

Queen's College ^[1]

Queen's College

by Stewart Lillard, 2006

See also: [Queens University of Charlotte](#) ^[2]

[Queen's College](#) ^[3] in [Charlotte](#) ^[4] was the first institution of higher learning in North Carolina, although it was never officially recognized by the British administrative system and was disallowed by King George III. In 1770 the Colonial Assembly passed a bill for the "founding, establishing, and endowing of Queen's College, in the Town of Charlotte," which was ratified by Governor [William Tryon](#) ^[5] in 1771. The act called for the endowment of the institution to be collected from a "duty of six pence per gallon on all rum or other spirituous liquors brought into and disposed of in [Mecklenburg County](#) ^[6] . . . during a space of ten years."

Col. [Edmund Fanning](#) ^[7] of Hillsborough, with a B.A. degree from [Yale College](#) ^[8] (1757) and an M.A. degree from [Harvard College](#) ^[9] (1764), was chosen as president of the institution out of deference to his scholarship, patriotism, and membership in the established Anglican Church. [Abner Nash](#) ^[10] was the only other member of the established church appointed a trustee. [Dissenter](#) ^[11] members included [Thomas Polk](#) ^[12], Robert Harris Jr., Abraham Alexander, and [Hezekiah Alexander](#) ^[13].

The 35 volumes of books that [Waightstill Avery](#) ^[14] purchased from Matthew Troy of Salisbury between 1771 and 14 July 1772, titled "Mecklenburg Library," were likely used by the tutors of this original college. The library collection included several biblical harmonies and commentaries, histories, the poems of [Edward Young](#) ^[15], and Henry Fielding's *The Adventures of Joseph Andrews*.

The college opened in a building that had been erected by Thomas Polk at what became the southeast corner of South Tryon and Third Streets in [Charlotte](#) ^[4]. Advertisements for the college first appeared in the *New London (Conn.) Gazette* ^[16] on 5 July 1771 and the *Gazette* (Mass.) for 3 Mar. 1772. These references suggest that the college operated during 1771 and 1772 without final approval from the British government.

Fanning probably never assumed the position of president, as he was actively suppressing a second [Regulator Movement](#) ^[17] in Orange (now [Alamance](#) ^[18]) County in the spring of 1771. Subsequently, Governor [Tryon](#) ^[5] and Fanning departed the Carolina colony in the summer for a post in the New York colony. As the colonial Assembly gathered for the 19 Nov. 1771 session, an amended proposal was drawn up by Thomas Polk and others for the modification of the original charter to permit the trustees' choosing of a vice president in the absence of the president. This amendment was approved by the Lower House and the Council and given assent prematurely by Governor [Josiah Martin](#) ^[19] on 23 Dec. 1771.

The great distance and the slowness of sea passage between New Bern Palace and the colonial offices in London's Whitehall contributed to the incongruity of the situation. It was not until February 1772 that His Majesty's Commissioners for Trade and Plantations took under deliberation the acts passed during the 1770-71 session of the colonial Assembly. They recommended "Royal disallowance of this Act" establishing Queen's College, and [George III](#) ^[20] agreed.

A second effort to establish the college was begun in January 1773 when John Phifer presented a petition from the inhabitants of [Rowan](#) ^[21] and [Mecklenburg](#) ^[6] Counties concerning the establishing of a "public Seminary of Learning in the Western part of this Province." Little was to come of this second effort, for news of the king's displeasure with the original effort reached New Bern in June 1773.

References:

Norris W. Preyer, *Hezekiah Alexander and the Revolution in the Backcountry* (1987).

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[Lillard, Stewart](#) ^[26]

Origin - location:

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