

Sugar Creek, War of ^[1]

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by James P. Whittenburg, 2006

In the spring of 1765, men from the Sugar Creek and Reedy Creek neighborhoods in newly created [Mecklenburg County](#) ^[2] attacked a crew [surveying](#) ^[3] [plantations](#) ^[4] on approximately 1.2 million acres granted to English merchant [Henry McCulloh](#) ^[5] two decades earlier. This so-called War of Sugar Creek was one of a series of mob actions in the 1750s and 1760s in which settlers on the southwestern North Carolina frontier attempted to thwart the designs of McCulloh and other speculators, notably Governor [Arthur Dobbs](#) ^[6] and Englishman John Selwyn. The terms of these [huge grants](#) ^[7] varied somewhat, but in general they called for the settlement of white Protestants at a ratio of one person per 200 acres. The speculators enjoyed cancellation of [quitrents](#) ^[8] for a decade. At the end of the ten years, unoccupied land in excess of the 1:200 ratio would revert to the [Crown](#) ^[9].

Although McCulloh had some success in settling people on similar large grants in the [Cape Fear River Valley](#) ^[10], these western tracts were almost completely vacant prior to the [French and Indian War](#) ^[11]. Dobbs discovered only 75 families during a 1755 tour of his western holdings, then in [Anson County](#) ^[12]. By 1762, when he revisited the area, there were many more settlers who, according to Dobbs, had banded together to resist his plans to be their landlord. At one point, a group of them chased Dobbs and his survey party on horseback and nearly got into a gun battle with Dobbs, who soon left for the coast, never to return to the backcountry.

Citing the disturbance of the late "war" with the French, McCulloh had convinced the Crown to alter the terms of the grants, giving the speculators until 1765 to determine just how many people had settled on the tracts by 1760, to conduct surveys of plantations, and to come to terms with the occupants. In 1761 McCulloh dispatched his able son, [Henry Eustace](#) ^[13], to see to this phase of the operations. Henry also acted as agent for Dobbs and for [George Augustus Selwyn](#) ^[14], who had inherited his father's western claims. Henry McCulloh encountered dogged resistance among the settlers, now led by [militia](#) ^[15] captain [Thomas Polk](#) ^[16], who had recently arrived from Pennsylvania and who would later become a hero of the [Revolution](#) ^[17] in North Carolina. Polk and his men relied more on intimidation than actual violence to frustrate the speculators, although violence may have been used. In 1767 the McCullohs and their associates finally returned to the Crown most of their land along the border with South Carolina.

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Additional Resources:

"War of Sugar Creek." North Carolina Highway Historical Marker Program. <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?sp=Markers&k=Markers&sv=L-111> ^[18] (accessed September 17, 2012).

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

[Mecklenburg County](#) ^[27]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[28]

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