

Abraham Alexander

Abraham Alexander, the Chairman of the Mecklenburg Convention of the 19th and 20th of May, 1775, was born in 1718, and was an active and influential magistrate of the county before and after the Revolution, being generally the honored chairman of the Inferior Court. He was a member of the popular branch of the Assembly in 1774-'75, with Thomas Polk as an associate; also one of the fifteen trustees of Queen's Museum, which institution, in 1777, was transformed into "Liberty Hall Academy."

After the involuntary retreat of Josiah Martin, the royal Governor, in June, 1775, from the State, its government was vested in--1. A Provincial Council for the whole province. 2. A District Committee of Safety for each county, of not less than twenty-one persons, to be elected annually by the people of each county. The members of the Provincial Council for the Salisbury district were Samuel Spencer and Waightstill Avery. The members of the District Committee of Safety were John Brevard, Griffith Rutherford, Hezekiah Alexander, James Auld, Benjamin Patton, John Crawford, William Hill, John Hamilton, Robert Ewart, Charles Galloway, William Dent, Maxwell Chambers. The county committee, elected annually by the people in each county, executed such orders as they received from the Provincial Council, and made such rules and regulations as the internal condition of each county demanded. They met once in three months at the Court-house of their respective counties, to consult on public measures, to correspond with other committees, to disseminate important information, and thus performed the duties and requirements of courts. The county committees exercised these important functions until justices of the peace were appointed by the Legislature and duly commissioned by the Governor.

It was this committee which met in Charlotte on the 31st of May, 1775, and passed a series of rules and regulations for the internal government of the county--a necessary sequel, as previously stated, of the more important meeting of the 20th of May preceding. This statement is strongly corroborated by a communication published last summer in the "Charlotte Observer," by D.A. Caldwell, Esq., one of Mecklenburg's most aged, intelligent and worthy citizens. The portion of the communication most pertinent to our subject reads thus:

"I was born and raised in the house of my maternal grandfather, Major John Davidson, who was one of the signers of the Mecklenburg Declaration. I have often heard him speak of the 20th of May, 1775, as the day on which it was signed, and the 31st of the same month as the time of an adjourned meeting. The '20th of May' was a household word in the family. Moreover, I was present (and am now the only surviving witness of the transaction) when he gave a certificate of the above dates to Dr. Joseph McKnitt

Alexander, whose father, John McKnitt Alexander, was also a signer, and the principal secretary of the meeting. This certificate was called forth by the celebrated attempt of Thomas Jefferson to throw discredit on the whole affair. A certificate to the same effect was given on that occasion by Samuel Wilson, a brother-in-law of Major Davidson, and a man of undoubted integrity. Mr. Wilson, although not a signer, was present at the signing on the 20th of May. I often heard my grandfather allude to the date in later years, when he lived with his daughter, Mrs. William Lee Davidson, whose husband was the son of General Davidson, who fell at Cowan's Ford."

Under the administration of Abraham Alexander as Chairman of the Committee of Safety, the laws passed by that body of vigilant observers of the common good were strictly enforced; and each citizen, when he left the county, was required to carry with him a certificate of his political standing, officially signed by the chairman.

Abraham Alexander was a most worthy, exemplary and influential member of society; was, for many years, a Ruling Elder of the Presbyterian Church, and lies buried in the graveyard of Sugar Creek Church. On his gravestone is this brief record:

"Abraham Alexander,
Died on the 22nd of April, 1786,
Aged 68 years."

"'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.'"

Adam Alexander was chiefly known by his military services. He was appointed Lieutenant Colonel of a battalion of minute men, with Thomas Polk as Colonel, and Charles M'Lean as Major, by the Provincial Council held at Johnston Court-house, on the 18th of December, 1775; and Colonel of Mecklenburg county, with John Phifer as Lieutenant Colonel, and John Davidson and George A. Alexander as Majors, by the Provincial Congress, held at Halifax on the 4th of April, 1776.

He was a brave and energetic officer; and his name will be found in nearly every expedition which marched from Mecklenburg county to oppose the enemies of his country. He was for many years, before and after the war, an acting Justice of the Peace, and tradition speaks of him as bearing an excellent character. He died in 1798, aged seventy years, and is buried in the old graveyard of Rock Spring, seven miles east of Charlotte. Many of his escendants lie buried in the graveyard at Philadelphia Church, two miles from Rock Spring, at which latter place the congregation worshipped before the Revolution, mingling with their pious devotion many touching and prayerful appeals for the

final deliverance of their country from the storms of the approaching conflict of arms in a righteous cause.

Hezekiah Alexander was more of a statesman than a soldier. He was born in Pennsylvania in 1728. He was appointed a member of the Committee of Safety for the Salisbury district by the Provincial Congress which met at Hillsboro on the 21st of August, 1775, with General Griffith Rutherford, John Brevard, Benjamin Patton and others--a position of much responsibility and power. He was appointed by the Provincial Congress, in April, 1776, with William Sharpe, of Rowan county, on the Council of Safety. He was elected a member of the Provincial Congress from Mecklenburg county, which met at Halifax on November 12th, 1776, and framed the first Constitution of the State, with Waightstill Avery, Robert Irwin, John Phifer, and Zaccheus Wilson, as colleagues. At the Provincial Congress, which met at Halifax on the 4th of April, 1776, he was appointed Paymaster of the Fourth Regiment of North Carolina Continentals--Thomas Polk, Colonel, James Thackston, Lieut. Colonel, and William Davidson, Major. He was the treasurer of "Liberty Hall Academy" (formerly "Queen's Museum") during its existence. He died on the 16th of July, 1801, and lies buried in the graveyard of Sugar Creek Church, of which he had long been an active and worthy member. The inscription on his tombstone reads thus:

"In memory of Hezekiah Alexander,
Who departed this life July 16th, 1801,
Aged 73 years."

John McKnitt Alexander, of Scotch-Irish ancestors, was born in Pennsylvania, near the Maryland line, in 1733. He served as an apprentice to the trade of tailor, and when his apprenticeship expired, at the age of twenty-one, he emigrated to North Carolina, joining his kinsmen and countrymen in seeking an abode in the beautiful champaign between the Yadkin and Catawba rivers--the land of the deer and the buffalo; of "wild pea-vines" and cane-brakes, and of peaceful prosperity. In 1759 he married Jane Bain, of the same race, from Pennsylvania, and settled in Hopewell congregation. Prospered in his business, he soon became wealthy and an extensive landholder, and rising in the estimation of his fellow-citizens, was promoted to the magistracy and the Eldership of the Presbyterian Church. He was a member of the Provincial Assembly in 1772, and one of the Delegates to the Convention which met at Hillsboro, on the 21st of August, 1775.

He was also a member of the Provincial Congress, which met at Halifax on the 4th of April, 1776, with John Phifer and Robert Irwin as colleagues. In 1777, he was elected the first Senator from Mecklenburg county, under the new Constitution. He was an

active participator in the Convention of the 19th and 20th of May, 1775, and preserved for a long time, the records, as being its principal secretary, and the proper custodian of its papers. He gave copies of its important and ever-memorable proceedings to Gen. William R. Davie, Dr. Hugh Williamson, then professing to write a history of North Carolina, and others. Unfortunately, the original was destroyed in 1800, when the house of Mr. Alexander was burned, but Gen. Davie's copy has been preserved. He was one of the Trustees of the "College of Queen's Museum," the name of which was afterward changed to "Liberty Hall." He was for many years, a ruling Elder of the Presbyterian Church, and by his walk and conversation, its firm supporter.

By the east wall of the graveyard at Hopewell Church, is a row of marble slabs, all bearing the name of Alexander. On one of them, is this short inscription:

"John McKnitt Alexander,
Who departed this life July 10th, 1817,
Aged 84."

It is a singular fact, that the signers of the Mecklenburg Declaration were all, with perhaps one or two exceptions, members of the Presbyterian Church. One of them, Rev. Hezekiah J. Balch, was a Presbyterian preacher, and nine others Elders of that Church, which may be truly styled, at and before the Revolution, the "nursing mother of freemen."

Source: Sketches of Western North Carolina, Historical and Biographical by Author: C. L. Hunter