CHERNOW

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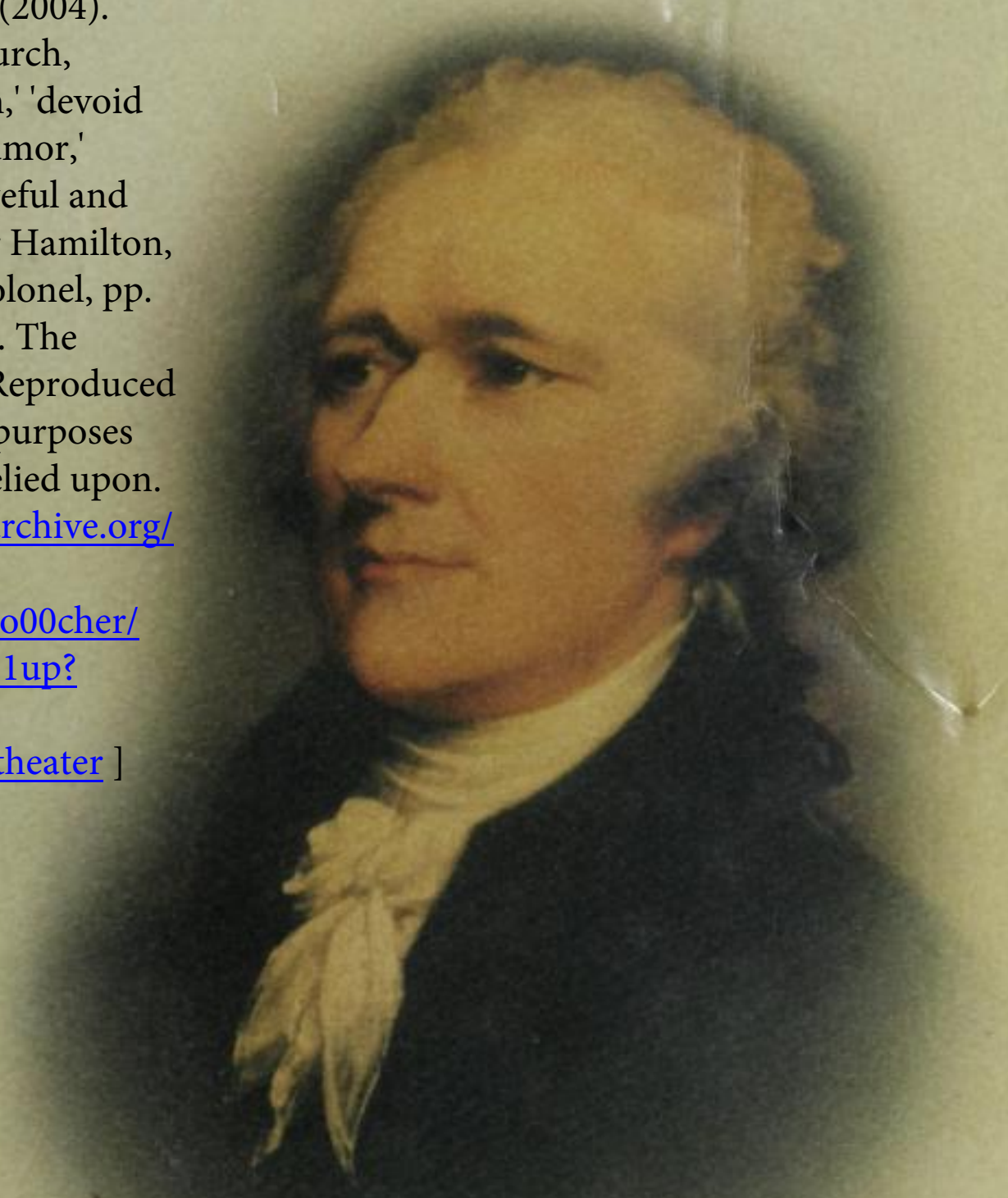

ALEXANDER HAMILTON

[Ron Chernow. (2004). John Barker Church, 'Fantastic wealth,' 'devoid of warmth or humor,' 'tactless,' 'revengeful and false.' Alexander Hamilton, The Lovesick Colonel, pp. 134-35, 818 pgs. The Penguin Press. Reproduced for educational purposes only. Fair Use relied upon. Source: https://archive.org/details/alexanderhamilto00cher/page/134/mode/1up?q=fantastic+wealth&view=theater]

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he wrote tenderly and lovingly, but seldom in the arch voice of gallantry. It is hard to escape the impression that Hamilton's married life was sometimes a curious ménage à trois with two sisters who were only one year apart. Angelica must have sensed that her incessant adoration of Hamilton, far from annoying or threatening her beloved younger sister, filled her with ecstatic pride. Their shared love for Hamilton seemed to deepen their sisterly bond. Ironically, Eliza's special attachment to Angelica gave Hamilton a cover for expressing affection for Angelica that would certainly have been forbidden with other women.

For a daring woman drawn to intellectual men, Angelica made a strange choice in marrying John Barker Church, a short man with shining eyes and thick lips who only grew fatter with the years. In 1776, he had been sent to Albany by Congress to audit the books of the army's Northern Department, then commanded by General Schuyler. While there, he managed both to woo Angelica and antagonize her father. John B. Church was then using the pseudonym of John B. Carter, and Schuyler scented something suspicious. Schuyler's instincts proved correct: Church had changed his name and fled to America, possibly after a duel with a Tory politician in London; some accounts have him on the lam from creditors after a bankruptcy brought on by gambling and stock speculation. Knowing that he would be denied parental consent, Church eloped with Angelica in 1777, and the Schuylers were predictably incensed.

Church amassed fantastic wealth during the Revolution. "Mr. Carter is the mere man of business," James McHenry told Hamilton, "and I am informed has riches enough, with common management, to make the longest life comfortable."[27] He and his business partner, Jeremiah Wadsworth, negotiated lucrative contracts to sell supplies to the French and American forces. Hamilton spoke highly of Church as "a man of fortune and integrity, of strong mind, very exact, very active, and very much a man of business."[28] Yet Church's letters present a cold businessman, devoid of warmth or humor. Very involved in politics, he could be tactless in expressing his opinions. One observer remembered him as "revengeful and false" after General Howe burned several American villages and towns. Church said he wanted to cut off the heads of the British generals and to "pickle them and to put them in small barrels, and as often as the English should again burn a village, to send them one [of] these barrels."[29] He lacked the intellectual breadth and civic commitment that made Hamilton so compelling to Angelica. On the other hand, he provided Angelica with the opulent, high-society life that she apparently craved.

Hamilton's relationship with his father-in-law was to be an especially happy part of his marriage to Eliza Schuyler. Tall and slim, with a raspy voice and bulbous nose, Philip Schuyler, forty-six, was already hobbled by rheumatic gout when he arrived

in Morristown that April to investigate army reform as chairman of a congressional committee. It is testimony to Hamilton's gifts that he was readily embraced by someone with Schuyler's rigid sense of social hierarchy. "Be indulgent, my child, to your inferiors," Schuyler once advised his son John, "affable and courteous to your equals, respectful not cringing to your superiors, whether they are so by superior mental abilities or those necessary distinctions which society has established."[30] Yet this same status-conscious man enjoyed an instant rapport with the illegitimate young West Indian. Both Hamilton and Schuyler spoke French, were well-read, appreciated military discipline, and had a common interest in business and internal-development schemes, such as canals. They also shared a common loyalty to Washington and impatience with congressional incompetence, even though Schuyler was a member of the Continental Congress.

Descended from an early Dutch settler who arrived in New York in 1650 (the surname may have been German), Schuyler was counted among those Hudson River squires who presided over huge tracts of land and ruled state politics. The Schuylers had intermarried with the families of many patroons or manor lords. Philip Schuyler's mother was a Van Cortlandt. His elegant Georgian brick mansion, the Pastures, sat on an Albany hilltop, surrounded by eighty acres dotted with barns, slave quarters, and a smokehouse. The enterprising Schuyler also built a two-story house on the fringe of the Saratoga wilderness, where he created an industrial village with four water-power mills, a smithy, and storehouses that employed hundreds of people. (It evolved into the village of Schuylerville.) In all, this Schuyler estate extended for three miles along the Hudson, encompassing somewhere between ten and twenty thousand acres. As if this were not enough, Philip Schuyler had married Catherine Van Rensselaer, an heiress to the 120,000-acre Claverack estate in Columbia County.

The image of Philip Schuyler varied drastically depending upon the observer. His enemies viewed him as cold, arrogant, and petulant when people crossed him or when his pride was offended. Alexander Graydon left this unpleasant vignette of a Schuyler dinner during the Revolution: "A New England captain came in upon some business with that abject servility of manner which belongs to persons of the meanest rank. He was neither asked to sit or take a glass of wine, and after announcing his wants, was dismissed with that peevishness of tone we apply to a low and vexatious intruder."[31] Graydon admitted, however, that the man might have forced his way into Schuyler's presence.

Schuyler's friends, in contrast, found him courteous and debonair, a model of etiquette, and very amiable in mixed company. He could behave magnanimously toward his social peers. During the battle of Saratoga, General Burgoyne burned Schuyler's house and most other buildings on his property for military reasons.