

A RECORD
OF THE
DESCENDANTS
OF
JOHN ALEXANDER,
OF LANARKSHIRE, SCOTLAND,
AND HIS WIFE,
MARGARET GLASSON,
WHO EMIGRATED FROM COUNTY ARMAGH, IRELAND,
TO
CHESTER COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA,
A. D. 1736.

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PART I.

THE DESCENDANTS OF HUGH ALEXANDER.

It is uncertain whether Hugh Alexander, eldest son of John of Lanark, was born in Scotland, or in County Armagh, Ireland. He was probably a lad of twelve years when his father's family emigrated to America, 1736. In consequence of the burning of his house and papers by the Indians in 1754 little can be known of his early youth. In accordance with a laudable custom of early times that every boy must learn some useful trade, Hugh Alexander had learned those of a Wheelwright and Carpenter—trades especially in demand when the settlers in the wilderness must all be housed by the builder, and clothed with the domestic productions of the spinning-wheel and loom. It is known that he practised these trades while residing in West Nottingham, Chester Co., on the Octorara, though at the same time he was also engaged in agriculture. The oldest document pertaining to his business, in the possession of the writer, is a receipt for fifty bushels of wheat which he had delivered to one Henry Willis, dated March 31, 1753. The next in order of time is a receipt dated 1755, given by George Armstrong, who had surveyed a tract of land for Hugh Alexander in Sherman's Valley, and had received his fee.

We copy an old Indenture for the historical interest of its dates, names of persons and places, and to illustrate the strictness of early times. The penmanship is

marvellous, the letters being all printed with a goose-quill pen, of about the size of Pica type, and almost as neatly as could be done with types. The paper is all brown with age, but the ink is still as black and the letters as distinct, after one hundred and eighteen years, as if they were just from the writer's pen.

“This Indenture Witnesseth that William Brown, son of James Brown of New Castle County in the Province of Pennsylvania, hath put himself, & by these presents doth voluntarily & of his own free will & accord put himself Apprentice to Hugh Alexander of the Township of West Nottingham in the County of Chester in the Province aforesaid, to learn the Arts, Trades or Mysteries of a Carpenter & Wheel Wright: & after the manner of an apprentice to Serve him from the day of the date of this Indenture for and during the full term of Eighteen Months next ensuing the date hereof, & so till the said term be complete and ended. During all which term the said Apprentice his said Master faithfully shall serve, his secrets keep, his lawful commandments gladly everywhere obey. He shall do no damage to his said Master, nor see it to be done by others without giving Notice thereof to his said Master. He shall not Waste his said Master's Goods nor lend them unlawfully to any: He shall not commit fornication, Nor contract Matrimony within the said term. At cards, dice, or any other unlawful Games he shall not play whereby his said Master may be damaged; nor buy nor sell without Leave from his said Master, Nor haunt Taverns or Play-houses—but in all things behave himself as a faithful apprentice during the said term—Absenting himself neither day nor night from his Master's Service without leave from his said Master.

And he, the said Master Hugh Alexander, shall use

the utmost of his endeavor to Teach and Instruct the said Apprentice in the Trades, Arts and Mysteries of a Carpenter & Wheel Wright according to the best of his knowledge during said term of Eighteen Months; and shall procure and provide for said Apprentice Sufficient Meat, Drink, Washing, Lodging & apparel suitable for an Apprentice during the Said Term; and at the expiration shall give him one new suit of wearing apparel: and for the true performance of the said Covenants & Agreements either of the said Parties do bind themselves to the other by these Presents; In Witness whereof they have interchangeably set their hands and seals this Thirteenth Day of October, Anno Domino, One Thousand Seven hundred & Fifty Seven—1757.

WILLIAM BROWN. [seal.]

Witnesses Present,

JOHN GARTRIL,

WILLIAM ALLEN.

About this time he made with his own hands for his brother James, a secretary with drawers below, and slips and pigeon-holes above for books and papers, with hinged lid to close and lock upward, or to open downward for a writing-desk. The drawers are bordered with vine work of inlaid wood of lighter color, and the whole exhibits a degree of curious art and skill of which no workman needs be ashamed. This heirloom is still in its integrity, preserved in the old homestead of James by his grandson Napoleon B. Alexander, in Kishacoquillas Valley.

The papers referred to show that Hugh Alexander was residing in Nottingham, Chester county, in 1757, and that before that date he owned land in Tyrone township, Cumberland county (now Perry county), in Sherman's Valley. There is a reliable tradition that his

oldest child Margaret was born in Sherman's Valley, in 1754—that in her childhood her parents fled several times from Sherman's Valley back to their old home on the "Eastern Shore of Maryland" from Indian raids, and returned to find their habitation burned. The "old home" was no doubt that of Margaret's mother, East of the Susquehanna in Cecil county, Md. In 1752 he married *MARTHA EDMISTON, of Lower West Nottingham, Cecil county, Md., whose father David Edmiston was born in the year 1700 and died Nov. 2, 1771. Her

* NOTE.—From the Records of Cecil county it appears that the Edmiston Family, in 1740, owned a tract of land (980 acres) on the Octorara Creek, at the mouth of Stony Run, of which Dr. Samuel Edmiston, Martha's brother, sold 33 acres and a mill property in 1795 for £800. Also David Edmiston, brother of Martha, owned "Stony Purchase," bounded West by the Octorara and North by the Pennsylvania line. On this property Margaret Donnel Edmiston lived with her son David after the death of her husband David Edmiston, Senr. Here she was visited by her granddaughter Margaret, in 1795, when she married Andrew Mitchel.

The children of David Edmiston and Margaret Donnel were :

1. Martha, born 1733-4; married Hugh Alexander, as above.
2. Samuel, physician, born July 21, 1746; a graduate of Princeton College under Dr. Finley, and long a ruling elder in Fagg's Manor Presbyterian church; married Martha, daughter of Samuel Blair, D.D., of said church in Chester county; died January 16, 1816.
3. David, long a ruling elder in Lower West Nottingham church, Cecil county, Maryland; a bachelor of considerable estate, whose will dates 1809, and is recorded at Elkton, Maryland.
4. Margaret married Mr. Donnel and went to North Carolina.
5. Mary married John Stephenson, of Cecil county, Maryland.
6. Sarah married her cousin, John Edmiston, of Virginia.
7. Elizabeth married her cousin, Samuel Edmiston, of Virginia.
8. Hannah married a Mr. Scott, of Maryland.

The parents and David were probably buried in the old Presbyterian churchyard at Rising Sun, Maryland.

The children of Dr. Samuel Edmiston and Martha Blair were: Francisca Blair, married John Hamilton, of "Fermanagh," and Margaret Donnel, married Joseph Turner, of Chester county. Their children are: Samuel, Rebecca, Francisca Blair, James, Washington B., Joseph and Martha Mary.

This genealogy is mainly derived from Mrs. Margaret Donnel Turner, of Chester County, a widow now in her eighty-ninth year (1875).

mother's maiden name was Margaret Donnel. Martha was born in 1733-4. About 1758 Hugh Alexander established himself permanently on his farm in Sherman's Valley. His tract contained 1100 acres, now owned by five or six persons. The site of the old homestead is owned by Mr. Jacob Bixler, who has near by a grist-mill and a woollen mill.

His energy and success as a man of business are evident, from the fact that in 1777 he had acquired, besides his farm in Sherman's Valley, tracts of land in Lost Creek and Kishacoquillas Valleys, and on the North Branch of the Susquehanna.

When British oppression had roused the spirit of the American patriots to open resistance, Hugh Alexander consecrated his time, energy and life to the cause of Freedom. His eldest son John hastened with other volunteers to reinforce Washington's army on the Delaware in December of 1776, and participated in the capture of the Hessians at Trenton, on the 26th of that month, which turned the tide of victory and revived the desponding spirit of the nation. The father was in the council while the son was in the field.

The Continental Congress on the 10th of May, 1776, having recommended to the Assemblies of the several Colonies, where no governments sufficient to the exigencies of their affairs existed, to adopt such systems as in the opinion of the representatives of the people would best conduce to the happiness and safety of their constituents in particular and British America in general, the Colony of Pennsylvania took action in order as follows:

1. The Committee of Safety, of the city of Philadelphia, invited the Committees of Safety in the counties, severally to send deputies to a Conference which met in

that city June 18, 1876. Hugh Alexander was one of the deputies from Cumberland county.

This Conference of deputies issued an address to the Associators or Patriotic Volunteers of Pennsylvania, made a declaration in favor of Independence, passed resolutions for raising 6,000 troops for the "Flying Camp" of 10,000, and made arrangements for the election of delegates from the counties to a Constitutional Convention.

To show the action and influence of this Conference in securing the vote of Pennsylvania in favor of the Declaration of Independence, we make the following extract from a Historical Sketch of Middle Spring Presbyterian church in Cumberland county, by the Rev. J. Jay Pomeroy:

"On June 18, 1776, there was assembled in Carpenter's Hall a Provincial Conference, composed of delegates from the different counties of Pennsylvania. The circumstances under which they assemble are impressive. The events that have transpired since the Provincial Committee met in the same hall nearly two years before, are important. The subjects for deliberation are of the weightiest character. The conclusion reached showed courage, devotion, sacrifice, faith. It brought Pennsylvania out of a state of indecision to positive declaration on the subject of independence. Middle Spring church, to-day, can rightly claim a large share of the honor that crowns the labors of that memorable conference assembled in Carpenter's Hall one hundred years ago meeting on June 18, 1776. Look at the events that cluster around this conference. War has actually commenced. It is over a year since the first blood had been shed at Lexington and Concord. As members of the Provincial Conference came together on June 18th, it was remarked by some of the deputies, 'a

year ago yesterday the battle of Bunker Hill was fought.' The Second Continental Congress had been in session since May 10th. It was on the 7th of June that Richard Henry Lee, member of Congress from Virginia, offered the famous resolution that was the harbinger of the Declaration of Independence, which was, 'That the united Colonies are and ought to be free and independent States, and that their political connections with Great Britain is and ought to be dissolved.' This resolution was adopted by nine of the Colonies, by their representatives in Congress voting for it. Of the four remaining Colonies, New York did not vote at all, Delaware was divided, South Carolina and Pennsylvania voted against it.

"The subject of the Declaration of Independence was placed in the hands of a committee, to be drawn in due form, in which form it was to be presented to Congress for final action. This is the critical moment. Many a good cause has been crippled or killed in the committee-room. The best of causes have been defeated on a technicality. How shall the report of this committee be made, and in what spirit will it be received? What will be the vote of Pennsylvania when the Declaration is to be pronounced upon as a finality? This was the posture of affairs when the Provincial Conference assembled in Carpenter's Hall on June the 18th. These delegates, coming directly from the people, at once joined issue with the Provincial Assembly, who had placed the members they had chosen to Congress under instruction as follows:—'We strictly enjoin you, in behalf of this Colony, to desist and utterly reject any proposition, should such be made, that may cause or lead to a separation from our mother country or change in the form of government.' This resolution had its parentage in Joseph Galloway, a man of erudition and

strength, but a thorough loyalist, and Speaker of the Provincial Assembly. While he could not resist the mighty wave of public sentiment calling for a Continental Congress in 1774, he did what he could to prevent the separation from the mother country, by fastening these iron-clad instructions on the members chosen to Congress; hence Pennsylvania's negative vote on the resolution for separation on June 7th, 1776. This but incited the members of the Provincial Committee to bold and positive action. They set aside the authority of the Provincial Assembly, and in the following language declared their sense of right and convictions of duty for themselves and their constituents: 'We, the deputies of the people of Pennsylvania, assembled in full conference, * * * now in this public manner, in behalf of ourselves, and with the approbation, consent, and authority of our constituents, unani- mously declare our willingness to concur in a vote of Congress declaring the united colonies free and inde- pendent States.'

"These words are part, but true samples of the Declara- tion of Independence of the colony of Pennsylvania by the Provincial Conference, signed by its deputies, and delivered by their President to Congress. Now it is to the imperishable honor of the Middle Spring church that in this noted Conference approving of its action, and signing the address to Congress calling for the Declaration, were three of its members, John Maclay, then an elder in this church, Hugh McCormick, and Hugh Alexander, members of this church. The con- spicuous place that Middle Spring church occupied in the Valley, and her influence one hundred years ago, can be judged from this fact, that from the nine depu- ties who represented the great county of Cumberland in the important Conference of 1776, at least three

were members of her communion. They helped to smite the directing power of the colony from the hands of the royalist, Galloway, to sweep away the barrier of delay raised by the able, but hesitating Dickinson. They declared that the Scotch-Irish of Cumberland Valley had one voice, that it was for the union of the colonies in separation; they helped to place Pennsylvania right upon the record, and helped, by their personal contact and patriotic address, to lead the thirteen colonies, by their representatives, to unanimously adopt the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776. We have, perhaps, unwittingly struck precisely on the Centennial of this Conference of deputies in Philadelphia. All honor to the three wise and patriotic men who, with others, represented the patriotism of Cumberland Valley a hundred years ago. Let the names of John Maclay, *Hugh Alexander*, and Hugh McCormick abide with us as a precious heritage."

2. The Conference of Deputies having arranged for the election of delegates from all the counties to a Constitutional Convention, the business proceeded with such expedition that the election was held and the Convention met July 15th, 1776. Hugh Alexander and William Clark were the delegates from Cumberland county. This Convention sat in Carpenter's Hall, Philadelphia, and adjourned September 28th, 1776, having framed and adopted the first free constitution of Pennsylvania. With sundry additions and amendments, this instrument remains as the fundamental law of the State.

3. In accordance with the provisions of this Constitution, the members of the first free Legislature, called the "Assembly" during the Revolution, were elected by the people, and met in Carpenter's Hall, November 28th, 1776. Hugh Alexander, William Clarke and

James Brown were the first Assemblymen from Cumberland.

From the 14th of December to the 13th of January so many members were absent as military officers, or engaged in raising quotas of troops at home to hurry to the Delaware and prevent the threatened invasion of Pennsylvania by the British army, that the Assembly had not a quorum for business. Hugh Alexander first took his seat in that body on the 13th of January, 1777. On the 27th of that month he was on a committee which reported a bill on Excise, Licenses and Taxes, which passed into a law.

Disease had fastened upon him, and his labors in the Assembly were destined to a speedy termination. The House Journal of February 7th, 1777, recorded his last vote on fixing the pay of delegates to represent the State in the Continental Congress. March 22d, 1777, the Journal records £11 mileage paid "for Hugh Alexander, per William Clarke."

The following brief letter, addressed to his son, then with the troops on the Delaware, is the last production of his pen which we have seen:

"PHILADELPHIA, Jan. 17th, 1777.

"*Dear Johnney*—I take this opportunity to write you a line or two. Pray to God and trust in him. He is able to save you where bullets fly. Obey all lawful commands with cheerfulness, and take prudent care of your person. Serve out your six weeks and return home. For my sake let no man persuade you to enter any longer into the service. Time will admit of no more at present, from your affectionate father,

"HUGH ALEXANDER."

John A. to his father:

“FEBRUARY 5th, 1777.

“*Honored Father*—These I send, having an opportunity per Mr. Swansey. I have been ailing these four days. I would be glad if you would please to send by the first opportunity your horse, that I may get to the city, where I can get something nourishing. We are very sickly here. Your compliance will much oblige, your son, till death,
JOHN ALEXANDER.”

This letter of John is addressed to “Mr. Hugh Alexander, Assemblyman in Philadelphia.”

The injunction to return home when the term of his enlistment should expire was laid upon the son in view of the father’s now broken and failing health. Soon after the date of the last letter both seem to have visited the homestead in Sherman’s Valley—a short and final visit. According to a reliable tradition, handed down from his daughter Margaret, Hugh Alexander’s death occurred as follows:

On account of the precarious state of his health, his wife and family remonstrated against his return to the Assembly, but patriotic devotion prevailed, and he returned to Philadelphia, taking John along to aid him in case of need. He reached the hall just before the hour to organize, was taken suddenly worse from fatigue, and was carried to his lodgings, where he died soon after.

His family bought a spot for sixty dollars in the old Spruce street burying-ground, where they deposited his remains, and placed over them a slab or stone with appropriate inscriptions. In 1832 or 1834, his remains were removed and reinterred in some other place unknown to his posterity. “He was a tall, strong, dark-

haired man, and had no fear about him." (*Hamilton Record*)

The exact day of his death is unknown, but an existing paper, a schoolmaster's bill, dated March 30th, 1777, speaks of him as the "late Hugh Alexander." This, with dates already given, shows that he died in February or March, 1777, probably near the end of March.

The children of Hugh Alexander by his first wife, Martha Edmiston, were: Margaret, John, Mary, David and Hugh. By a second marriage to Mrs. Lettice Thompson, about 1773, he had a son, James, and a pair of twins, William and Emily. These were born December 25, 1777, nearly nine months after the death of their father.

Mrs. Lettice Thompson Alexander had been the widow of Mr. James Thompson, who, from certain old receipts bearing date 1766-68, appears to have been a paying member of the Presbyterian church in Carlisle, under the Rev. George Duffield, D.D. A widow the second time, about 1797 she removed with her children, James and Emily Alexander, to McKeesport, Allegheny county, Pa. When these children had married, she removed and lived in Butler, Butler county, Pa., with a son by her first marriage.