

SCENE II

(The light comes up on the Narrator, center.)

NARRATOR

The summer dragged wearily in Philadelphia, for the weather was inordinately warm, and men's nerves were tense and tempers flared as the delegates sought the proper course, and all the time the Tory government of Britain, as slow to learn and as slow to forget as the Bourbons in France, refused to compromise with the colonies and modify their iron-fisted policy. And the summer retired grudgingly, and cooler days succeeded, and winter came, and spring again, and another summer.

Meanwhile in Mecklenburg the new government began to get established, though strangely -- and yet not strangely when one considers the practicalities--some of the officers of the Crown continued to serve in positions that continued the forms of the royal prerogative. And all the while the people of this section, smarting under the harsh treatment being given their brothers in other sections of the country, sought by every small means at their command to urge upon the Continental Congress the adoption for the colonies of an instrument similar to their own declaration.

And in the last days of July of 1776, some fourteen months after Mecklenburg had promulgated its own declaration, the usual calm of little Charlottetown was shattered with the arrival of startling news.

(The light dies on the Narrator, and comes up on Charlottetown at the crossing of Tryon and Trade streets. Several people are lounging on the tavern porch and two men sit on the courthouse steps, whittling. Several women are trading at the market beneath the courthouse. Horses are tied at the hitching racks, and several children are playing in the street, right. As the scene opens a man rides in from left, dismounts, ties his horse at the hitching

rack near Ochiltree's store. Then he walks toward the tavern, waving a paper that he has taken from his pocket.

HORSEMAN

News, men. Big news from Philadelphia!

(In less serious voice.)

And I need a drink powerful bad, too. Came from Salisbury.

MAN ON TAVERN PORCH

Come up, Brother. We'll get you a drink. Then you can tell us what's happened up in Philadelphly. Like as not, by that time we'll stir you up a crowd to hear yore paper read.

(The horseman goes on inside Jack's tavern, and while he is inside several of the men and women scurry about to tell of his arrival. One man pauses at the door of Waightstill Avery's office.)

MAN

Lawyer Avery, there's a man just rode up from Salisbury with news from Philadelphia. He's over at Uncle Pat's. Step over if you all want to hear the news give out.

(Meanwhile, others have been assembling in the street near the tavern, and when the rider comes out, wiping his mouth with his sleeve, they move up close to the porch.)

HORSEMAN

Ladies and gentlemen--

(Holding up the paper)

this is just a paper fetched south by a courier who just rode into Salisbury yesterday from Philadelphia. It tells about the Continental Congress finally deciding on independence from England--

(He is interrupted by shouts and the throwing up of hats and coonskin caps, and then the crowd begins to call for silence, and several persons shout "Read it! Read the paper!")

HORSEMAN

(Handing the paper to a young man who has come up on the porch in the company of several others, including John McKnitt Alexander, Hezekiah Alexander and John Davidson.)

I'll let Lawyer Avery read it.

AVERY

(Smiling, reads.)

"Philadelphia, July 5 -- The Continental Congress has adopted a declaration of independence from England, which is being signed by the delegates from the various provinces. We call upon all Americans as lovers of liberty to support this declaration and prayerfully to join in the movement to establish in this country a new nation dedicated to the principles of liberty, equality and brotherhood to the end that we may set up a government that will secure for us these much desired ends."

There's a lot more, but that is the substance. The Congress, has finally decided to dissolve our allegiance with England.

JETHRO

(Carrying his muzzle loading rifle.)

Mecklenburg's already done that, Lawyer Avery. The tail has done wagged the dog into doing what the tail done last summer.

VOICE FROM CROWD

Squire Alexander, what does all this mean, you reckon?

JOHN MCKNITT ALEXANDER

(Shaking his head solemnly.)

The way I see it, it could mean a lot of things, war maybe.

(He turns to Davidson.)

Eh, John?

JOHN DAVIDSON

Yes, McKnitt, I fear that unless the British change their way of looking at things, we'll have to fight for our independence. There may be much bloodshed and deep sorrow ahead. It may take a lot of fighting and a lot of praying. It's a great pity we don't have Pastor Balch to inspire us to do whatever we may have to do. His death last spring was a great loss. But if I know Mecklenburgers we'll fight the British to the last ditch, if we have to fight.

(He smiles.)

Eh, Jethro?

JETHRO

Well, Cap'n John, I aint 'zactly hankerin' fer no fightin', but if'n them dad-blamed Britishers aint got no better sense than to jump on us, then me and Flossie Belle here

(Pointing to his rifle, which he fondles with affection.)

will git our right fair share o' them!

(Light goes down)