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Wednesday, May. 05, 2010

The 'Spirit of Mecklenburg' lives next door

Bill Calvert portrays historic figure from nation's past

June K. Noe

The "Spirit of Mecklenburg" statue of Capt. James Jack will be unveiled by the May 20th Society at the corner of Fourth Street and Kings Drive in uptown Charlotte on May 20 at 11:30 a.m.

But you don't have to be a history buff to feel like you know the man riding the horse: He's the guy next door for some Raeburn residents.

Bill Calvert portrays Capt. James Jack, Charlotte's own rebel rouser and hero.

"The Spirit of Mecklenburg" was created by Chas Fagan, a nationally known sculptor, painter and designer whose sculpture of Ronald Reagan recently was unveiled at the Capitol building in Washington, D.C.

Calvert, 57 - a horse trainer and owner of Calvert Training Stables - was exactly the image Fagan was looking for when they met in 2003 at Brigadoon Farm.

"Chas Fagan needed someone to ride a horse," Calvert said. Fagan, as well as other artists, was submitting a plan and bid to do the statue.

"I kind of fell into the job," Calvert said. Calvert stepped in to be the model, and eventually actor, in the Capt. James Jack re-enactments.

"The horse I ride is 'Trixie,'" he said. "I broke her when she was 3. She is 14 now and a natural for the job."

Trixie boards at Calvert Training Stables; her owner is Joni Stanley.

In March 2007, Calvert portrayed Capt. Jack at a private historic home in the SouthPark area to raise money for the statue. Emulsion Arts filmed a four-minute documentary of Capt. Jack's ride, with re-enactors at Latta Plantation. Calvert also participates in the May 20th Society Trade & Tryon re-enactments and, last year, as Capt. Jack, he led the 63rd Annual Carolinas' Thanksgiving Day Parade.

"I enjoy helping out and being part of it," said Calvert. "I like history, but the main reason I do it is the people."

If you are new to the area, you may be wondering who is Capt. James Jack.

Take a look at the North Carolina state flag. Notice there are two dates: The one on top is May

Want to go?

The unveiling of the "Spirit of Mecklenburg" Sculpture will kick off the celebration of the 235th anniversary of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. The event is free and open to the public. Activities will include military and colonial re-enactors, historical readings, horses, military parades, modern and urban slam poetry and more. 11:30 a.m. May 20, on the corner of 4th Street and Kings Drive.

If you would like to learn more about Captain James Jack and North Carolina's fight for freedom, view the four-minute documentary at www.may20thsociety.org.

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20, 1775. On this date, soon after news of the bloody Battle of Lexington (and Concord) reached Mecklenburg County, two dozen delegates met in the Mecklenburg County Courthouse to declare independence from Britain. They unanimously adopted the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence (MecDec). At noon on May 20, the MecDec was read from the steps of the courthouse to several thousand citizens as the first declaration of independence by any civic body in the British colonies.

A Committee of Safety in Charlotte then adopted the Mecklenburg Resolves, designed to set forth how the county was to be governed.

When the delegates were looking for a courier to carry the MecDec resolutions and laws to Philadelphia, James Jack, a young man whose father owned a local tavern, volunteered. It was a dangerous mission that covered 1,100 miles and took one month to complete.

When he reached Philadelphia, Jack was told that the delegates to the Second Continental Congress declared the MecDec premature. They sent Jack back to Charlotte with a letter of support but did not bring the Mecklenburg Declaration or Mecklenburg Resolves before the Congress.

The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence was first published April 30, 1819, in an article written by Dr. Joseph McKnitt Alexander in the Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette, a newspaper based in Raleigh.

The MecDec is one of the nation's most controversial documents. It has never been authenticated - the original was destroyed in a fire in 1800 - but according to Alexander, the article was written from a "true copy" of the papers left to him by his father.

This year, as in every year since 1822, the MecDec is celebrated in uptown Charlotte. The MecDec celebration has hosted four former U.S. presidents (Taft, Wilson, Eisenhower and Ford), military generals, a first lady and countless dignitaries.

June K. Noe is a freelance writer who lives in the Raeburn/Kensington area. Have a story idea for June? E-mail her at jknoe@carolina.rr.com.

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[hornet75](#) wrote on 05/05/2010 12:47:17 PM:

I'm really looking forward to the Captain Jack statue. Despite the controversy over Mec Dec, no one has ever questioned the Captain Jack part of the story. His trip by horseback to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia was well established by a wide variety of contemporary witnesses, including Captain Jack himself. The only question concerns which document he delivered: Was it Mec Dec, the Mecklenburg Resolves, or both? The Mecklenburg Resolves, well respected by historians, completely suspended British rule in

Mecklenburg County, but did leave open the possibility of reconciliation. In either event, Captain Jack's trip was equally bold and dangerous and he is well deserving of a statue. If nothing else, this statue should serve as a reminder that this place has been around for a long time and that a lot of interesting things were going on around here during the early days of our country.

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