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TREASURY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

Inside this Newsletter...

- **Alexander Hamilton Exhibition.** The New York Historical Society opens a six-month exhibition on the first Treasury Secretary on August 28.
- **Accused Treasury Spy (?).** THA's guest lecturer for June was historian-author R. Bruce Craig, whose book *Treasonable Doubt: the Harry Dexter White Spy Case* examines the case of the accused Assistant Secretary of the Treasury during the FDR Administration.

Dumbarton House, Home of America's "First Civil Servant"

Dumbarton House, the residence of Joseph Nourse, is a Federal house museum administered by The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America. Built around 1800, the house has been open for public tours for over 70 years, and contains extensive collections of Federal period furniture, silver, glass, paintings, textiles and historic manuscripts. Included in the collections are various Nourse family artifacts, including Joseph Nourse's appointment document as first Register of the United States Treasury.

The house has been restored to show it as it might have appeared during the time of its first resident, Joseph Nourse, and presents an unusual opportunity to catch a glimpse of what life was like in Washington in the early 1800s.

On July 10, 2004, the 250th Anniversary of Nourse's birth was celebrated in a special commemoration at the House.

Located at 2715 Q Street, NW, in the Georgetown section of Washington, DC, Dumbarton House is open for docent-led public tours on Tuesdays through Saturdays at 10:15 a.m., 11:15 a.m., 12:15 p.m., and 1:15 p.m. A nominal admission fee is requested. However, by special arrangement between Dumbarton House and the Treasury Historical Association, each THA member may enjoy a complimentary tour for one person by presenting a copy of this article upon entry to the house museum.

Personalities from Treasury's Past —

Joseph Nourse, Register, A Life-Long Treasury Career

In recent times, Treasury employees usually retire after 25, 30 or 40 years, with portions of their service spent in other departments and agencies. Rare is the case for a public servant to spend half a century at Treasury; but, at the beginning of our national government, one of America's first public servants holds such a distinctive record -- Joseph Nourse.

Nourse, born in London in 1754, moved to America with his family in 1769. In 1776, Nourse was appointed as secretary to Continental Army General Charles Lee. Finding military life not to be suitable for him, the following year Nourse resigned and sought another position, subsequently being appointed as assistant clerk and then deputy secretary to the Colonial Board of War. This latter role was the most responsible position available to someone who was not a member of the Continental Congress. In 1778, he was elected secretary of ordnance and paymaster to the Board of War and Ordnance, but resigned seven months later to move to Philadelphia.

In 1779, Nourse became the Assistant Auditor General for the Board of Treasury, and two years later was elected Register of the Treasury, a position he held both in the Colonial Board of Treasury and, following the Constitution, in the Department of the Treasury. When President George Washington sought Senate confirmation of his nominated Treasury officials on September 11, 1789, the nominees included Alexander Hamilton of New York and several other men, with references to their home state; the nomination of Joseph Nourse to serve as Register of the Treasury did not cite his home state, but merely recorded his status as being "in office." The Senate promptly confirmed these nominations.

The duties of Register of the Treasury were to keep all accounts of the receipts and expenditures of the public money and of all debts due to or from the U.S. Government...duties of today's Financial Management Service.

Nourse left Treasury in 1829, after serving under seven Presidents and nine Treasury Secretaries, with a career at the Treasury Department and the predecessor Treasury Board spanning 50 years -- a tenure rarely found in public service.

(This is the sixth in a series of articles on the people who have shaped Treasury's history.)

June Lecture Examines Accused Treasury Spy

On June 16, THA sponsored a lecture by historian R. Bruce Craig on an important Cold War espionage case with a Treasury Department connection. In 1948, former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Harry Dexter White was accused, along with Alger Hiss, of colluding with the Soviets. White, an important member of the Treasury "brain trust" during the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, was responsible for the creation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank after World War II. The fact that White died shortly after testifying before the House Un-American Activities Committee only fueled speculation that he was indeed a Soviet spy and that his death was the result of foul play. However, Dr. Craig argues that, while White was involved in a "species of espionage," his actions fell short of "policy subversion."

Bruce Craig's lecture for THA was drawn from his recently published book *Treasonable Doubt: The Harry Dexter White Spy Case* (University Press of Kansas, 2004).

This study is based on ten years of research, which included examination of FBI and Treasury Department records, as well as oral interviews with Alger Hiss, former Attorney General Herbert Brownell, FBI agent Robert Lamphere, and KGB officer General Vitalii G. Pavlov. In 1996, the National Security Agency released the VENONA decrypts—a collection of cable transmissions between Soviet agents based in the United States and their Soviet superiors in Moscow.

These transmissions shed light on White's relationship with the Soviets. Dr. Craig also was successful in getting the records of White's grand jury testimony and materials related to the Alger Hiss grand jury unsealed. While this made invaluable historical records

available his research, this court case also established an important precedent for unsealing grand jury records for their historical value alone.

R. Bruce Craig is the director of the National Coalition for History (NCH), a Washington, D.C. based advocacy organization that represents the historical and archival community on Capitol Hill. He also is an adjunct faculty member at the American University in Washington, D.C., where he teaches policy history. He holds a Ph.D. from American University, and is currently researching his next book, a biography of Alger Hiss.

Treasury Building Notes —

Check Your Knowledge of the Treasury Building

(Continuing the article begun in December 2003 edition, which contains facts on East and South Wings of the Treasury Building. The North Wing will be covered in the future.)

West Wing...

- Designed by Isaiah Rogers, with construction beginning in 1855, the same year as the South Wing.
- Construction slowed due to shortage of labor and materials, resulting in completion four years after the South Wing (in 1864).
- Grand design included a triple-dome and skylight in the center, over the two spiral stair wells (currently obstructed by elevator shafts and mechanism).
- Secretary's office moved South Wing to directly over the West Wing's foyer immediately after completion.
- Secretary's outer office served as temporary White House office for President Andrew Johnson immediately after Abraham Lincoln's assassination.
- Wing included portions of what is now considered the North Wing, i.e. inclusive of northwest staircase and vaults in offices that face Pennsylvania Avenue and the Treasury Annex Building.

Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America

If you are planning on visiting New York City this fall, you will want to see the new exhibition "Alexander Hamilton: The Man Who Made Modern America" at the New York Historical Society. Drawing from the collections of the Museum of the City of New York, the Library of Congress, the New York Historical Society, and other institutions, this exhibit promises to showcase a rich collection of objects and manuscripts to tell the story how this American hero "shaped our world - modern America - perhaps more than any of his contemporaries."

Hamilton's long-lasting contributions and paradoxical life continue to fascinate historians and the public. As Richard Brookhiser, one of the curators of this exhibition, has written, "as first Treasury secretary, planner of the Federalist Papers, and adviser to George Washington, Hamilton had a career fit for Mount Rushmore. Born poor and illegitimate in the Caribbean, hated by Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, loved by women - including his wife - and killed in a duel by the Vice President of the United States, Hamilton had a life fit for the tabloids."

The exhibition will be on view from August 28, 2004 through February 28, 2005. The New York Historical Society is located at 2 West 77th Street in New York City. For more information, visit www.nyhistory.org, www.gilderlehrman.org/index.html or call (212) 873-3400.

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