

LANDMARKS IGNORED

Freedom's Shrine Fading Into Time

By KAYS GARY, Observer Staff Writer

While a nation's history is re-focused on its beginnings in Tuesday's glittering celebration here, the last two landmarks of freedom's first pulse will lie unnoticed in dense shadows of hanging ivy.

No tours will visit them. No patriotic order will mark them by plaque.

They will remain, as they have for 200 years, committed to the dust of legend and nothing more.

They are a spring and a collapsed pile of hand-sewn logs. They lie scarcely 100 yards from the Statesville highway 10 miles north of Charlotte on adjoining properties of the S. W. Davis and H. H. Cashion families.

ALMOST HIDDEN

And yet the spring, where the first words were passed culminating in the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, May 20, 1775, lies almost hidden by forest and barriers of brambles.

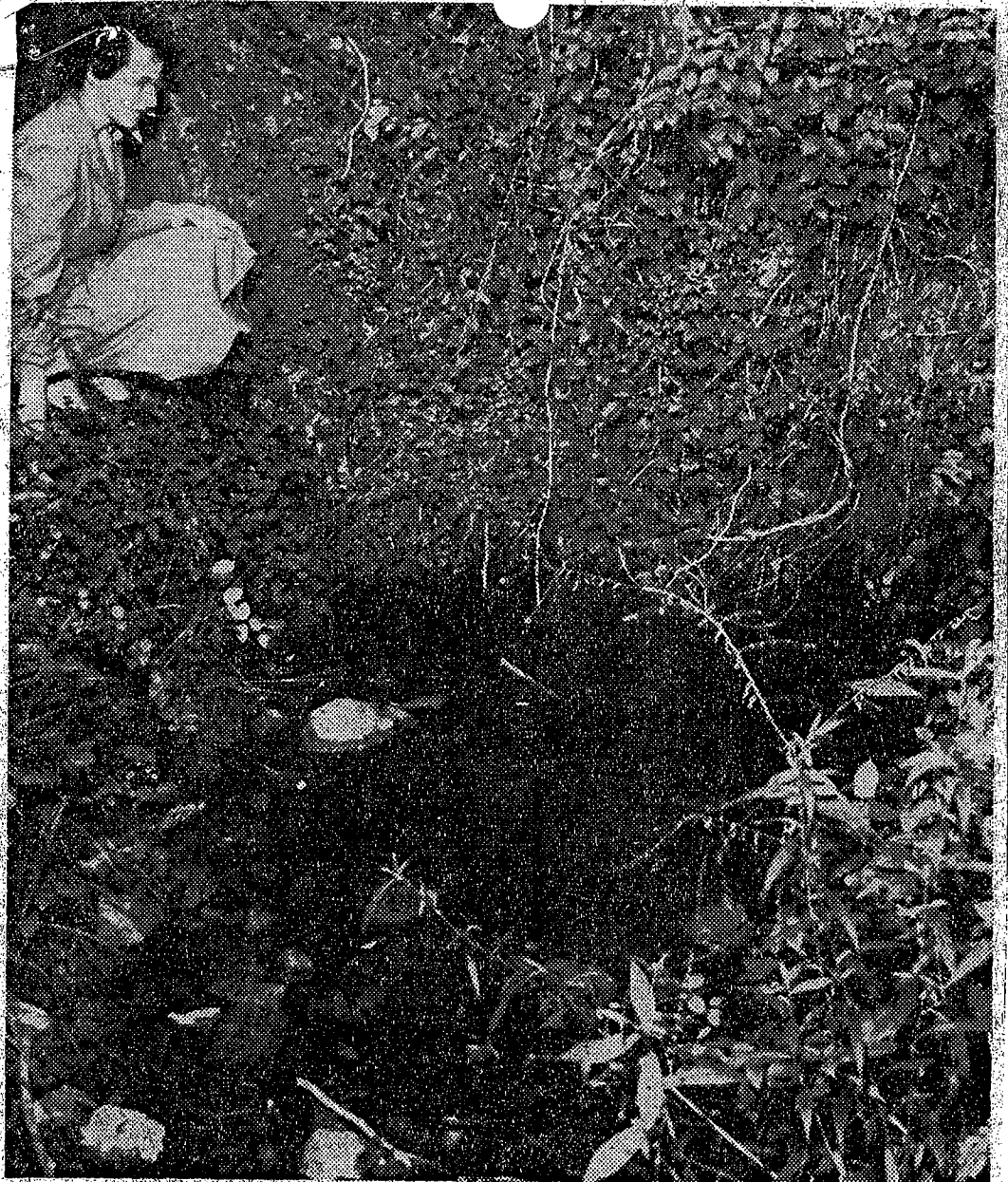
Only a few yards away, in whispering distance from the back door of the Independence Hill Baptist Church parsonage, is the last original building of the John McKnitt Alexander plantation where the Declaration was conceived and written a day before the actual signing in the Charlotte meeting house. The building itself, was the cabin of a slave named "Wynn."

Near these landmarks historians can still point out the unmarked site of the original John Knitt Alexander home, only 75 yards from the present Cashion home and on the crest of a slope leading down to the spring.

It was this home, containing the original written Declaration and other records of the May 20 convention in Charlotte that was destroyed by fire in 1800.

One direct descendant of John McKnitt Alexander, the late R. E. Henderson of Huntersville, made the one great effort to offer a landmark for the historical site several years ago by placing a

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SPRING WITH A HISTORY.—This complacent spring figures in the story of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Around it, determined Mecklenburgers gathered on May 19, 1775 and made their plans for the historic docu-

ment. Looking at the spring is Mrs. Furman S. Rivers, whose husband is pastor of historic Independence Hill Baptist Church. (Observer Staff Photo by Patterson)



The original Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence was prepared in the Alexander home and was lost when fire swept the house. (Staff Photos by Virgil Patterson)

Last Two Landmarks Of Freedom's First Pulse Appear Committed To Dust Of Past

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huge, dome-like stone in front of the property beside the highway. Plans for a patriotic organization to mount a plaque upon it never materialized.

The story, documented by experts in research and by news-

papermen including Legette Blythe, describes a meeting of leaders of the community at the spring on the Alexander plantation for discussion of growing discontent which was the outcropping of British oppression. It was during one such meeting

that John McKnitt Alexander, who became one of the signers, the Rev. Hezekiah Balch and Dr. Ephraim Brevard were chosen as members of a committee to draw up the Declaration. They retired to the Alexander home for that purpose.

The spark which had touched off a long-brewing action was said to have occurred when a rider from Lexington, Mass., arrived and told of Americans having been fired on by British troops there a month earlier.

The appointment of the Declaration committee coincided with a convention called for the following day at the one-room meeting house situated in the center of

what is now Charlotte's Independence Square. Two representatives of each militia company in the area were called as delegates.

Preparations extended far into the morning of May 20th and were climaxed with the actual signing and reading of the Declaration from the steps of the meeting house.

This chapter in American history was not challenged until some 50 years later, a quarter of a century after the John McKnitt Alexander home burned. Doubtters pointed to the lack of an original declaration.

No one claimed after the Alexander home burned that the original document was saved.

He was secretary of the convention which took place in the one-room meeting house which had no custodian and no facilities for storing records. The Declaration and other manuscripts related to the convention were placed in his care. There were copies, of course, circulated among the signers which accounts for preservation of the

original text, at least, if not the document itself.

Blythe, author of the historical drama, "Shout Freedom," admits he is nettled by any contest of the Declaration's authenticity and is armed with reams of evidence to back up a claim which he feels needs no defense.

One of the many small pieces

of proof concerns the son of one of the signers, Major John Davidson. The son was born May 20, 1782, seven years to the day after the signing occurred.

If there was no such signing, says Mr. Blythe, why was the son of Major John Davidson known from the day of his birth until his death as "Independence Ben"?



HISTORIC MEMORIES.—In photo at left, Mrs. Furman S. Rivers and Mrs. H. H. Cashion view the remains of the last original building on the John McKnitt Alexander planta-

tion, a slave cabin 200 years old. In center photo, Mrs. Rivers' daughters pose beside stone marker on which a plaque was to have been placed years ago marking the

historic spot. This movement faded when its leader died suddenly. At right, Mrs. Cashion stands on the site of the John McKnitt Alexander home which burned in 1800.



