

Hez's House An Early Lodge

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Hezekiah Alexander, a prominent 18th-century patriotic leader and Mason in North Carolina, used his historic home as a Masonic Lodge.

It was Sunday, July 19, 1801. After solemn services in the crowded sanctuary of Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, the body of a noble leader was borne to the church cemetery on the shoulders of men who loved him. Hezekiah Alexander died in the 74th year of his remarkable life.

Graveside services were conducted in the traditions of Freemasonry befitting an honored Brother. Each member of the burial team wore his Masonic apron. So did Hez, as people called him. They were burying a Scotch-Irish blacksmith in the Mecklenburg backcountry earth he chose as his homeland. And what a blacksmith he was! He helped forge North Carolina's constitution and bill of rights, and he

helped change Charlotte from a trifling crossroads into a place where history was made and a great city grew.



The gravestone erected over Hezekiah's body was simple, especially for a man of such accomplishment. But Hezekiah knew he had a monument already in place for which he would be known for ages to come-his nearby stone house, which served both as his home and a Lodge Hall (photo below). The Lodge that met in Hezekiah's home was almost certainly Phalanx Lodge Number 7, duly constituted by the South Carolina Grand Lodge based in Charleston. A 1790 South Carolina Masonic directory lists Masonic Lodge No. 7 as "at Charlotte Town." It is known that No. 7 had been active in Charlotte for years before that. It can claim as members several signers, including Hez, of the Mecklenburg Resolutions adopted by a Mecklenburg County Convention on May 20, 1775. The declaration "wholly suspended" all laws and commissions deriving their authority from England and was, in effect, a declaration of state independence more than a year before the national Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776.

Bro. Hezekiah Alexander made it his business to hold together the Freemasons who had migrated from Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania to Mecklenburg County. During these years of Masonic association, he was also a leader in the radical movement to separate America from British rule. In fact, throughout his adult life, Hez was a dedicated and enthusiastic Freemason whose Masonic affiliation figured into his personal, professional, political, social, and religious life. He chose Masons as his associates in many endeavors, and they chose him. The quality and character they looked for when selecting public servants could be quickly found among their Brother Master Masons. In them, the qualities of integrity, morality, leadership, and skill in speaking and writing had already been established through Masonic initiation and service.

The five delegates to the Halifax Convention to write the new North Carolina constitution were all political radicals, all signers of the Mecklenburg Declaration, and all Masons: Hez, as the senior member, Waightstill Avery, Robert Irwin, John Phifer, and Zaccheus Wilson.

Arriving at Halifax on April 12, 1776, they were greeted by so many Brother Masons that it looked like a vast Lodge meeting. The Halifax Resolves they executed were sent to Joseph Hewes, John Penn, and William Hooper, who were the three North Carolina members of Congress in Philadelphia. All were Masons.



The chain of Masons continued all the way to the top of the infant United States of America. Among many others, George Washington, James Monroe, Benjamin Franklin, John Paul Jones, Paul Revere, the Marquis de Lafayette, John Hancock, Dr. Joseph Warren, and General Joseph Warren were Masons. Even two later American Presidents who came from

Mecklenburg County, Andrew Jackson and James Knox Polk, were Masons.

Being a Freemason during the Revolutionary Period involved more danger than pride. By the time Hez and his 26 brave compatriots executed the Mecklenburg Declaration, it was singularly unpopular to be a Mason, a Presbyterian, or a Mecklenburger. To be all three, as many of the Mecklenburg Declaration signers were, put their necks close to the British noose. This danger made Mecklenburg Masons cautious. Hez incised Masonic symbols into the stones of his 1774 house, but they were purposely cryptic to the non-initiated while crystal clear to knowing Masons of that time.

In like manner, ardent Masons who died in late 18th century Charlotte Town were buried with their Masonic identities cleverly hidden in the capital letter A on their headstones. Instead of conventional capital A, a V was substituted for the letter A's crossbar, forming a neat Masonic



Square and Compasses. One such monument identifies the remains of Abraham Alexander, Hez's beloved cousin, who is buried next to Hez.

There can be no question that the Masonic leadership tradition in Charlotte, North Carolina, remains strong from Hezekiah Alexander into the 21st century. John Montgomery Belk, head of the largest privately owned department store chain in America, is the popular former mayor of the city. In 1999, 232 years after Hez arrived, Belk's foundation picked up the tab for The American Freedom Bell at the Charlotte Museum of History. Bro. Belk is a 50-plus-year member of Excelsior Lodge No. 261, and he is a direct descendant of Hezekiah Alexander's father. A grand tradition lives on!

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is a member of Excelsior Lodge No. 261 in Charlotte, N.C., and of the Scottish Rite Bodies of Charlotte. While working to create a museum at the Charlotte Scottish Rite Temple, he developed the idea that the Hezekiah Alexander House was built as a Masonic meeting hall, and he believes it to be the oldest Masonic structure in America. A member of the Scottish Rite Research Society, he received in 2000 the highest Masonic award in North Carolina, the Joseph Montford Medal, for his services to Freemasonry and America.