

An Important Historical Document.

MECKLENBURG DECLARATION FULLY ESTABLISHED.

We are indebted to Dr. J. M. Davidson, of Quincy, Florida, for a manuscript, written 51 years ago, by his grandfather, a brother of Dr. Ephraim Brevard, the author of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. The handwriting is bold and distinct, evincing force and decision of character. In some places, however, it is almost illegible from lapse of time. The manuscript was called forth by the reflections of the writer upon the 4th of July:

Iredell County, N. C., July 13, 1824.

July 4th, 1776, a mere speck on the great and fleeting current of time, but from which emanated the most important decisions of the combined human intellect – I mean the Declaration of Independence. An era, which will grace the historic page, while freedom and liberty with their concomitant blessings are the portions of the human race. The enquiring mind spontaneously traces so rich a stream in a retrograde direction in order to reach the fountain from which it issued. What section or particular portion of the United States may claim the greatest or some minor share in the above celebrated instrument is immaterial to the following disclosure, which fell out under the observation of the writer when all the organs of both body and mind were in their free and uncontrolled exercise. I mean the Declaration of Independence of Mecklenburg County, of May 19th, 1775. A detail of facts with some collateral incidents (observed as above) will rest the matter upon a basis in which the rational mind may justly infer the authenticity and truth of the whole matter.

In the month of either June or July, 1775, being in Salisbury at a Court of Oyer, when the late Governor Martin presided as Judge, a gentleman, a citizen of Charlotte, in Mecklenburg county, arrived in town, then on his way to Philadelphia, where Congress was then in session, as Delegate or Bearer of said Declaration from said county. His destination and business soon transpired, and as Salisbury was then inhabited by a number who were Loyalists or Tories (to use the then new phrase) and timid Whigs who had not embarked in the Revolutionary struggle; the Bearer, who was a man of spirit, which he fully manifested in the subsequent struggle, was treated by the above persons as a tool of a precipitous and unenlightened mob, who were rushing headlong into an abyss where Congress had not dared to pass. Their intemperance was, however, very suddenly arrested by a gentleman from the same county, who had entered with all his powers into the impending contest and offered to rest the propriety and justness of the proceeding both of Mecklenburg and the Delegate upon a decision by the arm of flesh with any one inclinable to abide the result. Matters were soon hushed, and the Delegate retired to rest and resumed his journey next morning.

In the Autumn of the year 1776, the writer being one of the number who composed the College or Academy (Queen's College) lived with a brother, Dr. Ephraim Brevard, into whose possession the letters, orations and other exercises, (usual in such institutions) were handed over for wrapping paper and other uses in his professional line. My curiosity frequently led me to ransack and examine the several contents for aid and assistance in my own task, when I came across a Declaration of Independence by Mecklenburg County. Upon requiring an explanation from the Doctor, he informed me that it was the mass or rudiments out of which he had sometime before drawn the aforesaid instrument, which had been dispatched to Congress as before noticed. The whole of the above proceedings then opened to view.

Being in Philadelphia in the latter part of the year 1778 and out of the year 1779 till May, during that space Mr. William Sharpe, then of Rowan County, North Carolina State, arrived in that city a delegate from the aforesaid State. The officers and soldiers of the States then generally, and of North Carolina in particular, were extremely straitened, and some almost (I might safely say altogether) beggared by the depreciation of their pay. The writer took every proper opportunity within his sphere of mixing in these occasional and * * companies when their mutual wants, complaints, privations, their several situations, forsaken and desolate for love of country, for which nakedness and starvation was like to be their final reward.

Amongst a variety of topics, the Declaration of Independence became a subject of remark, the company was large, composed of a number of the higher officers and members of Congress, amongst the former was particularly noticed Gen. Charles Lee, recently plunged into disgrace for misconduct at the battle of Monmouth, and Tom Payne, you may say infidel Tom, if you please. But to come to a point, the Declaration of Independence by Mecklenburg County in the State of North Carolina, somehow, floated into notice. In a variety of remarks and observation which were promiscuously thrown out, that of Mr. Penn, of North Carolina, and some others, (whose names cannot be recollected,) "declared themselves highly pleased with the bold and dignified spirit with which so enlightened a County of the State he had the honor to represent had exhibited to the world, and furthermore that the Bearer of the instrument had conducted himself very judiciously on the occasion by previously opening his business to the Delegates of his own State, who assured him that a very short lapse of time would bring all the Provinces or new States into the same situation as Mecklenburg county.

Dr. Ephraim Brevard was born in Maryland in the year 1744, was brought to North Carolina in 1746 or 1748, was sent with his cousin Adlai Osborne, on the conclusion of the Indian war in 1760 or '61, to Prince Edward in Virginia, to a grammar school under a certain William Cattles, who subsequently got stuck into a living in Chatham county as an Episcopal preacher for tobacco. Mr. C. was brought from Virginia to Carolina and commenced a Latin school close by uncle Rob't. Brevard's, where your uncle Andrew King first took a grammar in hand. But as Mr. Cattles was rather fond of the bottle, he was dismissed and was succeeded by Joe Alexander, a brother's son of Jno. McKnitt Alexander, he again by Dr. Caldwell, of Guilford, (then a young man.) He again by a

Mr. Welch (a very ugly fellow.) He again by Joel Benedict, from New England. Adlai Osborne, Eph. Brevard and Thos. Reese went to Princeton College in 1766. Eph. Brevard and Thos. Reese taught a school some time in Maryland which enabled him to put himself under Dr. Ramsey to qualify himself for a physician. They lived some time in Philadelphia, then moved to Somerset county in Maryland. Dr. Ramsey was invited to Charleston, South Carolina. Dr. Brevard practiced in Charlotte, as before hinted, then married, soon lost his wife, entered the Southern Army and was captured in the fall of Charleston, and I believe there caught a disease which baffled all the skill of medicine as I myself heard Dr. Reid, Physician General to the Southern Army, declare as I rode with him once or twice from Charlotte to John McKnitt Alexander's, where Dr. Brevard expired and was buried in Charlotte, in 1781, by his wife."

Editorially, we would remark that it is hardly possible to over-estimate the importance of this remarkable document, and we are amazed that it has been kept so long in the background.

Adam Brevard, Esq., was an honorable and high toned gentleman. There are old people still living in this section, who remember him well and testify to his entire truthfulness of character. He has numerous descendants in our midst, who are among our most substantial citizens. His grandson, who has forwarded to us this document from Florida, is well known everywhere in that State, and has been distinguished for half a century as an active and working Christian. The genuineness of Mr. B's document will not be questioned even by Prof. Welling himself. Now, what does that document establish? Mr. Brevard testifies that he was in Salisbury in June or July, 1775, when the Bearer of the Mecklenburg Declaration arrived. The Tories and timid Whigs attempted to mob him (Capt. Jack) but he found a powerful friend in an ardent Whig, who offered to fight anyone who molested him. Capt. Jack was allowed to rest that night quietly in Salisbury and suffered to proceed the next day quietly. Mr. Brevard further goes on to state that he was a student of Queen's College, in Charlotte, in 1776, and lived with his brother, Dr. Ephraim Brevard, (to whom tradition assigns the authorship of the Declaration.) In ransacking Dr. B's papers, he came across fragments which attracted his attention, and which he found upon enquiry of his brother were the *rough drafts of the Declaration of Independence* written by him.

Now the Senior of the HOME can relate a singular and undesigned coincidence, confirming the accuracy of the above statement of Mr. Adam Brevard. On the very day that he received it, he also got a letter from Rev. S. H. Chester, of Mount Holly, Arkansas, containing a copy of a letter from him under the date of June 20, 1875, to Lyman C. Draper, the Historian, residing in Madison, Wisconsin. Mr. C. informed Mr. Draper that a daughter of Adam Brevard, a Mrs. McRea, lived near him, and that she told him that her husband had made copies for all his children of the original draft in the possession of Adam Brevard. Upon inquiry, Mr. Chester learned that Mrs. Gatlin, a daughter of Mrs. McRea, living now in Mount Holly, had lost her copy, but she told him that her brother living in Indiana had most likely preserved his copy. She wrote to her brother for it, and he sent it, and Mr. Chester compared it with the copy published in Gov. Graham's Address. He gives this as the result of that investigation: "It agrees, *verbatim*,

with the one published on pages 105 and 131 of Gov. Graham's address, with the exception that the preposition "with" is used in stead of "to" in the phrase "connected us to the mother country." See resolution 2d, page 105 of address. The order in which the names of the delegates come varies also from that given on page 130, but the names are the same. Adam Brevard was in the possession of the original copy at the time of his death (Mrs. McRea states.) Some time after that event, all his papers were given to his brother, Capt. Alexander Brevard, for Col. James Dickerson, who intended having them published, but nothing definite has been heard from them since.

Mr. Chester, the writer of the above, is the Pastor elect of Castanea Church in Gaston county and Unity Church in Lincoln county, North Carolina. Mrs. McRea is well remembered in this section, where she has numerous relatives. She is now 87 years old. No one will pretend to question the trustworthiness of these two witnesses.

There is another point of interest in Mr. Brevard's statement. He speaks of "the Declaration of May 19th." The same date is given in the address of the school boy at Sugar Creek Academy in 1809. Mr. D. G. Stinson wrote to us some time ago that he was present when the address was spoken, and he thinks that the speaker was the son of Rev. Mr. Wallis, of Providence. The tradition is that the Convention met on the 19th and adjourned over till the 20th, to allow the Committee on Resolutions time to draft them. These were reported the next day and were adopted. Now it is natural for those, who lived in that period, to speak of the Declaration of the 19th, the day on which the Convention was called to be held. While others, living at a more remote period, would naturally speak of the Declaration of the 20th, the day on which it was actually made. We think that it is no mean proof of the genuineness of the Declaration that young Wallis and Mr. Brevard speak of it as the Declaration of the 19th, the day on which the Convention first met, just as men speak of the War of 1812, because it broke out in that year, though it did not close for three years.

Another point in the evidence of Mr. Brevard is of very great importance. He testifies that he heard the Mecklenburg Declaration talked of in Philadelphia in the year 1778, by Congressmen and high officers of the Continental Army. Gen. Charles Lee was present, Tom Paine, Hon. W. M. Penn, M. C. from North Carolina, &c., &c. It was spoken of as an undoubted fact, the boldness and the ability of the document were praised, and the prudence and judiciousness of Capt. Jack were commended because he had committed the document to the members of Congress from his own State – the members from other States not then being prepared for so important a step as Independence. Now this statement of Capt. Jack agrees exactly with the view presented by Governor Graham, viz: that the people at large and the Congress itself were far behind the people of Mecklenburg in their resolve to separate from the mother country, and therefore the Mecklenburg Resolutions were not acted upon by Congress and not spread upon it minutes.

How did these Congressmen and officers and Tom Paine, his friend, know of the Mecklenburg Resolutions and Mr. Jefferson know nothing about them?

- *From the Southern Home, Charlotte, July 5, 1875, Gen. D. H. Hill, Editor.*