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## **HISTORY GROUPS OFFER DIGITAL CELEBRATIONS TO MARK 245<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE MECKDEC**

**CHARLOTTE, N.C., May 8, 2020** – Local history groups will offer virtual activities starting on May 18 to honor Charlotte’s most legendary moment, the signing of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, or MeckDec, on May 20, 1775. Some historians say the MeckDec was America’s original declaration of independence.

In a typical year, MeckDec celebrations hosted by The May 20<sup>th</sup> Society and The Charlotte Museum of History include a public commemoration in Uptown and other live events, such as a trivia night and dinner. This year events will be digital due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All events will be available on the museum’s digital learning page, [charlottemuseum.org/digital](http://charlottemuseum.org/digital).

2020 MeckDec Commemorations include:

- Monday, May 18 – The museum will release an **Unexpected Homeschoolers video featuring Scott Syfert, author of “The First American Declaration of Independence? The Disputed History of the Mecklenburg Declaration of May 20, 1775.”** Together with historians from The Charlotte Museum of History, Syfert will discuss the legend of the MeckDec and its significance in North Carolina history.
- Tuesday, May 19 – The museum will release a **video premiere of a new exhibit featuring works by Chas Fagan, sculptor of The Spirit of**



Mecklenburg, the larger-than-life bronze sculpture of Captain James Jack located on the Little Sugar Creek Greenway. The exhibit includes paintings and sculptures that Fagan created as studies for the final Captain Jack greenway sculpture, depicting Jack's ride to Philadelphia to deliver the MeckDec to the first Continental Congress. Fagan is based in Charlotte and is known for his oil portraits of U.S. presidents. He also painted the official canonization image of Mother Teresa, and he created the bronze sculpture of President Ronald Reagan that is displayed in the U.S. Capitol's rotunda. Fagan's exhibit originally was set to debut in March, but then stay-at-home orders forced the museum to close to visitors.

- Wednesday, May 20 – MeckDec Day
  - **11 a.m. – The museum will live stream a reading of the MeckDec by local historian Robert Ryals.** Ryals will interpret a first-person, fictionalized account of the events leading up to the MeckDec, and then he will declare it to notify all citizens of Mecklenburg County that they are now a “free and independent people,” divorced from the political bonds that tied them to England.
  - **Noon – The museum will host a special MeckDec edition of its new Lunch & Learn series on Zoom, featuring author Scott Syfert and host of the Charlotte Readers Podcast, Landis Wade.** Scott and Landis will preview their full-length podcast and talk about Scott's research into the legendary MeckDec. The Lunch & Learn is free. To receive the Zoom link, register at [charlottemuseum.org/events](https://charlottemuseum.org/events).



- Thursday, May 21 – The museum will premiere **a digital video featuring a historic artifact it recently acquired for the museum collection – a document that contains the signature “Capt Jack” on the back.** The document is from 1776-1777 and provides an accounting of rations received by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the North Carolina Volunteers, which fought against the British during the American Revolution. Was this Captain James Jack the messenger? Did he work to get supplies to Patriot soldiers? Learn more about this incredible piece of history, donated to the museum by the Lyerly family.
- Friday, May 22 – The museum will premiere **a new digital learning video, the Signers Cemetery tour.** It will explore the graves of the signers of the Mecklenburg Declaration and learn more about their lives beyond that fateful day.

#### **About the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence**

The history of the MeckDec began soon after news of the battles of Lexington and Concord arrived in Charlotte Town (present-day Charlotte). The following day, on May 20, 1775, prominent civic leaders adopted The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence (MeckDec) – possibly the first declaration of independence in America. The MeckDec itself is steeped in mystery and controversy. There are no records of its publication before 1819, and many historians doubt it ever existed. But it is memorialized on North Carolina’s state flag and its state seal, where the date May 20, 1775, appears. There is no doubt about the existence of the MeckDec’s companion document, the Mecklenburg Resolves. A committee of local militia members adopted these “resolves,” or resolutions, and signed them on May 31, 1775. They were published in their entirety less than a month later in *The South Carolina Gazette*. They declared all royal authority suspended and laid out a plan for how Mecklenburg County would govern itself.

#### **About The May 20<sup>th</sup> Society**

The Society promotes Charlotte’s rich history of being the first American colony to declare independence from Great Britain. On May 20, 1775, more than two dozen colonial civic leaders



from Mecklenburg County approved and unanimously adopted the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. In honor of this historic occasion, The May 20<sup>th</sup> Society hosts several ceremonial events including live re-enactments, a speaker series featuring renowned historians, bike ride, dinners and annual noon commemoration in Uptown. For more information, visit [www.May20thSociety.org](http://www.May20thSociety.org).

### **About The Charlotte Museum of History**

The Charlotte Museum of History engages a broad audience in the history of the Charlotte region through the stories of its people, places and events to promote dialogue and historical perspective. The museum is the steward of the Hezekiah Alexander House (ca. 1774) and home site, a site listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the oldest home in Mecklenburg County. To learn more, visit [charlottemuseum.org](http://charlottemuseum.org) and follow the museum on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

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