

ing words of vindication, and even Woodrow Wilson, a descendant of Ulster-Scottish Presbyterians, brought no indorsement of the May 20 Declaration. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, briefed in advance by local people, came on May 18, 1954 (two days in advance of the anniversary) to give his version to a great audience of 30,000 in Freedom Park. This is what he said, as reported in the *New York Times*:

“And we have met, in addition, for the purpose, the additional purpose of honoring those men of long ago, who, patriots in their time, signed the Mecklenburg Declaration. Now if the storybook record of that particular moment in history 179 years ago has been disputed by some, particularly those who acclaim that they are the descendants of the true authors of all early historical documents of that kind, I believe that is not important. The important thing is that here, this great segment of America wants to be known as originators of our historical documents of freedom. . . . And so it matters not exactly how many men were gathered in that cabin [log courthouse] to sign a document. It matters not that part of the document had to be reconstructed from memories of those who were present. The fact is that it was an important step in our development because today people venerate the occurrence.”

This was a pretty good effort from a President who wished to give a lift to local pride without being definite enough to get himself involved in controversy. He hedged, of course, in his reference to reconstruction of resolutions from memory.

18. Antiquity of Noble Phrases



Now it may be pointed out that nothing already disclosed has tended to clear up the question raised by similarities of expressions in the May 20 Declaration to certain ringing phrases in the National Declaration of July 4, 1776. What of the charge that McKnitt Alexander plagiarized Jefferson's Declaration in writing later an entirely false one?

The dynamic phrases in the July 4, 1776 Declaration that McKnitt Alexander has been accused of cribbing were not written by Jefferson — with one or two exceptions — but by Lee. Jefferson closed his draft with the sonorous pledge of “our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.” The Charlotte Declaration of May 20, 1775 had these words: “we solemnly pledge to each other our mutual coöperation, our lives, our fortunes, and our most sacred honor.” How came the similarities?

Dr. Carl Becker and others who have written of the National Declaration have said candidly that Jefferson used ideas and expressions that were not original with him, and Jefferson himself said he made no claim to complete originality. What makes Jefferson's Declaration a great document is the loftiness of its ideas, the felicity of its expression, and the force and logic of its indictment of the British Crown. It is worth while to trace the real origins of expressions common to the Charlotte and Philadelphia Declarations.

Let us begin with “are and of right ought to be,” which is one of the most impressive. The acute reader is referred to Vol. 1 of the *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* for 1902, in which appears a short article by Professor William A. Dunning of Columbia University entitled “An Historic Phrase.” (Pp. 82-85.) The author points to a passage in the Drapier's Letters of Dean Swift, in which it is said the people of Ireland “are and ought to be as free a people as their brethren in England.” But Dean Swift was not the first to use the words. Professor Dunning reminds us that thirty-odd years before Swift wrote, the English Bill of Rights of 1689 declared that William and Mary “did become, were, are, and of right

ought to be by the laws of this realm our sovereign liege Lord and Lady." Back in 1621 the House of Commons in protesting against a lecture from James I — an habitual scold — declared that "every member of the House of Parliament *hath and of right ought to have* freedom of speech."

Professor Dunning offers other uses of the phrase in 1583 and 1571, and then goes all the way back to 1300. In that year King Philip the Fair of France claimed to be independent of all human authority. Pope Boniface VIII replied to this with force and directness: "Let not the French say in their pride that they have no superior. They lie. *Quia de iure sunt et esse debent sub rege Romano et Imperatore.*" That is to say: "For of right they are and ought to be subject to the Roman King and Emperor." Professor Dunning desisted in his search at this point, surmising that the phrase may have been used by the Egyptians and Assyrians in the years of dimmest antiquity.

Another ancient and excellent phrase is "the inherent and inalienable rights of man." It appears in the first resolution of the Mecklenburg Declaration, and useful evidence that this document was not fabricated after July 4, 1776 by McKnitt Alexander may be found in Dr. Carl Becker's account of what was done with the phrase by Jefferson. The revised rough draft of the Philadelphia Declaration contained this sentence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with *inherent and inalienable rights* . . ."

The phrase did not get into the final draft, which now reads thus: ". . . that they are endowed by their Creator with certain *unalienable rights*." The revision is credited to John Adams, who insisted on the spelling of "unalienable" and saw the thing through with the printers. And "unalienable" it remains today: evidence of Adams' most unique contribution.

The point to be remembered now is that "inherent and inalienable rights" couldn't have been borrowed from the National Declaration by McKnitt Alexander and used in writing a false document because the phrase *didn't appear* in the July 4 Declaration. We must give Dr. Brevard credit for that one, and for the other good old phrases, not forgetting that the Rev. Hezekiah James Balch, A.M., undoubtedly had a good memory also for old phrases that would fit well into a stirring Declaration of Independence.

Returning to "the inherent and inalienable rights of man," it was an esteemed phrase that appears in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, written mostly by Samuel Adams, and again in the first paragraph of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man: "the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of man." Waightstill Avery used a similar phrase in or soon after 1769, in writing a petition for repeal of the Vestry and Marriage Acts. This was pointed out in an earlier chapter.

Expressions like "absolved from all allegiance" and "dissolve the political bonds" were used in various ways before July 4, 1776 and it is difficult now to trace them back to their origins.

But what of Jefferson's most telling line: his pledge of "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor"? On June 17, 1776, a little more than two weeks before Jefferson's Declaration was read aloud to a throng in Philadelphia, two Ulster-Scottish communities in New England — Palmer, Massachusetts and Peterborough, New Hampshire — adopted resolutions amounting to regional declarations of independence in which the same pledge was used in slightly different words. The Palmer town meeting commended the issue of independence to the "honorable, wise and good" men in Congress, and its resolves closed with this ringing sentence: "And if they shall unite in a separation from Great Britain, we do unanimously determine and declare we will support them *with our lives and fortunes.*" At Peterborough on the same day this resolution was adopted:

"We, the subscribers, do hereby solemnly engage and promise that we will, to the utmost of our power, *at the risk of our lives and fortunes*, with arms, oppose the hostile proceedings of the British fleets and armies against the United Colonies."

WHENCE first came the consecrational pledge of lives and fortunes that adorned the Declarations of Charlotte, Palmer, and Peterborough before Jefferson's Declaration appeared? For the present we need go no farther back than the first Covenant of Scotland, adopted at Leith (adjacent to Edinburgh) in 1557 when the early Presbyterians dissolved the bonds that had held them to the Church of Rome. The Lords of the Congregation pledged "*our health, power, substance, and our very lives*, to maintain, set forward and establish the Most Blessed Word of God, and His Congregation."

Again, in the National Covenant of 1638, the signers "protest and promise with our hearts . . . *with our goods, bodies, and lives*, in the defence of Christ his Evangel, Liberties of our Country, ministration of Justice, and punishment of iniquity, against all enemies within the Realme, or without. . ."

In 1643 the signers of the Solemn League and Covenant pledged to "*endeavour with our estates and lives* mutually to preserve the Rights and Privileges of the Parliaments, and the liberties of the Kingdoms [of Scotland and England]."

Thus we discover that the pledge of lives, fortunes, and sacred honor is a product of evolution, with the words "sacred honor" added last. Jefferson may have read the Covenants, which certainly were known to Hezekiah James Balch, one of the founders of the Cliosophic Society at Princeton, to

his classmate Waightstill Avery, and to two other young men at Princeton, Ephraim Brevard and his classmate Thomas Reese. We may scarcely doubt that the dynamic phrases common to the Charlotte and Philadelphia Declarations were oft-used currency in the debates at Princeton when the four young men later to be associated with the Mecklenburg Declaration were students there.

A SOMEWHAT neglected part of American pre-Revolution history, as has been intimated earlier, is the movement toward independence represented by mass meetings in Ulster-Scottish Presbyterian communities bent upon adopting resolutions of protest and even of defiance. Colonials with English backgrounds were far more moderate.

Our historians might have pointed out that of the one-third of the population actively advocating independence, about half were these disaffected Ulster Scots and their German neighbors in Pennsylvania, the Shenandoah Valley, and North Carolina. The effect of adoption of resolutions urging resistance to the British Parliament must have been very considerable, and no doubt helped materially in stirring rebellious sentiment and in opening the way to the National Declaration of Independence.

The Charlotte protest of May 20, 1775 has received greater attention than the others because of the long and bitter controversy over its authenticity, but others made even earlier were sharply pointed. The first of all the meetings was held in Hanover, Pennsylvania, on June 4, 1774. It adopted these resolutions:

"First, that we resent the action of the Parliament of Great Britain as iniquitous and oppressive.

"Secondly, that it is the bounden duty of the people to oppose every measure which tends to deprive them of their just prerogatives.

"Thirdly, that in a close union of the Colonies lies the safeguard of the liberties of the people.

"Fourthly, that in the event of Great Britain attempting to force unjust laws upon us by the strength of arms, our cause we leave to heaven and our rifles.

"Fifthly, that a committee of nine be appointed, who shall act for us in our behalf as emergencies may require."

VIGOROUS ACTION was taken in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where a protest meeting was held on July 12, 1774 in the stone Presbyterian church on the square, with John Montgomery, an elder, as chairman. From this meeting came the Cumberland Resolves, named for the county of their origin. The story told by the Rev. George Norcross, D.D., pastor of the Second Pres-

byterian church of Carlisle, may be found in the *Proceedings* of the Eighth Scotch-Irish Congress held in Harrisburg in June of 1896:

"Resolutions were adopted declaring that Boston was suffering in the common cause of all the Colonies, that every prudent measure ought to be adopted to secure redress for the past and safety for the future, that a Congress of Deputies from all the Colonies would be a proper method for this purpose, that the Colonies ought to unite in refusing all commerce with Great Britain or her dependencies until they have secured a redress of grievances, that the inhabitants of this county will contribute to the relief of their suffering brethren in Boston whenever it is necessary, that a committee for this county be appointed to correspond with similar committees of this or other provinces as to 'the general welfare of British America,' and that James Wilson, Robert Magaw, and William Irvine be the deputies appointed to meet the other deputies from this province at Philadelphia, on Friday next, 'in order to concert measures preparatory to the General Congress.'"

The resolves were backed up by the organization of "a county committee of three thousand men associated, five hundred men were taken into pay and drafted, to be armed and disciplined and marched at the first emergency; and for this the county was drawn upon by a tax on all estates, real and personal, for £27,000." This was the earliest formidable preparation for revolution made anywhere in the American Colonies.

James Wilson, named above, a graduate of St. Andrews University in Scotland, was the man who broke the tie in the Pennsylvania delegation to help in the adoption by the Continental Congress of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

THE SMALL DUTCH COMMUNITY of Coxsackie, N. Y., adopted resolutions denouncing oppression on January 17, 1775, four months before Mecklenburg County acted. No fewer than two hundred twenty-five men signed. At the top of the list was the signature of John Schuneman, V.D.S., for *Verbum Dei Servus*, or minister of the Word of God. Mr. Schuneman may have written the resolutions.

The yellowed parchment, long lost, was discovered in Albany late in the nineteenth century by John M. Clarke, president of the Albany Institute and Historical and Art Society, and by him presented to the Society, after it had been pronounced unique by experts. The Coxsackie *News* published the text in 1889 along with other historical material, and the various papers, edited by Robert Henry Van Bergen, were published in 1935 in a book entitled *Ye Olden Time*. A copy of the book was lent for the present work by Miss June R. Bedell, editor of the Coxsackie *Union-News*.

Since the Cocksackie Declaration never has been given deserved notice, the text is offered in full:

"PERSUADED that the Salvation of the Rights and Liberties of America depends, under God, on the firm Union of its Inhabitants, in a vigorous prosecution of the Measures necessary for its Safety, and convinced of the necessity of preventing the Anarchy and Confusion which attend a Dissolution of the Powers of Government;

"THAT the freeholders and inhabitants of Cocksackie District in the County of Albany, being greatly alarmed at the avowed Design of the Ministry to raise a Revenue in America, and shocked by the bloody Scene acting in the Massachusetts-Bay;

"DO in the most solemn manner resolve never to become Slaves; and do also associate under all the ties of Religion, Honor, and Love to our Country, to adopt and endeavor to carry into Execution whatever measures may be rendered by the Continental Congress, or resolved upon by our provisional Convention for the purpose of preserving our Constitution and opposing the Execution of several arbitrary and oppressive Acts of the British Parliament, until a reconciliation between Great Britain and America on constitutional principles (which we most ardently desire) can be obtained; and that we will, in all Things, follow the advice of our general Committee, respecting the purposes aforesaid, the preservation of peace and good Order, and the safety of Individuals and private property.

"Dated at Cocksackie the Seventeenth day in the year of our Lord One Thousand seven hundred and seventy-five."

On the reverse side of the parchment is an indorsement in diminutive script: "George III, last King of America."

THE PRIDE OF VIRGINIA was stirred when on January 20, 1775, fifteen delegates representing the county of Fincastle in the Shenandoah Valley, met to draft and adopt an address to the Continental Congress. Colonel William Christian was chairman. The address was indignant in spirit. Fincastle men, it said, "cannot think of submitting our liberty and property to the power of a venal British Parliament, or to the will of a corrupt British ministry." Then this defiant paragraph:

"But, if no pacific measures shall be proposed or adopted by Great Britain, and our enemies will attempt to dragoon us out of those inestimable privileges which we are entitled to as subjects, and to reduce us to slavery, we declare that we are deliberately and resolutely determined never to surrender them to any power upon earth but at the expense of our lives."

These words so moved the men of the Valley that within a short while Colonel Christian and five other of the Fincastle delegates were elected trus-

tees of the young Presbyterian Liberty Hall Academy in nearby Augusta County. The Academy grew through various stages to become Washington and Lee University.

SO ENDS OUR STORY of efforts over a period of more than one hundred forty years to persuade Mecklenburgers and their outside friends that they have been duped by John McKnitt Alexander. The end result is the discovery that Dr. Charles Phillips was the real super-duper.

It is much pleasanter to think of the loyalties: the loyalty of North Carolinians who have adhered to their faith; the loyalty of Dr. Joseph Alexander and William Polk to their fathers; the loyalty of the fathers to the cause of independence; the loyalty to Jefferson of countless devoted admirers. Dr. Phillips never lost his love for England: a beautiful country indeed.

Many good men named in this recital deserve to be remembered. John McKnitt Alexander is given special honor by Mecklenburgers: partly because of his steady adherence to the First Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, partly because they have defended him so many long years with few in the field of scholarship to take their side except for Dr. Archibald Henderson of Chapel Hill.

Your author confesses a special regard for General Joseph Graham, courageous young fighting man in the Revolution, who remembered always the May 19-20 convention in 1775 and the audacious resolutions of independence it adopted. His eye-witness recital of what was said and done that May night is one of the memorable things in North Carolina history.