

him, William reported to his kinsmen, that he had come to Philadelphia as agent or bearer of the *May 20* Declaration, "with instructions to present the same to the Delegates from North Carolina."

The theory that no delegates in Congress except for Caswell, Hooper, and Hewes, ever heard of the Mecklenburg Declaration and the *May 31* resolves, is very difficult to accept. Both sets of resolves were of striking interest. They had been sent to Philadelphia by special messenger. They gave evidence of great and growing unrest. While Congress was at the time trying to patch things up with George III and his ministers, there was ample reason why the Mecklenburg resolves should be praised for their courage.

Dr. Henderson has said in correspondence with the present writer that it would have been unusual for the three North Carolina delegates to suppress the documents without consulting their colleagues. While we lack evidence that they submitted the papers to their friends from Virginia and other colonies, for opinions and counsel, we must consider the possibility they did. The three North Carolinians very likely behaved as other men usually have done in such circumstances, and gave other delegates quiet opportunities to become acquainted with the texts brought from Charlotte by Captain Jack. There was no reason for secrecy.

7. Corroboration by Moravians



CHALLENGERS OF THE INTEGRITY of the *May 20* Declaration of Independence gave great weight before 1904 to the contention that no corroborating documentary evidence of the 1775 period, from other and reliable sources in the area, could be offered.

In 1904, O. J. Lehman of Bethania, North Carolina, discovered an interesting, forgotten manuscript in the archives of the Moravian church. This manuscript, written in German, was entitled: "Fragment, Record of the events during the Revolutionary War which had a reference to Wachovia to the end of 1779." The Wachovia district, including Bethania and Salem, now in the area of the flourishing city of Winston-Salem, was the home of German settlers who adhered to the Moravian church.

The brief manuscript history had been completed by Traugott Bagge, a merchant of Salem, in September, 1783. It provided convincing evidence that the Mecklenburgers had declared themselves "free and independent" in 1775. The exact words had been used in the *May 20* declaration, and not in the *May 31* resolutions.

Dr. Archibald Henderson of Chapel Hill referred in detail to this discovery in an article in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* of September, 1918. He based his comments upon his own research.

On his return from Philadelphia, Captain Jack traveled to Salem on his way back to Charlotte. He had papers for Traugott Bagge, who after 1775 was one of the purchasing agents for the Continental forces in his section of North Carolina. He not only superintended the purchase and sale of store supplies, but ordered meat and grain from farmers.

Miss Adelaide Lisetta Fries, archivist and historian of the Moravian Church in America, Southern Province, has contributed a great deal more information about Captain Jack's visit to Salem, and the interest of the Moravians in the Mecklenburg independence movement, than has been given sufficient notice. In the second volume of her extensive *Records of the Moravians of North Carolina*, she tells of the grave nature of the papers brought by Captain Jack to Traugott Bagge, and of various writings that

showed the apprehension stirred among Moravians by the defiant posture of the Mecklenburg men. Often called by others "the gentle Moravians," the Germans around Salem feared a War of Revolution, but they had courage and spirit when tested.

Miss Fries contributed to the April, 1906 issue of the *Wachovia Moravian* an article telling of O. J. Lehman's discovery of Traugott Bagge's historical fragment, mentioned earlier in this chapter as of great corroborative value. Her very real contribution was in establishing who wrote the Fragment, and when. Her article was republished in a pamphlet, *The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, as Mentioned in Records of Wachovia*, that may be seen in the New York Public Library and elsewhere. We shall return to this later in the chapter.

The appearance of Captain Jack in Salem must have created a stir, because of the nature of the tidings he brought. In the second volume of her *Records of the Moravians* Miss Fries relates on page 843:

"... On July 7th [1775] Captain Jack, returning from Philadelphia, brought two circulars to Salem; one a Call from Congress for a Day of Humiliation and Prayer, and one a Call from the North Carolina delegates in Congress to the men at home to arm themselves and drill, and so prepare for defense or offense."

The first of these papers, probably in the form of a broadside, was completely different in spirit from the resolute call of the North Carolina delegates to arm and drill for possible war.

The first, dated June 12, 1775, was written less than eight weeks after the engagements at Lexington and Concord, and about three weeks after the First Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. This remarkable paper (certainly *not* written by Thomas Jefferson), was so astonishing that our historians have perhaps thought it wise to leave it to oblivion and to refer to it only as an olive-branch gesture.

Considering the "critical, alarming, and calamitous" state of the Colonies, Congress recommended that Thursday, July 20, 1775, be observed as a day of "HUMILIATION, FASTING, and PRAYER, that we may, with united hearts and voices, unfeignedly confess and deplore our many sins, and offer up our joint supplications to the All-wise, Omnipotent and Merciful Disposer of all events, humbly beseeching Him, to forgive our iniquities, to remove our present calamities, to avert those desolating judgments with which we are threatened, and to bless our rightful Sovereign, King GEORGE III, and inspire him with wisdom to discern and pursue the true interest of all his subjects, — that a speedy end may be put to the civil discord between Great-Britain and the American Colonies, without further effusion of blood. . . . And it is recommended to Christians of all Denominations to

Assemble for public Worship, and to abstain from servile Labour and Recreation on that day."

This paper was signed: "By Order of the Congress, JOHN HANCOCK, President."

What "sins" and "iniquities" was Congress repenting: those committed at Lexington, Concord, and Charlotte, among many others? Efforts by Congress to heal differences and get the British soldiers out of Boston inspired contempt rather than compassion, as evidenced by a proclamation issued by George III in August, in which he called upon all good men and true to put down the rebellion in the Colonies. The broadside carrying the royal proclamation is reproduced on another page.

Miss Fries supplied the full text of the Declaration by Congress in Part IV of the second volume of her *Records*. Much of the verbiage omitted from the extract quoted here reads like a selection from a Book of Common Prayer, and should have had the good word Amen at the end.

Before continuing with the story of Captain Jack's visit to Salem, we must remain a moment to observe the impact of the Mecklenburg Declarations and the June 12 manifesto by Congress upon Bishop John Michael Graff, pastor of the District of Wachovia. His frontispiece portrait in Miss Fries' book shows a handsome, alert, amiably shrewd man. In the *Moravian Records* Miss Fries provides the text of a letter dated June 27, 1775, which Bishop Graff sent to Unity's Elders Conference in Germany:

"We had a quiet and blessed month, although around us the unrest constantly increases.

"In Mecklenburg County, where they have unseated all Magistrates and put Select Men in their places, they are threatening to force people, and us in particular, to sign a Declaration stating whether we hold with the King or with Boston, but we think for the present they are only threats. If a higher authority should ask such a Declaration of us, we think we will follow the form of the Declaration made by the Congress in Philadelphia concerning King George III, but say nothing whatever about the points at issue, which we do not understand.

"If a tax is laid on the people and we are expected to share in it, it will probably be better to bear what cannot be changed, than to refuse and so come into a much worse position. Such a course brought us fairly well through the recent Regulator confusion. We have been told that some of our Brethren in Bethlehem [Pennsylvania] have become members of the committee [of Safety] there; we know nothing about this except what we read in the newspapers."

Remembering that Congress called on June 12 for a day of humiliation and fasting, and that Bishop Graff referred to the proclamation in his letter

of June 27, it is helpful to understanding of true Moravian spirit to read Miss Fries' statement that the call for a day of abasement reached the Bishop's district of Wachovia "too late" for compliance on July 20.

In his Diary entry for July 20 (page 877 of Miss Fries' *Moravian Records*, second volume), Bishop Graff commented: "Today was appointed by the Congress in Philadelphia as a Day of Fasting and Prayer, but there is not the slightest sign that anyone has taken any notice of it."

Resuming with Miss Fries in her narrative, we read on page 844: "It is natural to assume that Traugott Bagge asked Captain Jack all about what happened in Mecklenburg; and it was Traugott Bagge who incorporated into his sketch of the Revolutionary War the statement that the men of Mecklenburg declared themselves free and independent, and made such laws for themselves as Congress later made for the nation, but Congress considered this act premature."

An express rider had brought rumors of bloodshed at Lexington and Concord to Salem on May 8, which indicates the intense interest in revolutionary incidents felt not only in the Moravian community but everywhere else. We must not think of our colonials as sluggish people in those days without railroads, telegraph, telephones, and radio, and with almost no daily newspapers. News was carried to remote places with astonishing celerity by galloping horsemen, and it was discussed with excited zest.

Letters and newspapers giving full accounts of the engagements at Concord and Lexington on April 19 reached Salem on May 17. The newspapers brought tidings of the February 7 Address to the King by Parliament, declaring a state of rebellion in the Colonies.

Continuing with Miss Fries: "In 1775 Mecklenburg was not on a national highway, but if the two items of news reached there in the order in which they came to Wachovia, then it may well be that in a public meeting on May 19th and 20th, the news of Lexington swept men into a Declaration of Independence; and a few days later the Committee [of Safety] heard of Parliament's declaration [of February 7], and included a reference to it in their [May 31] resolutions, which do not contain the words 'free and independent.'"

Actually, the action of Parliament in February was discussed in the May 19-20 convention, as we shall observe in the later narrative of General Joseph Graham. Reference has been made to the letter of the three North Carolina delegates in Congress (Hooper, Caswell, and Hewes) brought by Captain Jack to Salem, in which men were urged to arm and drill. Miss Fries supplies the final portion of this letter, as given in the Bagge manuscript.

"Oppose every effort of an arbitrary Minister and, by checking his licentiousness, preserve the Liberty of the Constitution, and the honor of your

Sovereign; look to the reigning Monarch of Britain as your rightful and lawful sovereign; dare every danger and difficulty in support of his person, crown and dignity, and consider every Man as a Traitor to his King, who infringing the rights of his American subjects attempts to invade those glorious revolution principles [of 1689], which placed him on the throne and must preserve him there."

It was customary in olden days for men of revolutionary intent, in pitiful efforts at avoidance of treason charges, to avow loyalty to the monarch. Thus in 1666, angry, persecuted Covenanters in Southwestern Scotland drank the health of King Charles II at the market cross of Dumfries before beginning the Pentland Rising. Their rebellion failed, and ten of the many captured men were hanged in a row on a long gibbet in Edinburgh.

We return to Miss Fries' account in her April, 1906 article in the *Wachovia Moravian* of the discovery by O. J. Lehman of Traugott Bagge's historical sketch that corroborated McKnitt Alexander's record of the adoption of the First Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Here in translation is what Traugott Bagge wrote in his "Fragment":

"I cannot leave unmentioned at the end of the 1775th year that already in the summer of this year, that is in May, June, or July, the County of Mecklenburg in North Carolina declared itself free and independent of England, and made such arrangements for the administration of the laws among themselves, as later the Continental Congress made for all. This Congress, however, considered the proceedings premature."

In considering the importance of this entry of Traugott Bagge in his historical "Fragment," with its corroboration of the record of the May 20 Declaration of Independence, we may observe an analogy. Various scholars have devoted years of their time to research and the writing of thick books to prove that William Shakespeare, "the butcher boy of Stratford" turned actor, simply could not have written the poems and plays attributed to him. They have argued the absence of corroborative evidence from contemporaries.

Traugott Bagge did for the May 20 Declaration what Francis Meres, an Oxford graduate, did to establish the integrity of Shakespeare as author, in a book entitled *Palladis Tamia*, which was entered for publication in September 1598. Meres, as related by Marchette Chute in her *Shakespeare of London*, produced a long list of the plays that Shakespeare had written, and proved he knew also of the narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. Still there may be scholars — not the same ones in both cases — to continue insisting that it is absurd to believe the "popular myths" that Shakespeare wrote plays and that young Princeton alumni wrote a May 20 Declaration of Independence, because both propositions are "inherently implausible."