



Aaron Burr became America's third Vice President in 1800, following a tied-electoral-college vote for President / Vice President in the U.S. Congress. Thomas Jefferson was elected President that year.

Burr has an interesting history. Among other things, he was the founder of a bank, still in existence, which is known today as "Chase." On the infamous side, he is known for:

- The 1804 duel (in Weehawken, New Jersey) during which he fatally injured Alexander Hamilton; and
- A trial in which he was accused of treason (in 1807).

By the time Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr engaged in their duel - a now-outlawed activity during which two men, standing at a specified distance from each other, fired pistols at each other - they'd shared a long history of mutual dislike.

Both men were involved in non-fatal duels before they faced each other on July 11, 1804. In fact, Hamilton had participated in ten prior challenges during which no one had fired a shot. Maybe he thought this duel would also be shot-less.

On the other hand ... Hamilton's son Philip died in a duel, so Hamilton would have had heightened awareness that duels could be fatal. Not only that ... because Hamilton was the challenged party, he had the right to choose the weapons. He selected the same dueling pistols which Philip had used three years before.

What were some of the issues which caused these two men to despise each other? Here are a few of them:

- Burr and Hamilton's father-in-law opposed each other for the same U.S. Senate seat in 1791. Burr won.
- Hamilton was a Federalist; Burr was a Democratic-Republican.
- For more than a decade, they used the press (and other people) to insult each other. In April, the year of the duel, the *Albany Register* published a story claiming that Hamilton expressed a "despicable opinion" of Burr while attending a political dinner.
- After that April newspaper article, the two men used polite words to write hateful letters to each other.

All that activity, which sounds like "politics as usual" to a 21st-century observer, resulted in Burr being so upset that he challenged Hamilton to a duel at the very place (Weehawken, New Jersey) where Philip Hamilton had been killed.

After the duel, and Hamilton was dead, Burr - who was then the sitting Vice President of the United States - was charged with murder in New Jersey and New York. Burr found no reason to be in those states, however, during the rest of his Vice-Presidential term.

Avoiding prosecution, Burr finished his term as VP. All charges against him were eventually dropped, but Burr did not walk away unscathed. His political career was over, and he was never able to hold office at the national level again.

Hundreds of years after the duel, which killed Hamilton from a shot to the liver, the pistols were taken apart (for reproduction purposes). This led to a significant observation.

Experts uncovered a most-astonishing, long-unknown fact. Both pistols "had concealed hair triggers - what a

modern target shooter would call a single-set trigger."

It appears that Hamilton (who supplied the pistols) may have known that fact, but Burr did not. At least ... that's what experts surmise.

Credits:

Image online, courtesy U.S. Library of Congress.

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