

6. In the paragraph following the fifth and last resolution, the word "up" is omitted from the second sentence, beginning: "After sitting *up* in the Court house all night. . . ." Also, the letters "A. M." are inserted to mark the time when the convention adopted its resolutions: "about 2 o'clock *A. M.*, May 20."

7. The final sentence of the document is omitted in the newspaper article: "Booth & Dunn (lawyers) were brot from Salisbury, tryed, convicted, proscribed & banished &c. &c." (This sentence *does* appear in William Polk's copy made for Judge Murphey, which indicates another omission in the composing room, or by design in proof-reading, after the text left Dr. Joseph Alexander's hands.)

ANTICIPATING INQUIRIES as to the propriety of changes in Document B made by Dr. Joseph Alexander in editing the copy for publication in the *Raleigh Register* of April 30, 1819, it may be said that it would have been proper to present the document exactly as originally found. Dr. Alexander's changes may have been due partly to oversight in copying and partly to an unjustified desire to make the copy shipshape. Also the printers made their own errors.

His mistake (if any) cannot possibly be compared with the acts of critics who later offered purported copies of McKnitt Alexander's record that totally reversed his meaning. Dr. Alexander sought to clarify rather than to deceive. The alterations did not change the sense of the document. The original text is restored in the Declaration record to appear in the next chapter.

4. Alexander's Story of Declarations



INFORMED now of the general background, the quality of the earnest young alumni from Princeton who animated the independence movement in Charlotte, and the primary documents that provide our foundations of fact, we come finally to the heart of the matter: John McKnitt Alexander's record of the flaring of spirit after the arrival of news of the "attact at Lexington." This is the basic material upon which the controversy has been built.

The text of the record of the May 19-20 convention and of the First Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, as preserved in the working copy, follows:

"No. CAROLINA, Mecklenburg County. Declaration of Independence May 20, 1775.

"In the spring of 1775 the leading characters in Mecklenburg County, stimulated by that enthusiastic patriotism which elevates the mind above considerations of individual agrandisement & scorning to shelter themselves from the impending storm by submission to lawless power, &c, &c. held several detached meetings in each of which the individual sentiments were 'that the cause of Boston was the cause of all; that their destinies were indissolubly connected with those of their Eastern fellow-citizens — & that they must either submit to all the impositions which an unprincipled & to them unrepresented parliament might impose — or support their brethren who were doomed to sustain the first shock of that power, which if successful there — would ultimately overwhelm all in the common calamity.'

"Conformably to these principles Col. Thos. Polk thro solicitation issued an order to each Captain's company in the County of Mecklenburgh (then comprising the present County of Cabarrus) directing each militia company to elect 2 persons & delegate to them ample powers to devise ways & means to aid & assist their suffering brethren in Boston, & also generally to adopt measures to extricate themselves from the impending storm & to secure unimpaired their inalienable rights, privileges, & liberties from the dominant grasp of British imposition & tyranny.

"In conformity to said order on the 19th of May 1775 the said delegation met in Charlotte town vested with unlimited powers, at which time official news, by express, arrived of the battle of Lexington on that day of the preceding month. Every delegate felt the value & importance of the prize & the awful & solemn crisis which had arrived — every bosom swelled with indignation at the malice, inveteracy, & insatiable revenge developed in the late attack at Lexington. The universal sentiment was, let us not flatter ourselves that popular harangues or resolves — that popular vapour will avert the storm, or vanquish our common enemy — let us deliberate — let us calculate the issue, the probable result, & then let us act with energy as brethren leagued to preserve our property, our lives, & what is still more endearing, the liberties of America.

"Abraham Alexander was then elected Chairman & Jno. McKnitt Alexander Clerk. After a free and full discussion of the various objects for which the delegation had been convened it was unanimously ordained

"1. That whosoever directly or indirectly abetted or in any way, form or manner countenanced the unchartered & dangerous invasion of our rights as claimed by G. Britain is an enemy to this County — to America & to the inherent & inalienable rights of man.

"2. We the Citizens of Mecklenburg County do hereby dissolve the political bands which have connected us to the Mother Country & hereby absolve ourselves from all allegiance to the British crown & abjure all political connection, contract, or association with that nation who have wantonly trampled on our rights & liberties & inhumanly shed the innocent blood of American patriots at Lexington.

"3. We do hereby declare ourselves a free & independent people — are & of right ought to be a sovereign & self-governing association, under the controul of no power other than that of our God & the general government of the congress, to the maintainence of which independence civil & religious we solemnly pledge to each other our mutual cooperation, our lives, our fortunes, & our most sacred honor.

"4. As we now acknowledge the existence & controul of no law or legal officers, civil or military, within this County, we do hereby ordain & adopt as a rule of life, all, each & every of our former laws — wherein nevertheless the crown of great Britain never can be considered as holding rights, privileges, immunities, or authority therein.

"5. It is also further decreed that all, each, & every military officer in this County is hereby reinstated in his former command & authority, he acting conformably to these regulations. And that every member present of this delegation shall henceforth be a civil officer, viz. a Justice of the peace in

the character of a 'Committee-man' to issue process, hear & determine all matters of controversy according to s^d. adopted laws — to preserve peace, union & harmony in s^d. County & to use every exertion to spread the love of country & fire of freedom throughout America untill a more general & organized government be established in this province. A selection from the members present shall constitute a Committee of public safety for s^d. County.

"A number of bye-laws were also added merely to protect the association from confusion & to regulate their general conduct as citizens. After sitting up in the Court house all night, neither sleepy, hungry, or fatigued, & after discussing every paragraph they were all passed, sanctioned & decreed unanimously about 2 o'clock May 20th. In a few days a deputation of s^d. delegation convened, when Capt. Jas. Jack of Charlotte was deputed as express to Congress in Philadelphia with a copy of s^d. resolves & proceedings, together with a letter addressed to our 3 representatives there, viz. R^d. Caswell, Wm. Hooper, & Joseph Hughes, under express injunction personally & thro the s^d. State representation to use all possible means to have s^d. proceedings sanctioned & approved by the general Congress. On the return of Capⁿ. Jack the delegation learned that their proceedings were individually approved by the members of Congress, but that it was deemed premature to lay them before the house. A joint letter from s^d. 3 members of Congress was also received, complimentary of the zeal in the common cause & recommending perseverance, order & energy.

"The subsequent harmony, unanimity & exertion in the cause of liberty & independence evidently resulting from these regulations & the continued exertion of s^d. delegation, apparently tranquilised this section of the state & met with the concurrence & high approbation of the Council of safety who held their sessions at Newbern & Wilmington alternately & who confirmed the nomination & acts of the delegation in their official capacity.

"From this delegation originated the Court of Inquiry of this County who constituted & held their first session in Charlotte. They then held their meetings regularly at Charlotte, at Col. James Harris' & at Col. Phifers alternately, one week at each place. It was a civil court founded on military process. Before this judicature all suspicious persons were made to appear, formally tryed, & banished or continued under guard. Its jurisdiction was as unlimited as toryism, & its decrees as final as the confidence & patriotism of the County. Several were arrested & brot before them, from Lincoln, Rowan, & other adjacent Counties. Booth & Dunn (lawyers) were brot from Salisbury, tryed, convicted, proscribed & banished. &c. &c."

So ENDS the pre-1800 account of the May 19-20 convention, the text of the Declaration, and the record of what followed. Observe the sequence of

events. "A selection from the members present" that night met as a Committee of Safety on May 31 and adopted twenty resolutions regarded by historians as the true Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Captain Jack was sent to Philadelphia. A Court of Inquiry was set up. All these acts were consequent upon decisions reached at the May 19-20 convention.

It is possible that when the call for the convention was issued through Colonel Polk, the patriot leaders had not gone so far as to plan a declaration of independence for the county. McKnitt Alexander wrote in his historical narrative that the purpose for which the meeting was called was "to devise ways and means to aid and assist their suffering brethren in Boston, and also generally to adopt measures to extricate themselves from the impending storm. . . ." The news from Lexington, received only a few hours before the convention began, evidently stirred the angry delegates to go farther than they originally had intended. In their indignation they elected to make the most resounding protest they could, giving no heed to the fact a single remote county could not alone maintain a state of independence. Observe the hot haste in which the first of the resolutions seems to have been written.

EVENTS immediately following the May 19-20 convention are summarized rather better in McKnitt Alexander's rough notes than in his more extended record. This paragraph follows the statement that many laws and ordinances were debated and voted unanimously late in the night:

"But in a few days (after cooling) a considerable part of s^d. Committee Men [delegates] convened and employed Captⁿ. James Jack (of Charlotte) to go express to Congress (then in Philadelphia) with a copy of all s^d. resolutions and laws &c and a letter to our 3 members there, Rich^d. Caswell, Wm. Hooper and Joseph Hughes, in order to get Congress to sanction or *approve* them &c &c. Captⁿ. Jack returned with a long, full, complasent letter from s^d. 3 members, recommending our *zeal, perseverance, order & forbearance* &c. (We were premature.) Congress never had our s^d. laws on their table for discussion, though s^d. copy was left with them by Captⁿ. Jack."

As McKnitt Alexander put it in his rough notes: ". . . . We smelt and felt the blood and carnage of Lexington, which raised all the passions into fury and revenge, which was the immediate cause of abjuring Great Britain on May 19, 1775 as before related."

McKnitt Alexander — his friends dropped the name John and we shall hereafter — did not preserve a list of the delegates at the May 19-20 convention, apart from the minute book, and did not try to call up the names from memory. A committee of the North Carolina Legislature made up the lack in 1830, probably from the memories of survivors. After the authenticity of the Declaration had been challenged by Jefferson in 1819 and a

controversy had raged for a few years, the Legislature determined to issue a pamphlet containing the text of the Declaration and the written accounts of men who had been present when it was adopted. The State pamphlet of 1831 contains this list of delegates:

Colonel Thomas Polk, Dr. Ephraim Brevard, the Rev. Hezekiah James Balch, Waightstill Avery, John Phifer, James Harris, William Kennon, John Foard, Richard Barry, Henry Downs, Ezra Alexander, William Graham, John Queary, Abraham Alexander, John McKnitt Alexander, Hezekiah Alexander, Adam Alexander, Charles Alexander, Zaccheus Wilson, Sr., Benjamin Patton, Matthew McClure, Neil Morrison, Robert Irwin, John Flenniken, David Reese, and Richard Harris, Sr. The name of John Davidson, elected a delegate with McKnitt Alexander from the same militia company, was overlooked in compiling the list, and belongs in it. Richard (or Robert) Harris was not actually present at the convention, it has been said.

WHAT BECAME OF THE DRAFT COPY of the First Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, read before the Charlotte convention and adopted in the early hours of May 20, 1775? The question is likely never to be answered, although we know a little about the preliminary writing.

Before Dr. Ephraim Brevard left Charlotte to become a surgeon with colonial forces in the South, he had living with him in the autumn of 1776 a younger brother Adam, then a student in Queen's Museum. On July 13, 1824, Adam Brevard wrote an account of events following the adoption of the Mecklenburg Declaration, which his grandson, Dr. J. M. Davidson, sent from Quincy, Florida years later to *The Southern Home*, a paper published in Charlotte. The account was printed on July 5, 1875 and may be seen among the Mecklenburg papers in the Southern Historical Collection.

Adam Brevard wrote that while looking over some old papers in his brother's home he came across what appeared to him to be the May 20 Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. When he asked Dr. Brevard about it, he was told the papers were the rough drafts from which he had written the resolutions. The editor of *The Southern Home* added that Adam Brevard kept the papers for many years, then handed them to his brother, Captain Alexander Brevard, for Colonel James Dickinson, who proposed to have them published. Nothing more was heard of them, and the editor presumed the papers to have been long lost.

Dr. Ephraim Brevard, surgeon in the Revolution, was captured by the British and confined at Charleston, until paroled to go back to Charlotte an invalid. McKnitt Alexander took him into his home and cared for him until he died in 1781. Hezekiah James Balch already had died in 1776.