

CHAPTER XI.

HARFORD IN THE REVOLUTION.

THE PEOPLE OF THE NEW COUNTY ALIVE TO PUBLIC AFFAIRS—
FAVORABLE SITUATION OF COUNTY SEAT AT BUSH—GREAT MEN
PASSING ALONG—HARFORD DECLARATION OF POPULAR RIGHTS.

Several things conspired to cause the people of Harford county to be especially active and interested in public affairs at the breaking out of the Revolutionary War. In the first place, the county had been formed but a year before Lexington and Concord were fought; our people had all the zest and interest in public matters which always characterize newly organized governmental agencies, and the same feeling which made them restless under the removal of their county seat and led to the formation of the new county, was manifest in the spirit that actuated them under the wrongs inflicted by the mother country. One of the first duties imposed upon the new county was to send delegates to the Provincial Convention at Annapolis, which protested against the Stamp Act. The situation of the county seat at Harford Town, or Bush, on the route to and from Philadelphia and New York, the early national capitals, was particularly favorable to our ancestors keeping thoroughly in touch with the spirit of the times. There were several hotels at Bush at the time of which we write, and when our people in those

days would repair to the county seat on court business, or whatever might be their errand, it was an usual occurrence for them to meet with and enjoy the acquaintance of such men as Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Randolph, Patrick Henry, the Lees and other great men of those days who lived in the South and who would pass that way in their journeys to and from the large cities of the North.

It is not too much to assume that something of the same spirit and feeling that actuated Washington, who commanded our armies, and Jefferson, who wrote the Declaration of Independence, and Madison, the father of the Constitution, and the other prominent men who were in the habit of stopping at Bush, was infused into our own people, and to the extent of their association with these great men, which, as indicated, was considerable, to the same extent our ancestors had the advantage in public information, knowledge and public spirit over those sections not so favorably situated. As we look back to that distant day, we can see the village hostelry filled with jurors, witnesses, judges and others of our people who had repaired to the county seat on public business. The great open fireplace would be blazing with the cordwood logs; kindly feeling and good cheer would prevail; Mr. Jeremiah Sheredine, Mr. William Webb and Mr. Thomas Bond, of the lords justices, would discuss with Mr. William Smithson the opening of a new road from the Hickory Fork to Winter's Run and debate the probable cost; in another part of the room Mr. Alexander Lawson, the clerk of the court, would be engaged in conversation with Mr. Aquila Hall and Mr. Aquila Paca, who lived nearby and had dropped in for a social hour; a

slight commotion would be heard outside and, as is the custom in the country, all would go to discover the cause. Just coming over the brow of the hill from Bynum's run two horsemen would appear, the dress, carriage, horses and tout ensemble of the riders would clearly indicate that they were gentlemen of distinction; following them would be two negro servants equally well mounted; the livery of the servants and their perfect manners indicating that they were of the quality as well as their masters; some one of the better acquainted would advance and address the elder traveler with "Colonel Washington, how do you do?" The gentleman accosted would reply, "Mr. Paca, I am glad to see you; allow me to present to you my friend, Mr. Jefferson, of Virginia," and then the entire assemblage would be presented to the great men and would for the rest of the evening enjoy the conversation of one or both of them. The politics of the day would be discussed and the latest views of the leading men of the times would be freely given to the guests thus gathered together. We can imagine Mr. Jefferson, with his tall, spare form, red face and hair, advising the fathers of our county met at the Bush tavern to organize and send delegates to the Annapolis Convention and the Continental Congress. We can see him standing in front of the open fire, exhorting his auditors to organize and pass resolutions expressing their views; and to scenes such as these were the representative people of the county so accustomed that when the hour arrived they were ready, active and courageous.

This association, with the leading men of the colonies, bore fruit in the passage of a resolution by the

committee of Harford county on the 22nd day of March, 1775, which may properly be called the first Declaration of Independence made by any representative body in America. The committee of Harford county was not in any sense a mass-meeting. Its members were duly elected by the ten thousand white people of the county; the thirty-four names signed to the resolution were the leading men of the new county, and their descendants are justly proud of this signal evidence of the courage and patriotism of their ancestors. The terms of the resolution, even without the aid of the knowledge of the resolves and the association of the Continental Congress and the resolves of the Provincial Convention, indicate beyond a doubt that the signers realized that they were not dealing in mere glittering generalities, but that it was necessary for them to hang together, so that they might thereby avoid the unpleasant alternative of hanging separately.

When it was considered necessary to close the resolution with these words, "We do most solemnly pledge ourselves to each other, and to our country, and engage ourselves by every tie held sacred among mankind, to perform the same at the risque of our lives and fortunes," we may know that the signers had a full realization of the meaning of their famous declaration and of the work in which they were about to engage.

The following is the language of the declaration:

"We, the Committee of Harford County, having most seriously and maturely considered the Resolves and Association of the Continental Congress and the Resolves of the Provincial Convention, do most heartily approve of the same, and as we esteem ourselves

in a more particular manner intrusted by our Constituents to see them carried into Execution, we do most solemnly pledge ourselves to each other, and to our country, and engage ourselves by every tie held sacred among mankind, to perform the same at the risque of our lives and fortunes.

“Aquila Hall, Jos. Carvel Hall, Geo. Patterson, Wm. Morgan, Frans. Holland, Saml. Caldwell, Aquila Paca, James Lytle, Aquila Hall, Jr., Robt. Morgan, Robt. Lemmon, Thos. Brice, Thos. Johnson, Alex. Rigdon, Edward Ward, Abm. Whitaker, Charles Anderson, William Fisher, Jr., Richd. Dallam, John Durham, James McComas, William Bradford, Sen., Wm. Smithson, John Donohuy, John Patrick, Daniel Scott, Benj. Bradford Norris, James Harris, Edward Prall, Greenberry Dorsey, John Archer, W. Smithe, W. Webb, John Taylor.”

In this declaration is foreshadowed Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill and Long Island, Trenton, Monmouth and Princeton, and the final triumph at Yorktown.

When we consider that the Resolves of the Continental Congress were the Bill of Rights defining the privileges of English speaking people everywhere, and that the signers to the Bush declaration declared their intention to see them carried into execution at the risk of their lives and fortunes, we may consider that except in detail this declaration breathed the same spirit as Jefferson's instrument of more than a year later.

A revolution differs from a rebellion only in that the former is attended with success. And had the Revolution of 1776 failed, and had the army of Washington been overthrown, it is not too much to suppose

that the good people of our county, who rejoice in their descent from these patriots whose names are signed to the Bush declaration, would have as part of their inheritance the bitter knowledge of the execution of an ancestor for treason.

The same quality of the Englishman that put Harrison to death and dug up the dead body of Cromwell and hung it in chains after it had been in the grave for years, would have made itself manifest at that later day had the British government triumphed in their effort to enslave the American colonies. The date of this declaration is but two days after the celebrated speech of Patrick Henry, in Virginia, when he exclaimed: "The war is inevitable. Gentlemen may cry peace, peace, but there is no peace. The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the crash of resounding arms. What would you have? Is life so dear or peace so sweet to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery. I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death."

The fires were beginning to be kindled and liberty or death was the prevailing sentiment. And so the representatives of the county signing this declaration at Bush sixteen months before the declaration at Philadelphia on July 4, 1776, was a cry for liberty, from an obscure community, if you please, but it breathed the same patriotic spirit and bore the same central thought as the great instrument itself.

Let no one belittle this act of our forefathers, or take one laurel from the brow of those great and good men of our county, who at the risk of their lives and their

fortunes were the first to give utterance to such sentiments, looking to national freedom and independence. They have all long ago passed over the dark river and joined the silent majority, and of them we can say in the ritual of the church, to the Author of every good and perfect gift, "we bless Thy holy name for all Thy servants departed this life in Thy faith and fear," and in particular "we give Thee hearty thanks for the good example of these, Thy servants, who having finished their course in faith do now rest from their labors."

The surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown was the final overthrow of English supremacy. With the success of the American arms came the necessity for a more perfect union. The first government was under the Articles of Confederation, which proved inadequate, and so the constitution was formed and adopted, and with the inauguration of Washington the new government went into operation in all its branches.