

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

October 25, 2021 EST, Philadelphia

Viewing:

Exhibition is open by appointment at our [1600 West Girard Avenue](#) location October 8-24. To make an appointment, please contact Colin Foley at cfoley@freemansauction.com.

Lot 8

Estimate: \$2000 - \$3000 (plus Buyer's Premium)

[Hamilton, Alexander] [Lighthouses] Hamilton, Alexander Free-frank Address Leaf

Alexander Hamilton's free-frank to Collector of the Customs for Baltimore

New York, September 28, 1789. One sheet, 9 1/8 x 7 3/4 in. (232 x 197mm). Alexander Hamilton's free-frank address leaf, to Collector of the Customs for Baltimore, Otho H. Williams, postmarked New York, September 28, 1789, with Williams's draft response to Hamilton, retained on verso, dated October 8, 1789. Addressed and docketed on free-franked side in Williams's hand: "22d September 1789/Alexr Hamilton/Balto 3d October 1789/Acknowledged Rect/& will observe contents"; the final word "Answered" appears to be in another unknown hand. Creasing from original folds, separations along same; toned and soiled; loss at center left and right edges from removed wax seal, affecting some words and letters of Williams's MS.; a few sello tape repairs recto. Lot includes a photograph of a lighthouse.

This draft was written on what was the third page of a once four-page document. The first two pages contained Hamilton's Treasury Department Circular, dated September 22, 1789. The third page was blank, and the fourth page was used to address it when folded and mailed. It appears that when drafting his letter, Williams confused the dates of the September 22 letter, per the docketing, and Hamilton's October 2 circular; despite Williams referencing the September 22 date in his letter, the entire content responds to Hamilton's October 2 circular. It is further corroborated by the franking date of September 28, and the date of the draft, October 8. William's recycled half of the original leaf as scrap paper to compose his draft. The completed letter can be found in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 5, *June 1788–November 1789*, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1962, pp. 431–432, showing the many emendations and corrections that Williams made to the letter.

As Ron Chernow observes about Hamilton's preoccupation with lighthouses, "This towering intellect scrawled more mundane letters about lighthouse construction than about any other single topic." Two months before Williams penned this letter Congress passed the Lighthouse Act, the first public works act under the new Constitution. The Act, among other things, transferred control of the existing 12 lighthouses in the United States from the individual states to the Federal Government. Williams starts by acknowledging receipt of Hamilton's September 22, 1789 Treasury Circular, but in fact, based on the content, is actually responding here to Hamilton's October 2, 1789 Treasury circular which asked the



Collectors of the Customs to report on existing aids to navigation at the ports of their charge. As Williams writes to Hamilton, "that from Cape Henry to the extreme branches of the Susquehanna all inclusive there is not, that I have heard of, one single Light House, Buoy, Beacon or other Artificial object for navigators..." and hopes that "the subject will be taken into serious consideration at the ensuing (Congressional) Sessions..." In January 1790, Hamilton compiled the data received from the Collectors of the Customs, given in letters like the above, into a detailed report submitted to President Washington concerning the location of existing structures, annual expenses for maintenance, proposed superintendents, etc.

The Cape Henry Lighthouse at Virginia Beach, Virginia, was built in response to Hamilton's report, and quite possibly spurred by this letter from Williams. The lighthouse was the first federally funded public works project of the new government, and Hamilton's first major infrastructure project as Secretary of the Treasury. It was completed in 1792.

RR Auction, November 11, 2015, Lot 188.