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Dr. Alexander Hamilton and the Tuesday Club

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Abstract

Dr. Alexander Hamilton (1712-56) and his beloved Annapolis, Maryland “Tuesday Club” (1745-56) were two halves of the same sociable coin; reflections of a multi-decade, transatlantic quest for British identity, belonging, and connection that eventually coalesced in a single place among singular men. To understand Hamilton is to understand the Tuesday Club, and vice versa. On an even larger scale, importantly, to understand Hamilton and his Tuesday Club is to understand the very core of British American sociable institutions.

When a lack of job prospects forced Hamilton to move to Annapolis in 1739, the recently-minted Edinburgh physician felt adrift in what he considered a dour mire of boredom and incivility. The twenty-seven-year-old had cultivated a keen connection with Edinburgh's various public venues, namely the tavern-based "Whin-Bush Club." But now he found himself slogging through life in a new city alone, unwell, and homesick. Something had to change. He needed to find, if not recreate, Scotland's celebrated sociable venues in his new colonial home, and fast.

By 1744, Hamilton had managed to save up some money through relative success in his physician trade, but his physical and mental health flagged by the day, as tuberculosis ravaged his lungs and wistful melancholy gnawed at his mind. Hamilton hoped that a trip north—for "health and recreation" as he explained—might assuage his various ailments.¹ Perhaps the brisk, dry climate of the northeastern climates would heal his bloody lungs? And perhaps, *just perhaps*, he might find sociable circles which compared to those tavern clubs and gentlemen, namely the Whin-Bush Club, with which he so reveled in Edinburgh?

Hamilton's five-month "Itinerarium" from Annapolis, Maryland to York, Maine and back again was thus an intentional journey of sociable exploration and recreation. If other colonial cities had cultivated British-style clubs which satisfied British-born or -educated gentlemen, Dr. Hamilton surmised, perhaps he could manage to do the same in Annapolis, that "distant and comical corner of the world," as he called his new hometown.²

At every stop on his journey, Hamilton sought out those he considered his social "equals," namely educated, elitist men who understood "civil" notions of gentility, consumption, and conversation. As a man who worked with his hands and lacked a title, Hamilton hardly achieved the lofty status of a gentleman according to English customs of power and custom. But things were different in America—here there were no landed gentry, and those who might be considered the "middling" sorts in England could achieve greater social and commercial status in the comparably-rustic American colonies. These opportunities for upward mobility impelled so many white men, including Hamilton, to move to America in the first place.

Such deeply-ingrained notions of class-based sociability fundamentally shaped Hamilton's multi-week northeastern sojourn. He felt especially drawn to urban taverns and clubs, where he believed the most suitable men and societies would and should congregate. Not only were taverns the most numerous, popular, and accessible of all British American public spaces, but they also offered locals and travelers alike myriad opportunities at sociable improvement. Alcoholic and caffeinated beverages were in great supply, as were fine China vessels, carefully-appointed private and public rooms, and well-organized auctions, meetings, and travelling shows. The stage was set, Hamilton simply needed to find his part.

The Annapolis physician did, at least sparingly. Arguing that his own "European Erudition" necessitated genteel sociability, lest it "turn Rusty and lose its gloss in these American deserts, and degenerate into mere Barbarism and Savageness," Hamilton glommed onto

English- and Scottish-born or educated men at every stop in his *Itinerarium*.³ By doing so, he hoped to find the key to recreating these same companies and societies in his new hometown of Annapolis.

Of all the tavern clubs Hamilton visited during his multi-month journey, his experiences with the Hungarian Club in New York City's Sign of the Black Horse and the Scots' Charitable Society in Boston's Sun Tavern proved the most beneficial for his future endeavors. The Hungarian Club was a Scotch-centric group of New York elites who met to ridicule the day's most pressing topics, never mind down pints of beer with dizzying efficiency. Here were three of the most vital components of Hamilton's beloved Whin-Bush Club: genteel company, excess alcohol, and biting innuendo! After multiple evenings with this "elegant" company, Hamilton concluded that "to drink stoutly with the Hungarian Club...is the readiest way for a stranger to recommend himself" to New York City's polite company.⁴

Though not as alcoholically-motivated as New York City's Hungarian Club, Boston's Scots' Charitable Society offered elite company and enlightened compassion in plenty. Importantly, this cosmopolitan tavern club committed itself to encouraging connections with, and contributions to, the widening Scottish diaspora. Impressed by the Scots' Charitable Society's devotion "to the relief of the poor of their nation," Hamilton pledged three pounds New England currency to the cause and, in turn, earned membership in the Society.⁵

But all was not clubs and commiseration. Colonial American taverns' diversity—their very ability to attract and entertain a broad swath of the lower- and middle-class populace—often sullied them in this condescending physician's opinion. Their clientele was coarse and caustic, amenities simple and slovenly, and owners greedy and guileless.

Thus, just as Hamilton concluded his *Itinerarium* in September 1744, he also concluded that he could indeed recreate the Scottish-style tavern club, so rife with sociability, wit, and overt consumption, in his new hometown of Annapolis. He simply needed to do so, ironically, without the colonial American tavern, as this rude institution's company and customs would only sully such an enlightened enterprise.⁶

This is where the Tuesday Club came into play. On the one-year anniversary of his *Itinerarium*, May 14, 1745, Hamilton organized the first meeting of what would become one of the most famous, well-attended associations in the eighteenth-century British American colonies. He did so, not surprisingly, at his own private residence rather than the public tavern. So too did he carefully select the initial eight members of the Tuesday Club, almost all of whom were native Scotsmen or Englishmen who had been educated in Britain and had attended other such clubs. If his experience in America thus far had taught him anything, it was that re-creating the Scottish-style tavern society in these new "wilds" necessitated careful and deliberate culling, collecting, and siphoning of a limited-but-qualified coterie of members and directives. In what should also come as no surprise, Hamilton directly cribbed the Tuesday Club's founding rules from those of his favorite Edinburgh association, the Whin-Bush Club.

Hamilton's Tuesday Club, which he described as the Whin-Bush Club "transmigrated to America," offered certain British American gentlemen just what they were looking for: association, sociability, and satire.⁷ The Club's regular membership, which soon grew to fifteen men, consisted of commissioners, judges, lawyers, reverends, pastors, merchants, and clerks, each of whom referred to each other using pseudonyms. As the Club's convener and resident historian, Dr. Hamilton went by "Loquacious Scribble, Secretary and Orator," while Jonas Green, local printer and protege of Benjamin Franklin, earned the lengthy title of "Jonathan Grog, P.P.P.P.—Purveyor, Punster, Punchmaker General, Printer, and Poet—and later P.L.M.C.—Poet Laureate and Master of Ceremonies."⁸ Dry rhetoric obviously wasn't the driving force of this coterie.

Over the next eleven years, anyone who was anyone made it a point to attend the Tuesday Club upon visiting Annapolis. Hamilton offered "honorary memberships" to those who wanted to join the Club while in Annapolis, while plenty of other guests regularly crowded into a member's home every other Tuesday evening. A loose set of rules governed these affairs, wherein Hamilton encouraged "gaiety, Jollity, pleasantry and Jocosity" among his carefully-selected attendees.⁹

Once a homesick, sickly physician wandering about Annapolis with little purpose, by early 1750 Hamilton had married Margaret Dulany, the daughter of one of Maryland's most powerful men, established himself as a trusted physician, and, perhaps most importantly, become the proud director of his own Scottish-style club, wherein he could guide his colonial hometown towards a more civil, sociable future.

But this process had not been easy or, for that matter, straightforward. At the same time that Hamilton's Tuesday Club enjoyed such popularity in the twelve years after his 1744 *Itinerarium*, the Scottish physician's health deteriorated at an equal pace. "Loquacious Scribble" devoted himself to the Club, even penning a multi-volume, satirical *History of the Tuesday Club* among his other duties, but consumption continued to flood his lungs. Hamilton eventually had to give up his position as record keeper for the Club, and could no longer attend meetings by early 1756. This broke Hamilton, who argued that without the Tuesday Club, life became "a *tabula rasa* or *Cart Blanch*, or rather a blotted Scroll or Scutcheon, in which nothing of sense or significance can be read or discerned."¹⁰

His fellow Club members found that without Hamilton there really was no Tuesday Club, and met for the last time on February 10, 1756. Their leader, meanwhile, languished at home in a fog of opiates before finally passing on Tuesday, May 11, 1756. Fittingly—even ominously—the date of Hamilton's death coincided with the eleventh anniversary of the Tuesday Club.¹¹

1. Alexander Hamilton, *Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744*, ed. Carl Bridenbaugh (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), 1.

2. Alexander Hamilton to Robert Hamilton, 15 March 1739/40, Annapolis, in Elaine G. Breslaw, "A Perilous Climb to Social Eminence: Dr. Alexander Hamilton and His Creditors," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 92: 4 (1997): 446.

3. Elaine G. Breslaw, *Dr. Alexander Hamilton and Provincial America: Expanding the Orbit of Scottish Culture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 118 (quote).

4. Hamilton, *Itinerarium*, 88.
 5. Hamilton, *Itinerarium*, 133.
 6. Vaughn Scribner, “Remember Me to All the Members of the Whin Bush Club’: Dr. Alexander Hamilton and the Scottish Tavern Club in America,” *International Review of Scottish Studies* 49:2 (2024): 72.
 7. Alexander Hamilton, *The History of the Ancient and Honorable Tuesday Club, Volume One*, ed. Robert Micklus (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), I:60.
 8. Robert Micklus, “Introduction,” in Hamilton, *History of the Tuesday Club*, I:xx.
 9. Hamilton, *History of the Tuesday Club*, I:72.
 10. Hamilton, *History of the Tuesday Club*, 1:310.
 11. Micklus, “Introduction,” xxv.
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[Alexander Hamilton's Itinerarium \(1744\)](#)
[Records of The Tuesday Club of Annapolis, 1745-56](#)