

THE HISTORY
Of Mecklenburg County

From 1740 to 1900.

BY

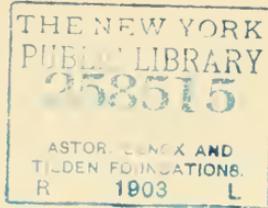
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Charlotte, N. C.

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Rev. Alexander Craighead.

Mr. Craighead came to America in a time that was auspicious for the work that the march of events was marking out for him to engage in. From the most reliable authority we are led to date Mr. Craighead's admission into the ministry in 1736. He was born in Ireland, and possessed in a large degree the characteristics that are peculiar to the Irish people. Being an exceedingly zealous man, of an ardent temperament, devoted to the work of the ministry, he was noted for preaching sermons peculiarly calculated to awaken careless sinners. He was accused of irregularities before his Presbytery in 1740. No immoralities were alleged against him, or false doctrines charged on him; the complaint was against various proceedings thought to be irregular. The Presbytery was unable to make any conclusion of the matter, for while the majority were against him, his vehement appeals to the public turned the sympathy of the community in his favor. The charge of irregularity he rebutted by the recriminating charge of Pharisaism, coldness and formality, and in the ardor of his defence he was not very measured in his epithets and comparisons. Probably the principal cause of the disagreement was Mr. Craighead was opposed to British rule, opposed to one church having advantages over another. He believed in a separation of Church and State. About this time he was directed by the Presbytery in Cumberland, January, 1758, to preach at Rocky River, on the second Sabbath of February, and at other vacant churches till Spring.

At the meeting of the Presbytery in April, a call from Rocky River was presented for the services of Mr. Craighead. He accepted the call and requested installation, which was attended to soon afterwards. It appears that this was the first church established in the upper country.

“In this beautiful, fertile and peaceful country, Mr. Craig-

head passed the remainder of his days in the active duties of a frontier minister of the Gospel, and ended his successful labors in his Master's vineyard in the month of March, 1766, the solitary minister between the Yadkin and Catawba. In this retired country, too, he found full and undisturbed exercise for that ardent love of personal liberty and freedom of opinion which had rendered him obnoxious in Pennsylvania, and was in some measure restrained in Virginia. He was ahead of his ministerial brethren in Pennsylvania in his views of civil government and religious liberty, and became particularly offensive to the governor for a pamphlet of a political nature, the authorship of which was attributed to him. The Synod disavowed both the pamphlet and Mr. Craighead, and agreed with the justice that it was calculated to forment disloyal and rebellious practices, and disseminate principles of disaffection.

In Carolina he found a people remote from the seat of authority, among them the intolerant laws were a dead letter, so far divided from other congregations, even of his own faith, that there could be no collision with him on account of faith or practice; so united in their general principles of religion and church government that he was the teacher of the whole population, and here his spirit rested. Here he passed his days; here he poured forth his principles of religious and civil government, undisturbed by the jealousy of the government, too distant to be aware of his doings, or too careless to be interested in the poor and distant emigrants on the Catawba. Mr. Craighead had the privilege of forming the principles, both civil and religious, in no measured degree, of a race of men that feared God, and feared not labor and hardship, or the face of man; a race that sought for freedom and property in the wilderness, and having found them, rejoiced—a race capable of great excellence, mental and physical, whose minds could conceive the glorious idea of Independence and whose convention announced it to the world in May, 1775, and whose hands sustained it in the trying scenes of the Revolution.”

Previous to the year 1750, the immigration to this beautiful, but distant frontier, was slow and the solitary cabins were found upon the borders of prairies and in the vicinity of canebreaks, the immense ranges abounding with wild game, and affording sustenance the whole year, for herds of tame cattle. Extensive tracts of country between the Yadkin and the Catawba, now waving with thrifty forests, then were covered with tall grass, with scarcely a bush or shrub, looking at first view as if immense grazing farms had been at once abandoned, the houses disappearing, and the abundant grass luxuriating in its native wildness and beauty, the wild herds wandering at pleasure, and nature rejoicing in undisturbed quietness. At the time of the settlement of Mr. Craighead, the county of Anson extended indefinitely west, having been set off in 1749 as a separate county. In the year 1762, the county of Mecklenburg was set off from Anson, and took its name in honor of the reigning house of Hanover; and the county seat, in the bounds of Sugar Creek congregation, and about three miles from the church, was called Charlotte, in honor of the Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg. There were seven congregations in a short time, in Mecklenburg, except a part of Centre, which lay in Rowan—now Iredell—and in their extensive bounds comprehended almost the entire county, viz.: Steel Creek, Providence, Hopewell, Centre, Rocky River, Poplar Tent and Sugar Creek. From these came the delegates that formed the celebrated convention that met in Charlotte on the 20th of May, 1775. In this old graveyard of Sugar Creek church, where Mr. Craighead preached the most of his time, is certainly a spot of remarkable interest. It was here in 1766 that this wonderful man was given sepulcher. Borne to his grave on two sassafras hand-spikes, and one placed at the head and one at the foot of the grave, both grew into large trees; but in the course of time they have fallen; they have been sawed up into lumber and church furniture made of them. The grave is now marked by a neat slab of marble, with an iron fence around the

grave. A cenotaph has been erected in the cemetery in Charlotte to his memory, but not one person in a thousand of those who visit the city are ever told that such a man ever lived, or see the monument to inquire "What does this mean, or what good did he effect?" We hold that much of the spirit of Independence that was exhibited in Charlotte in May, 1775, was the result of his teaching.

Although he died nine years before this convention met, yet his doctrine was gladly received, and bore fruit to the good of this people. His grand-son, Rev. S. C. Caldwell, preached in Sugar Creek from 1792 to 1826, and did much work in building up Hopewell and Mallard Creek, organized and built up Paw Creek, and devoted considerable toward building the church in Charlotte, although the church in Charlotte was not organized till 1832. Rev. Dr. Hall Morrison preached at Sugar Creek for several years after Mr. Caldwell died in 1826, and then in 1837 was elected President of Davidson College. The next minister at Sugar Creek was Rev. J. M. M. Caldwell, a great-grand-son of the first minister, Mr. Alexander Craighhead. Who shall say that the covenant of God is not visited from the fathers to the children, in the infinite mercy of God? Another name, which will never be forgotten in Mecklenburg, although on a very humble stone in "this city of the dead," is Abraham Alexander, the chairman of the convention of the 20th of May, 1775. Not only was he an active patriot, but an active member of Sugar Creek church.

A large number of the descendants of Hezekiah Alexander—a brother of John McKnitt Alexander—still live in the county, but are not sure whether their ancestor was buried in Sugar Creek or Hopewell. Strange that such carelessness should have been permitted, but such is the fact in every church yard in the county. The posterity of these early patriots have ever been our best class of citizens, as pertaining to both Church and State. And it is a noted fact that no descendant of a Revolutionary hero bore arms against his home, or took sides with the Federals to destroy

the civilization of the South. The blood of 1775 continued to tell from 1861-'65. People who were Tories in the first revolution had descendants who were Tories in our last. In the early part of the Nineteenth century, Archibald Frew built probably the finest house in the county. Mr. Frew was visited by misfortune, and the residence passed into other hands. Dr. D. T. Caldwell became owner of the place, and his son, R. B. Caldwell, and his sister, Miss Alice, live there. The place now appears to be of the fashion that was in vogue three quarters of a century ago. Descendants of some of the old settlers are still in the neighborhood, viz.: Robinsons, Barnetts, Alexanders, Hendersons, etc. It was here, on the highway that Col. Locke was killed September 26, 1780, after the fight in Charlotte; also where Gen. Graham was severely wounded, and was taken care of by "Aunt Susey," when quite a young girl..