Matheson Bridge Project

William Puckett

Why the Story of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence?

I was approached a couple years ago by Shannon Haringx, former NoDaRioty President, about painting a mural on the Matheson Bridge, a significant gateway into NoDa. From the start, I had several ideas from a 'Welcome to NoDa' theme to the Japanese story of the Koi fish swimming upstream towards enlightenment and then transforming into dragons. However, I was asked to hold off due to funding and organizational issues. About that time the opportunity to paint the mural at Jack Beagle's, across from the Salvador Deli, presented itself. Since that was a hot spot for locals to gather and listen to live music, it seemed extremely appropriate to me that I celebrate the now with that wall; painting what I like to think of as a time capsule of present-day life in NoDa.

Having done that, I believe we should now celebrate our past. What I'm looking to do is to tell the story of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, also known as the Mecklenburg Resolves.

Here is a quick summary of how the Meck Dec and/or Resolves came to be...

It seems to be commonly accepted that the primary trigger for the American Revolution and the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, known as the "Meck Dec" were the events that took place in Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts. Under Crown order, General Thomas Gage brought British troops into the Boston Harbor with the intention of arresting Sam Adams and John Hancock at Lexington and to capture the arms stored at Concord. Upon invasion, Paul Revere alerted the town's people of Boston by lighting two lanterns in the north chapel, and rode to Lexington, getting word to Adams and Hancock, who escaped General Gage. They then sent word to Concord to move the stores of weapons and protect them from being apprehended. When the British arrived they were met by the Minute Men where ultimately the first shots of the revolution were fired April 18, 1775.

Upon initial blockade of the Boston Harbor, prior to the events at Lexington and Concord, the colonials created the Continental Congress, sending letters to the provinces (states) to form local government. This local government was formed to aid in communication and to send representatives to Philadelphia, PA. Upon receiving this letters, Governor Josiah Martin (a Loyalist to the Crown) refused to call meeting or send representatives to Philadelphia for fear of angering the Crown. After hearing of the events at Lexington and Concord, John Harvey called a meeting in Newbern, NC, where they selected William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, and Richard Caswell to represent North Carolina in Philadelphia at Congress. They also requested that each county create a committee of five that would later be called the Committees of Safety.

With government deteriorating, these committees took on the roles of the court, buying and selling arms and ammunition as well as forming military reinforcement and organizing the drilling of soldiers. At the request of the Mecklenburg Committee of Safety, Reverend Hezekiah Balach, Colonel Kennon and Dr. Ephirian Brevard wrote up a series of Resolves to be presented to the Committee of Safety. These Resolves were accepted and signed by 25 members of the community. The Resolves were then carried by Captain James Jack to Philadelphia and given to the NC Representatives to present to Congress.

There were 20 Resolves in total and together they established some of the following:

1. Annulled the authority of the crown
2. Empowered the Colonials to govern themselves
3. Established law, executors, courts, formality to militia, community agents, constables (police), etc.

It was to be a temporary establishment of order until direction by the Continental Congress.

The date that these Resolves were signed is the top date on our state flag. There is some debate about the specifics in the history and in proving that it was in fact a Declaration of Independence pre-dating our American Declaration of Independence. What is provable is that the Resolves were written and published.

Date of the signing of the Mecklenburg Resolves.

Date of the signing of the Halifax Resolves.

For my intentions, the specifics and dates are not what is important. What is important is the greater idea of what these men did. They joined together to change the world around them. Without compromise, these men endangered their livelihood, as well as their lives, to change an injustice in their world. This idea is what I hope to convey: That we can do anything we want to if we show determination and strength.

Of the 25 signers of the Mecklenburg Resolves, all but three have streets and roads named after them. Of the 22 with streets named after them, the majority are in the North Charlotte corridor.

Examples of these street names include: Davidson, Brevard, Kennon, Alexander, Harris, etc., many of which can be found in the NoDa Arts District.

These are our forefathers. They are the men who changed and created this community and world that we live in. We should celebrate them and create something of artistic and historical inspiration that can find it's home in Charlotte's Historic Arts District, NoDa. This mural is not meant to be a history lesson, but to spark an interest in history through artistic presentation and to illustrate the power of the everyday man.

The Mecklenburg Resolves

1. That all Commissions, civil and military, heretofore granted by the Crown, to be exercised in these Colonies, are null and void, and the Constitution of each particular Colony wholly suspended.
2. That the Provincial Congress of each Province, under the Direction of the Great Continental Congress, is invested with all legislative and executive Powers within their respective Provinces; and that no other Legislative or Executive does or can exist, at this time, in any of these Colonies.
3. As all former Laws are now suspended in this Province, and the Congress have 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.
4. That the Inhabitants of this County do meet on a certain Day appointed by this Committee, and having formed themselves into nine Companies, to wit, eight for the County, and one for the Town of Charlotte, do choose a Colonel and other military Officers, who shall hold and exercise their several Powers by Virtue of this Choice, and independent of Great-Britain, and former Constitution of this Province.
5. That for the better Preservation of the Peace, and Administration of Justice, each of these Companies do choose from their own Body two discreet Freeholders, who shall be impowered each by himself, and singly, to decide and determine all Matters of Controversy arising within the said Company under the Sum of Twenty Shillings, and jointly and together all Controversies under the Sum of Forty Shillings, yet so as their Decisions may admit of Appeals to the Convention of the Select Men of the whole County; and also, that any one of these shall have Power to examine, and commit to Confinement, Persons accused of Petit Larceny.
6. That those two Select Men, thus chosen, do, jointly and together, choose from the Body of their particular Company two Persons, properly qualified to serve as Constables, who may assist them in the Execution of their Office.
7. That upon the Complaint of any Person to either of these Select Men, he do issue his Warrant, directed to the Constable, commanding him to bring the Aggressor before him or them to answer the said Complaint.
8. That these eighteen Select Men, thus appointed, do meet every third Tuesday in January, April, July, and October, at the Court-House, in Charlotte, to hear and determine all Matters of Controversy for Sums exceeding Forty Shillings; also Appeals: And in Cases of Felony, to commit the Person or Persons convicted thereof to close Confinement, until the Provincial Congress shall provide and establish Laws and Modes of Proceeding in all such Cases.
9. That these Eighteen Select Men, thus convened, do choose a Clerk to record the Transactions of said Convention; and that the said Clerk, upon the Application of any Person or Persons aggrieved, do issue his Warrant to one of the Constables, to summon and warn said Offender to appear before the Convention at their next sitting, to answer the aforesaid Complaint.
10. That any Person making Complaint upon Oath to the Clerk, or any Member of the Convention, that he has Reason to suspect that any Person or Persons indebted to him in a Sum above Forty Shillings, do intend clandestinely to withdraw from the County without paying such Debt; the Clerk, or such Member, shall issue his Warrant to the Constable, commanding him to take the said Person or Persons into safe Custody, until the next sitting of the Convention.
11. That when a Debtor for a Sum below Forty Shillings shall abscond and leave the County, the Warrant granted as aforesaid shall extend to any Goods or Chattels of the said Debtor as may be found, and such Goods or Chattels be seized and held in Custody by the Constable for the Space of Thirty Days; in which Term if the Debtor fails to return and discharge the Debt, the Constable shall return the Warrant to one of the Select Men of the Company where the Goods and Chattels are found, who shall issue Orders to the Constable to sell such a Part of the said Goods as shall amount to the Sum due; that when the Debt exceeds Forty Shillings, the Return shall be made to the Convention, who shall issue the Orders for Sale.
12. That all Receivers and Collectors of Quitrents, Public and County Taxes, do pay the same into the Hands of the Chairman of this Committee, to be by them disbursed as the public Exigencies may require. And that such Receivers and Collectors proceed no farther in their Office until they be approved of by, and have given to this Committee good and sufficient Security for a faithful Return of such Monies when collected.
13. That the Committee be accountable to the County for the Application of all Monies received from such public Officers.
14. That all these Officers hold their Commissions during the Pleasure of their respective Constituents.
15. That this Commission will sustain all Damages that may ever hereafter accrue to all or any of these Officers thus appointed, and thus acting, on Account of their Obedience and Conformity to these Resolves.
16. That whatever Person shall hereafter receive a Commission from the Crown, or attempt to exercise any such Commission heretofore received, shall be deemed an Enemy to his Country; and upon Information being made to the Captain of the Company where he resides, the said Captain shall cause him to be apprehended, and conveyed before the two Select Men of the said Company, who, upon Proof of the Fact, shall commit him the said Offender, into safe Custody, until the next setting of the Convention, who shall deal with him as Prudence may direct.
17. That any Person refusing to yield Obedience to the above Resolves shall be deemed equally criminal, and liable to the same Punishments as the Offenders above last mentioned.
18. That these Resolves be in full Force and Virtue, until Instructions from the General Congress of this Province, regulating the Jurisprudence of this Province, shall provide otherwise, or the legislative Body of Great-Britain resign its unjust and arbitrary Pretentions with Respect to America.
19. That the several Militia Companies in this county do provide themselves with proper Arms and Accoutrements, and hold themselves in Readiness to execute the commands and Directions of the Provincial Congress, and of this committee.
20. That this committee do appoint Colonel Thomas Polk, and Doctor Joseph Kennedy, to purchase 300 lb. of Powder, 600 lb. of Lead, and 1000 Flints, and deposit the same in some safe Place, hereafter to be appointed by the committee.

The Meck Dec Facts from Leslie M. Kesler and The Charlotte Museum of History

What is Mec Dec?

A traditional celebration of Mecklenburg's break with British rule and Mecklenburgers' role in the forefront of the struggle for independence.

A specific document said to have been created on May 20, 1775, that declared Mecklenburg County's independence from Britain.

When did the tradition of Mec Dec celebrations start?

The first recorded celebration was on the 50th anniversary, in 1825, and included a parade, speeches, and a reading of the declaration.

What's the controversy about the Mec Dec?

In the early 1800s, arguments centered on whether accounts of the Mec Dec were true or were a hoax. Today, most people agree that something happened in May 1775, but they debate exactly what that was. Some maintain that traditional accounts and wording of the Mec Dec are accurate. Others think that people in the early 1800s were really remembering the creation of a different document, one we now call the Mecklenburg Resolves.

How can it be so hard to figure out what actually happened?

In 1775, there were no local newspapers to report on the events. No original copies of the document(s) have ever been found. Some may have burned in an 1800 fire at the home of John McKnitt Alexander, one of the participants.

In 1819, when people began to look for a copy of the Mec Dec to publicize and reprint, the best one they could find was one that signer John McKnitt Alexander was said to have reconstructed from memory and passed down to his son. Some participants and local residents testified to the accuracy of that version.

In 1837, the text of the Mecklenburg Resolves was rediscovered in New York newspaper from 1775. Some people suggested that the Resolves were the document that people had been calling the Mecklenburg Declaration, and that the discrepancies in the two texts grew out of people's imperfect memories of long-ago events. By that point, none of the original participants was alive to support or disagree with that theory.

What aspects of what happened in May 1775 are not controversial?

Most people on both sides of the debate would agree:
In late May 1775, a group of local leaders held at least one meeting, and issued a public statement about the county's relationship to British rule.

The meeting took place at roughly the same time news of the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord reached the area.

The position the group took was among the most radical of any colonial community in 1775, and more radical than that of the Continental Congress at the time.

Mecklenburg leaders sent a messenger to the Continental Congress with a copy of their document. North Carolina's Royal Governor, Josiah Martin, read the resolutions in an eastern North Carolina newspaper, and considered them treasonous.

What are the main differences between the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence and the Mecklenburg Resolves?

The Mec Dec says "we do hereby declare ourselves a free and independent people" and asserts that the colonists are "and of right ought to be" self-governing. Those are the key components that make it analogous to – but earlier than – the national Declaration of Independence. The Resolves make no claim of independence as an inherent right. They do declare British rule to be "null and void" in the colonies as the result of Parliament having declared "a state of actual Rebellion" there. And they make detailed provisions for how the local community will govern itself until the Continental Congress provides other instructions or until Parliament changes its stance.

What role did the Alexanders play?

Hezekiah Alexander has traditionally been identified as one of the signers of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Several of the participants who made statements between 1819 and 1830 testified that he was present at the meeting where it was written. His brother, John McKnitt Alexander is also identified as a signer. Several, though not all, of the participants' statements identify him as the group's secretary, and it was his house that burned in 1800. The earliest versions of the Mec Dec are all credited as having been passed from him to others, and having been reconstructed by him from either memory or notes.

Since only Ephraim Brevard, as secretary, signed the Mecklenburg Resolves, it is not technically correct to refer to the Alexanders as "signers" of that document. However, it is reasonable to assume that they were participants in the discussion that led to its creation.

What is the Charlotte Museum of History's position on the authenticity of the Mec Dec?

The museum takes no official stand on the Mec Dec, other than to note that while it has a long local history and tradition, its existence has not been conclusively proven. We encourage all interested parties to review the available historical evidence and make up their own minds about the controversy.

Charlotte Museum of History
May 16, 2008

Signers of Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence

The men highlighted by **bold** font have streets named after them in the North Charlotte corridor.

1. **General Thomas Polk**
2. **Dr. Ephraim Brevard**
3. **General Robert Irwin**
4. **Captain Zaccheus Wilson**
5. **Richard Barry**
6. **William Graham**
7. **John Queary**
8. **Waightstill Avery**
9. **Colonel James Harris**
10. John Foard
11. **Major John Davidson**
12. **Benjamin Patto**
13. **Richard Harris**
14. **Colonel Abraham Alexander**
15. **Colonel Adam Alexander**
16. **Hezekiah Alexander**
17. **Neil Morrison**
18. John Flenniken
19. **Matthew McClure**
20. **Ezra Alexander**
21. **Colonel William Kennon**
22. **Henry Downs**
23. **Charles Alexander**
24. **John Phifer**
25. David Reese

Spectators of Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence

1. General Joseph Graham
2. General George Graham
3. Reverend Francis Cummings
4. Colonel Ezekial Polk
5. David Rose (Grandfather of President Polk)

Project Goals

1. Create a local landmark to further promote the NoDa Historical Arts District

2. Create a solid gateway into NoDa, that is both aesthetically pleasing, but also symbolizes the entrance of a truly art-inspired community

3. Obtain city/state/national recognition for the artwork

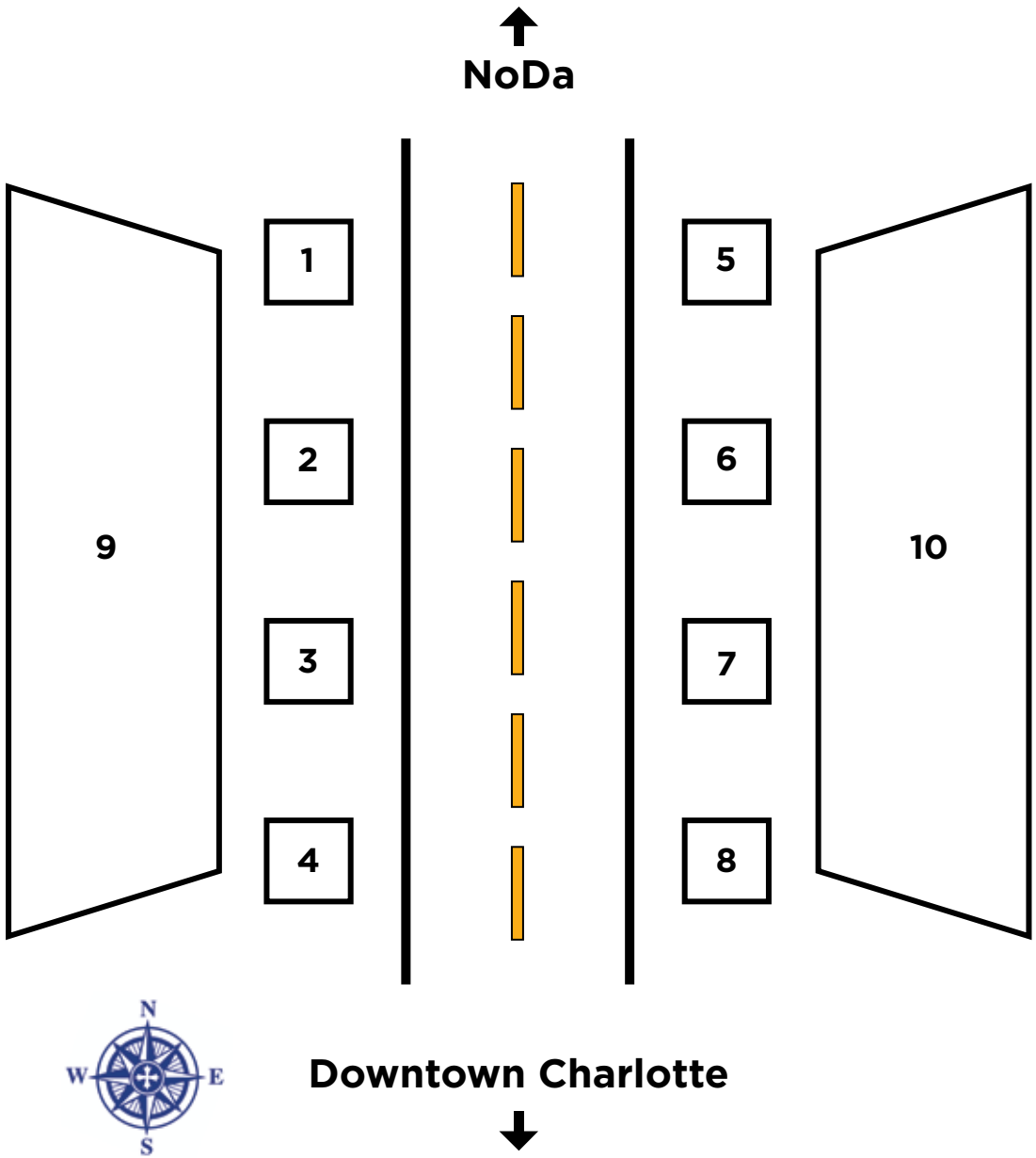
4. Further establish public art in the both NoDa and City of Charlotte and set a precedent for the value of public art and its ability to change the environment around it

5. Clean up the entrance area, remove graffiti, trash, vagrants

6. Increase home/property value in the neighborhood by further creating a niche market - a true arts community

7. Set an example for future public art projects in the city and what is attainable with this type of budget

Footprint of Matheson Bridge and Key People/Scenes Represented



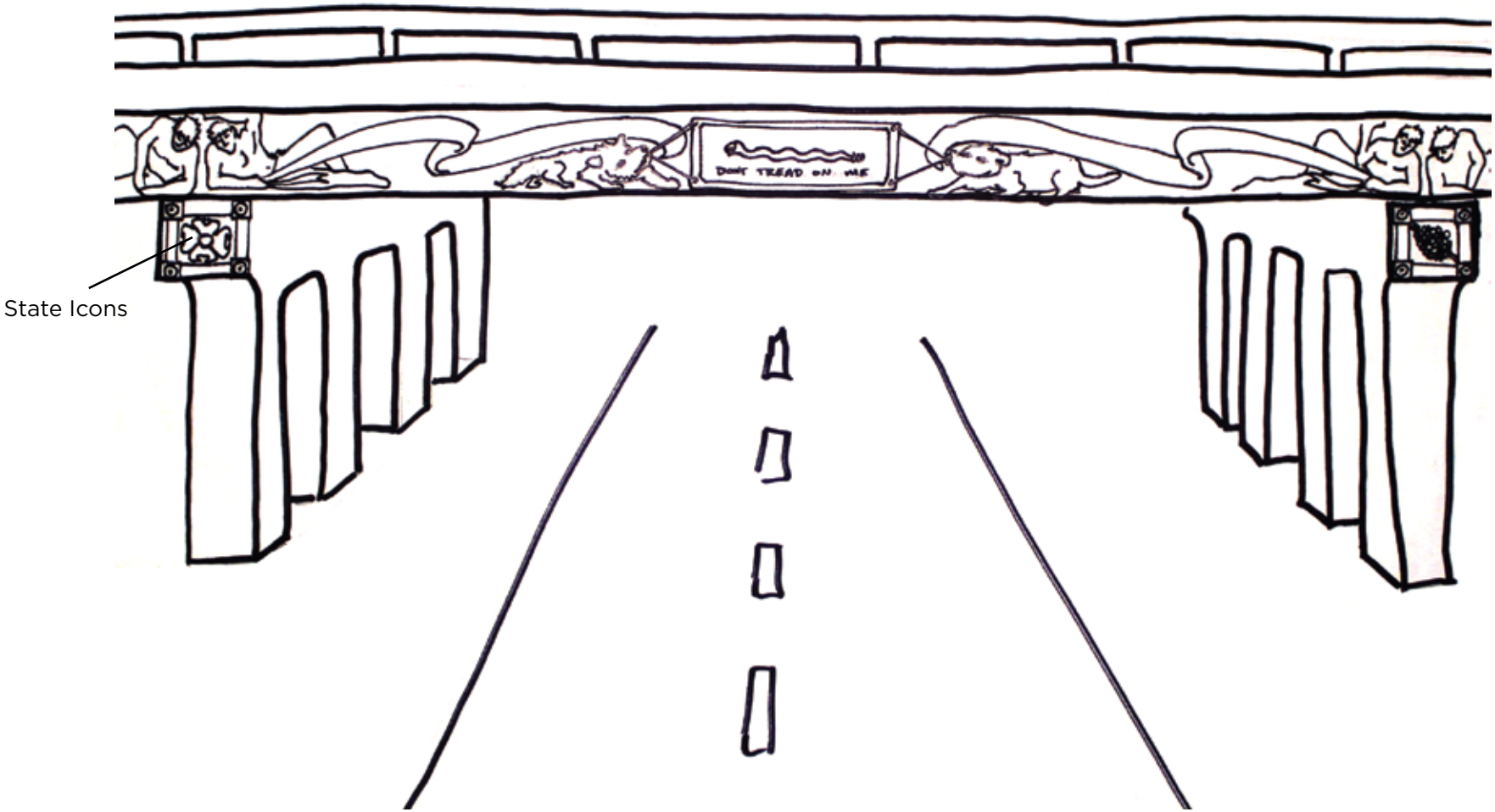
1. Captain James Jack
2. Governor Josiah Martin (Loyalist)
3. H. Balach, Col. Kennon, Dr. Brevard
4. King George III & Queen Charlotte
5. General Thomas Gage
6. Colonial Community Support
   (Representing Men/Women/Children/Minorities)
7. Benjamin Boote & John Dunn
   (Representing Loyalist Business/Trade)
8. Mecklenburg Committee of Safety
9. Empowerment Scene (Resolves 1-10)
10. Action Scene (Resolves 11-20)

Matheson Bridge Project - West Column & Embankment Artist Rendering

Matheson Bridge Project - East Column & Embankment Artist Rendering

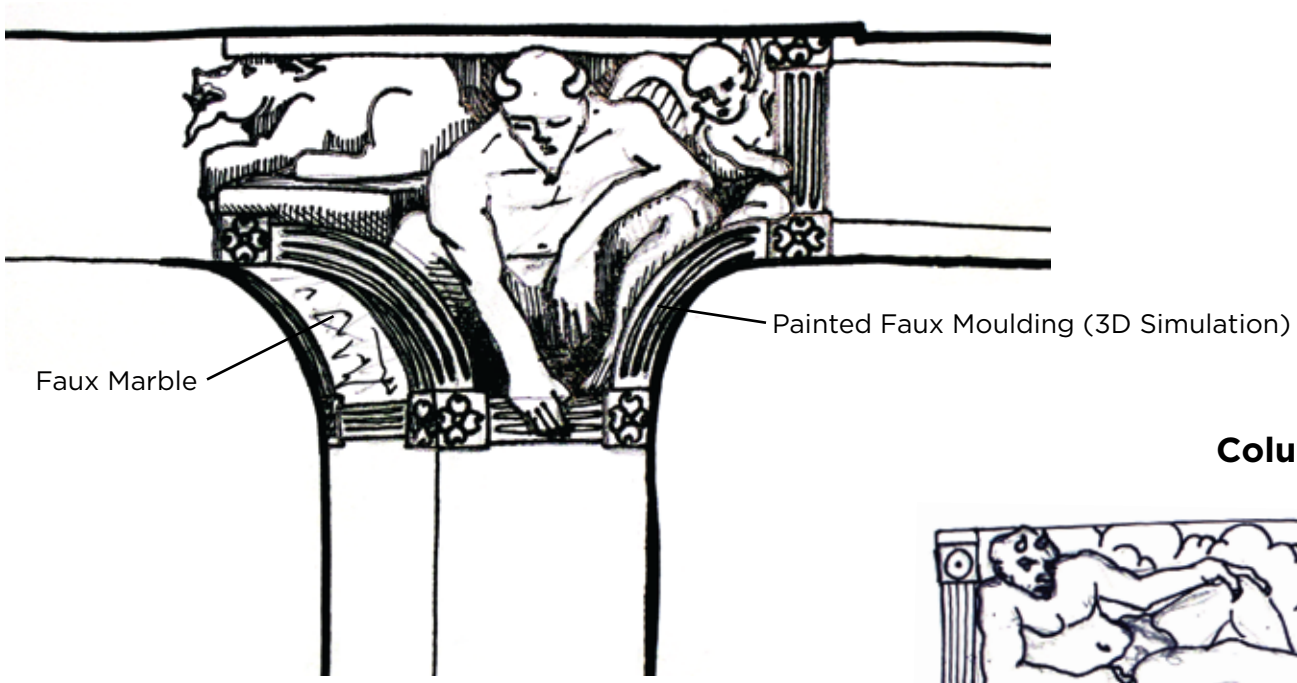
Matheson Bridge Project - Example of Image Organization on Each Column

Ex. King George

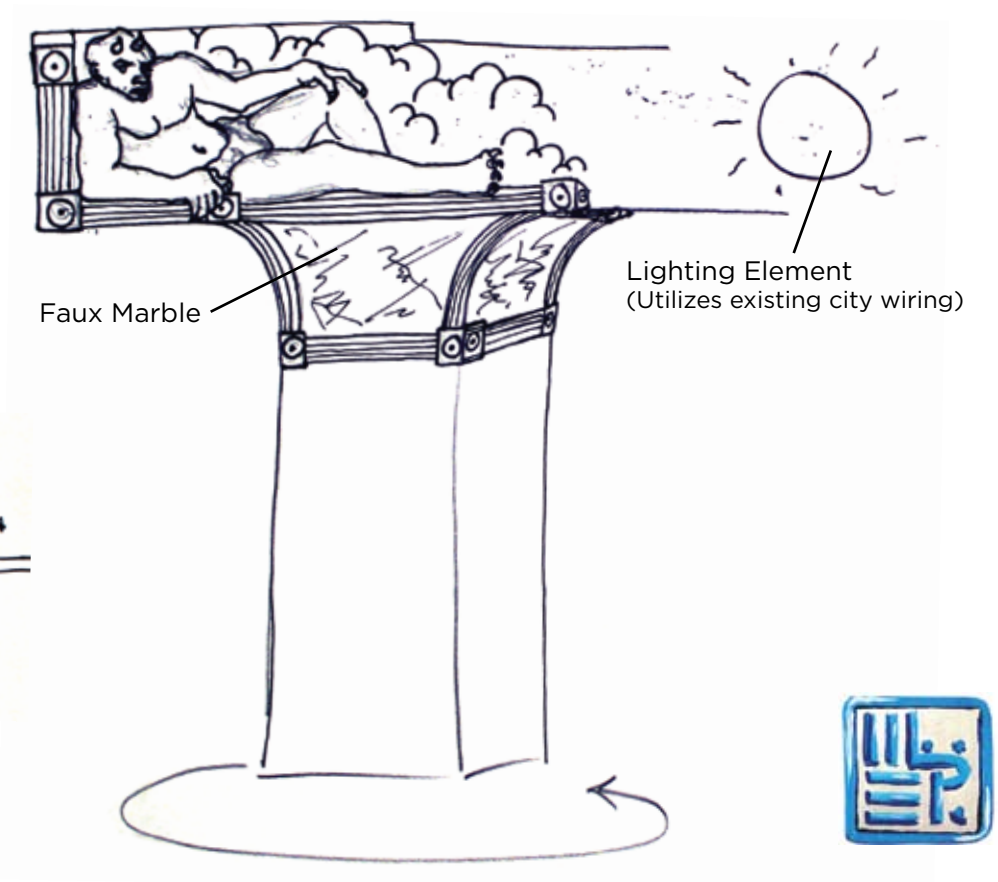


Matheson Bridge Project - Cross Section (North/South) Artist Rendering

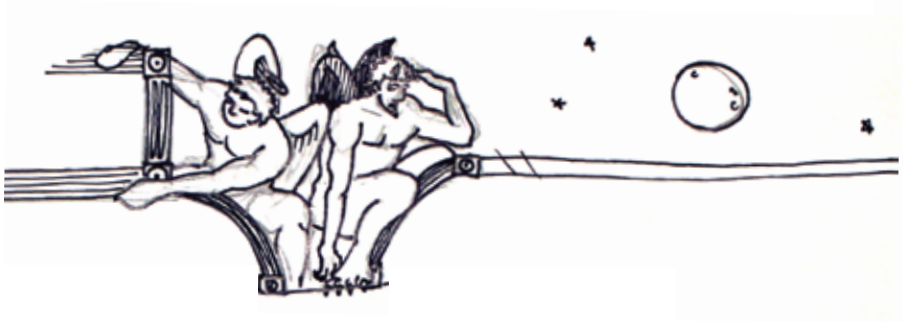
Column Centerpieces



Column Ends



Rafter Elements



The Team

William Puckett	-	Lead Design Head Painter Full Artistic Direction
Lauren Puckett	-	Project Manager Web Design (We currently own MathesonBridge.com) Promotions/Sponsorships/Donations 1st Assistant
Victoria Manning	-	Professional Grant Writer Greenification Committee Advisor
Leslie M. Kesler	-	Historian & Curator, Charlotte Museum of History Fact Checker/Historical Accuracy
Frank Stillo	-	Environmental Scientist Advisor/General Contractor/City Regulations
Daniel Williams	-	Hertz Equipment Rental Corporation Heavy Equipment Advisor
2nd Assistant	-	TBA
Interns	-	TBA (We are working with UNCC and Professor Malena Bergman)

Basic Timeline of Project

I. Preparation/Clean-Up of Area
   a. Greenification Committee Involvement
   b. Volunteer commitment (in-kind donations)
   c. Estimated date(s) of completion
   d. Tree/Limb/Debris Removal
   e. Clear bags and gathering for trash removal

II. Preparation for Painting
   a. Pressure washing (if approved by city)
   b. Pressure washers (volunteer or rental equip.)
   c. Water source location
   d. Organization of volunteers or hired help
   e. Total feet to pressure wash: 6,040 sq. ft.

III. Priming
   a. Best primer for concrete (temp. is a factor)
   b. Dry time (temp. is a factor)
   c. Timeframe TBD before painting begins

IV. Building Temporary Wall (Bulwark)
   a. Purchase or donation of lumbar
   b. Construction of wall

V. Painting
   a. Line work for assistants/interns/volunteers
   b. Organization of help by Lauren Puckett
   c. Total paint needed/colors/cost
   d. Flags/signage/traffic cones

VI. Overpass Header Painting
   a. City's approval to shut down one side of the street at a time (City Permits)
   b. No. 7 Firefighter's re-route plan and approval
   c. Necessary signage
   d. City workers and/or volunteers to direct traffic
   e. Full timetable to present to city for permit
   f. Ladders/Scaffolding/Scissor Lift

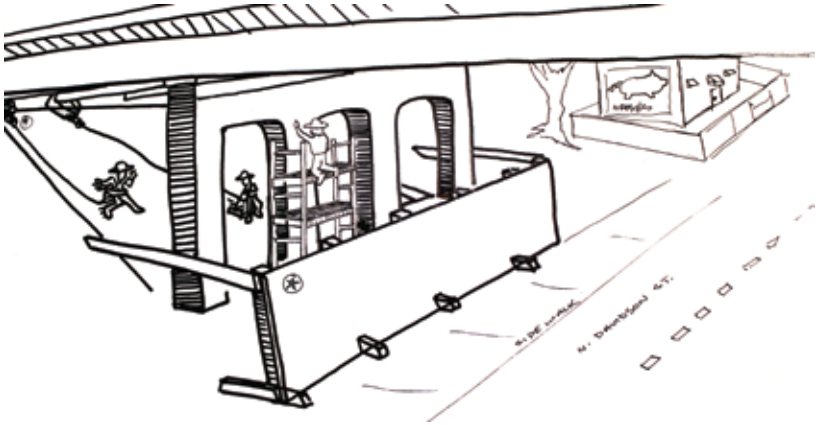
VII. Final Protection
   a. Sealant Layer
   b. Water Protectant Layer
   c. UV Coating Layer

VIII. Lighting Installation
   a. Consutation with city lighting contractors
   b. Possible hiring of outside artist for design
   c. City approval for connection to main power lines

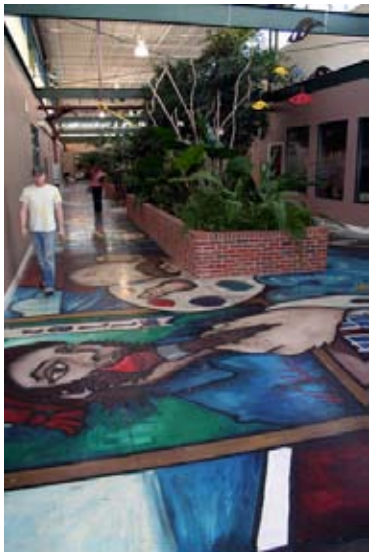
IX. Final Landscaping and Aesthetic Touches
   a. Complete clean-up of area
   b. Sustainable plants and/or decorative foliage to be added to the embankments
   c. Lighting of the bridge to be turned on

IX. Final Presentation/Celebration of Work
   a. Work with MHA to possibly organize re-enactment
   b. Contact media sources for coverage of mural

Bulwark Temporary Wall - Artist Rendering



Examples of Mural Work in Charlotte, NC



Welcome to NoDa, Approx. 7,500 sq. ft.

Hey Diddle, Diddle..., Approx. 800 sq. ft.

Examples of Mural Work in Charlotte, NC

Trips for Kids, 24-hour Paint-By-Number Mural, Approx. 1,200 sq. ft.

Als Ich Chan: A Tribute to NoDa (The Best I Am Capable of Doing), Approx. 1,200 sq. ft.