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SOME CHIPS FROM HISTORY

MORAVIAN RECORD GENUINE

Document From the Archives Relating to the Adoption of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Was Written in Salem, About September, 1783, by Traugott Bagge—No Doubt of the "Fragment's" Having Been Part and Parcel of the Church Diary.

Written for the Observer.

In September, 1804, Mr. O. J. Lehman, of Bethania, N. C., discovered among the papers in the Moravian Archives at that place an historical sketch bearing on the title: "Bruchstück Aufsatz von den Norkommheiten während dem Revolutions-Kriege welche einen Bezug auf die Wacheu hatten bis Ende 1778."

In this paper Mr. Lehman found a pointed reference to the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, which he translated and sent to the Charlotte Observer. The paragraph and its translation are as follows: Ich kan zu Ende des 1778 sten Jahres nicht unangemerkt lassen, dass schon im Sommer selbigen Jahres, das is im May, Juny, oder July, die County Mecklenburg in Nord Carolina sich fuer so frey u. independent von England declarirte, u. solchs Einrichtung zur Verwaltung der Geseze unter sich machte, als jamaelen der Continental Congress hernach ins Gens gethan. Dieser Congress aber sahe dieses Verfahren als zu fruehzeitig an. (The underlined words are written in English script.) "I cannot leave unmentioned at the end of the 1778th year that already in the summer of this year, that is in May, June or July, the County of Mecklenburg declared itself free and independent of England, and made such arrangements for the administration of the laws among themselves, as later the Continental Congress made for all. This Congress, however, considered these proceedings premature."

The publishing of this paragraph in 1804, and the printing of the fac-simile in December, accompanied by an article from the pen of Mr. Alexander Hamilton has brought forth a number of letters inquiring as to the date and authorship of the "Fragment," which unfortunately lacks both date and signature. The question may be condensed into five, which cover the whole ground: (1) The authenticity of the Moravian Church Diaries is beyond question, but this paper, by its title, is a part of the Diary, but only a "Fragment"—can it be considered reliable? (2) Taken alone the paragraph reads like a kind of a postscript, and was certainly written after 1778, since it refers to the later proceedings of Congress;—is it a part of the original document? (3) Where was the paper written? (4) Who wrote it? (5) When was it written?

A considerable amount of time, care, and research have been necessary before these questions could be satisfactorily answered, but the following statements may now be made. THE DOCUMENT'S RELIABILITY. (1) Can it be considered reliable? It was customary to keep the daily Church Diaries as concisely as possible, and any event which required more extended notice was written separately and filed with the diaries. Memoirs, accounts of special Church services, historical sketches, etc., are classed together by Moravian Archivists under the technical name of "Bellage," the term employed by the earlier diarists, and this "Fragment" has its counterpart in a number of such papers written at different periods. Many of these "Bellages" are still between the pages of the diaries,—others have been taken out from time to time for reference, and after removal, the ascertaining of date and authorship is difficult, as practically none are signed. This arouses no surprise in the mind of any one who has worked among the records, for it was not customary to sign anything even the carefully kept minutes of the various boards give the name and signature of neither chairman nor secretary. Apparently, to their minds, the subject of which they wrote was all-potent, their own connection with it entirely secondary, but their painstaking accuracy is so marked that the careful student gives them entire confidence even while regretting that their custom did not conform to modern usage.

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH. (2) Is it a part of the original document? The "Fragment" is neither a diary, nor a mechanical compilation from a diary. It is an historical sketch, well written, clear-cut, showing from insight into the affairs of the State and nation, as well as the most intimate acquaintance with events in Wachovia. While for convenience the author divides his account into years he frequently runs forward to link

some result to its cause. For example, in reciting some of the events early in 1775, he states that the sailors on the English merchant ships in Charleston harbor, being unable to secure permission to land their cargoes simply threw them overboard, so that they could load with rice and sugar for home. Salt was one of the articles so destroyed, and he comments on the great scarcity of this prime necessity later on, and the suffering that the sailing of this salt might have averted. Paper money claims his attention in each year's history, but in speaking of the first issue without royal authority, in 1775, he notes its utter loss of value late in the war; and again, in 1777, he mentions the statement by the Assembly of 1783 that the depreciation began in '77. The introduction of later developments in the Mecklenburg paragraph is therefore quite in keeping with the rest of the paper, and its form is also paralleled by similar editions at the close of other years where items which had been omitted in the current account were added at the close. This paragraph is plainly a part of the original document, and entitled to all the credence that may be given to any part thereof.

(3) Where was it written? Although found in Bethania this paper was most certainly written by a man who lived in Salem during the Revolutionary War. Not only does the whole story center about Salem, then already the principal town of Wachovia, but events transpiring there are given with a certain intimate knowledge that can have no other explanation. The paper must have been taken to Bethania at some later date, perhaps in comparatively recent years.

(4) Who wrote it? The handwriting of the "Fragment," differs from that found in the Church Diaries of those years, and certain features in the paper itself suggested Traugott Bagge as its author. This was confirmed by a question by finding in the Land Office in Salem several Annual Statements of the store, written, dated and signed by Traugott Bagge. The script, though small, is unusually firm and distinct, and it is possible to compare two specimens, letter by letter. When this test is applied to the "Fragment," with these Annual Statements as the standard, the writing of the "Fragment" is found to be Bagge's throughout. Moreover, in the body of the "Fragment" there is given a list of the men who still remained in the town explaining the position of the Moravians in regard to the War, and their neutrality, and in this list appears the name of Traugott Bagge. Laid by the side of the signed statements already alluded to it becomes evident that this name is a genuine signature, and by the fortunate insertion of this list of the names of the author is contained in the body of the paper, although it does not appear at the end.

ITS ACCURACY GUARANTEED. This not only proves the author but guarantees the accuracy of statements in the "Fragment" for Bagge was the most able man of affairs in Wachovia during the war. At that time the store was the center of trade for all the country round, and under Bagge's able management the necessities of life were never entirely lacking for those who depended on his store to supply them. His influence as a "strong man" from financial ruin in the flood of paper currency which swept over the land; and as he went to Charleston for supplies, to Bethlehem or Newber to appear before the Assembly, or to Old River on the county courts, he was ever on the alert to watch the trend of events, and it was doubtless from the information so gained, and with the aid of his shrewd judgment that the minutes charged with content of affairs in Wachovia were able to lead their brethren safely through the very great perplexities and dangers that surrounded them. As merchant, financier, politician, as a sturdy, conscientious man, Traugott Bagge ranks among the first in the history of the State.

DATE OF THE WRITING. (5) When was it written? The question of date presents the most difficulty, but by a process of elimination it has become possible, to decide on the month and year in which it was written, and the occasion for it. A busy active man like Traugott Bagge would not sit down and cover forty pages with close German script, running forty-two lines to the page, simply for amusement, and he did not live to an age when too abundant leisure would be an incentive thereto. The latest date in the "Fragment" is contained in the reference to the Assembly of 1783, already mentioned. This Assembly met in the spring so the paper could not have been written before April, 1783. In the diary of 1783, the first pertinent entry is on April 12, when the congregation is rejoiced to hear of the signing of peace preliminaries on January 20 at Paris. On July 4, in response to a proclamation

by the Governor of North Carolina, Salem had a great peace jubilee. The programme is given in full, (see Clewell's History of Wachovia, p. 170), but no mention is made of historical papers. Under date of October 8, the secretary of the Aeltesten Conferens (the ruling board of Wachovia, at that time) make this entry: "The memoranda concerning the protection of God during the American war, which have been collected by Br. Peter, will be gone through at a special conference meeting." On November 23 the congregation hears of the signing of the Peace Treaty of September 3 and on December 11, in common with the Moravian congregations in Pennsylvania, and by order of Congress, they celebrated a "Friedens Dankfest" by special prayer in the evening service. On December 30, the Aeltesten Conference fixed the program for New Year's eve: "The children shall have their closing meeting at three o'clock; the adult congregation shall have a love-feast at eight in the evening, at ten o'clock the Memorabilia for this year and for the war shall be read, and the closing meeting shall follow at half past eleven." This is confirmed by the diary for December 31, which says of the ten o'clock service that they "remembered the many mercies which the Lord had showed them not only during the year, but throughout the eight years' war. It will be noted that Bagge's name does not appear, and the War Memorabilia, under title of "Lob und Dankopfer," read in the service and filed with the diary, is in the handwriting of John Frederick Peter, then minister in Salem. But Peter did not come to Wachovia until 1780, would therefore have no knowledge of events prior to that time, and it seems evident that when he began to collect the memoranda which he presented to the Aeltesten Conferens early in October, he turned to Bagge, who at his request wrote the "Fragment" under discussion. This explains why Bagge ended his account with December, 1779, for from then on Peter knew all the circumstances as well as he, and the closing line is otherwise inexplicable, for he stops just short of the time when Wachovia came directly in contact with the opposing forces, and passed the most perilous and most exciting days of her history. The paper was far too long to read in a one hour service, but the "Lob und Dankopfer" is strikingly like a resume of Bagge's sketch, and the supposition that it is such is strengthened by the fact that in the archives of Bethlehem, Pa., there are two copies of the "Lob und Dankopfer," one of which, evidently the rough copy, is in Peter's handwriting, while additional notes pasted on the margin, and slipped loose between the leaves, are in Bagge's handwriting. The other, incorporating many of these notes, is entirely in Peter's handwriting. That Bagge, having helped to prepare his paper, should later, without any apparent reason, take the trouble to amplify the sketch to the limits of the "Fragment," seems most improbable—that he should in September have completed his sketch, and then later assisted Peter to make a proper resume of it, is quite natural, and fully in accord with the prevailing interest in the close of the war.

Traugott Bagge died in April, 1800, but a close scrutiny of the diary from January, 1784 on, fails to reveal a single reason for the writing of such a paper. The Salem congregation had a service every evening in the week, and steadily observed anniversaries of various kinds, but Fourth of July and Third of September pass year after year, with record of the topic of the service and no reference whatever to Declaration of Independence, or signing of peace treaty, or events of the war. Summing up the evidence, therefore, it may be definitely stated that the "Fragment" containing the Mecklenburg reference, belongs to the Salem "Bellage," and was written in Salem, by Traugott Bagge, about September, 1783. ADELAIDE L. FRIES, Winston-Salem, April 13, 1906.

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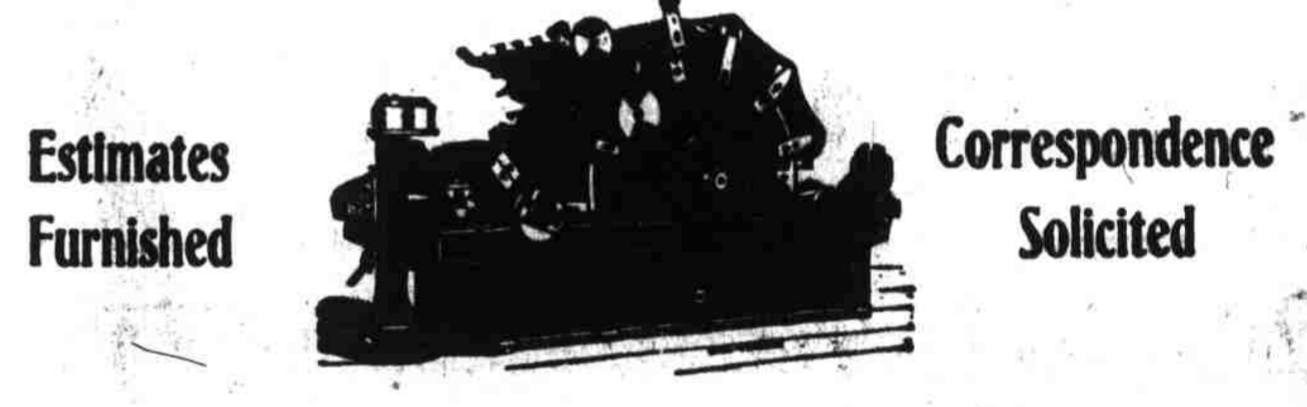
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