton scholars continue to accept this.

Scholars have, however, shied away from identifying any particular site. There is also considerable scepticism among them about there being any site in Charlestown linked to Rachel Faucett, let alone one on the shore.

The NHCS has been bold in its assertion that the location of Hamilton's birth was one of the various buildings in the yard where the Museum of Nevis History and the Nevis Island Assembly building stands. In practice, however, it seems that the question has never been seriously investigated. Partly this is because the Nevis Court Records, which include details of property ownership, have until now been relatively difficult to access and work on in any detail. These historic records have now gone online making it possible to carry out such research.

From the descriptions and plans which have thus become available, the current 'Hamilton House'/Trott House property has been identified. The ownership of the property can be traced back from the Trott family in 1950 through various owners to the Huggins family, to the family of *Andrew* Hamilton from 1772 to 1807, and further through to Sir Ralph Payne and his father in the 1760s and probably into the 1750s. They show that the site was primarily a commercial one, with storehouses for merchants and planters, rather than a domestic one.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Nelson Coleridge *Six Months in the West Indies* John Murray 1826

¹⁰⁷ Harold Larson: Alexander Hamilton: The Fact and Fiction of his Early Years *The William and Mary Quarterly*, April 1952 p147 fn 37

The Hamiltons involved did not include Alexander Hamilton or his parents but were a family of the same name who came from St Kitts and were merchants and planters who owned Hamilton Estate.

However, based on the little information Alexander Hamilton revealed about his origins, people believed, not unreasonably, that he was born on Nevis. A local lore, or oral tradition, developed and photos were produced associating him with a site which in reality had been owned by Andrew Hamilton and his son. The story was fuelled by a fictionalised biography published in 1902. Despite this, during the First World War the colonial administration of St Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla was unable to identify any particular location as the site and declined to erect a plaque at the Assembly/Trott House yard. Nevertheless, local lore was given further traction by enthusiastic returning migrants from the USA in the 1950s.

More fuel may have been added by the US government's desire to assist a newly independent nation with a prestige project in 1983. Having a site identified as Hamilton's birthplace boosted the island's tourism offer, especially for visitors from the USA. Recent support from the Alexander Hamilton Awareness Society and the success of the musical about Hamilton have provided opportunities for the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society and the wider island economy to further capitalise on the tourism potential.

Hamilton scholars remain reasonably in agreement at this point that Alexander Hamilton probably knew which island he was born on. Until further detailed research proves otherwise, the NHCS and the local Tourism Authority could use the undoubted interest in Hamilton among visitors to promote the island as a whole rather than concentrating on claims about a specific site on the waterfront which are not supported by the evidence. Such a re-alignment would also have the benefit of allowing a broader view of the past on Nevis that does not obscure other important aspects of Nevis history.

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Of course, we are entirely responsible for any errors or inaccuracies, any views expressed and for the conclusions drawn.

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