

Univ. of N. C. At the time of Governor Swain's death, the documents which did not belong to him were, unfortunately, in his private library, and not mentioned in his will. During the Reconstruction period many were lost, sold, or given away. All that remains of the Swain collection, of which the writer has any knowledge, is in the State archives, in the archives of the University of North Carolina, and in the Emmet Collection in the N. Y. Pub. Lib."

Dr. Swain's private collection, largely dispersed, covered many historical matters apart from the Mecklenburg Declaration. The original and decisive Mecklenburg papers, which did not belong to Dr. Swain, though he held them for years, *were not lost*.

In acknowledging in the introduction to his 1907 monograph his indebtedness for the assistance in preparation given him by Dr. Battle, Mr. Hoyt was of course unaware that all the Mecklenburg papers he should have seen, but was not privileged to see, were safe in Dr. Battle's custody in the collections of the North Carolina Historical Society at the time.

Fairness requires a word here for Dr. Battle, revered in his lifetime and ever since as one of the great presidents of the University of North Carolina. He was an old man at the time of the incidents recounted, and may have been absorbed so deeply in other interests that the real significance of the Mecklenburg papers did not become apparent to him.

15. Added Links in Chain of Error



WITH all the old documents available to him Dr. Phillips should have known in 1853 that McKnitt Alexander did not write the Davie Copy from memory, and that Dr. Alexander did not suppress truth in the 1819 publication. In his letter of April 15, 1858, to Henry S. Randall, Dr. Phillips was not referring to the Davie Copy alone when he wrote: "*The condition of the originals in our possession here, the diversity of hand writing, the frequent interlineations, erasures etc. show that the younger Alexander tried to set forth a poem in Alexandrian measure. . .*" [Italics supplied.] What he meant here was that he now blamed the son for "forging" a "faked" Declaration, rather than McKnitt Alexander. This weathervane phase is discussed at the close of this chapter.

The contemporary attitude of scholars toward Dr. Phillips is shown in a letter Dr. Randall sent to the historian George Bancroft on February 7, 1859, with which he enclosed the letter from Dr. Phillips, quoted in the preceding paragraph. Dr. Randall wrote: "Prof. P.'s letter is not marked confidential, but you will of course take good care that he is not brought into danger by his frankness. The publication of his remarks would probably cost him his professorship." (Letter subsequently in Bancroft collection, New York Public Library.)

Dr. James C. Welling contributed to the *North American Review* for April 1874 a shrewd article in which he used the erroneous version of the last paragraph of the Davie Copy. General C. M. Wilcox, a believer in the Declaration, entered a general remonstrance in an article published in the *Magazine of American History* for January 1889. Dr. Welling, who had advanced from a professorship to the presidency of Columbian University in Washington, D. C. (now George Washington University), replied to General Wilcox in the March issue of the same magazine. Once more he championed the May 31 resolves and derided the May 20 Declaration, using again Dr. Phillips' mistaken version of McKnitt Alexander's final paragraph in the Davie Copy. He went on to write:

"With this full certificate before us, we see that the certificate published by 'J. McKnitt' in 1819 was only a truncated form of the certificate which had been attached to the 'Davie copy' by his father. We see, too, that John McKnitt Alexander, in reproducing the 'Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence,' professed to be only 'fundamentally correct' in his reminiscences. . . .

"As water in finding its natural level can never rise higher than its source, so the 'Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence' can never rise higher than its natural level in these 'recollections' and 'beliefs' of its original sponsor. The full certificate was published for the first time, so far as I know, by the Rev. Prof. Charles Phillips, D.D., in an elaborate article contributed by him to the *North Carolina University Magazine* of May, 1853. . . .

"It [the Davie Copy] is now reported to be lost or mislaid, but the authenticity of the certificate, as transcribed and published by Prof. Phillips, has never been questioned. I have private letters from him in which he confirms the textual accuracy of the certificate as given above in its integrity. His high personal character is a sufficient guarantee for his loyalty to truth in this matter. Moreover, as the document at the time of its publication was still in the custody of Dr. Swain, it is impossible that a member of his faculty, writing with his full cognizance, could have published a falsification of the document without instantaneous detection and exposure."

Dr. George W. Graham published in 1905 a popular work, *The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence*, which contains a great deal of interesting information about the action and the persons in the Mecklenburg story.

Dr. Graham and Mr. Hoyt fell into the same trap in preparing their monographs on opposing sides of the issue. Both accepted as true the error of the 1853 magazine article, which offered mistaken evidence that John McKnitt Alexander admitted at the close of the Davie Copy that his record of the May 19-20 convention and the May 20 Declaration was written from memory and might not be literally correct. Alexander made no such admission.

Dr. Graham sought to pass over this seeming fatal weakness in the Davie Copy as of no consequence, but his acceptance of Dr. Phillips' 1853 error seriously damaged his book. Mr. Hoyt, on the other hand, used the 1853 error as the cornerstone of the edifice of his monograph, reiterating again and again the statement that John McKnitt Alexander had concocted a spurious Mecklenburg Declaration from a faulty memory of what had been done in May 1775. Although he accepted this conclusion from the 1853 magazine article, he two or three times expressed doubts of the full reliability of the article's author in certain other details. It is due both Dr. Graham and Mr. Hoyt to point out that they could not have examined the

Davie Copy to discover the full truth had they tried. Believed lost, the document was in Chapel Hill, but inaccessible at the time they wrote.

They had precedents for accepting the error of 1853. Henry S. Randall, LL.D., was perhaps the first in the line of distinguished scholars to be led astray by it. While completing his biography of Thomas Jefferson, published in 1858, he wrote President David L. Swain of the University of North Carolina for information about the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence and was referred to the author of the article in the University magazine, who accommodated with his text of May 1853. Dr. Randall made extended use of the error in the appendix to his biography, swallowing whole Dr. Phillips' erroneous version.

Even more notable was the manuscript history of the Mecklenburg Declaration written by Dr. Lyman C. Draper of Madison, Wisconsin, and dated 1876. This work, never published, has been examined continuously through the years in the library of the State Historical Society in Madison. Photoprint copies of parts of it have been supplied researchers. When the manuscript began showing signs of wear, microfilm copies were made from it, as well as from other papers in the Draper collections, and students of history now may read Dr. Draper in the libraries of various universities, including Princeton, North Carolina and Duke. The Mecklenburg County library in Charlotte has the Draper film also.

Dr. Draper's decision against the authenticity of the Mecklenburg Declaration undoubtedly has had great influence. This decision was based chiefly upon the erroneous magazine article of 1853, whose author wrote voluminously to Dr. Draper in 1875 to help shape his conclusions. Dr. Draper accepted the error without question, and relied also upon the published opinions of Dr. Randall, George Bancroft, and Dr. Welling.

In reviewing the monographs of Dr. Graham and Mr. Hoyt at great length in the *American Historical Review*, (Vol. XIII, published 1907, pp. 16-43), Alexander Samuel Salley, Jr., of Columbia, South Carolina, pressed as true the error of 1853, though of course he didn't know it was an error. The May 1853 article in the *North Carolina University Magazine* he pronounced an "admirable paper."

All these writers and other scholars have believed the Davie Copy unavailable because lost, and accepted trustingly the erroneous version of its important final paragraph as published in the 1853 magazine article. They trusted the author because he was a professor, a preacher, and an evangelist, with the degrees of D.D. and LL.D. awaiting him. Almost all the literature adverse to the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence thus is based upon the unfortunate use of two words.

Whether the story grows more amusing than sad as we observe one critic after another falling into the trap set by the error of 1853, is matter for debate. Mr. Hoyt, who held the line for Dr. Phillips in the present century, was not quite so ready as Dr. Welling to believe everything. In his book on the Mecklenburg Declaration, Mr. Hoyt expressed the opinion that Dr. Phillips did not read carefully the working copy, then unidentified, (p. 166), and that the judgment against Dr. Joseph Alexander was based on flimsy evidence, insufficient for proof. Mr. Hoyt was on the edge of discoveries he would have made had he been able to see the closely-guarded primary documents, and compare the "certificate" at the end of the Davie Copy with Dr. Phillips' incorrect version. But this was Mr. Hoyt's verdict:

"The certificate of the Davie Copy constitutes the last link in the chain of documentary evidence, all proceeding from John McKnitt Alexander, which proves that the 'Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence' is a distorted record of a true manifesto of Mecklenburg County, clothed in language wholly different from that of the true manifesto [of May 31], conceived in the imperfect memory of John McKnitt Alexander, and written twenty-five years after its alleged date."

The error of 1853 has had many unwitting accessories after the fact.

IT IS WORTH pointing out that in 1858, five years after publication of his magazine article, Dr. Phillips had an entirely different culprit to blame for the "forgery." In a letter to Henry S. Randall, a biographer of Jefferson, he charged that Dr. Joseph McKnitt Alexander, less "honourable" than his father, had on coming home from Princeton concocted the May 20 Declaration, "but was mistaken as to date and form." Before Dr. Phillips turned back to his original accusations of the father — which he impressed upon Dr. Draper in 1875 — he apparently had convinced several of the truth of his temporary story that Dr. Joseph was the hoaxer, with great resulting harm to the reputation of an honest and conscientious man.

It must be remembered that Dr. Phillips was taken seriously; he was a Professor of Mathematics and a Doctor of Divinity, inferentially with the influence of the University of North Carolina behind him. One of those to take up and expound the second — and early abandoned — accusation was Alexander Samuel Salley, Jr., for years secretary of the State Historical Commission of South Carolina. Mr. Salley wrote extensively and with extreme severity in attacking the father and son for *separately* committing the same "fraud": that of fabricating the First Mecklenburg Declaration.

16. Dr. Phillips Tells Dr. Draper



DR. LYMAN C. DRAPER, who made a great and valuable collection of historical manuscripts now in the library of the State Historical Society in Madison, Wisconsin, wrote in 1875 to Dr. Phillips for information on the Mecklenburg Declaration. He intended, he said, to write a book on the subject. This he did, but his work did not find a publisher.

Dr. Draper was a slight figure of a man, a little less than five feet tall, who after trying a variety of jobs was able at last, by the aid of a well-to-do patron, to enter a useful career as assembler of materials relating to frontier history. For this service the University of Wisconsin gave him the degree of LL.D. in 1871. He was for years secretary of the State Historical Society at Madison.

The correspondence with Dr. Phillips began at the time of the celebration in Charlotte on May 19 and 20 of the hundredth anniversary of the revered First Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. It was a very joyous celebration, with a parade enlivened by the music of bands, the public reading of the famous document, patriotic speeches, horse races, a salute of a hundred guns at sunrise on the 20th, another parade, a cocking main between game birds representing the State of North Carolina opposed to a contingent of gamecocks from South Carolina, and fireworks. If no floats carried beautiful girls of Charlotte in the parades, then this delightful modern feature must have been left over for the bi-centenary celebration in 1975.

On the evening of May 24, Colonel John H. Wheeler delivered an instructive address at the courthouse on the lives and characters of the signers: a paper that was made into a pamphlet by the *Observer's* job office. One of his memorable passages was his graceful reference to the celebration throngs as a concourse of "the lovely and the learned, the generous and the good."

Dr. Phillips was biding his time during the festive days, in his temporary domicile at nearby Davidson College, a fine Presbyterian institution established in 1837 and named for General William Lee Davidson of Revolu-