

**THE ADDRESS OF THE HON. WM.
A. GRAHAM ON THE
MECKLENBURG DECLARATION
OF INDEPENDENCE OF THE 20TH
OF MAY, 1775**

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The Address of the Hon. Wm. A. Graham on the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence of the 20th of May, 1775 by Wm. A. Graham

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WM. A. GRAHAM

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THE ADDRESS
OF THE
HON. WM. A. ^{Alexander} GRAHAM
ON THE
Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence
OF THE
20TH OF MAY, 1775.

DELIVERED AT CHARLOTTE, ON THE 4TH DAY OF FEB'Y, 1875, BY REQUEST
OF THE CITIZENS OF MECKLENSBURG COUNTY. WITH ACCOMPANYING
DOCUMENTS, INCLUDING THOSE PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE
LEGISLATURE OF NORTH CAROLINA IN THE YEAR 1881.

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DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

BY THE COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE OF
MECKLENBURG COUNTY, N. C.,

ON THE

TWENTIETH OF MAY, 1775.

Viewed in the light of History, American and English, Congressional and Provincial, with observations on the characters of the chief witnesses who testified of it, as known to the writer from personal acquaintance, or their reputation among their contemporaries.

A MEMORIAL ADDRESS

At a Mass Meeting in Charlotte, Feb. 4th, 1875, preparatory to its Centennial Celebration.

BY WM. A. GRAHAM.

I ESTEEM it the duty of some one who has had opportunities of acquaintance with the Revolutionary history of the State, and this a fit occasion, to vindicate the authenticity of the Declaration of Independence by the delegates of the people of the County of Mecklenburg on the 20th of May, 1775, against the attempts recently made to bring it into discredit. With some recollections of the discussion of this topic, running back more than half a century, I have taken no part in it heretofore. The event occurred (as I believe it did occur) in the immediate vicinity of the residence of the families from which I am descended. Several of my near relatives, including my Father, when it was called in question soon after its publication in the gazettes of 1819-20, gave their

testimony as witnesses who had been personally present at the transaction, with references to some of the circumstances of the occasion, as well as to precedent and subsequent events. I deemed it proper not to participate in the controversy as to the credibility of this testimony while these witnesses were alive—the more especially as I thought the claim on the part of Mecklenburg well sustained by others. But those who championed the cause of the State (for it has been made a State matter) have all passed away—Martin, Jo. Seawell Jones, Foote, Hawks, are no longer among the living. The witnesses to whom I have alluded, and those others whose evidence was then taken, their comrades and neighbors, with whom they had passed through the fiery trials of the war which ensued, are all likewise dead. We may now speak of them without flattery, and, I trust, without vanity. If my connection with some of them shall induce a suspicion of bias on the one hand, unfavorable to impartial consideration, I hope it will be conceded on the other that it gave me opportunities of information in respect to their traditions, and to public opinion in the region of this occurrence, as far back as my memory extends, not accessible to strangers, and not possessed by many now surviving. I had preferred that the duty of this vindication should have been undertaken by other hands, but on consultation with the Hunters, Brevards, Polks, Alexanders, and others, whose ancestors were either actors in or witnesses of the event in question, though they felt that injustice had been done by the publications

referred to, and desired that the truth of history, as we understood it in the State, should be asserted, they were unprepared for the discussion. Of twenty copies of the publication, by order of the Legislature in 1830, of the evidence in relation to the Mecklenburg Declaration, directed to be deposited in the State Library, but one remains. Of the local newspapers, the *Western Carolinian*, established at Salisbury in 1820, and the *Yadkin and Catawba Journal*, and *Miners and Farmers' Journal*, published in Charlotte at a later period, which may contain articles on this theme when its agitation was fresh, and eye and ear witnesses of the event were alive, the files are nowhere to be found. The difficulty, therefore, of now procuring all the evidence bearing on this subject which satisfied the country fifty odd years ago, rises to an impossibility. Enough, however, I apprehend, is within our reach to establish the authentic character of the Mecklenburg Declaration, according to the accepted evidence of historical truth.

The position we maintain is very readily stated. It is, that the resistance to British authority, which assumed the form of war in 1775, was not begun, or waged on the part of the colonies generally, or the Congress which represented them, with any view to a severance of the empire, before late in the spring of 1776. Like the risings against King John, Charles I. and James II., it contemplated only a reformation of abuses and redress of grievances, as British subjects under the crown of the monarch, but did not contem-

plate a change of government or freedom from the dominion of their King and country beyond the sea: that North Carolina, and especially the people of Mecklenburg, formed an exception to this general sentiment of loyalty. The leading spirits, in that county and elsewhere, were ripe for revolution from the beginning. They were opposed to monarchy, had little or no attachment to the mother country, were chafed by recent provocations in the actual operation of the government, and were ready to throw it off at any favorable opportunity. Hence their decided and manly action in proclaiming Independence on the 20th of May, 1775, in advance of all the other colonies. This proud distinction we claim for them, and, at the disadvantage of having to meet a challenge of this claim at the end of nearly a hundred years from the act, and more than the third of a century after the last of the attesting witnesses departed this life, trust to make it good.

It may conduce to the better understanding of our observations, before proceeding further in the discussion, to state the condition of the question as to the genuineness of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence in North Carolina. There are some facts which have occurred within the time of living memory about which I presume there can be no dispute:

I. No one, I apprehend, doubts that the men of Mecklenburg, who were old enough to remember the events of 1775, and survived till 1819 and 1820 and 1830, believed there had been a Declaration of Independence at Charlotte, on the 20th of May, in the year

first mentioned, and that they themselves witnessed its promulgation.

II. That not only was this conviction prevalent among those who had remained in that county in the interim, but was shared by those who had emigrated to Georgia, Tennessee and elsewhere.

III. That the whole people of Mecklenburg, without distinction from difference in religious opinion, political parties or personal antipathies or rivalries, were likewise impressed with this conviction, and from early after the year 1820 onward, united in celebrating the anniversary of the day of the Declaration at Charlotte, with all the demonstrations tending to commemorate a great event. Among these celebrations we have reports of three of the most memorable.

* In 1825,* as we learn from the *Raleigh Register*, an immense concourse attended, and beside a parade of the military, an oration was pronounced by Washington Morrison, Esq., a lawyer of repute, subsequently a Senator from the county in the State Legislature, but since deceased: and the religious exercises were conducted by the Rev. Humphrey Hunter, who also read the Mecklenburg Declaration, of the announcement of which he had been a witness fifty years anterior, when past the age of twenty, with comments on the circumstances which had accompanied it. At the public festival of the occasion General George Graham acted as President, and Clerk Isaac Alexander as Vice President, both of whom had given their

* June 7th, 1825.