

ts in his character that into controversies during cal life, and later during ce. Edward Field says: to penetrate trickery or ker still to expose it, there ividuality to his make-up es operated to his disad- to right the supposed o elevate himself in the his fellow men. With a g and positive, coupled rial manner of the master times, he naturally made became easily drawn into

most interesting portion centers around the events he establishment of the navy and the appointment its first Commander-in- the summer months of landers were kept con- because of the feared Narragansett Bay by the The British fleet lurked side of Brenton's Reef, mors, and definite steps en to protect the inland olony. Captain Hopkins, most able shipmaster in was eagerly requested to l of the tiny but gallant been assembled to protect e Colony. At this time early sixty years of age ingly assumed responsi- ng both the naval and ns in this section. When directed its attack upon ns rushed to that point ts and proved to be of n repulsing the enemy.

is local reputation for der of men, an expert a successful organizer, Congress by unanimous mand of the American being built and assem- phia. His selection was e to the fact that his hen headed a committee and was prominently hose who urged naval dentally most of this

pressure which was brought to bear upon Congress urging quick and definite steps to be taken for American sea protection came from loyal Rhode Islanders. Immediately following his appointment as Commodore, Esek Hopkins resigned all of his local commands and journeyed to Philadelphia accompanied by a picked group of local volunteers who had expressed their willingness to sail and fight on American vessels under the command of the most distinguished Rhode Island sailor. Shortly after his arrival in Philadelphia, and when he had inspected the first squadron of United States fighting ships, Hopkins requested that Congress give him additional ships of war to increase the strength of his fleet, and Congress complied with this wish by allowing him eight additional armed merchantmen.

Lord Dunmore with a squadron of British ships was meeting with no resistance in his raids up and down the Atlantic coast and Hopkins was soon ordered to move his command from Philadelphia and put a stop to this annoyance. The first American naval fleet set sail on January 9, 1775, with a Rhode Islander in command and the scene must have been an inspiring one for those gathered on the shores and along the wharves to witness the ceremonies attending the hoisting of sails and the hauling of anchors. What amounted to disaster beset the fleet almost at the very beginning. The river was filled with ice at the time and it was nearly a month before the proud armada squared its sails off the Delaware Capes and headed south in search of the enemy. When he was

located, the British ships were all safely harbored beneath a formidable array of frowning fort guns, therefore the careful commander dared not to push an attack and risk defeat at the hands of a combined land and sea force. Seasickness among many of the unseasoned sailors also had some influence upon Hopkins' decision to delay the attack, and so the fleet was ordered to proceed south to the Bahama Islands, where it had been rumored that the enemy had stored a valuable supply of arms, ammunition and supplies.

The story of this expedition, which was successful in many respects; the misunderstandings which resulted from the actions taken by Hopkins when the fleet returned to the Colonies; and the facts concerning the censure received by the fleet's commander during the weeks which followed make a long, interesting story which every Rhode Islander should read with an open mind. Historians have dealt rather harshly with Hopkins because of his decisions in times of combat emergency, but there are always two sides to every story. Jealousy was keenly evident at the time of the navy's birth; others secretly and some openly desired the post of honor held by the Rhode Islander. No one has ever questioned his patriotism and loyalty, and the passing of time, together with the intelligent research of fair-minded historical narrators, will probably emphasize the undermining influences of his political enemies rather than exploit the shortcomings of the one who was given the post because of his unquestioned ability to lead fighting men on fighting ships.

RHODE ISLAND'S JUST CLAIM

AMONG many other just claims to distinction, Rhode Island has every right to boast of her leadership in the cause of independence. The first blood shed in the noble cause stained the decks of the stranded "Gaspee," the hated ship that local patriots attacked and burned when they learned of her plight, high and dry on the sand bars off Namquit Point

in Narragansett Bay. Records disclose that this Colony supplied a larger proportionate share of soldiers than any other Colony during the long and disheartening struggle; and Rhode Island was the first to renounce, in certain and straightforward language, any and all allegiance to Great Britain. Since the latter claim has been disputed by a few historians, and

particularly by one section of the nation, it will be the purpose of this account to attempt to disprove such counter claims and clarify the original intents and purposes of the immortal session of the Rhode Island General Assembly that met in the Old State House in Providence on May 4, 1776, exactly two months before the more widely exploited meeting of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia.

First, what of the contention that a Declaration of Independence was made elsewhere previous to May 4, 1776. Reams of paper, gallons of ink, and rivers of eloquence have been expended in the efforts to prove the authenticity of the so-called "Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence," alleged to have been promulgated at Charlotte, North Carolina, on May 20, 1775. Statesmen and historians have taken up the cudgels in defence of the honor of the "Tarheel" state; the anniversary of the date is a state holiday; prominent national figures have journeyed to North Carolina year after year to participate in the celebration exercises, but, from all the evidence that is at hand thus far, Rhode Island's claim still stands supreme.

The South's claim to the disputed honor all hinges on the word "if." If a document reputed to have contained certain resolutions of a body of patriotic citizens of North Carolina had been authentic, and if such a document ever did exist, then Rhode Island should forget its contention and relinquish the honor to another. The document in the South was said to have been signed by Abraham Alexander and by John McKnitt Alexander, and it is claimed by many, especially citizens of North Carolina, that it contained several resolutions that expressed the following general sentiments; first, that whosoever aided or countenanced an invasion of American rights by Great Britain was an enemy to this country, and to the inherent and inalienable rights of man; second, that the citizens of Mecklenburg County resolved to dissolve the political bands which connected them to the mother country, and that they absolved themselves from the British crown; third, that they declared themselves a free and independent people; fourth, that they no

longer acknowledged laws and control of legal officers; fifth, that every effort was to be made to spread the love of country and fire of freedom throughout America until a more general and recognized government be established in this province.

As stated previously, if such a declaration had been made, the historic action in Rhode Island should be given a position of secondary importance. Such language as was contained in the foregoing outline of resolutions would indicate that the people of one section of North Carolina positively demanded complete and absolute independence. But, what proof is there that such a document ever existed, or that action of that character was ever taken? In July, 1905, there appeared a facsimile copy of the disputed document as it appeared in what purported to be a long-lost copy of the Cape Fear Mercury, a Colonial newspaper in which the said document is said to have been originally printed. This paper, however, was soon proved to be a forgery, and the original paper said to have been sent at the time by Colonial Governor Martin to the Earl of Dartmouth in England is still missing. Governor Martin, much incensed over the rebellious actions of his constituents, did send a document back to the mother country, but, more likely, it was one that contained a copy of the equally-famous "Mecklenburg Resolves," said to have been adopted at a meeting of the patriots on May 31, 1775. These "Resolves" contained no mention of independence, nor did they hint at open rebellion — they were of a far different character from the words and phrases of the questionable "declaration."

Furthermore, William Henry Hoyt, who wrote an enlightening history of the controversy, showed that the alleged declaration of May 20 had no better foundation than the imperfect memory of aged participants in the meeting, and in an account written from memory years after by the secretary of the particular assembly. The similarity of this declaration to that of the one put forth by the Continental Congress brings up another question. At one time it was insinuated that Thomas Jefferson filched some of the

finest phrases in from the Mecklenburg Declaration. It has been found that the Mecklenburg Declaration have found positive evidence of a similar character of similarity. John McKnitt Alexander's declaration that the Mecklenburg Declaration was in the Raleigh Register. Thomas Jefferson thought it genuine. He promptly and sent the Carolina Declaration roundly for approval of its authenticity. He placed the story in the Mecklenburg Declaration that of a volcano in North Carolina and he added, "The Mecklenburg Declaration," which is by John McKnitt Alexander's letter from Caswell (they were Representatives of North Carolina to the Continental Congress) all dead; to a copy of the Declaration, well, and another (historian) now in memory did not know. He has written of North Carolina's step of its Continental Congress. Jefferson further stated in the statement that the Declaration in question was a fact of history, a fact of history heard; and that the Declaration was signed by Hall thirteen months after then said of a similar Declaration in North Carolina.

What does all this mean? North Carolina claims that the Mecklenburg Declaration was the first to demand the rule of Great Britain. The contention has no foundation by documentary evidence and other cases have been decided during the time during the time — the Governor at the time denied the time on the part of his Jefferson also denied the claim and ridiculed the North Carolina Declaration as a momentous step in the nation — finally, it was never aware

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finest phrases in his immortal document from the Mecklenburg paper, while others have found positive proof of the fraudulent character of the latter from this very similarity. John Adams sent a copy of the declaration that was published in the Raleigh Register on April 30, 1819, to Thomas Jefferson with the remark that he thought it genuine. Jefferson answered promptly and sharply. He repudiated the Carolina claim and rapped Adams roundly for appearing to believe in its authenticity. Jefferson sarcastically placed the story in the same category with that of a volcano said to have broken out in North Carolina some time previously, and he added, "It appeals to an original book, which is burnt; to Mr. John Mc-Knitt Alexander, who is dead; to a joint letter from Caswell, Hooper and Hughes (they were Representatives from North Carolina to the Continental Congress) all dead; to a copy sent to the dead Caswell, and another sent to Dr. Williamson (historian) now probably dead, whose memory did not recollect in the history he has written of North Carolina this gigantic step of its County of Mecklenburg." And Jefferson further alluded sarcastically to the statement that a copy of the declaration in question had been sent to Congress, a fact of which that body never heard; and that even when the immortal declaration was signed at Independence Hall thirteen months later, nothing was then said of a similar document preceding it in North Carolina.

What does all of this mean? North Carolina claims that one of its counties was the first to declare independence from the rule of Great Britain, but that this contention has not yet been substantiated by documentary evidence — many forgeries and other misrepresentations in the case have been uncovered from time to time during the century-old controversy — the Governor of North Carolina at the time denied the truth of any such action on the part of his constituents — Thomas Jefferson also denied the truth of the claim and ridiculed the attempt to give North Carolina the credit for such a momentous step in the history of this nation — finally, Continental Congress was never aware of the fact that a bold,

startling declaration had been previously made somewhere in North Carolina.

But the Continental Congress did know about the declaration made on May 4, 1776, here in Rhode Island. When the formal statute had been drawn and approved with but six dissenting votes, and when signatures had been affixed, the two Rhode Island Congressional delegates, Stephen Hopkins and William Ellery, were instructed, by virtue of the action taken, to take a position on the side of those Colonies demanding complete and absolute freedom. Of course, some contend that the word "independence" did not appear anywhere in the sentiments of the Rhode Island legislature. The word may not have been used but the intention was there. The action taken repealed an existing act entitled, "An Act, for the more effectual securing to his Majesty the allegiance of his subjects in this, his Colony and dominion of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations," and it also altered the forms of Commissions, of all writs, and processes in the Courts, and of the oaths prescribed by law. Nothing could have been more decisive, no procedure could have better demonstrated that this Colony, for one, had relinquished all ties with the mother country. George the Third, King of England, was severely taken to task in the body of the Rhode Island document, his power was to be opposed — Rhode Island wanted independence and she demanded it in plain, understandable language.

Even if North Carolina's fantastic claim is once and for all disproved, there is still the problem of correcting the statements and impressions of writers and historians who stubbornly refuse to acknowledge the importance of the legislative action taken in Providence on May 4, 1776. For example, the late Sidney S. Rider in an issue of his celebrated "Book Notes," published in 1908, called the Rhode Island Declaration of Independence a "farce." He said that "no such act was ever done . . . the General Assembly repealed a law of its own enactment. The allegiance of the people remained exactly as it had existed before." Such statements are ridiculous; the obser-

vation is illogical. No one can rightfully question the fact that Rhode Island was overwhelmingly patriotic and wholeheartedly behind any movement that would

bring about independence — as a matter of fact, Rhode Island was the first Colony to declare its independence from Great Britain.

GENERAL NATHANAEL GREENE

THE noted historian Sparks, writing of General Nathanael Greene, called the Rhode Islander the "most extraordinary man in the Army of the Revolution." Some may consider such a statement an attempt to undermine the reputation of General Washington. Such was neither the intention nor the case. Washington was without a peer, but Nathanael Greene was a unique individual in the true sense of the term. Perhaps the characterization "the right hand man of Washington" would fit him most appropriately, but of course he was infinitely more than that.

Born in 1742 into one of the strictest of Quaker families, he soon acquired tendencies of thought entirely hostile to Quaker principles. He had always been a voracious reader, absorbing from books the education that had been denied to him by his too practical father, a Warwick blacksmith. Nathanael was no bookworm, but he had a passion for study and borrowed every book he could get hold of, soon acquiring a library of his own. Many books he read and re-read, but those with the greatest appeal to him were those dealing with the campaigns of past great generals and other military leaders. Such a display of taste brought upon his head the condemnation of all Quakers. But Nathanael was to do more than that to antagonize the members of his sect. He was to be one of the original organizers of the famous band of Kentish Guards and soon to embark upon a career that would separate him and Quakerism by an unbridgeable gulf.

He married in 1774, his bride being Catherine Littlefield, and went to live in Coventry, near his father's mill, of which he was then overseer. Training with the Kentish Guards became an enjoyable pastime for the young husband, particu-

larly when his charming wife was a spectator at the drills.

A year or so of this, and then a chance to put training and long reading and research into practice. The news came to Rhode Island of Lexington and Concord, of the fact that the British were back in Boston and the American forces under Washington were preparing for a stubborn fight. Washington sent out a direct call for aid, a call that the Kentish Guards hailed with delight. They assembled their packs and fine equipment and marched off to Pawtucket and Massachusetts in fine feather. But at the boundary of Rhode Island and Massachusetts they were held up by orders from the Tory governor of their own colony, disbanded, and sent back home. But four men refused to turn back, among them Nathanael Greene. With his companions he pushed on to Boston and there laid his abilities and services at Washington's command.

Whether this token of patriotism and loyalty to the call of his commander-in-chief began Nathanael Greene's close friendship with Washington is of no great matter as a question. Such a friendship did develop, and rapidly. There was some evidence of jealousy on the part of other officers of Washington's staff, but Greene's ability as a general was too great for such criticism to exist for long. He had all the ingenuity of a typical Yankee combined with a sagacity far in advance of his years. The very training that he had had at his father's forge and mill gave him a foundation of practical experience that was invaluable, especially when he was Commissary-General faced with the enormous difficulties of providing men with food, shelter, arms, and clothing during the awful winter of 1777-1778 at Valley Forge. He proved a giant of strength under stress, indefatigable, meeting every

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