

The Alexander Hamilton Collection of John E. Herzog (1716)

October 25, 2021 EST, Philadelphia

Viewing:

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Lot 30

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[Hamilton, Alexander] [Giles Resolutions] Communications from the Secretary of the Treasury, to the House of Representatives of the United States...Resolution of the House, of the 2d of March 1793

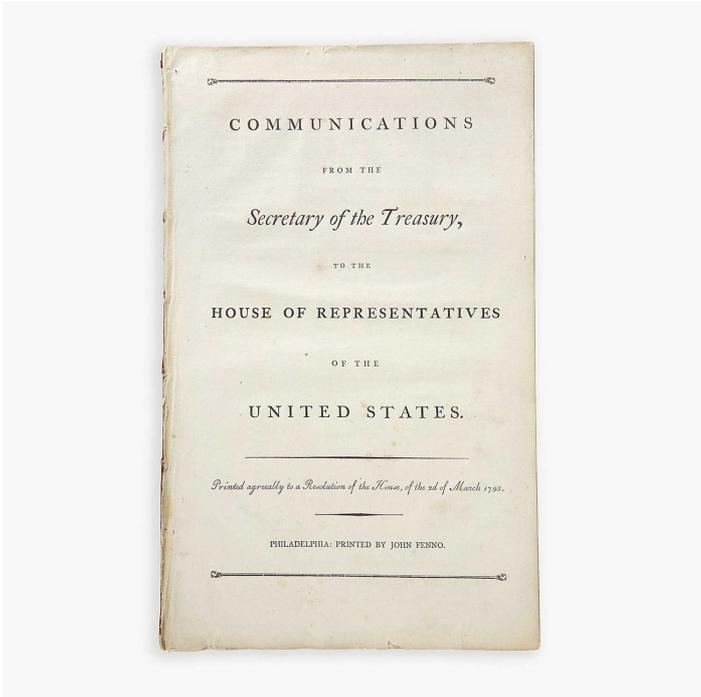
Alexander Hamilton's detailed report responding to the "Giles Resolutions," a partisan-leveled House resolution seeking to discredit and remove him from office

"The resolutions, to which I am to answer, were not moved without a pretty copious display of the reasons on which they were founded. These reasons are before the public, through the channel of the press. They are of a nature to excite attention—to beget alarm—to inspire doubts...I feel it incumbent upon me to meet the suggestions, which have been thrown out, with decision and explicitness. And while I hope, I shall let fall nothing inconsistent with that cordial and unqualified respect, which I feel for the House of Representatives,—while I acquiesce in the sufficiency of the motives that induced on their part the giving a prompt and free course to the investigation proposed—I cannot but resolve to treat the subject with a freedom which is due to truth and to the consciousness of a pure zeal for the public interest."

Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1793. One of only 300 copies printed. Folio, 12 1/2 x 7 7/8 in. (317 x 200mm). 65 pp. Illustrated with one folding table. Disbound; all edges trimmed; light foxing and toning to title-page and text. Evans 26343; Ford, Bibliotheca Hamiltoniana 246

A rare report by Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton to the House of Representatives, issued after a series of resolutions passed by the House on January 23, 1793, calling for extensive information from him in an attempt to discredit him for impropriety, and expel him from President George Washington's cabinet (see lots 28, 29, 35).

By the end of Washington's first term, in early 1793, the partisan divide in Congress, exemplified by the intra-cabinet fighting between Secretary of the Treasury Hamilton and Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, was culminating in outright war. With Hamilton's numerous victories enacting his financial reforms during Washington's first term, Jefferson and his allies had come to view him as a threat to the republic, nothing short of a monarchist seeking to destroy the nation. In order to save the republic from Hamilton's nefarious plans they set into motion what Ron Chernow observes as "the first concerted effort in American history to expel a cabinet member for official misconduct." Jefferson, alongside James Madison, used Virginia congressman William Branch Giles as



a surrogate to attack Hamilton, and had Giles submit five resolutions in the House of Representatives on January 23 calling for extensive information regarding foreign loans "improperly" used by Hamilton. The charge leveled against Hamilton was that he used foreign loans that were earmarked to repay debts on foreign accounts, especially to France, but instead transferred the borrowed money to the Bank of the United States to aid speculators. The charge, while false, was part of a larger campaign to smear his name, one that followed him throughout his tenure as Secretary. As Chernow continues, regarding the resolutions filed by Giles, "By design, these resolutions made massive, nay overwhelming, demands on Hamilton. He had to furnish a complete reckoning of balances between the government and the central bank, as well as a comprehensive list of sink-fund purchases of government debt. Some historians, including Giles's biographer, believe that Jefferson instigated these resolutions, with Madison drafting their language. Taking advantage of a short, four-month congressional session, the House gave Hamilton an impossible March 3 deadline. Republicans hoped that Hamilton's failure to comply would then be construed as prima facie evidence of his guilt..."

Hamilton, exhausted from providing Congress detailed reports concerning these same foreign loans in early January, responds in this report with an impressive and comprehensive overview of the Treasury Department, informing the House of his goal, "To evince nevertheless my readiness to do all in my power, toward fulfilling the views of the House, and throwing light upon the transactions of the department..."

By late February, days before the Congressional recess, Giles filed nine censure resolutions against Hamilton, accusing him of myriad things, including the same charge of improperly handling foreign loans that catalyzed the above report. These resolutions were struck down by the House, but it only portended the grave and ever-deepening rift within Congress, and the trouble that lay ahead for Hamilton as Secretary of the Treasury.

This report did not change the minds of Hamilton's many detractors, and more efforts in the future were made to discredit him, leading him to request the formation of a special select House Committee to investigate his department and clear his name (see lot 35).

We can locate only five copies of this report ever being offered at auction, and the first since 2002. *Rare.*