

Polk Family

Thomas Polk is a name of historic distinction in North Carolina, as well as in our nation. He was the early, constant, and enduring friend of liberty, and the unfaltering opponent of arbitrary power and oppression. He was a member of the Colonial Assembly in 1771 and 1775, associated with Abraham Alexander from Mecklenburg. In 1775, he was appointed Colonel of the second battalion of "Minute Men," with Adam Alexander as Colonel, and Charles McLean as Major.

As Colonel of the Mecklenburg militia, he issued orders to the Captains of the several beats, or districts, to send two delegates each to the Convention in Charlotte on the 19th of May, 1775. This act alone, proceeding from patriotic motives, entitles him to our gratitude. In accordance with orders, and the anticipated discussion of political measures affecting the welfare of the country, a vast concourse of delegates, and of the citizens generally, from all parts of the country, as well as from the adjoining counties of Anson, Rowan and Tryon (afterward Lincoln) assembled on the appointed day--such a gathering as had never before met in Charlotte, preceding, or during the Revolution. It was not a small assemblage, like that of the 31st of the same month, composed entirely of the Committee of Safety, met for the purpose of passing such rules and regulations as the internal government of the county demanded.

At the Provincial Congress which met at Halifax on the 4th of April, 1776, he was appointed Colonel of the fourth regiment of Continental troops, with James Thackson as Lieutenant-Colonel, and William Davidson as Major. The last named officer was afterward appointed a Brigadier General, and was killed while disputing the passage of Cornwallis at Cowan's Ford, on the 1st of February, 1781. After the death of General Davidson, he was appointed Brigadier General in his stead. When General Greene took command of the Southern army in Charlotte on the 3rd of December, 1780, the commissary department was left vacant by the resignation of Colonel Polk. At the earnest solicitation of General Greene, Colonel Davie was induced to accept the position, an ungracious and troublesome office at any time, but then attended with peculiar difficulties, as the country had been lately devastated and stripped of its usual resources by a large invading army.

Colonel Thomas Polk married Susan Spratt, and left several children. He died in 1793, full of years and full of honors, and his mortal remains repose in the graveyard of the Presbyterian Church in Charlotte.

William Polk, son of Colonel Thomas Polk, was born in 1759, and was present at the Mecklenburg Convention of the 19th and 20th of May, 1775. He commenced his military career with his father in the expedition against the Scovillite Tories, in upper South Carolina, in the autumn of 1775. He was with General Nash when he fell at Germantown; with General Davidson, at Cowan's Ford; with General Greene, at Guilford Court House; and with the same officer at Eutaw Springs. In the last named battle he was severely wounded, the effects of which he carried with him to his grave. When the war closed,

he held the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. He settled in Charlotte, his place of nativity, and represented Mecklenburg county in the Commons in 1787-'90, and '91. Soon thereafter he removed to Raleigh, where he spent the remainder of his life. He was the last surviving field officer of the North Carolina line. He died on the 14th of January, 1835, in the seventy-sixth year of his age. He was the father of

Bishop Leonidas Polk, a brave and meritorious officer, killed in the late civil war, while holding the position of Major General; of the late Thomas G. Polk, of Tennessee, and of Mrs. Rayner, wife of the Hon. Kenneth Rayner, of Washington City.

Ezekiel Polk, one of the older brothers of Colonel Thomas Polk, was the first clerk of the county court of Lincoln, after its separation from Mecklenburg in 1768; a Magistrate of Mecklenburg county at a later period; and was a man of considerable wealth and influence, owning much of the valuable lands around "Morrow's Turnout," now the flourishing village of "Pineville." He was the grandfather of James K. Polk, President of the United States in 1845, some of whose noblest traits of character were illustrated in refusing to serve a second term and in being never absent from his post of duty. Well would it be for the best interests of our Republic if other occupants of the "White House" would imitate his noble example.

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