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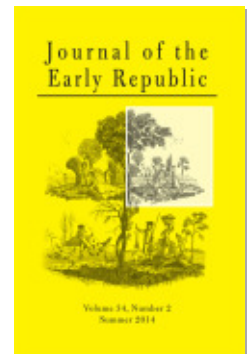
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**“If I Had It in His Hand-Writing I Would Burn It”: Federalists and the Authorship Controversy over George Washington’s Farewell Address, 1808–1859**

Jeffrey J. Malanson

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# “If I Had It in His Hand-Writing I Would Burn It”

Federalists and the Authorship Controversy over  
George Washington’s Farewell Address, 1808–1859

JEFFREY J. MALANSON

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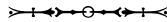
Alexander Hamilton did much to put his affairs in order in the days leading up to his duel with Aaron Burr on July 12, 1804, but he did not leave instructions on how his papers should be handled. Scattered amongst those papers were letters and drafts that documented Hamilton’s role in helping to write George Washington’s presidential Farewell Address. In life, Hamilton kept his involvement a secret, but in death the decision was no longer his to make. In 1808 or 1809, Philadelphia attorney William Lewis began circulating a rumor that a complete draft of the Farewell Address in Hamilton’s handwriting had been discovered, and that this draft proved that Hamilton was the true author of Washington’s Farewell Address. The circulation of Lewis’s rumor set off an authorship controversy surrounding the Farewell Address that would take more than fifty years to fully resolve.<sup>1</sup>

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Jeffrey J. Malanson is an assistant professor of history at Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne. He would like to thank François Furstenberg, R. B. Bernstein, and an anonymous reader for their thoughtful, thorough, and invaluable insights, as well as the members of the Fort Wayne Area Seminar in American History for feedback on an early draft of the manuscript.

1. Victor Hugo Paltsits dated the beginning of the authorship controversy to 1810, but Timothy Pickering wrote a letter in January 1811 in which he claimed that Lewis had informed him of the Hamilton draft of the Farewell Address “two or three years ago.” Timothy Pickering to Richard Peters, Jan. 5, 1811, Timothy Pickering Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Victor Hugo Paltsits, *Washington’s Farewell Address: In Facsimile, with Transliterations of All the*

The Hamilton authorship rumor set off alarm bells for Federalists. After Thomas Jefferson's Revolution of 1800, Federalists throughout the United States claimed Washington as a Federalist leader and used this connection as a central feature of their campaign to regain voter confidence and political influence. A critical part of that campaign was Washington's Farewell Address. Federalists argued that they were the true defenders of Washington's principles and that the Republicans had turned their backs on the Farewell Address. If the Hamilton authorship rumor proved to be true, Federalists feared that the authority of the Farewell Address would be diminished and its influence in the Federalist cause greatly weakened. When Federalists began to meet renewed success at the polls in 1808, at least in part due to their Washingtonian rhetoric and principles, their need to preserve the established narrative that the Address was solely Washington's work led them to do everything they could to quash the Hamilton rumors. Federalist needs conflicted with the desire of Hamilton's family to see their patriarch receive the credit they believed he was due, and when the Federalists passed from the scene in the late 1820s it was Washington's heirs who extended the controversy for an additional three decades. The authorship controversy revealed the importance the Federalists placed on Washington and his Farewell Address as an expression of their political beliefs and their renewed electoral relevance.



Recognizing his limitations as a writer, George Washington frequently relied on his closest advisors to help him compose important correspondence and messages. During the American Revolution, members of his staff, including Alexander Hamilton, helped draft his messages to Congress and the states. After the war, Washington hired Tobias Lear and David Humphreys to assist him in managing his correspondence. As president he sought advice from a host of advisors, but especially James Madison and Hamilton. When Washington resolved in spring 1796 to retire from the presidency, he asked Hamilton to help him turn an emotional and reactionary first draft of a retirement address into a dispassionate and persuasive valedictory. An analysis of the complete documentary

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*Drafts of Washington, Madison, & Hamilton, Together with Their Correspondence and Other Supporting Documents* (New York, 1935), 76–77.

record has enabled historians to develop a deep understanding of Washington's collaboration with Hamilton, which was carried out entirely through letters and exchanges of mailed drafts. The original plan and core ideas were Washington's, but Hamilton brought those plans to life. Hamilton introduced some innovations and improvements into Washington's design, but they conformed to Washington's original intentions; and it was Washington who retained final approval of what was included and what was not. The Farewell Address in its final form would not have been possible without the efforts of both men, but the document can accurately be called Washington's.<sup>2</sup>

When David C. Claypoole's *American Daily Advertiser* published Washington's Farewell Address on September 19, 1796, the American people did not have access to the documentary record. They could only see the final text with Washington's name affixed. During the ensuing weeks and months, newspapers throughout the country reprinted the Address and printers issued it in pamphlet form. Americans deeply appreciated the wisdom that Washington offered, but after his death on December 14, 1799, the Farewell Address acquired a new significance in popular discourse. As people celebrated its advice and principles as part of the national mourning process for the deceased president, the Farewell became what historian François Furstenberg called a "sacred text." From that point forward, when Americans celebrated Washington's Birthday (February 22) as one of only two holidays regularly observed throughout the nation, a reading of the Farewell Address and a discussion of its ongoing importance were essential elements of the day. A cursory reading of the multitude of speeches, pamphlets, and other publications devoted to the Farewell Address in this period demonstrates that Washington's authorship gave it its "sacred" status. The Address contained maxims handed down by the Father of his Country, and American reverence for *him* dictated their attachment to *them*. This reverence for both the man and his Farewell Address did not fade with time, as Washington evolved after his death into a mythic figure subject to a cult-like adoration that persisted through the Civil War, and as the

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2. For two important approaches to the writing and meaning of the Farewell Address, see Richard B. Morris, "Washington and Hamilton: A Great Collaboration," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 102 (Apr. 1958), 107-16; and Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ, 1961), 115-36.

nation's lived experience repeatedly demonstrated the wisdom of Washington's principles.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout their existence as a political movement, the Federalists derived legitimacy from their association with Washington (even though Washington himself advocated nonpartisanship). Historian James A. Tagg described the Federalist creation of a "cult of Washington's infallibility" during his presidency as a means of courting and keeping public support. Throughout much of his second term many Republicans condemned Washington as a partisan who had betrayed the principles of the American Revolution, but after his death he began to once again transcend party. This apotheosis of Washington as an American icon did not stop Federalists from using funeral orations to subtly remind Americans that Washington's principles were Federalist principles. More than three hundred of these funeral orations were published to solidify the Federalists' attempted hold on Washington's legacy.<sup>4</sup>

Even with Washington's posthumous assistance, the Federalists were not able to stave off defeat at the hands of Thomas Jefferson and the Republicans in 1800. The Federalists lost not just the presidency and Congress, but also their national leadership and national standing. Washington was dead, John Adams retired from public life, and Hamilton's

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3. François Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father: Washington's Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation* (New York, 2006), 44. Paltsits, *Washington's Farewell Address*, 311–60; Gerald E. Kahler, *The Long Farewell: Americans Mourn the Death of George Washington* (Charlottesville, VA, 2008); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, 1991), 17–90; Bernard Mayo, *Myths and Men: Patrick Henry, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson* (Athens, GA, 1959), 25–48; and Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York, 1965), 337–56. Also see Jeffrey J. Malanson, "Addressing America: Washington's Farewell and the Making of National Culture, Politics, and Diplomacy, 1796–1852," PhD diss., Boston College, 2010, 61–110.

4. James D. Tagg, "Benjamin Franklin Bache's Attack on George Washington," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 100 (Apr. 1976), 191–230, esp. 208; Glenn A. Phelps, "George Washington and the Paradox of Party," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 19 (Fall 1989), 733–45; Simon P. Newman, "Principles or Men?: George Washington and the Political Culture of National Leadership, 1776–1801," *Journal of the Early Republic* 12 (Winter 1992), 477–507, esp. 495, 502; Barry Schwartz, *George Washington: The Making of an American Symbol* (Ithaca, NY, 1987), esp. 41–89; Marcus Cunliffe, *George Washington: Man and Monument* (Boston, 1958), 201; and Mayo, *Myths and Men*, 36–37.

influence greatly diminished after he published an attack on Adams during the campaign. The Federalists soon regrouped and reorganized as a series of state parties with a new generation of leaders—David Hackett Fischer called them Young Federalists—focused on developing new ways of attracting voters. Many of the Old Federalist leaders, including Hamilton, were largely abandoned as driving forces in these revamped parties.<sup>5</sup>

Old and Young Federalists alike did share one thing in common: their devotion to George Washington, whom they used in a variety of ways after 1801. Most importantly, the Federalists redoubled their efforts to present Washington and his principles as being synonymous with Federalism. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall's five-volume biography of Washington, which depicted the first president as a strong Federalist leader, epitomized this effort. While the biography fell flat—Furstenberg described it as "one of the great failures of early American publishing"—it was still an important attempt to shape public opinion. Southern Federalists tried to discredit Jefferson through his association with Thomas Paine and newspaper editor James T. Callender, two men who had sharply criticized Washington. If these were Jefferson's friends, Federalists argued, it meant that Jefferson did not approve of Washington and could not be trusted by voters. More generally, Washington and his Farewell Address served as a sword and a shield for Federalists nationwide: a sword used to attack the Republicans for their abandonment of Washington's principles, and a shield used to defend against a wide variety of Republican slanders. In speeches, pamphlets, and newspaper editorials, Federalists used the Farewell Address to illuminate the dangers of Republican rule.<sup>6</sup>

Despite their best efforts, the Federalists failed to staunch the tide of

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5. David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution in American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (1965; repr. Chicago, 1975); James M. Banner Jr., *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789–1815* (New York, 1970), 216–67; and Claude G. Bowers, *Jefferson in Power: The Death Struggle of the Federalists* (Boston, 1936), v, 248–49.

6. Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father*, 139–42, esp. 140; John Marshall, *The Life of George Washington, Commander in Chief of the American Forces during the War which Established the Independence of His Country, and First President of the United States* (5 vols., Philadelphia, 1804–1807); James H. Broussard, *The Southern Federalists, 1800–1816* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1978), 65–67.

Republican expansion and Federalist contraction in the first seven years of Jefferson's presidency. On the state level, Republicans were more organized and efficient than Federalists. On the national level, the Federalists' dire warnings that Jefferson had abandoned Washington's principles proved overblown. Jefferson had made changes to government, but the United States was still prosperous and at peace with the world. The Federalists' Washingtonian warnings took on new relevance starting in December 1807 with Jefferson's embargo as international conditions worsened, the U.S. economy tumbled, and war arrived in 1812. As early as 1808, signs of a Federalist revival were visible throughout the United States. As Philip J. Lampi demonstrated, this resurgence could be witnessed not just in Federalist electoral victories, but also in Federalist competitiveness in most parts of the country and at all levels of government. The Federalists never regained the presidency or Congress, but they did retake some state governments and for the first time in years the voting public listened to what the Federalists had to say.<sup>7</sup>

As part of this Federalist resurgence, a new civic association was established in New York City in 1809: the Washington Benevolent Society. Its founders presented the Society as a charitable organization devoted to upholding Washington's principles, but in practice it was a Federalist group focused on using Washington's name and fame to win elections. Federalists throughout the northern states adopted the Washington Benevolent Society as a model, and by 1812 there were Societies in eleven states, from Maine to Maryland to Ohio; by 1816 there were 208 documented Societies, although it is likely that there were many more. Upon joining, most Washington Benevolent Societies gave new members a membership badge and a book containing copies of the Society's constitution and Washington's Farewell Address. The relationship between local Washington Benevolent Societies and Federalist parties varied from place to place, but members of both groups were dedicated to seeing Republicans turned out of office. On February 22, April 30 (the anniversary of Washington's first inauguration), and July 4 every year, Society members made speeches praising the principles of Washington and condemning the Republicans for turning their backs on the

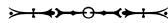
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7. Philip J. Lampi, "The Federalist Party Resurgence, 1808–1816: Evidence from the New Nation Votes Database," *Journal of the Early Republic* 33 (Summer 2013), 255–81.



Farewell Address. They then published these speeches to increase their reach and impact. Through these Societies, the Federalists had identified another means of using Washington and his Farewell Address to increase the popular appeal of Federalism.<sup>8</sup>

Historians of the Federalists have long noted the general role Washington played in Federalist activities and appeals, especially with the Washington Benevolent Societies, yet the precise nature of that role or its impact has gone largely unexplored. It has often been presented as axiomatic that the Federalists used Washington and thus does not warrant further investigation or explanation. In his study of southern Federalists, James Broussard referenced Federalist efforts to use "the ghost of Washington . . . to curse the Republican party" and his "name to sanctify [the Federalist] party." In their study of New Jersey Federalists, Rudolph J. Pasler and Margaret C. Pasler pointed to the Washington Benevolent Societies as an example of Federalists "exploiting the prestige of George Washington for electioneering purposes." Marcus Cunliffe likewise saw the Federalists as attempting to "exploit [Washington's] heroic legend" to gain electoral advantage. This was the extent of their analysis. None of these historians offered a nuanced assessment of the Federalists' Washington rhetoric; they simply provided the obligatory acknowledgment that Washington was a Federalist rallying point. To an even greater extent the same is true of the Farewell Address. Historians speak of its ubiquity and then leave it aside. Deeper engagement with Washington or his Farewell Address would not necessarily fundamentally alter any previous accounts of the Federalists, but it does reveal, as the rest of this article will demonstrate, how contingent Federalist appeals were on popular reverence for Washington and how precarious some Federalists saw their position in society being as a result.<sup>9</sup>




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8. Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 110–28; and William A. Robinson, "The Washington Benevolent Society in New England; A Phase of Politics during the War of 1812," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 49 (1916), 274–86.

9. Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 102, 37–38; Rudolph J. Pasler and Margaret C. Pasler, *The New Jersey Federalists* (Rutherford, NJ, 1975), 144–45; and Cunliffe, *George Washington*, 201.

Against the backdrop of the Federalist resurgence, William Lewis began circulating his rumor about the Hamilton draft of the Farewell Address, and Rev. John M. Mason started work on a Hamilton biography. The election of 1800 damaged Hamilton's reputation, and it had largely not recovered in the years since. Republicans remained opposed to Hamilton's economic system and outlook on government. Southerners, regardless of party identification, likewise did not support Hamilton's financial plan. And many Federalists throughout the country had still not forgiven Hamilton for his anti-Adams maneuverings during the 1800 campaign. Pointing to Hamilton and his accomplishments was simply not an effective way to win votes in Jefferson's America. Hamilton's family and remaining supporters hoped that a biography detailing Hamilton's contributions to American development and prosperity could bring about a more permanent restoration of Hamilton's posthumous reputation. Hamilton's relationship with George Washington and his role in creating the Farewell Address would be important components of this project.<sup>10</sup>

Authorship questions grew more complicated in 1810 when Judge Nathaniel Pendleton, one of the executors of Hamilton's estate and his second in his 1804 duel with Burr, discovered amongst Hamilton's papers the documents at the heart of Lewis's rumor. The documents included several letters from Washington discussing the Farewell Address and a complete draft of the Address in Hamilton's handwriting. To prevent Hamilton's widow, Elizabeth, from making the documents public, Pendleton bundled them together and sent them to a trusted friend, U.S. Senator and Federalist leader Rufus King. With the documents in King's possession, Pendleton felt reasonably certain that they would remain out of public view.<sup>11</sup>

Pendleton's concern for the documents did not stop Lewis from continuing to circulate his rumor. One person with whom Lewis shared the

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10. Jacob Van Vechten, *Memoirs of John M. Mason, D.D., S.T.P. with Portions of His Correspondence* (New York, 1856), 311; Stephen F. Knott, *Alexander Hamilton and the Persistence of Myth* (Lawrence, KS, 2002), 1–46; and Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, esp. 108.

11. Paltsits, *Washington's Farewell Address*, 76–77; Rufus King, *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King: Compromising His Letters, Private and Official, His Public Documents and His Speeches*, ed. Charles R. King (6 vols., New York, 1894–1900), 6: 618–19.

rumor in late 1810 was U.S. District Judge Richard Peters of Pennsylvania. Peters, a steadfast Federalist and an admirer of Washington, described Lewis as "constantly blabbing, *as a great Secret . . . the Affair of the Farewell Address.*" As far as Peters was concerned, Lewis only cared about the allure of sharing a powerful secret and he was not considering the potential negative consequences of spreading that secret. Peters reached out to John Jay and Timothy Pickering for any insights they might have on Washington or the Farewell Address that he could use to combat Lewis. Writing to Jay, Peters declared that he "would not *lie* to support any Position," while avowing that he "would not tell mischievous Truths." More revealing of Peters's mindset on the Farewell Address was his assertion: "If I had it in his Hand-Writing [Hamilton's] I would burn it." In Peters's estimation, "Hamilton has Fame enough. . . . He will not gain a Feather from his, or the Enemies of Washington's Principles. But those Principles would lose Force, by being ascribed to Hamilton, & deducted from Washington." Peters believed that the Farewell Address, as the work of George Washington, was important and he did not want to see speculation and innuendo, regardless of its veracity, vitiating the document or the first president.<sup>12</sup>

Timothy Pickering did not share Peters's view of the Lewis rumor. The Old Federalist Pickering had ties to Washington and to Hamilton dating back to their service in the Continental Army and Washington's cabinet. Although Pickering's loyalty to Hamilton never wavered, his estimation of Washington had grown increasingly bitter over time. Pickering complained of Washington's defects as a writer "owing to the inefficiency of his early education," and he criticized Washington as a military commander and a statesman. In one letter written later in life, Pickering boldly declared, "I might lose my memory of numerous facts before I can join my friend [Richard] Peters or [John] Marshall, in calling Washington a Great Man." Pickering's personal experience with Washington's practice of seeking assistance from his advisors when drafting important papers made him unwilling to dismiss the rumors that Hamilton wrote the Farewell Address. In answering Peters's inquiry, Pickering discussed Washington's authorship of papers attributed to him, acknowledging that Washington "did not *take* credit to himself when he was

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12. Richard Peters to John Jay, Feb. 14, 1811, in Paltsits, *Washington's Farewell Address*, 263.

assisted by others; but the credit was *bestowed* upon him by his fellow citizens & the world and this credit he could not *disclaim* without defeating the national object he had in view in what appeared under his name.” Pickering offered a fairly accurate assessment of the first president’s writings; however, an assessment of this kind did not help Peters.<sup>13</sup>

John Jay’s response proved to be of greater value to Peters, because Jay revealed that he had played a small role in helping to revise the Farewell Address. Sometime in the summer of 1796, Jay recalled, Hamilton approached him because the president had “requested our opinion” on a draft of his valedictory address. Hamilton proposed that they leave Washington’s draft “untouched,” and instead “write the whole over with such amendments, alterations, and corrections as he thought were advisable.” Hamilton had already prepared this alternate draft and they painstakingly read through it, “paragraph by paragraph, until the whole met with our mutual approbation.” They made some changes and improvements, “but none of much importance.” This account, while only representing one small piece of Washington’s writing and advising process, provided a reasonable explanation for the existence of a draft in Hamilton’s handwriting and could be used to rebut Lewis.<sup>14</sup>

In his reply to Jay, Peters expressed displeasure with men like Lewis and Mason, both of whom had a “Fondness for revealing Secrets.” Peters found Lewis particularly frustrating because he suffered “from an overweening Desire to accumulate Praise on our Friend Hamilton.” Peters had “beg’d [Lewis], for the sake of his Country, to cease from diffusing” the Hamilton authorship rumor, but he was not sure that Lewis understood the message. Mason posed a bigger threat, as he might publish the claim for Hamilton’s authorship at any time. Peters complained that although Mason was reported to have “an excellent Character, . . . his Zeal for Disclosure of any thing relating to Hamilton’s Fame, eats up his Discretion.” These considerations only amplified the importance of Jay’s letter.<sup>15</sup>

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13. Timothy Pickering to Richard Peters, Jan. 5, 1811; Timothy Pickering to William Rawle, Nov. 7, 1823, Pickering Papers.

14. John Jay to Richard Peters, Mar. 29, 1811, *The Correspondence of John Jay: First Chief-Justice of the United States, Member and President of the Continental Congress, Minister to Spain, Member of Commission to Negotiate Treaty of Independence, Envoy to Great Britain, Governor of New York, Etc.*, ed. Henry P. Johnston (4 vols., New York, 1890–1893), 4: 346–58, esp. 356–58.

15. Richard Peters to John Jay, Apr. 11, 1811; Peters to Jay, Apr. 14, 1811, in Paltsits, *Washington’s Farewell Address*, 272, 273–75.

Several Republican newspapers reported in 1811 that Mason's biography would give Hamilton credit for writing Washington's Farewell Address. According to one editorial, Mason intended to "robe [Hamilton] in the highest honors; and, at the expense of General Washington, to claim for Hamilton the rank which Washington now holds in the hearts of a grateful country." Mason would achieve this goal, the editorialist charged, by proving "that Hamilton was the author of all the state papers signed Geo. Washington," and by demonstrating "that the *farewell address* of president Washington . . . was actually from the pen of Alexander Hamilton." The editorial said nothing about where this information came from or what evidence Mason would use, but its tone strongly suggested that the author disbelieved the Hamilton authorship story. This editorial was the first public acknowledgement of the authorship controversy, but its impact was negligible because no Hamilton biography ever appeared from Mason.<sup>16</sup>

The depth of passion that the authorship question stirred in Peters and other Federalists is fascinating and perplexing. Peters seemed convinced that a revelation that Hamilton had written the Farewell Address would undermine public support for the Address, but that it would not diminish Washington's reputation. This would mean that the American people had an unwavering support for Washington that only extended to principles he himself wrote and not to ones that he only endorsed. Washington's defenders never argued that the Farewell Address's Washingtonian principles mattered more than its author. The importance of Washington and the Farewell Address to the Federalists and their new-found electoral relevance can help to explain this response. After 1808, and especially after the declaration of war in 1812, the Federalists mattered again; and that relevance stemmed from, among other things, the success of their argument that the Republicans had violated the principles of Washington's Farewell Address. If those principles proved to have been written by Hamilton and not Washington, Federalists feared that they would lose the force of Washington's authority and that the Federalists themselves would lose credibility. The Federalists thus faced a return to electoral irrelevance if the Hamilton authorship rumor proved

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16. "Hamilton Greater than Washington," *The Columbian* (New York, NY), July 24, 1811. A copy of this article has also been located in the *Raleigh Register*, and *North-Carolina Weekly Advertiser* of Sept. 27, 1811, which copied it from the *Democratic Press* of Philadelphia. All three of these newspapers were Republican.

true. This simple fact dictated their response to the authorship controversy.

A dispute taking shape in this same period over the authorship of a dozen essays in *The Federalist* can also help to clarify Federalist approaches to the Farewell Address. It had been a poorly kept secret that Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay had written *The Federalist*. All three men had consistently refused to attach their names to specific essays, but before his duel with Burr, Hamilton hid a list outlining the authorship of each essay in the law office of Egbert Benson. According to Hamilton's list, Hamilton wrote sixty-three of the eighty-five essays; Hamilton also co-authored three essays with Madison, who wrote fourteen essays of his own, with Jay contributing five more. This list was printed in newspapers in 1807, and in 1810 it became the basis for the first edition of *The Federalist* to attribute a specific author to each essay. Madison waited until after his presidency to respond, and in the Gideon edition of *The Federalist* (1818) he asserted that he had written twenty-nine of the essays. Up until the Civil War, the American people sided with Madison. Douglass Adair argued that two factors contributed to this view of *The Federalist*. The first was the ascendancy of the Republican view of the Constitution in the antebellum period. The second was the minimization of Hamilton in historical memory. In the decades before the Civil War the public revered Madison and largely forgot about Hamilton as a key member of the founding generation. The same sentiment that led Americans to believe that Madison wrote the disputed *Federalist* essays also made it much easier to dismiss the claim that Hamilton wrote Washington's Farewell Address.<sup>17</sup>

To help fuel their resurgence at the polls, the Federalists had condemned the Republican War of 1812. This strategy succeeded until the Treaty of Ghent, the Battle of New Orleans, and especially the Hartford Convention turned well-meaning New England Federalists into un-American traitors in the eyes of most people. The relatively quick disappearance of the Federalists from the national stage after the war did not diminish their resolve to defend Washington and his Farewell Address.

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17. Douglass Adair, "The Authorship of the Disputed Federalist Papers," *William and Mary Quarterly* 1 (Apr. 1944), 97-122. It is interesting that Hamilton took steps to ensure that the public would learn of his specific contributions to *The Federalist*, but made no such effort with the Farewell Address.

Lewis's rumor about the Hamilton draft not had gained widespread traction, although as late as 1819, Washington's nephew, Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington, referenced a Hamilton authorship rumor "now slyly propagating." From the Federalist perspective, the primary threat to Washington's legacy was a Hamilton biography. Mason worked on the project until 1818 when the poor state of his health forced him to give it up. The Hamiltons turned to former congressman Joseph Hopkinson, and then to the editor of the *New York Evening Post*, William Coleman, to produce the biography, but neither man succeeded. In 1819 Elizabeth Hamilton began collecting evidence herself, and the following year she informed a family friend "that her husband had left a copy of [the Farewell Address] in his own hand writing among his M.S.S." A "number of original letters" had also been found, "all tending to prove that he was the author of 'The Legacy.'" Despite the passage of time, Elizabeth Hamilton still felt deeply motivated to see justice done for her husband.<sup>18</sup>

At some point before his death in 1821, Judge Pendleton revealed to Hamilton's son James the existence of the drafts and correspondence that had been entrusted to Rufus King a decade earlier. These documents would be powerful evidence to include in a Hamilton biography, but retrieving them would be no easy task. King had long been a close friend of the Hamiltons, but he repeatedly rebuffed their efforts to recover the documents. King believed so strongly in his solemn duty to guard them that he did not even open the bundle that Pendleton had sent to him. The Hamiltons ultimately filed a lawsuit against King in 1825 to force the return of the papers.<sup>19</sup>

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18. Bushrod Washington's transcription of John Jay to Richard Peters, Mar. 29, 1811, Apr. 23, 1819, in Paltsits, *Washington's Farewell Address*, 278; and M. A. DeWolfe, ed., *The Articulate Sisters: Passages from the Journals and Letters of the Daughters of President Josiah Quincy of Harvard University* (Cambridge, MA, 1946), 37. Van Vechten, *Memoirs of John M. Mason*, 497.

19. James A. Hamilton, *Reminiscences of James A. Hamilton; or, Men and Events, at Home and Abroad, During Three Quarters of a Century* (New York, 1869), 24–26. The timing of events during this phase of the authorship controversy is somewhat unclear. James Hamilton claimed that Judge Pendleton informed him of the Hamilton draft of the Farewell Address in 1824, but Pendleton had died in 1821. A revelation as early as 1820 would explain how Elizabeth Hamilton knew of the draft's existence at that time, but begs the question of why the family waited until 1825 to sue to recover the documents.

Aside from the 1811 newspaper editorial, the authorship controversy had played out in private to that point, but the filing of a lawsuit—a matter of public record—threatened to make the nation aware of the controversy’s existence. The King family approached Bushrod Washington for help fighting the lawsuit, but Chief Justice John Marshall counseled Washington not to stand in the Hamilton family’s way. “The existence of the correspondence cannot now be concealed, did the wish to conceal it exist,” Marshall cautioned. “Should the correspondence be suppressed by the interference of those supposed to be most attached to the fame of General Washington,” the public would conclude “that the address is the entire production of General Hamiltons [*sic*] pen.” Resistance would only lend greater weight to the claim that Washington did not write the Farewell Address. If the documents proved that Hamilton wrote the Farewell Address, “the public opinion of General Washington will remain unaltered, but their respect for the address will be changed.” Regardless of what “the letters may disclose,” Marshall concluded, “I do not think their publication ought to be resisted.” Bushrod Washington agreed and declined to aid King.<sup>20</sup>

At the end of 1825, Philadelphia attorney William Rawle decided to put the authorship controversy to rest. Rawle had been a loyal Federalist since the 1790s and had co-founded the Washington Benevolent Society of Pennsylvania. Like his Federalist brethren before him, Rawle’s primary interest in the controversy was the preservation of Washington’s legacy. In December 1825, Rawle inspected the manuscript from which printer David C. Claypoole had published the Farewell Address in September 1796. Rawle described with “reverence” the thirty-page document, “all in the handwriting of this great man [Washington]. . . . It bears thro’out the marks of original composition,” Rawle noted, trying too hard to prove a point. “There are many erasures and interlineations—a transposition of paragraphs and other indications of its coming immediately from the hands of an unassisted individual.” Though largely worthless as historical evidence of authorship, these observations clearly speak to Rawle’s mindset and motivations.<sup>21</sup>

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20. John Marshall to Bushrod Washington, June 20, 1825, and Oct. 3, 1825, in *The Papers of John Marshall*, ed. Herbert A. Johnson and Charles F. Hobson (12 vols., Chapel Hill, NC, 1974–2006), 10: 180–81, 202.

21. “Report of William Rawle on Conversation with David C. Claypoole,” Dec. 16, 1825, in Paltsits, *Washington’s Farewell Address*, 289. Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 344.



The following February, Rawle, as co-founder and first president of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, appointed a committee to investigate the authorship controversy. The committee, composed of Rawle, Benjamin R. Morgan, and Charles Jared Ingersoll, got in touch with several of Washington's surviving associates to answer the "question whether the Valedictory Address of the venerable Washington was his own composition or the work of another." Bushrod Washington, John Marshall, and John Jay had not seen any evidence to cast doubt on Washington's authorship, and Jay gave the committee permission to use his 1811 letter to Richard Peters. Peters took the committee's request for information as another opportunity to offer his assessment of the controversy, describing it as "a strange pursuit in Hamilton's family. . . . If [Hamilton] had written the Address, it is perfidy to betray the confidence reposed in him. But as he did not, it is wrong in his family to assert his having done it. In either case his descendants would gain no reputation; but our nation would suffer a serious injury, by having the fascinating name of *Washington* taken from the creed of every friend of his country." Peters believed that the Hamiltons were in the wrong regardless of what the truth was. He also had no evidence to offer beyond Jay's letter, but that letter was more than enough to satisfy the committee's inquiry.<sup>22</sup>

Once the initial investigation was complete, the committee wrote to the sole surviving executor of Hamilton's estate, Nicholas Fish. The committee made little effort to hide the conclusions its members had already reached: "It has been supposed by some that the address was originally composed by General Hamilton. Our impressions from all the information that we have been able to recollect are to the contrary." Jay's letter explained the existence of the Hamilton draft, but to do "justice to the friends of General Hamilton" the committee offered Fish the chance to correct any "erroneous impressions" under which they were operating. In a curt response, Fish informed the committee of the family's lawsuit against King, but otherwise he had nothing to add to their deliberations. At no point did the committee reach out to any members of the Hamilton family to determine the foundation for their claims. They also never contacted Rufus King to inquire after the documents at the center of the lawsuit.<sup>23</sup>

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22. "Papers Relative to the Valedictory Address of President Washington," *Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, ed. Edward Armstrong, Vol. 1, Being a Republication (1826; repr. Philadelphia, 1864), 241–67, esp. 247.

23. *Ibid.*, 262, 264.

The committee's final report was a fitting conclusion to what had been a far-from-objective investigation. "The merits of this illustrious man [Washington]," they declared, "would be very little impaired by the discovery that he had made use of the hand of another to reduce his own thoughts and reflections to writing." However, the "effort" of Hamilton's heirs appeared to be an attempt "to ascribe to some other the merit of these thoughts and the sense of the utility of their publication, and thus to render George Washington a mere secondary character." As a result, "a warmth of feeling among those who loved and revered [Washington] has been unavoidably excited, and may be reasonably excused." Once the committee could plausibly account for the draft in Hamilton's handwriting, there was no need to look further: "The facts stated in Mr. Jay's letter to Judge Peters well account for the *mistake* which has accompanied this question." According to the committee's reading of the letter, "The whole address appears to have been copied by General Hamilton, whose affectionate attachment to the President prevented him from thinking any trouble on his account too great; and this copy having, we know not how, returned to his possession, was probably the cause of the opinion that he was the original author." This interpretation denied to Hamilton even the role of copyeditor. The report concluded with an attack on the Hamilton family for rendering this situation "more distressing by attempts to convict one [Washington] of intellectual deficiency and the other [Hamilton] of confidence betrayed." As far as the committee was concerned, the book on the authorship controversy was now closed.<sup>24</sup>

As with Peters's earlier fact-finding mission, Rawle's investigation and conclusions can best be understood within a broader Federalist context. Despite a significant decline after the War of 1812, the Federalists had survived. Many Federalists won reelection to Congress (often under different party labels after 1818); and between 1816 and 1826 Federalists served at least 157 two-year terms in the House of Representatives. This was a small minority of all congressional terms, but it was a demonstration that the Federalist cause endured. By the 1820s, Federalism found its greatest strength in a small number of urban strongholds, with Rawle's Philadelphia being arguably the most important. Federalists in these cities primarily focused on local politics, but they did still try to influence

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24. *Ibid.*, 242–43.

national decision-making and executive appointments, especially during John Quincy Adams's presidency. Federalists like Rawle took great pride in their identity as Federalists. Richard Peters Jr. explained the Federalist outlook in 1826: "Private grief, . . . disappointed ambition, a conviction that the entire surrender of the *name* will deprive some of the consequence they still retain as leaders." If there were no more Federalists, there would be "no standard around which they could assemble with confidence, and upon the principles of approved constitutional and general policy." Defending their Washingtonian principles against the Hamilton authorship claims in 1826 was likely less about preserving the Farewell Address as an electioneering tool and was more about not undoing the primary basis of their Federalism.<sup>25</sup>

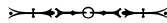
Hamilton was not without his defenders after the Rawle committee issued its report. One such defender was Timothy Pickering, who read the report with incredulity. "Hamilton is supposed to go through the drudgery of copying Washington's Farewell Address!" Pickering exclaimed to William Coleman, "An Address prepared on purpose *to be soon published!* How absurd!" Pickering believed that "Washington may have made the skeleton, and thrown a covering over it, but having long experienced the great abilities, the sound judgement, and the excellency of Hamilton's compositions—submitted the same to his correction, additions, and amendments." Pickering had been in Washington's cabinet when the Farewell Address was written, and was largely correct in his estimation of the authorship process; however, his conclusions stemmed from his emotional attachment to Hamilton rather than from any direct knowledge of the proceedings. Pickering lamented that the "true history" of the Farewell Address might never be made public. "Will it be just," Pickering asked the Marquis de Lafayette, "that the reputation to be derived from the essential aide . . . [Hamilton] afforded to Washington, should be withheld, and buried in oblivion?" So spurred was Pickering by the perceived need to rectify this injustice (as well as many other injustices he perceived affecting the historical memory of the founding

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25. Richard Peters Jr. to Henry Clay, Oct. 24, 1826, quoted in Shaw Livermore Jr., *The Twilight of Federalism: The Disintegration of the Federalist Party, 1815–1830* (Princeton, NJ, 1962), 218. Numbers on Federalist service in Congress after 1815 were tabulated from the "Congressional Biographical Directory," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>. For a study of the Federalists after 1815, see Livermore, *Twilight of Federalism*.

generation), that in 1827 at the age of 82 he began work on a biography of Hamilton. Pickering died less than two years later, having made little progress.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the Rawle committee's incomplete collection of evidence and confusing reading of Jay's letter, its report settled the authorship controversy for most of the interested parties. With the publication of the committee's report, Rufus King felt himself "exonerated from the trust under which [the bundled Hamilton] papers were originally placed in his hands," and delivered them to James Hamilton in October 1826. King felt that "the reasons which led to the creation of this trust . . . have ceased to exist." As with Pickering, though, Hamilton's family was not ready to accept the committee's findings. James Hamilton acknowledged the implication of John Jay's letter in his response to King, but added, "whether the conclusion intended by that letter . . . is correct or not will be a subject for more enlightened consideration when these papers are examined." The family had high hopes for what they would find in the bundle, but the recovered papers fell short of their expectations. Primarily letters written by Washington to Hamilton, they illustrated the collaborative nature of the endeavor and suggested important contributions by Hamilton—contributions far surpassing the Rawle committee's findings—but the documents did not establish that Alexander Hamilton had written the Farewell Address.<sup>27</sup>



The Rawle committee was the last Federalist effort to defend Washington's authorship, but the Washington and Hamilton camps prolonged the controversy for an additional thirty-three years before allowing the complete authorship story to be told. Upon Pickering's death, Elizabeth Hamilton looked to her minister, Francis Boyles, and finally to her sons, John Church Hamilton and James A. Hamilton, to write her deceased husband's biography. The Washingtons entrusted Professor (and later

26. Timothy Pickering to William Coleman, Oct. 5, 1826; Pickering to Lafayette, July 23, 1828, Pickering Papers. Gerard H. Clarfield, *Timothy Pickering and the American Republic* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1980), 268–69 and n42.

27. John Duer to James Hamilton [received Oct. 17, 1826]; Hamilton to Duer, Oct. 17, 1826, Hamilton, *Reminiscences*, 26–27. "Memorandum of Papers Relating to Farewell Address," *ibid.*, 29–30.

President) Jared Sparks of Harvard University with the project of publishing a definitive collection of George Washington's writings. The problem faced by both families was that each possessed an incomplete documentary record. Further complicating matters, Sparks had a series of letters written by Hamilton to Washington and the Hamiltons had letters written by Washington to their father.<sup>28</sup>

In 1827 Sparks and James Hamilton met to discuss their shared problem. By this point it was clear that Hamilton had not written the Farewell Address and that Washington had not worked alone. In the previous two decades, no one had seriously engaged with the possibility that Washington and Hamilton had worked together, but it was a story that neither side seemed fully ready to tell. Sparks and Hamilton, despite their initial cooperation, could not come to an agreement on sharing evidence for publication. In 1830 Sparks asked for permission to use the Hamilton documents, but a family friend reminded the Hamiltons, "When that address was published, it was understood among your father's friends that it was written by him. It was, however, considered important that it should have the influence of Washington's name and character, and I must advise that until it has ceased to do its work, the question of the authorship should not be discussed." How Hamilton's friends came to this understanding of the authorship question is unclear, but the Hamiltons found this logic to be persuasive and refused to share their documents with Sparks. Even they finally seemed to recognize that the Farewell Address mattered more as the legacy of George Washington than as the creation of Alexander Hamilton.<sup>29</sup>

Sparks's discussion of the Farewell Address in the twelfth volume of *The Writings of George Washington* (1838) is intriguing because he

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28. Knott, *Alexander Hamilton*, 22; and Hamilton, *Reminiscences*, 30.

29. Jared Sparks to James A. Hamilton, Mar. 23, 1830; "Memorandum of Papers Relative to Farewell Address," Hamilton, *Reminiscences*, 29–30. In his *Reminiscences*, James Hamilton claimed that the "Hon. George Cabot, of Boston" had been the one to caution against discussing the authorship question in 1830. Elsewhere in *Reminiscences* Hamilton referenced both his and his father's relationship with famed Massachusetts Federalist George Cabot; however, he died in 1823. Based on the way the Cabot letter was introduced and phrased, it is quite possible that it pre-dated the events of 1830, making Cabot another Federalist voice opposing the Hamilton authorship rumors. It is also possible that the letter was from a different George Cabot.

acknowledged Hamilton's contributions while also downplaying their importance. Even without the Hamiltons' documents, Sparks could have made a persuasive argument about the Washington–Hamilton partnership and shed new light on Washington's writing process. Instead, Sparks offered an extremely defensive reading of the evidence aimed at preserving the established narrative as much as possible. Sparks began his discussion of the Address by declaring the authorship question one of "small moment." In his view, "whether every idea embodied in [the Farewell Address] arose spontaneously from [Washington's] own mind, or whether every word was first traced by his pen, or whether he acted as every wise man would naturally act under the same circumstances, and sought counsel from other sources claiming respect and confidence, or in what degree he pursued either or all of these methods, are points so unimportant, compared with the object and matter of the whole, as to be scarcely worth considering." Washington's authorship process was irrelevant as far as Sparks was concerned.<sup>30</sup>

In his analysis of the Address, Sparks concluded that Washington was "much indebted . . . to the careful revision and skillful pen of Hamilton," who may have "suggested some of the topics and amplified others." Hamilton's contributions were not enough, though, "to detract from the substantial merit of Washington, or to divest him of a fair claim to the authorship of the address." Sparks echoed the oft-repeated sentiment that Washington's reputation would not suffer, nor Hamilton's benefit, from a reattribution of the Address; rather, if anyone should "take away [Washington's] name . . . its powerful charm would be broken." In perhaps the strangest attempt to avoid undercutting Washington, Sparks concluded with a diatribe against the use of handwritten documents as historical evidence to determine original authorship. Sparks got the basic outline of the authorship story correct, but the analysis around it revealed an unwillingness to fully embrace the reality of the Address's creation.<sup>31</sup>

Sparks was not a neutral observer when it came to George Washington. Though Sparks is often hailed, in the words of Daniel J. Boorstin,

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30. Jared Sparks, ed., *The Writings of George Washington; Being His Correspondence, Addresses, Messages, and Other Papers, Official and Private, Selected and Published from the Original Manuscripts; with A Life of the Author, Notes, and Illustrations* (12 vols., Boston, 1834–1838), 12: 382.

31. *Ibid.*, 382–98, esp. 397–98.

as “the founder of historical scholarship in the United States,” he was also, in Boorstin’s phrase, a “high priest of the Washington cult” whose goal was to preserve the heroic image of Washington. To accomplish this end, Sparks disregarded many of Washington’s letters, destroyed others, and frequently improved and corrected the writing in those that he chose to publish. Spark’s Washington-centric interpretation of the Farewell Address was thus consistent with his entire editorial process in its lack of true objectivity. Preserving Washington’s legacy mattered much more than presenting an accurate reading of the historical record.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps in an effort to offer a more balanced treatment of the Washington–Hamilton collaboration, the Hamilton brothers made at least two attempts to see all of the Farewell Address documents published together after the appearance of Washington’s *Writings*. The first attempt, in 1844, failed because Sparks had already returned Washington’s papers to the Washington family. The second attempt led to a face-to-face meeting in 1850 between John Church Hamilton and George C. Washington, the first president’s grandnephew and the man then in possession of Washington’s papers. Washington did not see the private papers of their ancestors as historical documents that should be shared with the world: “The intimate friendship and confidential intercourse which existed between” Hamilton and Washington was “sacred.” To put it on public display “would be in palpable violation of the wishes & intentions of the parties.” These documents “should be sacredly held as heirlooms, and if this could not be done,” then the families “should have mutually agreed to destroy them.” This course, he bluntly declared, would be “more proper than to make them public.” The younger Washington’s stance did not seem to be a defense against Hamilton’s authorship claims as much as a genuine show of respect for his granduncle’s privacy.<sup>33</sup>

As Sparks had before him, John Church Hamilton proceeded without the complete documentary record. In *The Works of Alexander Hamilton* (1850–1851), he published a series of letters exchanged by Hamilton and Washington pertaining to the writing of the Farewell Address, as

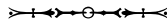
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32. Boorstin, *Americans*, 346–49, esp. 347; and Edward G. Lengel, *Inventing George Washington: America’s Founder, in Myth and Memory* (New York, 2011), 17–18.

33. “Minutes of a Conversation Between John C. Hamilton and George C. Washington,” Mar. 11, 1850, in Paltsits, *Washington’s Farewell Address*, 302–303. Hamilton, *Reminiscences*, 30–31.

well as two versions of the Address that his father had worked on for Washington. No commentary accompanied any of these selections, but their inclusion sent a clear message on the authorship question. A definitive history of the authorship of the Farewell Address remained to be written, but the publication of Washington's *Writings* and Hamilton's *Works* confirmed that Hamilton had played a significant role in its framing.<sup>34</sup>

The revelation of Hamilton's involvement in writing the Farewell Address influenced the way that some people viewed it. In January 1850, Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi questioned the ongoing significance of the Address given that it was "known to have been the joint production of Washington and one, at least, of his Cabinet—not the emanation of his mind alone." It is significant, though, that Davis expressed this loss of "respect" for the Farewell Address in response to Senator Henry Clay's proposal that the United States government purchase the original manuscript of the Address. The measure comfortably passed in both houses of Congress. Contemporary celebrations of Washington's Birthday and assertions of the Address's continued relevance in debates about U.S. foreign policy also made abundantly clear that the Federalists had been wrong to doubt American devotion to Washington's principles. It is impossible to disentangle Washington from the principles he endorsed in the popular consciousness, but ongoing support for those principles stemmed from both popular faith in Washington and the demonstrated wisdom of his principles.<sup>35</sup>



The complete picture of Washington's authorship process was finally rendered in 1859 by Horace Binney. At some point after their initial meeting in 1850, George C. Washington relented and gave John Church Hamilton permission to use the previously unpublished Washington-Hamilton correspondence in Hamilton's forthcoming *The History of the*

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34. John C. Hamilton, ed., *The Works of Alexander Hamilton; Comprising His Correspondence, and His Political and Official Writings, Exclusive of the Federalist, Civil and Military. Published from the Original Manuscripts Deposited in the Department of State, by Order of the Joint Library Committee of Congress* (7 vols., New York, 1850-1851), 6: 119-22, 135-38, 143-50; 7: 570-94.

35. *Congressional Globe*, 31<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 227. Also see Malanson, "Addressing America," 240-364.



*Republic*. Both men also allowed Binney, a Philadelphia lawyer and former congressman, to use all of the written sources pertaining to the Farewell Address in *An Inquiry Into the Formation of Washington's Farewell Address*. Binney went a bit further than most modern historians have in emphasizing Hamilton's contributions, but his *Inquiry* was by far the most accurate assessment of the authorship question offered to that point. "The Farewell Address speaks the very mind of Washington," Binney concluded after examining all of the letters and drafts; "there can be no doubt" that Washington was the author of the Farewell Address. The Address was the result of a collaborative process, though, and while Washington may have been its author, Hamilton was the "composer and writer of the paper." As Binney described it, "Hamilton developed the thoughts of Washington, and corroborated them—included several cognate subjects, and added many effective thoughts from his own mind, and united all into one chain by the links of his masculine logic." George Washington was the "soul" of the Farewell Address, and Alexander Hamilton was its "spirit."<sup>36</sup>

Binney's minute analysis of the complete documentary record resolved the authorship controversy. That it took more than five decades to achieve this resolution says something vital about the place that the Farewell Address occupied for Americans, and especially for Federalists. The Address was a fundamentally important document, a foundational statement of American principles and ideals that had attained and retained that status because it was the handiwork of George Washington. Federalist observers frequently bemoaned that, if Washington's name were withdrawn from the Farewell Address, the document would lose its force with the American people, as if they would immediately discard their copies of the "sacred text" the moment they learned that every word and phrasing was not Washington's own.

In light of the magnitude of American devotion to Washington in the decades after his death, this response to the controversy raises the question why no one argued that the authorship question did not matter. No one argued that the message was inherently significant, that its principles were and remained demonstrably useful, or that Washington's endorsement mattered more than his pen. Those who asserted that the ideas

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36. Horace Binney, *An Inquiry into the Formation of Washington's Farewell Address* (Philadelphia, 1859), 169–71.

were Washington's and that Hamilton's involvement was of secondary importance did so as a rationale for preserving the established narrative and not as a way of defending the merits of the Address itself. The needs of the Federalists at the beginning of the nineteenth century help to explain this awkward loyalty to the Farewell Address. The Federalists revered the Address, but they needed it to be the work of Washington to legitimize their ongoing place in the political system. If the Address was ascribed to Hamilton rather than to Washington, the Federalists feared that the Address would lose its influence and so might they in the process. The Washington and Hamilton families were deeply invested in protecting their heirs' legacies, but it was Federalist resistance to the truth that perpetuated the controversy in its first decades. This resistance blinded them to the reality that Americans saw the Farewell Address as the wisdom of George Washington and as being beneficial to the United States even if he received help in writing it.