

Primary Source: Edmund Fanning Reports to Governor Tryon ^[1]

From 1768 to 1771, the flames of local discontent against colonial officials were fanned by loyalist and colonial official Edmund Fanning. In addition to being a loyalist, Fanning was a lawyer and land speculator and held a number of government posts, including town commissioner in Hillsborough, member of the Colonial Assembly from Orange County, public register in Orange County, and a judgeship. Locals accused him of imposing excessive fees that colonists would have paid to the county for activities like recording deeds for real estate transfers. Fanning was seriously disliked by local residents and may have made himself even more unpopular through his friendship with Governor Tryon and through his tactics at buying up significant parcels of land in Hillsborough.

As the tension between the colonial government and the Regulators began to increase, Fanning reported back to Governor Tryon on their activities in April 1768 and their efforts to direct their anger at him. Below is a transcription of the letter written by Fanning to Tryon on April 23, 1768. The letter shows how the Regulators were seen by colonial officials and it includes annotations with additional historical information.

[I want words to express the concern I feel](#) while I communicate to your Excellency the wretched and [deplorable](#) ^[2] situation of this County; this my present uneasiness is greatly aggravated from a sense of the concern it must give you, & being informed that the late orderly and well regulated County of Orange, is now (O my favourite County and people how art thou fallen) the very nest and bosom of rioting and rebellion -- The People are now in every part and Corner of the County, meeting, [conspiring](#) ^[3], and confederating by solemn oath and open violence to refuse the payment of Taxes and to prevent the execution of Law, threatening death and immediate destruction to myself and others, requiring settlements of the Public, Parish and County Taxes, to be made before their leaders -- Clerks, Sheriffs, Registers, Attornies and all Officers of every degree and station to be [arraigned at the Bar of their Shallow Understanding](#) and to be punished and regulated at their Will, and in a word, for them to become the [sovereign](#) ^[4] [arbiters](#) ^[5] of right and wrong. This [Contagion](#) ^[6] and spirit of rebellion (for surely Sir it is rank rebellion) took its rise in the lower part of Anson spread itself into Orange and encouraged by some of the principal men of Cumberland (as I am informed & verily believe) became considerable -- On my return from Salisbury Supr Court hearing of the [Conspiracy](#) ^[7] I convened four of the Head men before me and [expatiated](#) ^[8] to them on the folly and madness of their conduct and three out of four readily acknowledged the [impropriety](#) ^[9] of their conduct, confessed a clear conviction of their error and made me a promise to put an end to it as far as in their Power. I dismissed them and expected to hear no more of it -- But alas I find it was not to be effected...

[I] this day got all the information in my power of the state situation and number of the regulators (as they are pleased to call themselves, tho' by Lawyers they must be termed rebels and Traitors) and learn that on this day they have a grand Association and that on the 3rd day of May they are to [environ](#) ^[10] the Town with fifteen hundred men & then to execute their vengeance on me and if not satisfied in every particular to their desire (which is impossible) why then to lay the Town in ashes &c. but I cannot believe them anything like so numerous, neither do I [apprehend](#) ^[11] such [inevitable](#) ^[12] death as the universal Panick and the popular cry seems to suggest and threaten -- Colo Gray, Major Lloyd, Captain Hart, Adjutant Nash & Captain Thackston seem to think that not above one hundred men can be raised in this County who will with spirit and courage oppose them, for say they those who are not for them will not fight against them. Unluckily for the cause of Government the County Court is next week to be held in this Town and considering the [prevalency](#) ^[13] of that [Party](#) and the impossibility of enforcing any order among the [tumultuous](#) ^[14] [throng](#) ^[15] and [rabble](#) ^[16] which ever attend Courts, I thought it most advisable to be silent until to-morrow week when in the evening I propose to send off a Detachment of the Trusty and loyal few that I can command for to apprehend three or four of the principals under the cover of the night, and to have them brought instantly to town where on the Tuesday following I verily expect an attack from the whole united force of the regulators or rebels at which time I intend, as do also the aforementioned Officers, to bravely [repulse](#) ^[17] them or nobly die -- If I can rally force to withstand one attack I then shall [plume](#) ^[18] myself as being the commanding Officer in this County & then shall expect to be joined immediately by numbers who now think it desperately dangerous and almost inevitable death to oppose them, so powerful are they thought, and so alarming are the [apprehensions](#) ^[19] of the [Populace](#) ^[20] at this time -- and was it not that they will be awed by their guilt and we supported and encouraged by our loyalty and attachment to the Constitution and Government our defeat would be [indubitably](#) ^[21] certain and sure -- They say they can command powerful and numerous aids from Anson, Rowan and Mecklenburg and if so it becomes the important concern of Government and undoubtedly my duty early to apply to your Excellency for Orders to raise the [Militia](#) ^[22] and if any will obey (which I think they will some few) to give them Battle immediately, and if any advantage can be once gained the show will be over I am convinced...

My duty to Her Excellency Mrs Tryon and do me the favour to believe that I am most [cordially](#) ^[23] and sincerely with the highest sense of Gratitude and respect most absolutely at your Excellency's full command

Edmund Fanning

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Wilmington the 27. April 1768.

Sir

Your Letter of the 23. of April, with the several Letters inclosed was delivered last Night; They opened a Stone which afforded me no less surprise, than real and hearty concern. I cannot too much applaud your Sense of the Outrages that have been already acted, as will . . . as those that may probably be carried into execution, even while I am now signifying my Abhorrence of them. . . . The spirited and determin'd Resolutions of yourself and Officers merit my highest Commendations. The best Testimonies I can give of my Approbation of such steady Behavior in so Righteous a Cause, is an Oath which I with sincerity make to come up and join ^{you} against all your Opposers, and this I will do, as soon as You inform me my presence is necessary, with all the Dispatch that the Emergency of the Case requires; therefore do not hesitate personally to enlist me in defence of the Laws of this Country.

I remain

[42]

April 27, 1768: Governor Tryon responds to Edmund Fanning's Letter, from the [Colonial Governors' Papers Collection, State Archives of North Carolina](#). [43]

[Regulator Movement Digital Collection, State Archives of North Carolina](#) [44]

Artifacts:



[45]

18th century illustration of Edmund Fanning. This illustration shows Fanning after he left North Carolina and relocated to Nova Scotia. From the collections of the New York Public Library.

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