

the subject, annoyed Jefferson, angered all his friends, and made himself look absurd, by writing hasty judgments that he precipitately took back. Adams is entitled to a bit of compassion, however. He wished above all to preserve his friendship with Jefferson, healed by reconciliation in 1812 after a long break. His memory still smarted when he thought of Tom Paine, whose views of government Jefferson had in 1791 preferred to his own. (See Dumas Malone's *Jefferson and the Rights of Man*, pp. 354-59.)

Jefferson's friends almost immediately began accusing John McKnitt Alexander of forging the May 20 Declaration, and some in North Carolina were unwise enough to suggest Jefferson had borrowed expressions from Dr. Ephraim Brevard and the other members of the resolutions committee in Charlotte who drafted the May 20 resolves. Various disciples of Jefferson have been resenting the aspersion ever since.

10. The Declaration Revamped



WE COME now to a piquant episode in the Mecklenburg story: the production of a shiny new version of the Declaration of Independence that inevitably was to add to puzzlement and mystery.

When Dr. Joseph McKnitt Alexander made a copy of the May 1775 record for publication in the *Raleigh Register* of April 30, 1819, he permitted William Polk to make another for William Davidson, then a member of Congress. Still another copy was made by Colonel Polk, for use in carrying out a project of historical writing of his own.

Colonel William Polk was one of many friends of Judge Archibald DeBow Murphey of Haw River, North Carolina, who proposed to write a history of the State, and who then was gathering manuscripts and historical papers, with the recollections of Revolutionary veterans. Judge Murphey did not live to write his history, but his manuscript collection was in time to prove very valuable. Many years later it was of absorbing interest to his great-great-grandson, William Henry Hoyt.

Colonel Polk was not satisfied with McKnitt Alexander's record of the independence movement, because he believed it did not do justice to his father, Colonel Thomas Polk. The numerous Alexanders had in his opinion made the May 19-20 convention too much their own, with six of them present as delegates, with Abraham Alexander in the chair, and McKnitt Alexander acting as secretary.

He suspected with reason they wished to give credit to Adam Alexander for getting the delegates selected, when in fact Colonel Thomas Polk had, "through solicitation," called upon the militia captains to arrange the election of two delegates from each company. McKnitt Alexander would have been wise to include in his record an account of the reading of the Declaration from the courthouse steps by the Colonel. It would have added another

convincing touch, and the Polk family would have been pleased. But he mentioned the Colonel only once.

So the son decided to write another account, giving his father ample credit, and making Dr. Brevard the secretary of the May 19-20 convention instead of McKnitt Alexander. He obtained a letter in 1820 from John Simeson (quoted on another page) giving credit to Colonel Thomas for reading the May 31 document to the assembled militia companies. He obtained also a long statement from George Graham, William Hutchinson, Jonas Clark, and Robert Robinson, who testified that Dr. Brevard had been the secretary, while otherwise confirming McKnitt Alexander's record. Isaac Alexander wrote on October 8, 1830, that Dr. Brevard had been secretary. The statements and the Simeson letter were published in the State pamphlet of 1831. It is not strange that Dr. Brevard should have been considered the secretary by some of the witnesses, then young. As chairman of the resolutions committee he wrote in part, and sponsored, the May 20 Declaration of Independence, and read it aloud to the convention, while McKnitt Alexander sat at his minutes, perhaps silently.

Wishing to see his own narrative published, Colonel William Polk sent it to Judge Murphey, with a covering letter. This letter, which Mr. Hoyt found in his great-great-grandfather's papers, read as follows:

"I had intended to give you the names of these Patriots who formed the Declaration & who passed the [May 20] Resolutions, but I have not been fortunate enough to obtain the whole of them. — At the time this meeting took place & for years before & after my Father Thomas Polk was the most popular man in the County, had represented it many years under the Colonial system & was one of the first Delegates from the County to the Provincial Congress & it was almost altogether attributal to him, the course that was taken by the people of that County the effects of which reached & was felt in the Counties of Rowan, Iredell & Lincoln."

Then followed a list of fifteen delegates to the May 19-20 convention in Charlotte. All these names were in the final list of twenty-six approved officially by the North Carolina Legislature in 1831.

William Polk provided in his own new account the text of the May 20 Declaration of Independence just as it had been given to him by Dr. Joseph McKnitt Alexander, and as published in the *Raleigh Register*. In writing to Judge Murphey of the five resolutions he said: "I cannot vouch for their being in the words of the Committee who framed them, but they are essentially so." He was entirely loyal to the Declaration and sent its text as essentially correct. Had there been even a tiny bit of fraud in McKnitt Alexander's record William Polk would have exposed it. He had no irregularity to point out to Judge Murphey. The Polk family was influential in

moving to have the State pamphlet published in 1831, and Colonel William Polk's son, General Thomas G. Polk, was chairman of the legislative committee that authorized it.

Judge Murphey got William Polk's narrative published, and what he did with the text of the Declaration makes a good story. There were repercussions and reverberations.

Mr. Hoyt studied all these things and wrote for his monograph a chapter of real interest, with information not to be found elsewhere. The title of this chapter is "The Martin and Garden Copies."

In the year 1820 Judge Murphey prepared a series of articles from the manuscripts he had, including the one given him by Colonel William Polk. Mr. Hoyt found various bits of evidence to indicate the Polk narrative was published in March 1821 in the *Hillsboro Recorder*, although no copies of the newspaper for that month remained. The Polk manuscript, attendant papers, and many other interesting documents, Mr. Hoyt relates on page 180 of his book, "were purchased by Dr. Thomas Addis Emmet in 1889 from an autograph dealer in New York," and now repose in the Emmet Collection in the New York Public Library. Through all this detail we are advancing toward a terminal point.

In 1828, Alexander Garden published in Charleston the second series of his *Anecdotes of the American Revolution*. In the following year François Xavier Martin published in New Orleans his *History of North Carolina*, nearly all of which he had written before 1809, in which year he had been appointed a Federal judge for a district in Mississippi. Both these works contained accounts of the May 19-20 convention in Charlotte, with texts of the First Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence.

Both narratives and both texts of the May 20 resolutions were very similar; both differed in detail from McKnitt Alexander's account; both gave strong internal evidence of having been cribbed from Judge Murphey's articles published in the *Hillsboro Recorder* in March 1821. Judge Murphey had rewritten Colonel Polk's narrative, and in doing so, had "touched up" the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence and added a sixth resolution, which when transplanted into Martin's *History* read as follows:

"Resolved, That a copy of these resolutions be transmitted, by express, to the president of the continental congress, assembled in Philadelphia, to be laid before that body."

Judge Murphey evidently thought the text of the Declaration as printed in the *Raleigh Register* in 1819 needed editing and polishing. He improved the spelling, but didn't stop with that. He cut out words to tighten up and simplify the sentences. Dr. Alexander's version of the first resolution, and the Judge's "improved" version, are here shown side by side:

Raleigh Register Version

Revised Version

1. Resolved, That whosoever directly or indirectly abetted, or in any way, form or manner countenanced the unchartered and dangerous invasion of our rights, as claimed by Great Britain, is an enemy to this country [properly *county*] — to America — and to the inherent and inalienable rights of man.

Resolved, That whosoever directly or indirectly abets, or in any way, form or manner, countenances the invasion of our rights as attempted by the parliament of Great Britain, is an enemy to his country, to America and the rights of man.

Judge Murphey undoubtedly bettered the resolution by changing the tense from past to present and modernizing the grammatical style, but in improving it, he subtracted from force. He had no warrant for doubting the text as he had found it, or for dropping the words "unchartered and dangerous," "as claimed by Great Britain," and "inherent and inalienable." Judge Murphey limited his tampering with the second, third, fourth, and fifth resolutions to condensation, so it is hardly necessary to reproduce his text. Then he invented a sixth resolution quoted above.

Alexander Garden and Judge Martin had a choice between the *Raleigh Register* text and Judge Murphey's, and they chose the latter because it looked better, edited as it was to a more modern style. Judge Martin often has been quoted as saying he obtained his Declaration text before 1800 from someone other than McKnitt Alexander, but his use of other parts of Judge Murphey's article indicates the real source.

Who took liberties with the text of the Mecklenburg Declaration? McKnitt Alexander has been accused innumerable times of doing so, but there is no proof; only suspicious doubt. Judge Murphey certainly took liberties in writing a new version and offering it as the original one. Mr. Hoyt condones this. After quoting from Colonel Polk's letter — "*I cannot vouch for their being in the words of the Committee who framed them but they are essentially so*" — Mr. Hoyt adds: "It will appear below that Judge Murphey, being thus informed that the resolutions were not an extract from an original record and virtually told that he might take liberties with them, made emendations in several places where he thought that the original text had not been preserved. . . ."

Opinions may differ as to whether Colonel Polk "virtually told" Judge Murphey to take liberties. Rather would it appear that the Colonel held the text to be essentially the same as originally written by Dr. Brevard. All this will be found to have a unique bearing, when we observe later the use made of the "improved" text in the magazine article of 1853.

11. State Clarifies Its Record



NORTH CAROLINA celebrated on May 20, 1825, the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration. Then when Jefferson's *Works* appeared in book form in 1829, with the 1819 letter to John Adams, Governor Stokes and the Legislature moved to publish a State pamphlet containing the text of the Declaration and other documents, and the stories of men on the scene in 1775. Dr. Joseph McKnitt Alexander, wishing to clear his father's name, worked diligently in gathering written accounts provided by men who remembered the May 19-20 convention.

The State pamphlet of 1831 has not lost any of its value in the passing of many years, and is as effective now in supporting the case for the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence as it was when published by Governor Montfort Stokes by authorization of the Legislature. Copies may be found in some of the larger libraries. Dr. Graham and Mr. Hoyt carried the text in their monographs.

The pamphlet opens with a preface containing a long and detailed review of the story of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. It was written for Governor Stokes by David L. Swain, who is credited with having edited the work as well. Since Swain is to appear again and again in the story, it is useful to observe briefly his brilliant rise. Born in Asheville on January 4, 1801, he was educated at the University of North Carolina; after studying law he was admitted to the bar in 1823, and began practice in Raleigh. He was elected to the Legislature in 1824. In 1831, the year in which the State pamphlet appeared, he was appointed to the State Supreme Court. He was Governor from 1832 until 1835; thereafter he was president of the University of North Carolina until he resigned in 1868 in protest against a carpet-bagger drive. The degree of LL.D. was conferred upon him by Princeton in 1841, and by Yale in 1842. With this information about the man who gave able assistance, we may proceed with the State pamphlet.

Jefferson's letter to Adams is printed and adequately and temperately answered. The Legislature has the task, the Preface says, of proving "Mr.