

The Reynolds Pamphlet

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Historical Paper

Senior Division

Word Count: 1636

She lowered herself by the fireplace, clutching a fistful of the indecent parchment firmly. The parchment was beginning to become blunt, her tears eating away at the edges and smearing the elegant scribe. Elizabeth Schuyler glowered at the hand grasping her husband's work. He had told the whole world how he had brought some woman into their house and committed sin in their bed. The husband she thought was loyal to her told her untruths, which later ruined their lives. When he wrote to her to reside longer with her parents in Albany, she had thought of it as a retreat from him. However, when Eliza returned to find this shocking and shameful pamphlet in the hands of friends and of their family...It was but thin sheets of parchment scrawled upon with preposterous confessions, yet they could bring tremendous sorrow. After arriving to this pamphlet, she went through every emotion. At first there was the disbelieving, then the sadness, forgiveness, and now all she felt was a white-hot rage. Perhaps that's what convinced her to get any of the parchments he wrote and burn them in the flames. Eliza glanced at the parchment in her hand one last time before throwing it into the blazing fireplace. Being so near to the scorching heat dried the tears that had streaked down her cheeks, but her eyes were still watering viciously. After the years of marriage and love her once faithful husband misguided her. It was his secrets that were causing her this agony and humiliation. As she tossed more parchment into the flames she felt her tears flow from her eyes. Had she not been good enough to suit him? How could he believe she would forgive him for this? And in the warmth of the fire, she allowed sobs to wrack her body to release her conflicting emotions. A hand rested softly on her shoulder and Eliza flinched. Peering through curtain of hair, she met her son's eyes. Philip, their son, knowing of his father's affair troubled her immensely. Memories of them enjoying each others

company pushed into her head and more tears slid down her cheeks. Philip wrapped his arms around her in a soft embrace. She knew well that he was trying to keep strong, but the tear marks on his face showed his struggle to accept it. They stayed like that for a while, comforting each other.

What could have caused so much agony and humiliation for the Hamilton family? The source was The Reynolds Pamphlet, scribed by Alexander Hamilton. Do you know about The Reynolds Pamphlet? Some people do, but only from listening to the Broadway musical, Hamilton. However, the musical leaves out many details from the scandalous event that occurred at the time of the American Revolution. From the secret letters to the pamphlet itself, learn about the affair and famous political sex scandal. The Reynolds Pamphlet is an example of conflict and compromise in history, because it was the first sex scandal in American political history, included blackmail, and informed America of a torrid affair between Alexander Hamilton and Maria Reynolds.

The start of The Reynolds Pamphlet begun with an unknown affair. This affair was amid Alexander Hamilton and Maria Reynolds who met in the summer of 1791. Maria approached Hamilton while he was at his home in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Alexander Hamilton was the secretary of the United States Treasury and Maria was to soon be considered his mistress. She reached Hamilton, revealing to him that her husband, James Reynolds, had mistreated and abandoned her. Maria asked for his help and monetary aid, saying she needed money to stay with her friends. Not having any money currently on his person, Hamilton retrieved Maria's address

so he was able to deliver the funds in person. When Hamilton arrived at Maria's boarding house, she led him upstairs to her bedroom recounts that "Some conversation ensued from which it was quickly apparent that other than pecuniary consolation would be acceptable."<sup>1</sup> They continued to meet each other regularly; However, Hamilton wanted to end the affair in the autumn of 1791. He did not end the affair in autumn like he wished, and the affair reached its end in the June of 1792.

A twist to Hamilton and Maria's affair is that Maria's husband, a certain James Reynolds, was well-aware of their numerous meetings. James Reynolds had served in the commissary department during the Revolutionary War. He was several years older than Maria and was very abusive towards her. When he found out about their affair, he let them continue it, but did so by blackmailing Hamilton. He said that if Hamilton didn't pay him, he would reveal the affair. Afraid of the affair being made public, Hamilton obliged and gave James sums of money. However, in the November of 1792, he was imprisoned for committing forgery. In more detail, he was jailed because he had been participating in a scheme involving unpaid wages intended for Revolutionary War veterans. Naturally, he called out to his 'friend' Hamilton, wanting Hamilton to assist him, but Hamilton refused. Enraged by Hamilton, James Reynolds sought out Hamilton's Republican rivals, claiming he had information to bring the Federalist hero down.

Following this event, James Reynolds informed three other men about the affair. The first three men to discover this included Frederick Muhlenberg, Abraham Venable, and a future president, James Monroe. The three decided to confront Hamilton on the fifteenth of December,

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Hamilton, "Printed Version of the "Reynolds Pamphlet", 1797", <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0138-0002>

in the same year of 1792. Hamilton admitted to their accusations and his role in the affair. A few months later James Reynolds sent Hamilton a letter that forbade him from meeting Maria. It said:

**“From James Reynolds**

Philadelphia 2d. May. 1792.

Sir

I must now for ever forbid you of visiting Mrs. R any more I was in hopes that it would in time ware off, but I find there is no hopes. So I am determed to put a finell end to it. if its in my power. for I find by your Seeing her onely Renews the Friendship, and likewise when you Call you are feareful any person Should See you am I a person of Such a bad Carector. that you would not wish to be seen in Coming in my house in the front way. all any Person Can say of me is that I am poore and I dont know if that is any Crime. So I must meet my fate. I have my Reasons for it for I cannot be Reconsiled to it. for there is know person Can tell the pain it give me except the[y] were plased in my sutivation I am shure the world would despise me if the[y] Onely new what I have bin Reconsiled to, I am in hopes in a short time to make you amends for your favour Rendered me I am Sir your humble Servant

J. Reynolds

Alexr. Hamilton Esqr.’<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander Hamilton, “To Alexander Hamilton from James Reynolds”, 15 December 1791, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-10-02-0029>

The affair could have come to its end right then, but it continued when he got more letters from both Maria and James Reynolds. On June 2, 1792, Hamilton received another letter from Maria. In the letter, she begged him to come back to her. Only a week after getting her letter, her husband wrote to him. He was asking to borrow three hundred dollars, more than double what he usually asked for. Yet, Hamilton obliged.

Hamilton was stuck in it now, being that he did not discontinue the affair even though he had wanted to and still paid James money. Then there was another factor coming into play- for James Monroe sent the letters from Maria and James Reynolds to one of Hamilton's rivals, Thomas Jefferson. Armed with this new information, Thomas Jefferson began to spread rumors about Hamilton's private life. Finally, Hamilton put an end to the whole affair in the year of 1792.

Still unable to escape the affair, he concluded that the only way to preserve his economic reputation and create his new legacy was to create a pamphlet. In this ninety-five paged pamphlet he wrote about what he had done and the meetings with Maria. Only a few people knew and by publishing this pamphlet, he allowed thousands to read what he had done. Before it gained its name of *The Reynolds Pamphlet* it was titled '*Observations on Certain Documents Contained in No. V & VI of "The History of the United States for the Year 1796," In Which the Charge of Speculation Against Alexander Hamilton, Late Secretary of the Treasury, is Fully Refuted*'. The historic pamphlet was published August thirty first, 1797.

The people who read it were shocked, disgusted, and enraged after reading the pamphlet. They had read everything Hamilton had committed. What truly made them angered was how he

had participated in the affair while his family was not present and states in his pamphlet, “Mrs. Hamilton with her children being absent on a visit to her father”<sup>3</sup>.

Mrs. Hamilton was Elizabeth Schuyler otherwise called Eliza or Betsey and was the loyal wife of Alexander Hamilton. She and their children were away on a visit to her father and relatives in Albany. Hamilton encouraged her to stay in Albany, so he could have his rendezvous with Maria without questions. In fact, she forgave him and tried to undo the damage of his last decade of life. She loved and remained faithful to him even after death, but she had still been humiliated by the pamphlet. Eliza reacted by leaving Hamilton and moving to Albany with her parents. The Reynolds Pamphlet humiliated her so much that she bought every copy she could get of the pamphlet her husband had scribed and burned them. However, she forgave him and tried to undo the damage of his last decade of life. She also became the co-founder and deputy director of the first private orphanage in New York, following Hamilton’s death.

After the Reynolds Pamphlet, Maria sued her husband for a divorce. She was aided in this process by no other than Aaron Burr, the man who ended Alexander Hamilton’s life. She had taken residence in Alexandria, Virginia.

The Reynolds Pamphlet impacted both immediately upon the American Revolution and in today's society. The immediate impact of Hamilton’s pamphlet was mostly that it tarnished his name. Another result was people speculating that he was doing something with the nation’s

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander Hamilton, “*Printed Version of the “Reynolds Pamphlet”, 1797*”, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0138-0002>

money. Publishing the pamphlet ruined his reputation and that of his family's, but was really the only impact. The impact of today would be based on the media and how they would have to either agree and resign or deny the accusations. This would make political sex scandals seem a little more expected than it had been in history. The impact of the Reynolds Pamphlet was not as huge as other subjects such as slavery and has not defined much of today's society.

And it also goes to show that American political history wasn't always just laws and elections. There is so much more to America's history. The Reynolds Pamphlet is an example of conflict and compromise because it was the first political sex scandal in American History. Facts from the affair, hidden letters, and blackmail. It was so important because people began to realize things were not always true and wonderful in the government.