

The Regulators ^[1]

Prior to the American Revolution, many people in North Carolina were upset by the way the government was handling the colony's affairs. Their complaints were not about the form of government or the colony's laws but about abuses caused by government officials.

Complaints from the colonists included excessive taxes, dishonest sheriffs, and illegal fees. Lack of money contributed to the state of unrest. Colonists living in the western part of the province were isolated and unsympathetic with colonists living in the east. The War of the Regulation began in those western, frontier counties.

The government and colonists clashed in small instances until the spring of 1768. In 1768, an association of "Regulators" was formed. Wealthier colonists considered them to be a mob. The Regulators never had an outstanding leader. There were several important men in the Regulator movement, including James Hunter, Rednap Howell, William Butler, and Herman Husband. Husband was a Quaker and follower of Benjamin Franklin. He also circulated ^[2] political pamphlets advocating for peaceful reform.

Violent resistance

The reformers took a more radical stand after failing to secure justice through peaceful negotiations. Violence and disorder reigned. When the government retaliated against them, the Regulators refused to pay fees. They also terrorized those who administered the law and disrupted court proceedings.

It was royal governor William Tryon's ^[3] responsibility to suppress the revolt. In March 1771, the governor's council advised Tryon to call out the militia ^[4] and march against the rebel colonists.

Volunteers for the militia were mustered ^[5] by Tryon. General Hugh Waddell ^[6] was ordered by Tryon to enter Hillsborough through Salisbury. Waddell had the Cape Fear and western militias at his command. Tryon and his army marched toward Hillsborough. Waddell had only 284 men, and was challenged on his way to Hillsborough by a large group of Regulators. Waddell ordered to retreat since he was outnumbered by the Regulators. On May 11, 1771, Governor Tryon and his forces left Hillsborough to rescue Waddell. Tryon stopped at the Alamance Creek in the heart of Regulator country and gathered his army of approximately a thousand men. 2,000 Regulators had assembled five miles away.

The Battle of Alamance

The battle began on May 16, 1771 after the Regulators rejected Tryon's suggestion that they disperse ^[7] peacefully. The Regulators were no match for Tryon's militia since they lacked proper leadership, organization, and weapons. Many Regulators fled the battlefield.

The rebellion of the Regulators was crushed by Tryon. Nine members of the king's militia were killed and 61 wounded. The Regulator losses were much greater but exact numbers are unknown. Tryon took 15 prisoners; seven were hanged later. Many Regulators moved on to other frontier areas beyond North Carolina. Those who stayed were offered pardons by the governor in exchange for pledging an oath of allegiance ^[8] to the royal government.

The War of the Regulation illustrates the dissatisfaction of many people before the American Revolution. The boldness displayed by reformers opposed to royal authority provided a lesson in the use of armed resistance. These principles were employed by patriots and rebels years later in the American War for Independence.

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People:

- [Hugh Waddell](#) ^[6]
- [Gov. William Tryon](#) ^[3]
- [James Hunter](#) ^[20]
- [Rednap Howell](#) ^[21]
- [William Butler](#) ^[22]
- [Herman Husband](#) ^[23]

Places:



^[24]

A monument at [Alamance Battleground](#) ^[25] remembers those who died in the final, violent clash between the Regulators and the colonial government.

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^[28] **N.C.'s Regulator Movement**

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Primary Sources:

North Carolina

17 May 1777

My His Excellency William Tryon Esquire
His Majesty's Captain General and Governor
in Chief in and over the said Province.

A Proclamation

Whereas I have been informed that several ignorant Persons have been
under false pretences induced to join in Arms to oppose Government and the
Laws of this Country. Therefore out of Humanity and in Tender Compassion
to the Distresses that must fall on them and their Families should they
through fear of Punishment persist in their Errors. I hereby give Notice
that every Person (except those who stand outlawed, and such as are now prisoners
in the Camps) who will come into Camps, lay down their Arms, take the Oath
of Allegiance and promise to pay all Taxes that are now due or may hereafter
become due by them respectively, and submit from this Day to the Laws of this
Country, shall have His Majesty's most Gracious and free Pardon for all Treasons
Insurrections and Rebellions done or committed before this Day provided
they make their Submission aforesaid on or before the 21. Instant.

Given under my Hand and the Great Seal of the
said Province this 17 Day of May Anno 1777.
Wm Tryon

By His Excellency's Command
Robt Palmer Secy.

God save the King.

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