

The Lives and Peculiarities of Some of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence of May 20, 1775.

As Col. Tom Polk lived ten years after the independence of the United States was established, he entertained Gen. Washington in 1791, in Charlotte, when on his southern tour; was one of the most prominent and popular citizens of our county, his reputation was cleared of every stain, and no one dared to calumniate his revolutionary record. He died in 1793, and his wife Susannah, who preceded him many years, was buried in the old cemetery of Charlotte back of the old church. He had much to do with those early patriots in securing independence for the people of Mecklenburg, and through them for the people of the Western world. Sufficient credit cannot be given the plain people for the noble stand they maintained in those years of trial.

MAJ. JOHN DAVIDSON.

As for Maj. John Davidson, a signer of the Declaration of Independence of Mecklenburg, every one who knew him could attest that he was not only the truest of patriots, but one of the most devoted of Christians. He lived to extreme old age, far into the Nineteenth century, lacking but three years of attaining his one hundredth birthday. He was born in Cecil, Md. While but a small boy he lost his father, and his mother, whose maiden name was Isabella Ramsay—with her two children, John and Mary, moved to Rowan county and purchased a farm. Here she found a fine school to educate her children, and for the teacher there was a mutual attraction, which resulted in a marriage between Mrs. Davidson and Mr. Henry. When John became of age he moved to Mecklenburg with his sister Mary, to keep house for him. He was a skillful blacksmith, and for

many, many years followed the trade. Blacksmithing at that period was a lucrative business, and competition was not close as it got to be in after years. He married an English lady—Violet, a daughter of Samuel Wilson—who was a near kinsman of Gen. Wilson, in whose veins flowed the blood of royalty. Their royal kinsman, Sir Robert Wilson, made them a visit once before the Revolutionary war, but never repeated it. He prospered far beyond his compeers, and took a great interest in developing the iron industry of the country after the war. He appears to have lived an exemplary Christian. Some incidents are related illustrative of his character. His oldest grand-daughter (a noted beauty) married a distinguished and wealthy South Carolinian, William Edward Hayne. This led to more gay company in the old homestead than usual; and sometimes the guests differed widely from their host in manners and opinions. On one occasion a party of gentlemen who had adopted the principles of French philosophy then so prevalent, were visiting at his house. Knowing that they were avowed atheists, and believing that his father's evening devotions would only subject him to ridicule, one of the younger Davidsons suggested that, for once, they be omitted. But such was not in keeping with the independent and conscientious character of Maj. Davidson. When the hour for retiring came, he said quietly, "Gentlemen, it is always my custom to close the day with Scripture reading and prayer in my family. If you choose to be present, you are most welcome to do so. If not, you can retire to your own rooms." They decided to remain, and for once in their lives listened respectfully on bended knees to an earnest prayer from the lips of a very earnest worshipper.

Another grand-daughter, a gay young girl who was motherless and consequently much at his house, had the usual dislike of young ladies for early rising, and consequently she was sometimes late at morning prayers. The grandfather was usually very patient, but at last administered a

mild rebuke. He said: "Mary, I hope you will marry some one who will *make* you come to prayers." The hope seemed to be prophecy, for she married the Rev. Dr. R. H. Morrison, who during his long life, was especially strict in requiring every member of his family to be present, at both morning and evening prayers. Notwithstanding this (or let us say, in consequence of it) he was the most tender and devoted of husbands and fathers. Maj. Davidson's last years were spent at the home, and in the devoted care of his youngest daughter, Elizabeth. She married William Lee Davidson, the youngest son and namesake of her father's old friend, the officer who fell at his post of duty at Cowan's Ford, and whose death at the hands of a Tory, ought to protect him from all subsequent misrepresentations.

Maj. Davidson was a man of wealth, attended strictly to his own business, and was very industrious and spent no money foolishly. His slaves were native Africans, bought from the New England slave ship which landed their pitiful cargoes on the wharfs of Charleston, S. C. That was the Pandora's box from which issued untold evils to our people one hundred years later. Although it was a master stroke to civilization and Christianized the cannibal tribes of Africa.

During the time of African slavery in the United States, there was 700,000 converted to Christianity from "hoodooing" cannibals. Greater progress was made here with the slaves than was effected by the missionaries of all other Christian nations in their home country. But their freedom was a great blessing to the white people of the South. How gentle and faithful and affectionate they became to their Christian masters and mistresses. And it seemed natural for them to hate "poore white trash." In fact the negroes of the rich had but little time for the negroes of those who owned but two or three.

Maj. Davidson's title was first conferred upon him by Gov. Tryon, and afterwards re-conferred upon him by the Provincial Congress. His home was about fifteen miles

northwest of Charlotte, near the Catawba river; and his sons located themselves on adjoining plantations. The oldest son, Robert (called Robin), married Margaret Osborne (known far and near as "Aunt Peggy"). She was the granddaughter of Alexander Osborne and Agnes McWhirter. The second son, John, (commonly called Jacky), married Sarah Brevard, grand-daughter of John Brevard and Jane McWhirter. "Jackey" had the most stentorian voice in the State. He could deliver a message two miles by calling out. The third son, Benjamin Wilson (named in honor of his grand uncle, Benjamin Wilson, of England, who was the father of Gen. Sir Robert Wilson), married Elizabeth Latta, and lived about seven miles east of his father. Benjamin was called "Independence Ben" because he was born on May 20, 1787. The three elder daughters of Maj. Davidson married distinguished rebel officers, Captain Alexander Brevard, Gen. Joseph Graham, and Dr. William McLean, who was an army surgeon. Another daughter, Sarah, married Rev. Alexander Caldwell, son of Rev. David Caldwell, D. D., of Guilford, who suffered almost martyrdom for the sake of independence.

They had two sons and one daughter—probably the most remarkable family, not only in Mecklenburg county, but in North Carolina. They were noted for their mental calibre, their mind appeared to grasp whatever subject or problem came within their reach, and when once fixed in their mind, was there never to be forgotten. Their energy and industry was unsurpassed, and their influence was felt for miles around them. Mr. D. A. Caldwell, one of the brothers, was a man of great determination, always ready to contend for what he considered was right; he was anything else than a policy man. He possessed that mould of features that was peculiar to men of a former day, that denoted friendship, decision of character, and did not know what fear was; and was the very soul of honor.

When the Confederate soldiers were wending their way home, the war being over, a captain and twelve men—cav-

alry—rode up and said they would stay all night with him; in the meantime one of their horses became so badly foundered that it was impossible for it to travel, so the captain looked around at Mr. Caldwell's stable and selected his family carriage horse, and said he would be obliged to take it. Mr. Caldwell told him he could not spare that horse, but was willing to let them have another horse that was not so valuable. The captain said no, "I must have the bey horse." I was immediately sent for, and hastened to his aid. He met me at the back door and told me he wanted me to witness what was about to transpire. We walked to the front door where the captain and his men were saddling their horses. The captain spoke kindly, or rather I should say, politely, "Mr. Caldwell, you have entertained us kindly, fed our horses, showed us all the courtesies we could expect, but necessity knows no law; I will certainly take the bey horse." Mr. Caldwell replied, "I will kill whoever puts his hand on my horse." The captain said, "There is thirteen of us and but one of you. Would you sacrifice your life for a horse?" "Not for a horse, but for the principle of the thing, I will do it quick." The captain told his troopers to let the horse alone. These three—the Caldwell branch—lived to an average age of 90 years, and their offspring still inherits all the fine qualities of their ancestors.

The youngest daughter, as before stated, married William Lee Davidson. So that no family in the county was more thoroughly identified with the achievement of national independence. Maj. Davidson shared the labors of his newly purchased slaves, and instructed them personally in every branch of plantation work. And he did everything so well with his own hands that his grand-sons would laugh and say: "Grand-father can do everything in the world, except shear a sheep." He had tried to assist in the sheep-shearing, and failed so signally that it was a standing joke in the family ever afterwards. His handsome old brick mansion, built after the close of the war, was unfortunately destroyed by fire a few years ago, but his plantation is still

in the hands of his descendants. His grave and that of his wife may still be seen near his homestead.



HEZEKIAH ALEXANDER.

Four of the six Alexanders who signed the Mecklenburg Declaration were so well known in the county that they are still spoken of with reverence and affection. We know just where their homes were, and their graves are with us to this day. The principal transactions of their lives are recorded in history. But of the other two, Ezra and Charles, diligent enquiry has revealed nothing that is satisfactory from the oldest citizens. One informant was under the impression that they lived within the bounds of Providence, and were neighbors of Ezekiel Polk, and like him, were atheists. If this is true, they probably emigrated with him to Tennessee, carrying with them their circulating library or infidel literature, and so both they and their books disappeared and were a good riddance to their fellow citizens. Hezekiah and John McKnitt Alexander were brothers, and were near kinsman of the Brevard family. Hezekiah Alexander was born in Pennsylvania the 13th of January, 1722. By the Provincial Congress at Hillsboro (21st August, 1775) he was appointed with Griffin Rutherford, John Brevard and Benjamin Patton and others a Committee of Safety for the Salisbury District, which included Mecklenburg within its bounds. In April, 1776, he was appointed with William Sharp, again on a Council of Safety—an evidence of the great respect inspired by his intellect and integrity. He afterwards held the position of paymaster to the Fourth Regiment of North Carolina Continentals, of which Thomas Polk was colonel, James Thackston lieutenant-colonel, and William Lee Davidson major. In November, 1776, he was elected a member of the Provincial Congress from Mecklenburg with Waightstill Avery, Robert Irwin, John Phifer, Zaccheus Wilson as colleagues, which assembly formed the Constitution of North Carolina. He died in