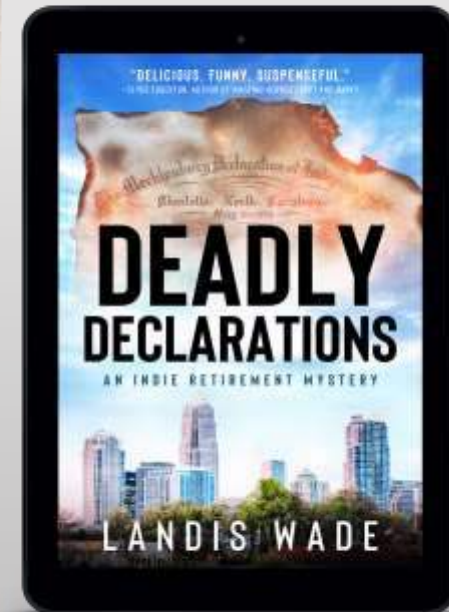
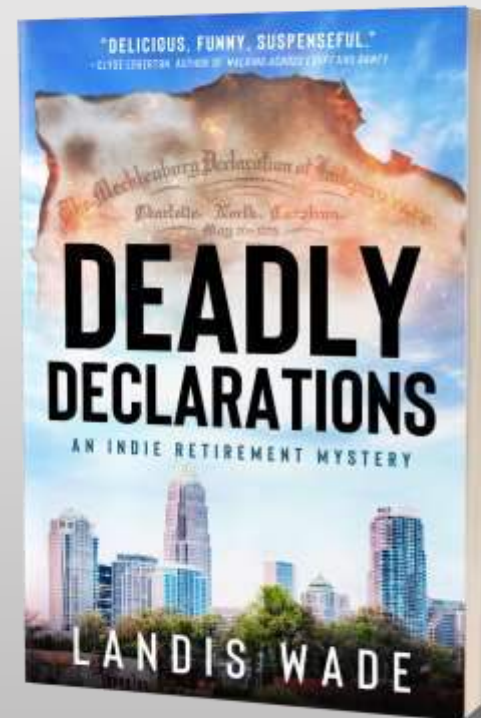


# The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence

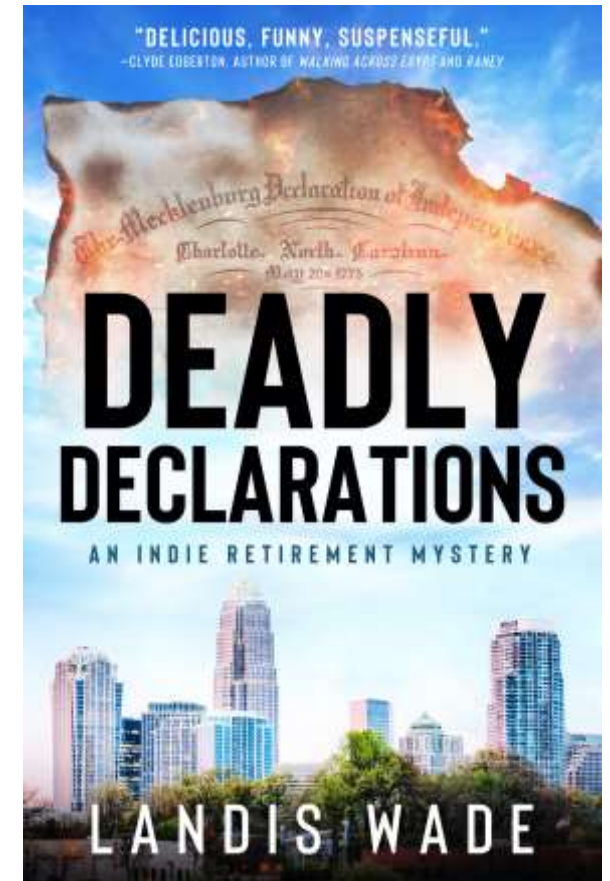
How Charlotte's Actions on May 20, 1775 inspired my novel, *Deadly Declarations*



# Q. Why write a Meck Dec novel?

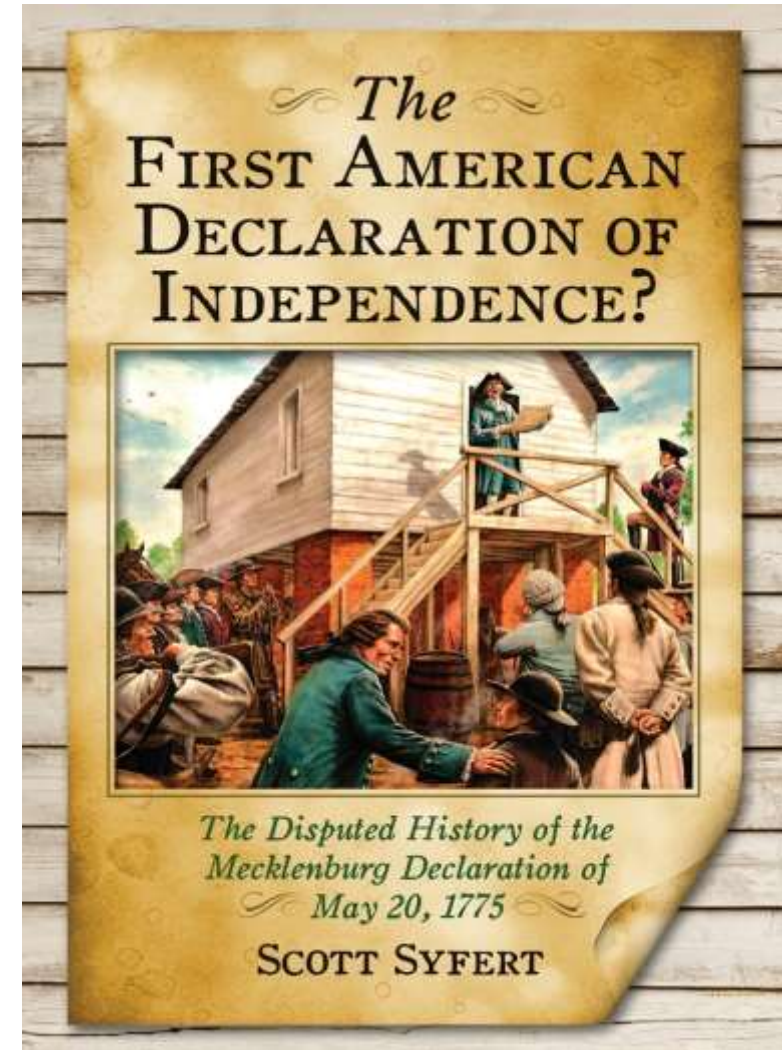
## A. Conflict and Mystery

- **John Adams** says the Meck Dec was “concealed” and accused Thomas Jefferson of plagiarizing from the Meck Dec
- **Thomas Jefferson** called the Meck Dec “spurious”
- **Historians** have treated the Meck Dec with disdain
- **Others** have celebrated the Meck Dec: Presidents William H. Taft, Woodrow Wilson, Dwight Eisenhower, and Gerald Ford visited Charlotte to celebrate Meck Dec Day
- **Controversy followed the Meck Dec** with missing documents, burned documents, and enterprising frauds who tried to pass off forged copies of the Meck Dec for profit
- **Neither side** can prove that the other side is wrong
- **The mystery has never been solved: Perfect for a novel**



# The Research

- Scott Syfert's *The First American Declaration of Independence? The Disputed History of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence*, published 2014
- Mary Kratt, *Charlotte, North Carolina: A Brief History*, published 2009
- Richard Plumer, *Charlotte and the American Revolution*, published 2014
- V.V. McNitt's *Chain of Error*, published 1960, reprinted by Mecklenburg Historical Association, 1996
- George Graham, *The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, May 20, 1775, and Lives of its Signers*, published 1905
- William Henry Holt, *The Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence; a study of evidence showing that the alleged early declaration of independence by Mecklenburg County, on May 20<sup>th</sup> 1775, is Spurious*, published 1907
- James Hall Moore, *Defence of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence*, published 1908
- May 20<sup>th</sup> Society, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, books, articles, websites





# From Paul Revere to Captain James Jack



April 18, 1775: The Midnight Ride



April 19, 1775: 5:00 am Lexington Green



April 19, 1775 Old North Bridge, Concord



May 19-20, 1775 Mecklenburg Courthouse



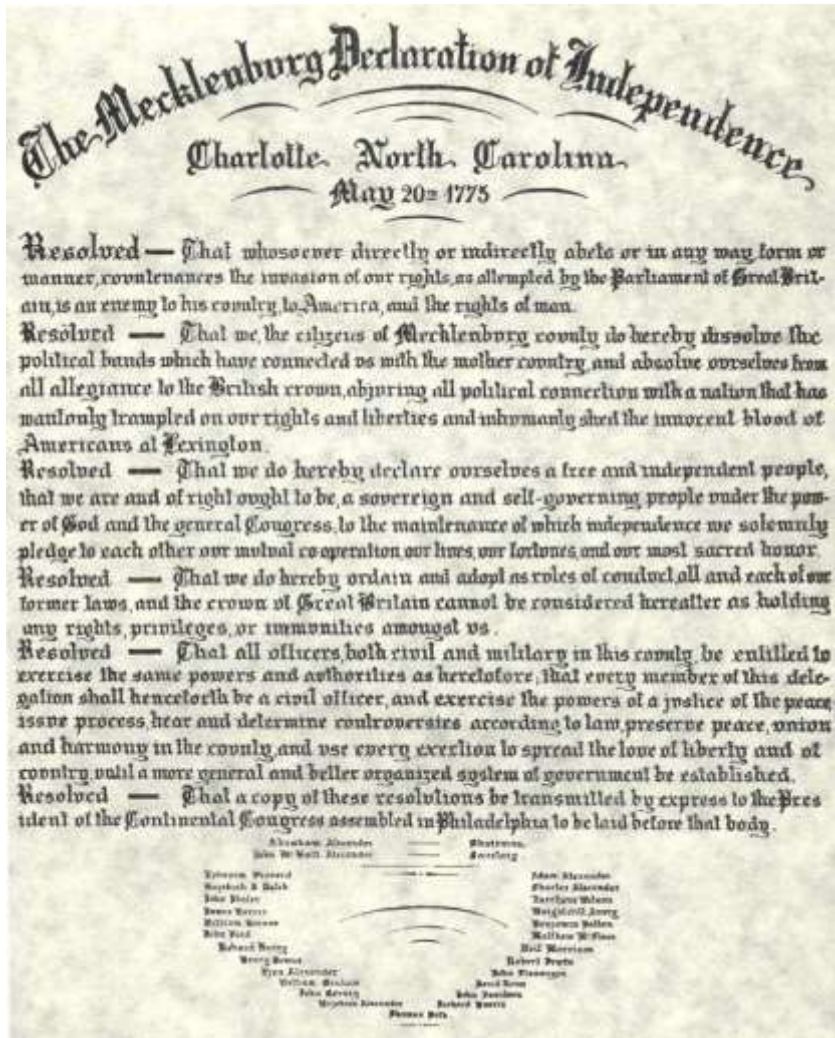
May 20, 1775: Independence



May-June 1775: Captain Jack's 500 mile ride



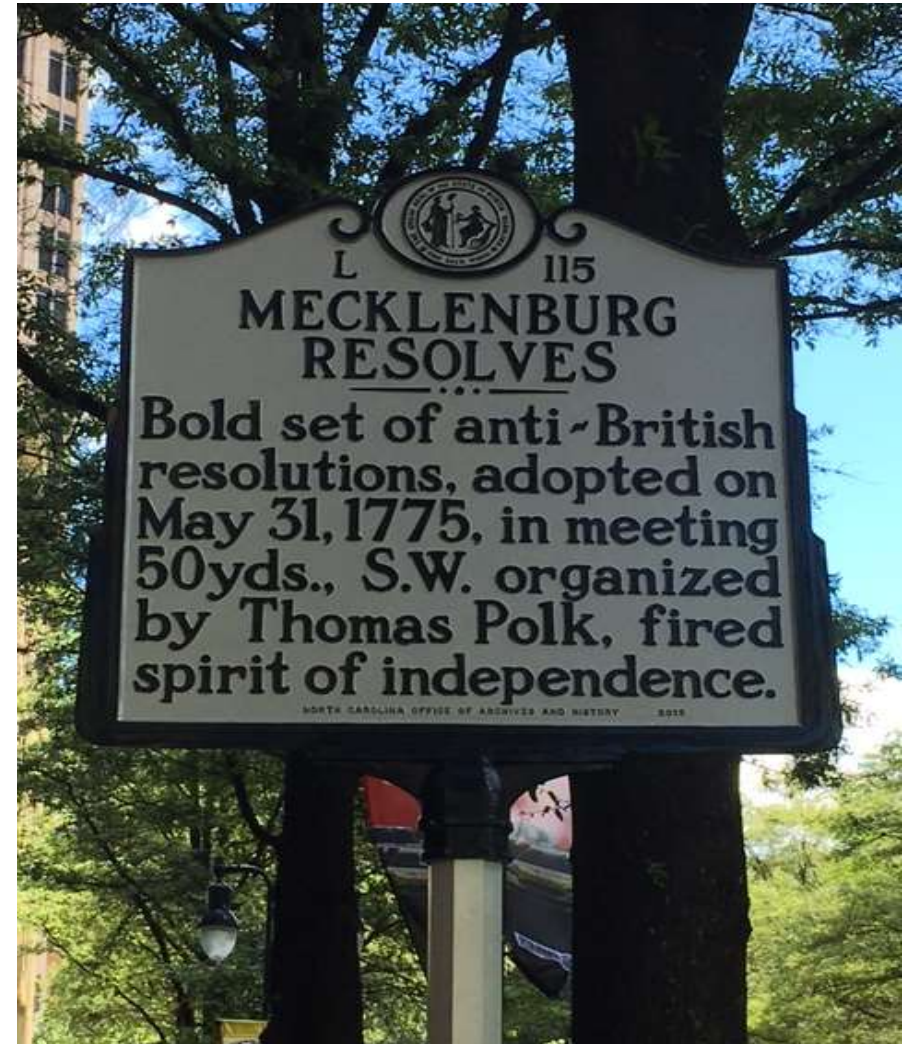
# A Declaration of Independence One Year Early



- **Resolved, That we do hereby declare ourselves a free and independent people, are, and of right ought to be, a sovereign and self-governing Association, under the control of no power other than that of our God and the General Government of the Congress; to the maintenance of which independence, we solemnly pledge to each other, our mutual co-operation, our lives, our fortunes, and our most sacred honor.**

# May 31<sup>st</sup>: A Committee of Safety Adopts Twenty Resolves (“The Mecklenburg Resolves”)

- III. **As all former laws are now suspended in this Province**, and the Congress has not yet provided others, we judge it necessary for the better preservation of good order, **to form certain rules and regulations for the Internal Government of this county, until laws shall be provided for us by the Congress.**
- XX. That the Committee appoint Co. Thomas Polk and Dr. Joseph Kennedy to **purchase 300 pounds of powder, 600 pounds of lead, 1000 flints, for the use of the militia of this county**, and deposit the same in such place as the Committee may hereafter direct.





# The Evidence



- **June 1775:** N.C. delegates Richard Caswell and William Hooper tell Captain Jack that the Mecklenburg resolutions are premature. Supposedly, they did not share the documents with others at the Congress.
  - **Was this the first great American cover-up?**
- **June 1775:** Several newspapers publish The Mecklenburg Resolves. They are forgotten until historians discover them in 1838 and 1847 by historians. If the Meck Dec were published, the newspapers were lost to time.
- **June-July 1775:** Records reveal Captain Jack stopped in Salem, North Carolina, and spoke with Moravian Traugott Bagge, a merchant, about the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. In the German language Moravian archives written in 1783, **Bagge wrote: "I cannot leave unmentioned at the end of the 1775th year that already in the summer of this year, that is in May, June, or July, the County of Mecklenburg in North Carolina declared itself free and independent of England, and made such arrangements for the administration of the laws among themselves, as later the Continental Congress made for all. This Congress, however, considered the proceedings premature."**



# April 6, 1800: The Evidence Burns Up

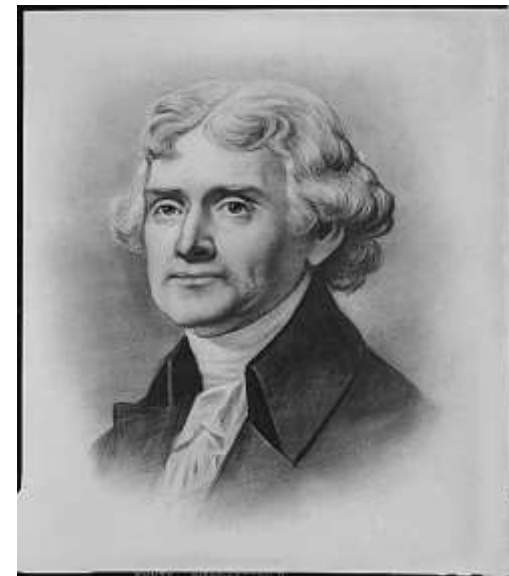


A fire at the home of J. McKnitt Alexander, Secretary of the Convention, destroys the Meck Dec documents, leaving behind only rough notes of the Convention



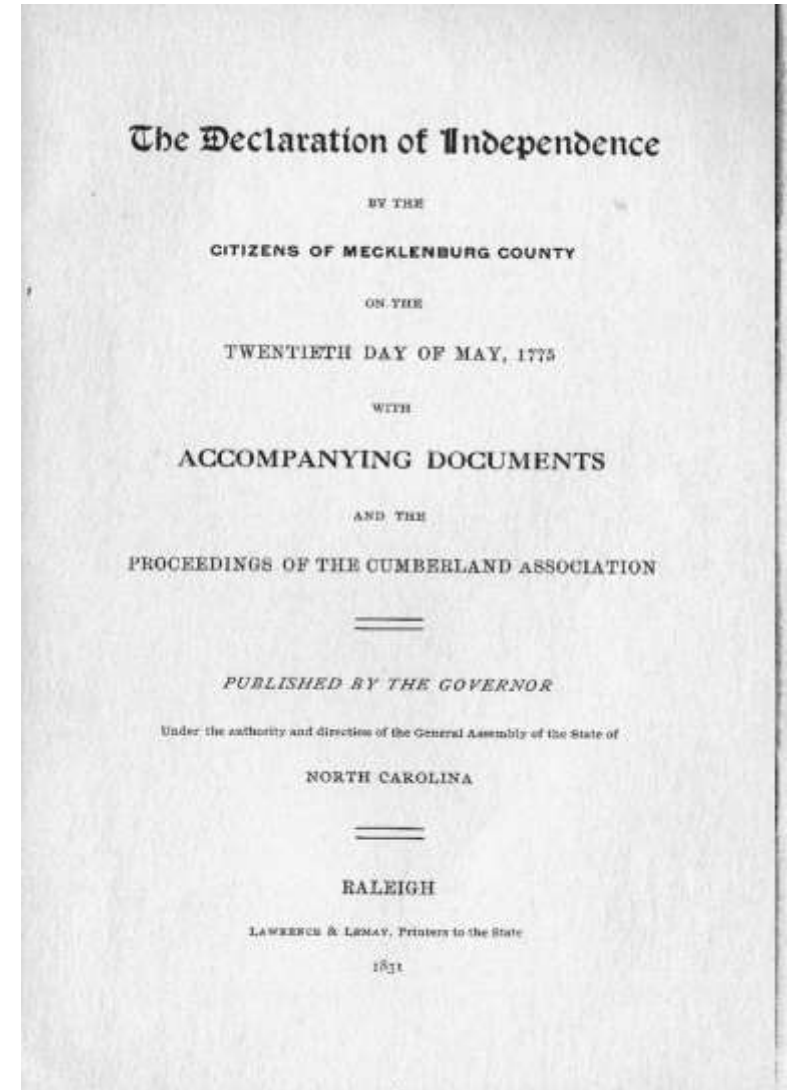
# An 1819 controversy erupts with a story in the Raleigh Register

- May I enclose to you one of **the greatest curiosities** and one of the **deepest mysteries** that ever occurred to me? .... How is it possible that this paper should have been **concealed from me to this day?**
- ...you seem to think it genuine. I believe it **spurious**...I must remain an **unbeliever in the apocryphal gospel.**



# North Carolina Defends Its Honor: The 1831 Governor's Report

- The report recites Adams's and Jefferson's letters
- It refutes the notion that the Meck Dec was a hoax
- It decries the allegation that the Meck Dec was copied from Jefferson's Declaration of Independence
- It includes signed certificates by witnesses to what happened on May 20, 1775





# Did You Know?

May 20, 1775  
NC State Flag

First in Freedom  
NC License Plate





# One Document or Two?



- Historians, who rely on primary documents, say there was only one document from the Convention – The Mecklenburg Resolves – arguing:
  - These were the Resolves later found published in newspapers
  - These Resolves were very anti-British but don't declare "independence."
  - The witnesses were mistaken, not lying.
- Believers in the Meck Dec argue there were two sets of documents, saying the originals were lost in a fire, the witnesses know what they saw, and two documents makes sense, because:
  - One was for independence and one was for governance.
  - Just like there is a U.S. Declaration of Independence and a U.S. Constitution
  - And don't forget the writings of Moravian Traugott Bagge



# The Setting

- A fictitious Charlotte retirement community called the Independence Retirement Community a/k/a The Indie
- Located next door to the Hezekiah Alexander House a/k/a The Rock House, the oldest standing home in Mecklenburg County, where one of the signers of the Meck Dec lived



# *Deadly Declarations* – Two Mysteries

An unlikely trio of retirees team up to try to solve two mysteries related to the death of a 96-year-old resident known as the professor.

(1) Why was his **manuscript** about the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence missing when they found his body? AND

(2) Why did his **handwritten will** dated the day he died disinherit his beloved granddaughter (his only heir), and leave his \$50 million fortune to Sue Ellen Parker, the most despised resident at the Indie?





# Underlying Themes and a Reading

- Why is it so hard for lawyers to retire?
  - Page 12 – “Lawyers need to transition to their Act 3 before they turn 65. After that, it’s like practicing law at the Hotel California. They can check out but they can never leave.”
- The emotions of moving to a retirement community
  - Page 23 – Craig Travail’s mindset: “Why bother to make friends? The residents were there to die, not live, with one-third up to their shinbones in their graves and the other two-thirds too preoccupied with their next meal to see the reaper creeping up.”
- Dealing with career transitions and life after age 65
- Retirement Community living:
  - Page 25 – “Peaches was the activities director who’d bombarded Travail with invitations when he’d arrived at noon.....”



# The Protagonists – Three Amateur Sleuths

- **Craig Travail: (we are in his point of view in 41 scenes);** he is a retired lawyer; widower; age 65; Indie resident; mostly referred to as Travail in the manuscript, except in conversation; depressed about retirement; kicked out of his law firm at age 65; his arc is coming to terms with aging.
- **Harriet Josephine Keaton: (we are in her point of view in 10 scenes);** she is a retired businesswoman; widow; age 70; Indie resident; goes by Harriet; determined; competent; thinks lawyering is easy (why would she need to go to law school to do that); keeps the men in line; loves nature; despises Sue Ellen Parker; looks after Yeager and takes on Travail as her project too
- **Chuck Yeager Alexander: (we are in his point of view in 5 scenes, including the opening scene where he finds the professor's body);** he is an unemployed Indie resident who inherited the Indie cottage from his mother; age 75; goes by Yeager; rough and tumble guy; scruffy; jeans and flannel suit him; beard; eternally optimistic; loves history and a good conspiracy; favorite beer is Captain Jack Pilsner



# The Antagonists –Protecting Secrets at All Costs and Fighting the Good Guys

- **Robert Elkin:** managing partner of Travail's law firm; fires Travail early in the book; board member of The Jefferson Experience, a secret society; arrogant; greedy; despises Craig Travail (the partners liked Travail better but also because Travail is old school and doesn't see the law as a business like Elkin does)
- **Sue Ellen Parker:** she is an Indie resident who inherits the professor's \$50 million fortune; competent; dictatorial; always in charge at the Indie; long-time rival of Harriet Keaton; goes by Sue Ellen
- **Robert Elkin and his law firm represent Sue Ellen Parker** in the will contest brought by Craig Travail; they square off against Travail, Harriett, Yeager, and half the residents at the Indie; the other half support Sue Ellen Parker



# A Colorful Supporting Cast

- **Nascar Nelli** - earned her nickname due to her motorized wheelchair and her penchant to drive fast
- **Carrie Roberts** – known as **the Indie Gossip Queen**; she tells the judge that the hearsay rule shouldn't keep her evidence out because if she didn't hear about it, it didn't happen
- **The Godfather** – is he really living in witness protection at the Indie?
- **Judge Roscoe “Chaw” Brady** – a judge who chews tobacco in court
- **Tommy DoLittle** – an Indie staff member who does as little as he can
- **Peaches** – the enthusiastic and flirtatious activities director
- Among many others

# Charlotte Locations Featured



Rock House



Courthouse



Park Road Books



Liberty Walk



Green's Lunch



Uptown Library



Park Road Soda Shoppe



Trail of History

# I Put the Meck Dec on Trial to Stay True to History – Because There are Two Sides to Every Story

- "A page-turning tale that takes an unexpected journey through law, history, and retiree living."

–*Kirkus Reviews*

- "It's hard to tell where history ends and fiction begins. And as a former trial lawyer, Landis Wade makes the courtroom scenes as entertaining as they are convincing."

–*BookLife Reviews*

- "*Deadly Declarations* is a fine example of how historical precedents can neatly weave into modern times to create a dilemma that is captivatingly contemporary."

–*Midwest Book Review*





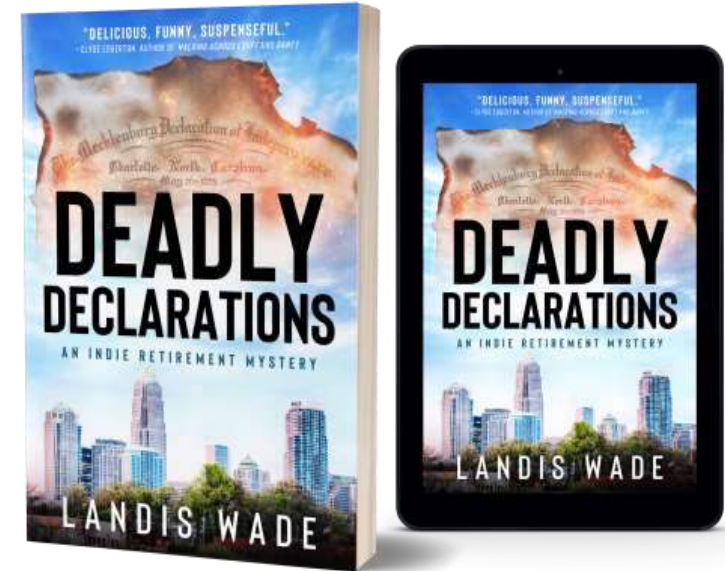
# Questions to Consider and Your Questions

- Were the North Carolinians first in freedom, as one North Carolina license plate says?
- OR, Was the Meck Dec nothing more than a fabrication for North Carolina to gain favor in the nation's revolutionary history?
- AND, If the Meck Dec did exist, who copied from whom?
- Your Questions



# *Deadly Declarations* Is Now Available

- In print: wherever books are sold
- In eBook: on Amazon Kindle
- In Audiobook: on Audible and wherever audiobooks are sold



Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the Meck Dec and *Deadly Declarations*

To find out more, visit: [Landiswade.com](http://Landiswade.com)