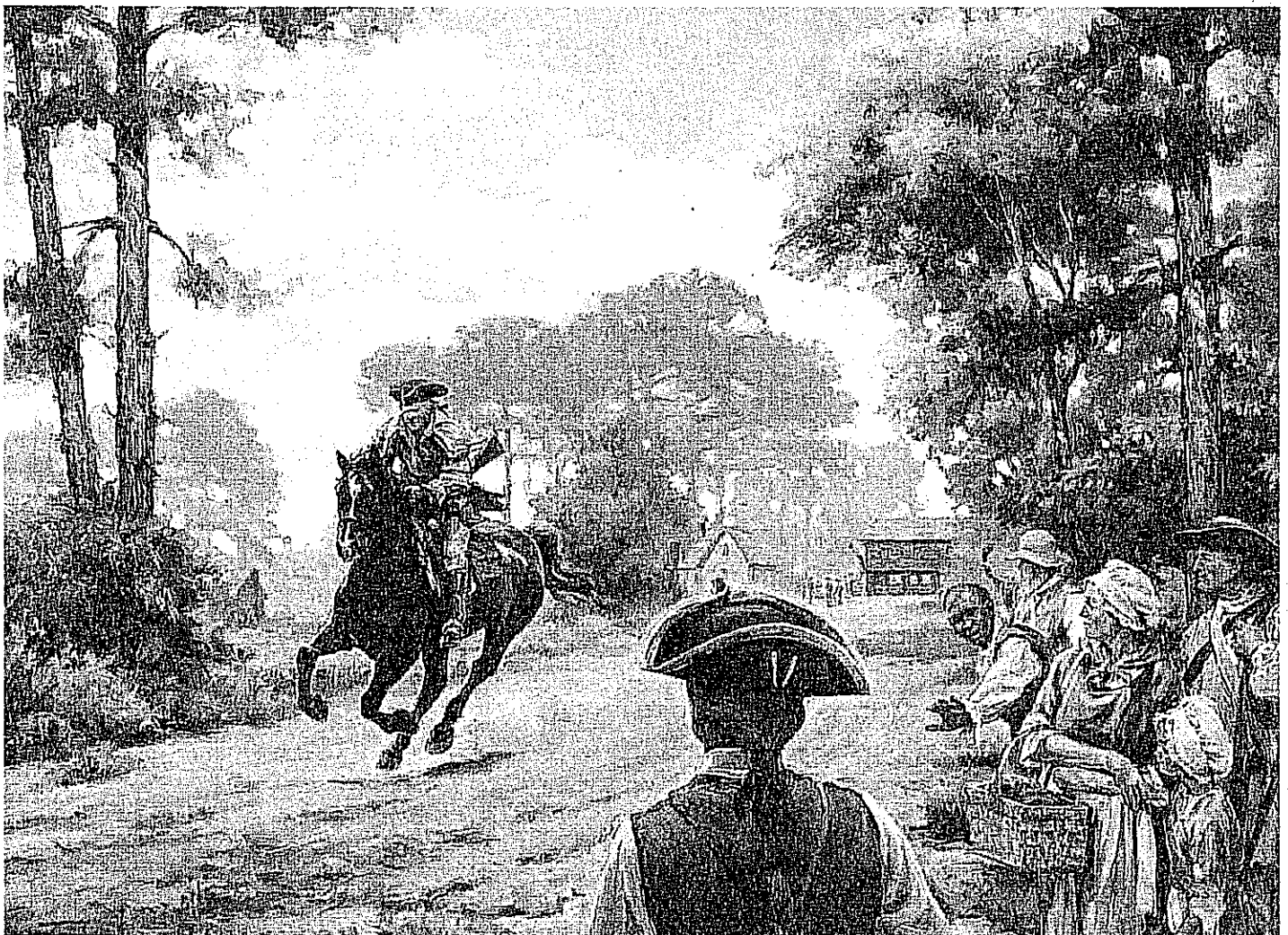
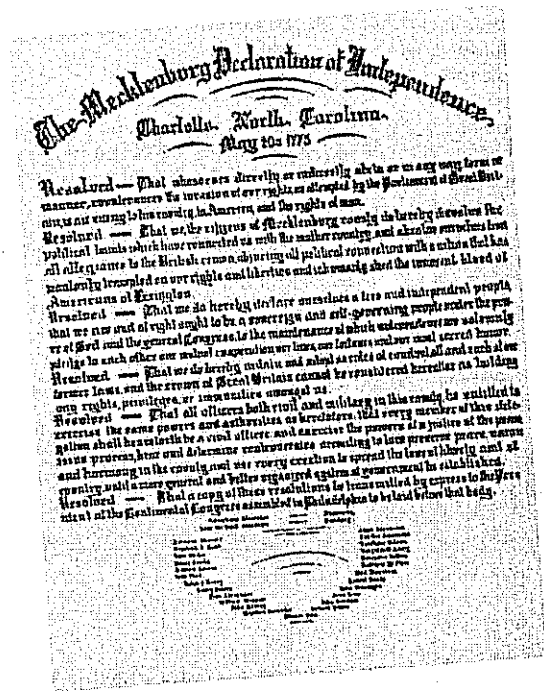


Defending the MecDec

233 years ago, Mecklenburg settlers
signed a groundbreaking Declaration
of Independence ... right?



MAY 20TH SOCIETY

This painting depicts Captain James Jack in 1775, riding from Charlottetowne (now Charlotte) to Philadelphia to deliver the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence to the Continental Congress.

Hey, did you know buttoned-down Mecklenburg was actually settled by a bunch of revolutionaries? A year before Thomas Jefferson wrote the U.S. Declaration of Independence, a group of Mecklenburg's forefathers broke with England. May 20 marks the 233rd anniversary of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence.

But there's some skepticism over whether "MecDec" was real or revisionist history.

For answers, I tapped Charles Jonas, 37, chairman of the May 20th Society – a group he cofounded in 2003 to honor MecDec.

His group has several hundred members and this year's chairmen of the board are

Lowe's Motor Speedway President Humpy Wheeler and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Superintendent Peter Gorman.

Jonas' e-mailed responses were edited for brevity.

Q. What's the story of MecDec?

On May 19, 1775, the citizens of Charlotte-towne (as it was called at the time) received news of the bloody and unprovoked British attack on fellow colonists at Concord and Lex-

ington. Charlottetowne was made up of rebellious Scots-Irish who had risked everything to leave their native lands for a new life in the New World, which they found in the farming community of the Piedmont. They were Presbyterian and vehemently anti-British. After learning of this attack in Massachusetts, they met late into the night and determined to separate the bonds of

the British empire. Colonel Thomas Polk read the document from the courthouse steps in the middle of what is now Trade and Tryon early on the morning of May 20, 1775. It was the country's first declaration of independence.

Got a question?
abaldwin@
charlotte
observer.com

Amy Baldwin



Q. Don't some people doubt that it happened or that it was created after the fact?

The controversy arose because the original documents and notes of the famous meeting were lost to a house fire in 1880. Still, there is vast evidence that the story is true and the MecDec existed.



Jonas

In a letter dated June 30, 1775, North Carolina Royal Governor Josiah Martin wrote: "The Resolves of the Committee of Mecklenburg surpass all the horrid and treasonable publications that the inflammatory spirits of this Continent have yet produced."

MecDec deniers point to the fact that there is no original copy left. The original copy of the Emancipation Proclamation was also lost to a fire; do we deny that happened?

Subsequent events also support the event itself. May 20, 1775, is on the state flag and state seal. John Adams wrote on reading a copy of the MecDec: "The genuine sense of America at that moment was never expressed so well before, nor since."

Q. Why are you so interested in MecDec?

This is our story. Charlotte's story. It does not matter if your family settled here in 1770 or 2008, this is our history. Charlotte has always been first and led the way. We believe that the MecDec is a symbol of that attitude and that success.

233rd anniversary events

Saturday:

■ Captain Jack's Commemorative Bike Ride, 9 a.m. at Waxhaw Elementary School. Afterward, there will be lunch and prizes. Cost: \$20. Address: 1101 Old Providence Road.

More info: www.may20thsociety.org.

■ The Charlotte Museum of History picnic, featuring barbecue, colonial music and a MecDec reading, 4 to 9 p.m. Cost: \$10 per adult, \$5 per child. Free museum admission all day.

Address: 3500 Shamrock Drive. More info: www.charlottemuseum.org.

May 20:

■ 11:45 a.m.: Re-enactors will read the MecDec at Trade and Tryon streets. Free.

■ 7:30 p.m.: Documentary filmmaker and historian Ken Burns will speak at the McGlohon Theatre. His films include "Jazz" (2001) and "The War" (2007). Tickets: \$30 each, available at CarolinaTIX.org. Reception prior to speech. Info: www.may20thsociety.org.