

Introduction

ON ANNIVERSARIES

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BEFORE DAWN on July 11, 1804, Alexander Hamilton boarded a boat in New York City with two friends and four oarsmen, and headed up the Hudson River to Weehawken, New Jersey, where he was to meet Aaron Burr for the famous duel that would end Hamilton's life. As the sun rose and the boat pulled out into the current, he looked back at lower Manhattan and said, "It's going to be a great city someday."

This is the scene described by Ron Chernow, who talks about his newly released biography, *Alexander Hamilton*, in this issue's "history makers" interview. Two hundred years after Hamilton's death, the New-York Historical Society commemorates the bicentennials of both the duel and its own founding with an exhibition of unprecedented scale, *Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America*. In anticipation of the show's fall opening, the spring *New-York Journal of American History* includes essays by Richard Brookhiser, the show's co-curator, on Hamilton's life and influence; by James Oliver Horton on Hamilton and slavery; by Robert A. McCaughey on Hamilton's education at King's (Columbia) College; by Richard Sylla on Hamilton's role in the Federalist financial revolution; by Joanne B. Freeman on the duel; and by Sherwin B. Nuland on Hamilton's final hours. Through the words of these eminent scholars, a multidimensional portrait of the man emerges.

But what of Hamilton's great city? In addition to the above-mentioned bicentennials, 2004 marks the centennials of the New York City subway, of

the renaming and development of Times Square, and of the *General Slocum* disaster. It is also the one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary of Madison Square Garden and the one hundred fiftieth birthday celebration of Central Park. These auspicious events are recognized in illustrated essays about the subway by Clifton Hood; Times Square by James Traub; the *Slocum* disaster by Edward T. O'Donnell; Madison Square Garden by Catherine Lewis; and Central Park by Sara Cedar Miller. Of particular interest are the photographs in Hood's subway article, drawn from the collections of the New-York Historical Society. Chosen from the more than fifty-thousand prints documenting every square foot of land where track was laid, both above and below ground, the images speak volumes about how the subway contributed to the city's growth. They vividly illustrate the twentieth century imposing itself on the nineteenth, the subway transforming the more rural sections of the boroughs into the busy cross-roads we know today.

Thus, Alexander Hamilton, New York, and the way we chart the past by acknowledging an anniversary, are the overlapping themes that tie this journal issue together. A deeper, but less-obvious bond is the way that the New-York Historical Society and its collections record and interpret these and other events in our history. From the physician's bill for Hamilton's "final illness," to flotsam from the doomed *Slocum*, to the original manuscript minutes of the anti-slavery New-York Manumission Society, of which Hamilton was a founder, to peep show tokens from Times Square — the N-YHS has collected and borne witness to it all.

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