

THE HISTORY

Of Mecklenburg County

From 1740 to 1900.

BY

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Charlotte, N. C.

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May 20, 1775.

Mecklenburg county was populated with a race of people not a whit behind any others on the American continent. They were independent by nature, having no one to lean upon or to appeal to; they were considering well the question if they had not paid taxes long enough to the mother country, and had received but oppression when protection was looked for; they got weary of being taxed and never represented in their Parliament. In 1758, Rev. Alexander Craighead was driven from Maryland for preaching against kingly authority. He supposed that he would find friends in Pennsylvania, but his hopes were soon dispelled, for he was promptly told that such doctrine was disagreeable, and that he must move on. The tendency at that time was to move South, not to get too far away from the coast. Mr. Craighead came down into North Carolina and accepted a call from Rocky River and Sugar Creek churches. This was three years before any church was organized in all this section of country. With the help of Revs. McWhirter, McAden and other missionaries, the noted seven churches were organized in 1762 or thereabouts, at all of which places it is more than probable that Mr. Craighead preached. He was a man of great energy. Wherever he could get a congregation he would preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and instruct the people that it was their duty to resist tyranny; that we should resist paying taxes without representation. Here he found willing and eager listeners. In 1762 the county was surveyed and soon a county government was organized. Among the first things done was to lay off military precincts, and enrol all the males from 18 to 45 to bear arms as the militia of the colony. These companies were permitted to elect their own officers, to serve as long as their physical condition permitted.

The best men in the county were elected officers in the

militia. Another committee was appointed called "The Committee of Safety," to look after the safety of the country. When the county was well organized, the great leader, Mr. Craighead, was called home after a life well spent in laying the foundation for American independence, 1766. His body was laid to rest in the first graveyard of Sugar Creek church. Has Mecklenburg ever had his equal to point out the way to independence, to a representative government, one that is the friend of the oppressed and that has grown in one hundred and twenty-five years to be the first power in wealth and influence in the world? Mr. Craighead's influence can only be measured by what followed. He laid the foundation of its future greatness. After his demise, the good men that he had trained in both religion and patriotism, consulted often, in regularly appointed places, what would be best for the country, which was fast ripening into freedom, and soon to take her place in the great family of free and independent States.

Mecklenburg was more fortunate than other counties, in that her citizens had been taught that liberty and independence were necessary to achieve the highest aims in life. The frequent conferences were held by the leaders of public opinion where it was convenient. Three of the noted places where this Committee of Safety were in the habit of meeting was at the residences of Robert Irwin, of Steel Creek; Abram Alexander, of Sugar Creek; and John McKnitt Alexander, of Hopewell. Here at these places was the question of independence discussed, and the people were gotten ready for action. The militia officers were men of rank, elders in the church, were leading men, justices of the peace, ministers of the Gospel, etc.

Everything, both public and private, tended to Independence. In the year 1771, the people of Alamance were so oppressed with high taxes that they rebelled against Governor Tryon. The country was wild with excitement, and the men organized companies to defend themselves against the royal troops from New Bern. In the meantime Meck-

lenburg was not idle, but sent troops to aid the patriots of Alamance; but the battle was over and the patriots routed before the Mecklenburg contingent arrived. Hence our troops returned, and as evidence that they would bear true allegiance to Great Britain in the future, the governor had them sworn to support the crown. This oath was the source of much trouble to the conscience of many good people, when, a few years later, they were about taking steps to dissolve all ties that bound us to the mother country. They were at last persuaded that when England had ceased to protect them, they were under no obligations to abide by the oath formerly taken; that a contract broken by one side ceases to be binding on the other. This solution gave general satisfaction to every true patriot.

In the summer of 1771, the good people of Lincoln county gave a picnic to the people of that county. The excitement in Mecklenburg arising from swearing her militia to bear true allegiance to the crown, could not be passed over in silence. So, when the day for the picnic came, a large party from Mecklenburg rode over with flags flying, made of white cloth with black letters, so that they could be seen, "Independence." This was received as an insult, whereupon a general fisticuff fight ensued, which shows plainly that Mr. Craighead had not labored among the Dutch of Lincoln county, to show them the truth as it appears from Scripture and common sense.

This was a time that required the services of the best of men to be on the Committee of Public Safety, to be at the head of the militia, and at every position in the county. The county had great reason to be proud of her men, and loves to point back to her noble women who sacrificed every comfort to aid her soldiers in gaining her independence. The Committee of Public Safety notified the commissioned officers when they were expected to meet in Charlotte, to take specific action on the state of the country. Matters seemed to grow more threatening with each year; whatever part of the country was oppressed, was considered a thrust at Meck-

lenburg, for whatever was hurtful to one part was felt by all. In other words, we felt the necessity of making common cause against a common enemy.

The Committee of Public Safety notified the commissioned officers and as many others as could attend to be in Charlotte on the 19th of May, 1775.

[Copied From Francois Xavier Martin's History of North Carolina, From the Earliest Period.]

"Imperfect as the present publication is, it began to engage the attention of the writer as early as the year 1791. At that period the Legislature of North Carolina afforded him some aid in the publication of a collection of the statutes of the Parliament of England then in force and use within the State. In preparing that work, he examined all the statutes from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Independence, and an arrangement of all those which related to America, afforded him a complete view of the colonial system of England. In 1803 he was employed by the same Legislature to publish a revival of the acts of the General Assembly, passed during the Proprietary, Royal and State Governments, and the local information he acquired in carrying into effect the intentions of those who employed, suggested the idea of collecting materials for a history of the State; and when afterwards he had the honor of representing the town of New Bern in the House of Commons, he was favored with a resolution of the General Assembly, authorizing the Secretary of State to allow him access to the records of his office. In the speeches of the Governors at the opening of the sessions of the Legislature, he found a reference to the principal transactions during the recess, and there were few important events particularly relating to the State, which left no trace on the Journals of the Legislature or the proceedings of the executive. * * * The writer imagined he had collected sufficient materials to justify the hope of producing a history of North Carolina worth

the attention of his fellow citizens, and he had arranged all that related to transactions, anterior to the Declaration of Independence, when, 1809, Mr. Madison thought his services were wanted, first in the Mississippi territory and afterwards in that of Orleans; and when the latter territory became a State, the new government thought proper to retain him. He had entertained the hope that the time would arrive when disengaged from public duties, he might resume the work he had commenced in Carolina; but years have rolled away without bringing on this period; and a shock his health lately received during the year of his great climacteric, has warned him that the moment is arrived when his intended work must engage his immediate attention, or be absolutely abandoned. * * * The determination has been taken to put the work immediately to press in the condition it was when it reached New Orleans. This has prevented any use being made of Williamson's History of North Carolina, a copy of which did not reach the writer's hands till after his arrival in Louisiana. The expectation is cherished that the people of North Carolina will receive, with indulgence, a work ushered to light under circumstances so untoward."

Martin, the historian, further states the conditions which led up to the appointing of delegates to the convention that paved the way to independence. This all occurred prior to 1809, after which date he ceased to write any historical reminiscences of the country, being so engaged for the welfare of the purchase; being a native of France, and otherwise well qualified for the position, he was kept until all difficulties were adjusted and amicably settled. His health gave way, and he was unable to return to historical work, as he desired to do.

In the western part of the province the people were still eager in their resistance. In the months of March and April, 1775, the leading men in the county of Mecklenburg held meetings to ascertain the sense of the people, and to confirm them in their opposition to the claim of the Parlia-

ment to impose taxes and regulate the internal policy of the colonies.

At one of those meetings, when it was ascertained that the people were prepared to meet their wishes, it was agreed that Thomas Polk, then colonel commandant of the county, should issue an order directed to each captain of militia, requesting him to call a company meeting to elect two delegates from his company, to meet in general committee at Charlotte, on the 19th of May, giving to the delegates ample power to adopt such measures as to them should seem best calculated to promote the common cause of defending the rights of the colony, and aiding their brethren in Massachusetts. Col. Polk issued the order, and delegates were elected. They met in Charlotte on the day appointed. The forms of their proceedings and the measures to be proposed had been previously agreed upon by the men at whose instance the committee were assembled. The Rev. Hezekiah Jones Balch, Dr. Ephraim Brevard, and William Kennon, an attorney-at-law, addressed the committee, and descanted on the causes which had led to the existing contest with the mother country, and the consequences which were to be apprehended, unless the people should make a firm and energetic resistance to the right which Parliament asserted, of taxing the colonies and regulating their internal policy.

On the day on which the committee met, the first intelligence of the action at Lexington, in Massachusetts, on the 19th of April, was received in Charlotte. This intelligence produced the most decisive effect. A large concourse of people had assembled to witness the proceedings of the committee. The speakers addressed their discourses as well to them as to the committee, and those who were not convinced by their reasoning, were influenced by their feelings, and all cried out, "Let us be independent! Let us declare our independence and defend it with our lives and fortunes!" A committee was appointed to draw up resolutions. This committee was composed of the men who planned the whole proceedings, and who had, already, prepared the resolutions

which it was intended should be submitted to the general committee.

Dr. Ephraim Brevard had drawn up the resolutions some time before, and now reported them, with amendments, as follows:

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.

Resolved, That we, the citizens of Mecklenburg county, do hereby dissolve the political bonds which have connected us with the mother country; and absolve ourselves from all allegiance to the British crown, abjuring all political connection with a nation that has wantonly trampled on our rights and liberties, and inhumanly shed the innocent blood of Americans at Lexington.

Resolved, That we do declare ourselves a free and independent people; that we are and of right ought to be a sovereign and self-governing people, under the power of God and the general congress; to the maintenance of which independence we solemnly pledge to each other our mutual co-operation, our lives, our fortunes and our most sacred honor.

Resolved, That we do hereby ordain and adopt as rules of conduct, all and each of our former laws, and the crown of Great Britain cannot be considered hereafter as holding any rights, privileges or immunities among us.

Resolved, That all offices, both civil and military, in this county, be entitled to exercise the same powers and authorities as heretofore; that every member of this delegation shall henceforth be a civil officer, and exercise the powers of a Justice of the Peace, issue process, hear and determine controversies according to law, preserve peace, union and harmony in the county, and use every exertion to spread the love of liberty and of country, until a more general and better organized system of government be established.

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.

These resolutions were unanimously adopted and subscribed by the delegates.

Signers of the Declaration of Independence, 20th of May, 1775:

ABRAHAM ALEXANDER, *Chairman.*

JOHN MCKNITT ALEXANDER, *Secretary.*

EPHRAIM BREVARD, *Secretary.*

REV. HEZEKIAH J. BALCH,	CHARLES ALEXANDER,
JOHN PHIFER,	ZACCHEUS WILSON, JR.,
JAMES HARRIS,	WAIGHTSTILL AVERY,
WILLIAM KENNON,	BENJAMIN PATTON,
JOHN FORD,	MATTHEW MCCLURE,
RICHARD BARRY,	NEILL MORRISON,
HENRY DOWNES,	ROBERT IRWIN,
ESRA ALEXANDER,	JOHN FLENNIKEN,
WILLIAM GRAHAM,	DAVID REESE,
JOHN QUEARY,	JOHN DAVIDSON,
HEZEKIAH ALEXANDER,	RICHARD HARRIS, JR.,
ADAM ALEXANDER,	THOMAS POLK.

James Jack, of Charlotte, but afterwards living in Georgia, was engaged to be the bearer of the resolutions to the President of Congress, and directed to deliver copies of them to the delegates in Congress from North Carolina. The President returned a polite answer to the address, which accompanied the resolutions, in which he highly approved of the measures adopted by the delegates of Mecklenburg, but deemed the subject of the resolutions premature to be laid before Congress. Messrs. Caswell, Hooper and Hewes forwarded a joint letter, in which they complimented the people of Mecklenburg for their zeal in the common cause, and recommended to them the strict observance of good order; that the time would soon come when the whole continent would follow their example.

On the day the resolutions were adopted by the delegates in Charlotte, they were read aloud to the people, who had assembled in the town, and proclaimed amidst the shouts and huzzas, expressing the feelings and determination of all present.

When Capt. Jack reached Salisbury on his way to Philadelphia, the general court was sitting, and Mr. Kennon, an attorney-at-law, who had assisted in the proceedings of the delegates at Charlotte, was there in Salisbury. At the request of the judges, Mr. Kennon read the resolutions aloud in open court to a large concourse of people. They were listened to with attention and approved by all present. The delegates at Charlotte being empowered to adopt such measures, as in their opinion would best promote the common cause, established a variety of regulations for managing the concerns of the county. Courts of justice were held under the direction of the delegates. For some months these courts were held in Charlotte, but for the convenience of the people (for at that time Cabarrus formed part of Mecklenburg), two other places were selected and the courts were held at each in rotation. The delegates appointed a committee of their own body who were called a "Committee of Safety," and they were empowered to examine all persons brought before them charged with being inimical to the common cause, and to send the military into the neighboring counties to arrest suspected persons. In the exercise of this power, the committees sent into Lincoln and Rowan counties and had a number of persons arrested and brought before them. Those who manifested penitence for their Toryism, and took an oath to support the cause of liberty and the country, were discharged. Others were sent under guard into South Carolina for safe keeping. The meeting of the delegates at Charlotte and the proceedings which grew out of that meeting produced the zeal and unanimity for which the people of Mecklenburg were distinguished during the whole of the Revolutionary War. They became united as a band of brothers, whose confidence in each other and the cause

which they had sworn to support was never shaken in the worst of times.

The history of the convention that convened in Charlotte on the 19th and 20th of May, 1775, is detailed by an educated lawyer—Francois Xavier Martin—a native of France, lived in New Bern, was frequently a member of the North Carolina Legislature, was in close contact with the history of North Carolina from 1791-1809, when he was employed by Mr. Madison, as an attorney, to proceed to New Orleans and the Western purchased territory; that he was well qualified for the work, and also to write history. And we understand that previous to 1819, the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence had never been called in question in any manner. Some of the signers lived and were able to travel around in the county for nearly fifty years after the great epoch. Maj. John Davidson lived till 1830. Surely the people of Mecklenburg, with all of its boasted intelligence, would have discovered the fraud before forty years had passed over us, or if it was necessary to bolster up the famous son, Mr. Jefferson, of an adjoining State. Another quotation and that will suffice:

The following persons attended the meeting at Hillsboro August 21, 1775, to consider the state of the country: Thomas Polk, John Phifer, Waightstill Avery, Samuel Martin, James Houston, and John McKnitt Alexander.

To the meeting at Halifax, 4th of April, 1776, she sent John Phifer, Robert Irwin, and John McKnitt Alexander. (The county was ever jealous of her rights, in sending her best men as delegates to see that her rights were maintained at all hazards. The following instructions were given to the delegates from the people, being found among the old surviving papers of John McKnitt Alexander. He is the author of them, dated 1st September, 1776.)

Instructions for the delegates of Mecklenburg county:

"1. You are instructed to vote that the late province of North Carolina is and of right ought to be, a free and independent State, invested with all the powers of legislation,