

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.

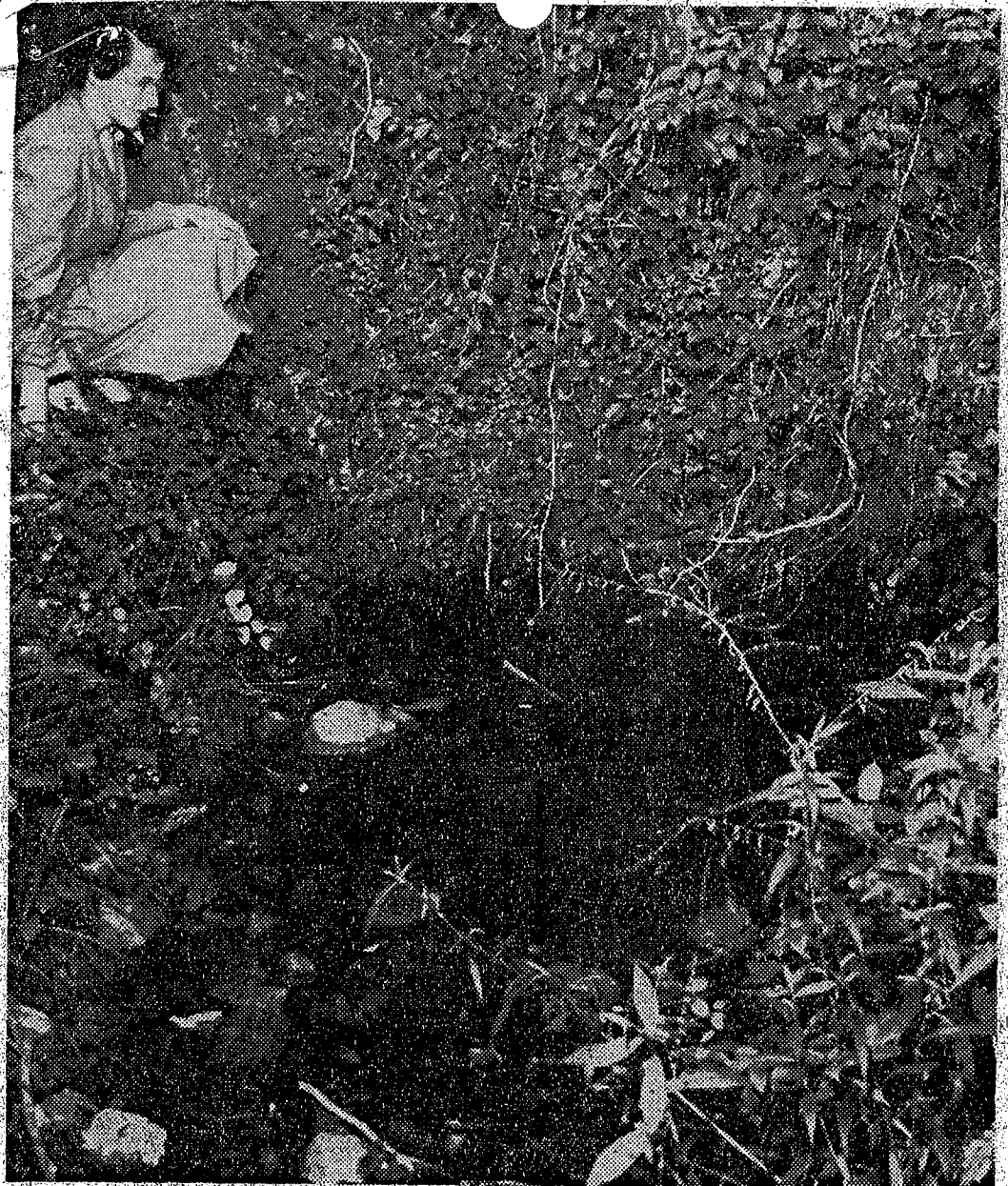
Only a few yards away, in whispering distance from the back door of the Independence Hill Baptist Church parsonage, is the last original building of the John McKnitt Alexander plantation where the Declaration was conceived and written a day before the actual signing in the Charlotte meeting house. The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

See LAST, Page 3, Col. 1



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

Continued From Page 1

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. Doubters 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

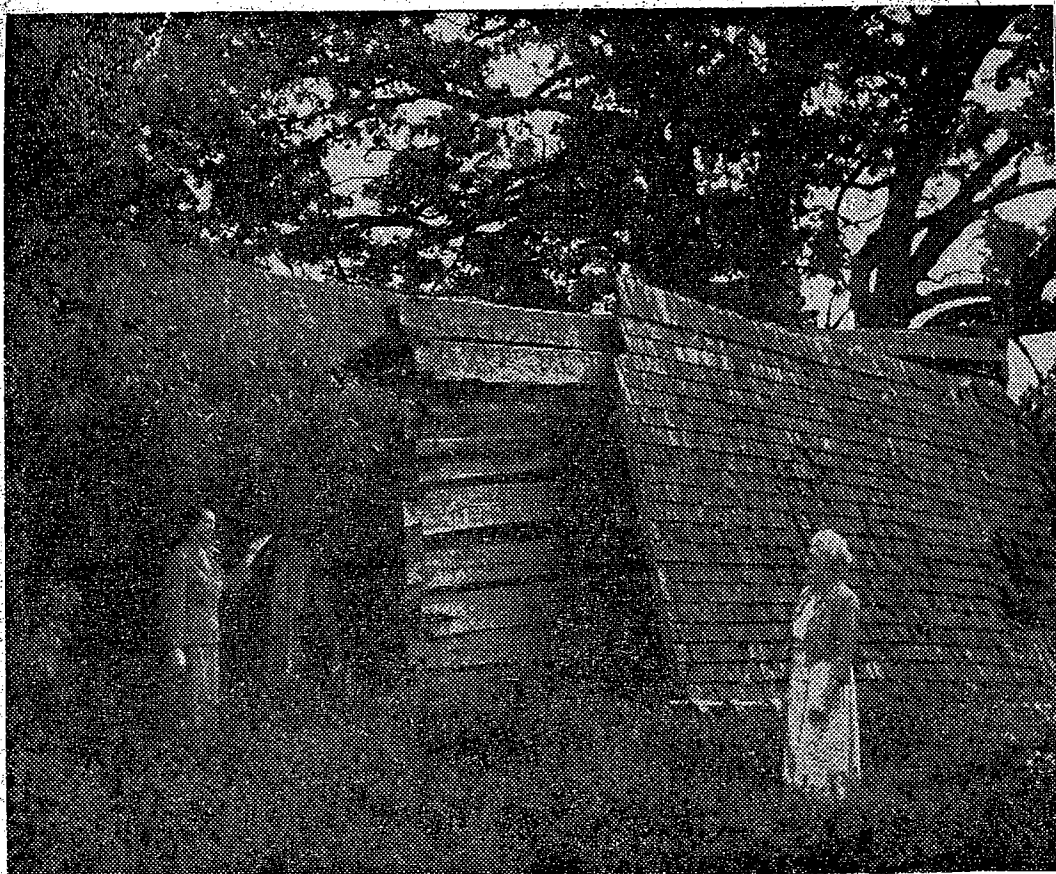
original text, at least, if not the document itself.

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"?

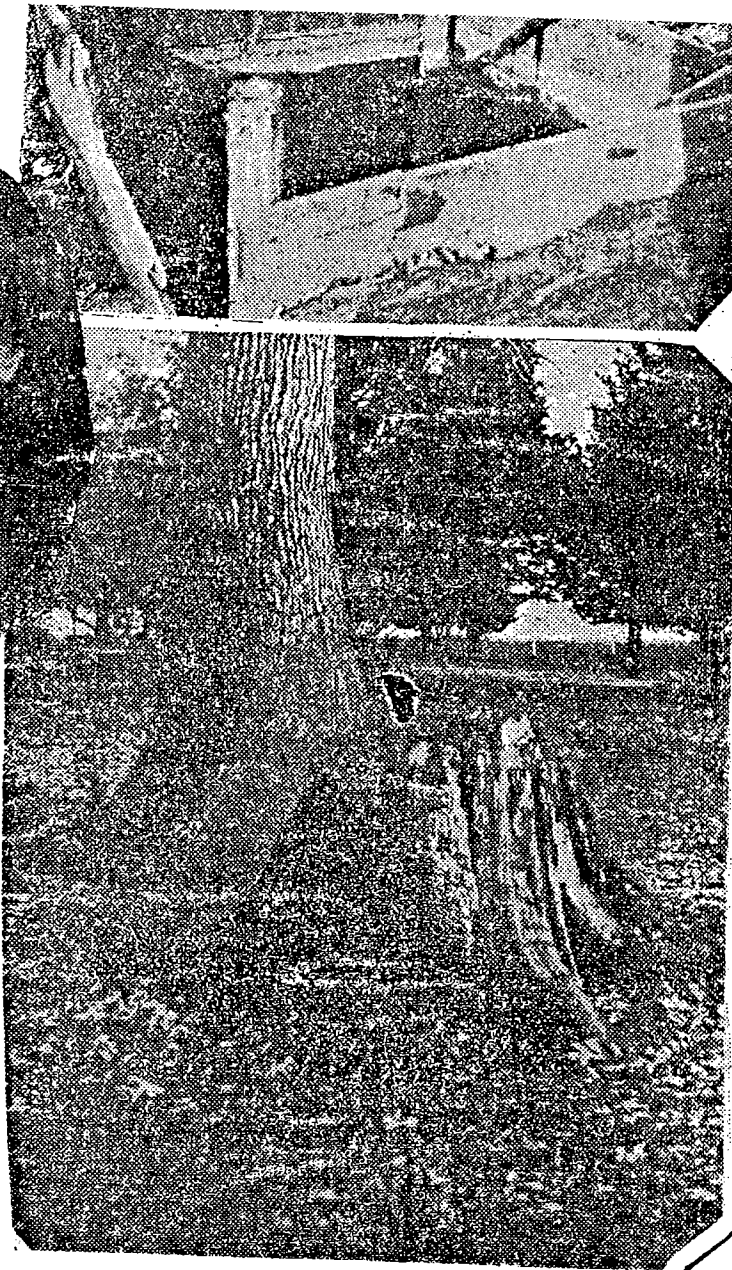


HISTORIC MEMORIES.—In photo at left, Mrs. Furman S. Rivers and Mrs. H. H. Cashion view the remains of the last original building on the John McKnitt Alexander planta-

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.





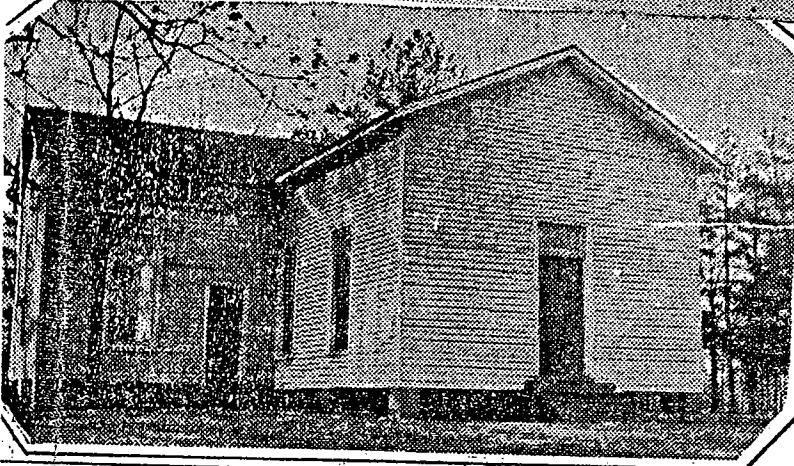
PHYSICAL APPEARANCE.

The physical appearance of John McKnitt Alexander is said to have been striking. He was of average size, with dark skin and an intelligent face. His dress was orderly, and he bore himself with unusual dignity. His outstanding trait was his good common sense. He was recognized as a leading politician in his day. But his greatest bid for fame comes through his connection with the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, and the fact

that the scheme for rousing and precipitating the revolution was evolved at the old spring and under the old tree on the land that his descendants are now preparing to commemorate with a marker.

After his house was burned in 1880, he spent the seventeen remaining years of his life with his son, William Bane Alexander, who had built a home on a part of his father's estate. During the last five years of his life he was almost blind and very feeble, but his chil-

For the intent of P. 5-15-5 from July 1796 to July 1817 1817
 1796 July Court Ballance due John McKnitt Alexander as set off by him 1796
 North Carolina
 Alexander County John McKnitt Alexander as the County Treasurer of Mecklenburg County
 and with in due going ahead that for the County of 1796 he the deponent
 was by French Graham appointed and he is pleased to be the Clerk of Capt.
 Storer's Company and that Leonard Gause did advise the deponent to testify
 Storer's Company and did pay this sum on 11/15/95 which the deponent is willing
 due the County of P. 5-15-5 which sum the deponent will make appear
 as their records will make appear therefore the deponent is willing to testify
 principal and the intent of P. 5-15-5 is partly paid from the sale of
 Leonard Gause in all P. 5-15-5 sworn to and subscribed this 29 day of July
 1796 before Edw. Giles
 J. McKnitt Alexander



dren and grandchildren loved him and cared for him. He died July 10, 1817, at the age of 84 years. He was buried in the old cemetery at Hopewell church, where his grave and those of many of his family are yet to be seen. His descendants cherish greatly his numerous personal belongings, which have been handed down to them. These include his cuff buttons, his table, his measure, his spectacles and other articles of immediate necessity to him.

GREATEST MEMORIAL.

Though it has now passed from the ownership of the Alexander family, the John McKnitt Alexander homestead will always remain the greatest memorial to him. The property has been owned in succession by Mr. Cunningham, Burwell Cashion and is now the property of H. H. Cashion. This old homestead, where "Independence," the key word of Americanism and the essence of American power, first found utterance, is a significant landmark not only in Mecklenburg county, but to the whole of North America. It is a fitting place for posterity to stop and ponder awhile over the deeds of great men who have gone before.

Descendants of John McKnitt Alexander, signer of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence and secretary of the convention that adopted it, will erect a memorial on the old home site on the Statesville road, probably near the spring and the stump above it of the tree under the shade of which the patriots assembled, and where the word "independence" was first spoken in its significance to American liberty. The spring and the stump are seen in the pictures on the left. At the right (top) is a facsimile reproduction of a report of John McKnitt Alexander as a trustee of Mecklenburg county, with his signature. The central picture is that of the church that stands across the road from the home site on ground donated for the purpose by the patriot. On the right (oval) is Miss Julia Alexander, Charlotte lawyer, and first woman to be seriously mentioned for the governorship in North Carolina, who is secretary of the association of descendants of John McKnitt Alexander.