



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

May 20, 2025

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Foundation Joe Morris

Programs Luther Moore



Dr. Tony Zeiss, President Emeritus, CPCC



Mr. Dan Nance, Historical Artisan

Meck Dec Day Celebration – May 20th, 2025: Dr. Tony Zeiss and Dan Nance

by **Bill Bartee**

The meeting of Charlotte Rotary began with a resounding “Hip, Hip, Huzzah,” brought by our introductory speaker, Charlotte Rotary Club’s past president, **Dr. Tony Zeiss**. The reason? The club’s meeting date, May 20th, is the semiquincentennial (or the 250th anniversary) of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, which occurred in 1775.

Zeiss, wearing a Mecklenburg SAR color guard uniform, championed the founders of the May 20th Society for their work and advocacy on behalf of Mecklenburg’s place in history. This current grouping of citizens champion the love of history and celebrate the brave people who risked their lives, property, and citizenship to refute allegiance to the Crown.

Zeiss continued with the meeting of educated leaders in this area that assembled on May 19th, 1775. There were 27 Committee members present in the Courthouse. The founder of Charlotte and the leader of the meeting was Thomas Polk. Abraham Alexander chaired the meeting, with Dr. Ephraim Brevard as the key author and John McKnitt Alexander acting as the Secretary. They were upset with the Battle of Lexington and Concord that occurred in Massachusetts the previous month. Lexington and Concord were the first major battles of the Revolution and ignited the Carolina frontier as a “hornet’s nest of rebellion.” He continued that the men quickly agreed on their want to separate from the Crown but spent the night debating the wording.

Although the originals from the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence are not thought to have survived, there are countless documents and testimony to their existence. In fact, the date is present on the North Carolina state flag, Presidents visited, parades occurred, and May 20 was a vacation day in North Carolina schools until the early 1970s.

Then the well-known historical artist, Dan Nance, took the stage in the Charlotte Ballroom of the Fairfield Suites and Inn, with the captivating phrase, “I paint history. Telling stories about the past with windows in time.”

Nance told about learning history growing up in the Carolinas (first in Columbia, SC, then graduating from South Meck High School in Charlotte). He had inspiration from the movies with Indiana Jones and Star Wars and decided to become “the next Lucas, Spielberg, James Cameron” by breaking into the movie business. However, the movie GLORY, starring Denzel Washington and Matthew Broderick, propelled him into his interest in the Civil War.

After not succeeding in the movie industry, Nance described returning to his love of art. He and his family purchased a home in southern Mecklenburg County, near the South Carolina border, so he could focus on painting. The property on which he built a home was a beautiful area, but there were many lean years. It was then that he discovered that his home, where he was creating area historical paintings, was the Great Wagon Road. It was this road that was used throughout history by native people, armies, traders, and travelers from the Carolinas up the eastern seaboard to Pennsylvania. It is the Road that Captain James Jack used to carry the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence to Philadelphia from Charlotte (and now includes parts of South Blvd, South Tryon, and NC Highway 49 and more).

This helped reignite Nance (and his family) in art. In fact, his children have put their fingerprints into his work.

Now, after 30+ years of working in art, Nance is one of the most esteemed historical artists in the United States. His work covers many different genres, cultures, and topics. It includes some of our area's most important occurrences like the Battle of Charlotte, the Reading of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, and Cowan’s Ford. However, he also has works that include Native American people, world history, World War II, and the largest collection of battlefield dioramas in the country.

He spoke about his level of research from what people wore, lighting, and weaponry, to how horses react and fall when in battle. This brought added meaning and appreciation to his opening statement of “allowing windows of time.”

Dan Nance shared that he recently reached a milestone by opening the Dan Nance Historical Art Gallery. The Gallery is located in the SouthPark area of Charlotte, at 6601 Carnegie Road, inside the Pavilion near the Roosters Wood Fired Grill.

Both speakers created a level of excitement that replicated the celebration that was happening a few blocks away during Charlotte’s 250th Meck Dec Celebration. That celebration included a reenactment of city founder, Thomas Polk’s, first reading of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence in 1775.

A recording of the meeting can be found here:

This one is without the slides: <https://vimeo.com/1086516729>

This one is with the slides: <https://vimeo.com/1086469249>

The program starts at 11 minutes and 40 seconds.