

ACT II

SCENE I

(The audience reassembles after the intermission and the lights go down. The orchestra begins playing while the audience remains in darkness. The music at first is spirited, but quickly the theme changes and the mood becomes less spirited, and even grim, and then it falls away to a low background accompaniment of the Narrator and continues very softly while he speaks.)

NARRATOR .

So on May 20, 1775, the men of ancient Mecklenburg declared themselves free, the first in all America, and eleven days later, on May 31, the committeemen met, heard Lawyer Avery read the resolves establishing the form of the new government, and formally approved them. Captain James Jack was employed to carry copies of the documents to the Continental Congress then meeting in Philadelphia. At Salisbury he stopped, and the declaration, read in court, was received with enthusiasm by all present except two lawyers, John Dunn and Benjamin Booth Boote, who protested and warned that the action of Mecklenburg constituted treason.

On June 23 Captain Jack arrived on horseback in Philadelphia and there he sought out North Carolina's delegates to the Congress, Richard Caswell, William Hooper, and Joseph Hewes.

(The light dims on the Narrator, and goes out, and comes up again on the taproom of the Inn of the Golden Pheasant in Philadelphia. Capt. Jack is seated at a table with Hooper and Caswell. Hooper is thirty-three, while Caswell is forty-six.)

MR. CASWELL

(Pointing to a sheaf of papers on the table in front of him.)

Captain Jack, we have taken time to consider well the papers you have fetched from Mecklenburg. We have been very busy with committee assignments and a thousand and one matters pressing upon

the Congress. But we digested these documents carefully, all three of us--Will here and also Mr. Hewes. By the way--

(Turning to Hooper)

where is Joe?

MR. HOOPER

I understand he was unable to get away from an important committee meeting.

MR. CASWELL

Yes. You see, Captain Jack, that's the way it goes. We are very busy. It is a tremendously hard working Congress. There are so many pressing problems.

CAPTAIN JACK

Yes, sir, Mr. Caswell. In the little time I have been up here I have seen that. And we appreciate your taking the time to bother with our doings in Mecklenburg.

MR. CASWELL

Well, that's what we were sent up here for, Captain. If we can't do the job, then we should pack up and go home. And it's our business to listen to the suggestion of the people back at home. Isn't that right, Will?

MR. HOOPER

(Smiling.)

Exactly, Dick.

(Turning to Captain Jack.)

We're up here to serve the dear people, Captain. And sometimes I wonder if we don't serve them better by raising our glasses in the taprooms than by lifting our oratory in the halls of Congress.

MR. CASWELL

Will's only a youth, Captain. He craves action. He's one of the brightest young men Harvard College ever turned out, but he isn't willing calmly to weigh matters.

(He taps the younger man, affectionately.)

Eh, Will?

(To Captain Jack.)

But he'll calm down and make us a conservative member one of these days.

MR. HOOPER

If the British don't hang me first. But go, ahead, Dick. I didn't mean to interrupt. What were you about to tell Captain Jack?

MR. CASWELL

Yes, we were getting a bit off the subject.

(He turns to Captain Jack, his face serious.)

Captain Jack, as I said, we have studied these documents carefully, particularly the declaration of independence from Great Britain. I am including Mr. Hewes, who has also discussed this matter with Mr. Hooper and me. Let me say, Captain, that we are heartily in accord with the sentiment expressed here.

(He points to the papers.)

We admire tremendously the courage of you Mecklenburgers in taking this positive step. It was indeed a bold thing to do, more courageous perhaps than some of these men realized when they were placing their names on this paper. It certainly marks Mecklenburg as the first place in the colonies to defy the King. And it may light the way for the future course of Congress.

(He changes his tone a bit, evidences more caution.)

But just at this time, Captain, we feel that submission of this declaration to the Congress would be premature. Isn't that

our view, Will?

MR. HOOPER

That's right, Captain. Personally, I agree with you Mecklenburgers. We all three do, in fact. And I suspect we'll all live to see that Mecklenburg has shown the way in our course toward Great Britain. But right now Congress is bent on reconciliation with Britain, and I suppose that is the sensible course. And the submission of this paper, as several other members to whom we have shown it have pointed out, would certainly not be calculated to promote reconciliation.

CAPTAIN JACK

But, gentlemen, how does Congress reconcile such a policy with its organization of an army and the appointment of Colonel Washington of Virginia to command that army?

MR. HOOPER

You have put your finger on the crux of the matter.

(Laughing, he faces Caswell.)

Eh, Dick?

MR. CASWELL

That is a somewhat anomalous position, I'll grant you, Captain.

CAPTAIN JACK

How can we fight England and still be an English colony? You are a soldier, Colonel Caswell. In fact, you were one of Governor Tryon's main leaders at Alamance--

MR. HOOPER

(Laughing.)

Again, Captain, you have placed your finger on an exceedingly sore spot, when you speak to Dick Caswell of His Excellency, the

former Governor of North Carolina.

CAPTAIN JACK

I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean to do that. You did your duty then as you saw it. But I was just wondering how Congress could be raising an army and at the same time trying to be reconciled with England.

MR. CASWELL

That's a sensible question, Captain. And I think that at any moment, perhaps, Congress may change its policy. But right now the members of the Congress seem to feel that we should seek a little longer to avoid a war. As I understand it, we are declaring that we have a just cause and that if we must fight for it, we will be prepared to do so. We are not raising armies to rebel and tear ourselves away from England but simply to defend our freedom.

CAPTAIN JACK

I don't see how we can be free men and still be colonies of England, Mr. Caswell. I don't believe you can make it work out. Before many more months pass, I'll vouch, sir, Congress will be taking the course we have already taken in Mecklenburg.

MR. HOOPER

(Standing up, stretching his legs.)

Captain, I have a feeling you're right. But it's the view of the Congress that we should make another effort to get along with Britain. The older heads seem to think that should be the course to follow. There are some younger men, though, including Tom Jefferson of Virginia, who are pretty independent-minded and I'd like to lay your declaration before them.

CAPTAIN JACK

(Rising)

Well, gentlemen, I suppose I'd better start getting ready to

go back to Mecklenburg. Maybe it's better the way you have figured it out, but we folks down that way were counting powerfully on a little support from the rest of the country. I leave these papers with you.

(He hands them to Hooper.)

You can show them around as you think best. We've heard tell this young fellow Jefferson had a lot of fire and spirit. Might be a good idea to let the Virginia delegates see them. I--

(He is interrupted as a man sticks his head in at the door at left opening on to the street, and at the same time distant marching music is heard.)

THE MAN

A big parade's coming up the street. If you fellows want to see it, you'd better step to the door.

(He disappears.)

MR. CASWELL

(Smiling.)

He's had a little too much grog, perhaps. Why'd there be a parade in Philadelphia--

(Suddenly he is serious).

Wait! That fellow was right. That must be General Washington leaving!

(The three cross to the door, open it, stand looking out, and the music grows in volume. Caswell suddenly points.)

Look! There he is! General Washington. The big man. There. See him? The big man in the blue and buff uniform of the new army. And look at the troops.

CAPTAIN JACK

Where's he going, Colonel Caswell?



MR. CASWELL

He's on his way north. Going to Boston to take charge of the American forces.

(His face is suddenly very serious, and he points again.)

Gentlemen, there goes the commander of the American army!

MR. HOOPER

You're wrong, Dick. There goes the American army.

(The light fades quickly and the sound of the music and the cadenced, marching feet dies away in the distance.)