

## The Regulators <sup>[1]</sup>

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During the years leading up to the American Revolution many North Carolina people became strongly discontented with the way the provincial government was handling the colony's affairs. However, their quarrel was not with the form of government or the colony's laws but with abuses by government officials.

Grievances <sup>[2]</sup> affecting the daily lives of the colonists included excessive taxes, dishonest sheriffs, and illegal fees. Scarcity of money contributed to the state of unrest. Those living in the western part of the province were isolated and unsympathetic with the easterners and it was in those frontier counties that the War of the Regulation began.

Minor clashes occurred until the spring of 1768, when an association of "Regulators" was formed. Wealthier colonists considered them to be a mob. The Regulators never had an outstanding leader, though several men were prominent in the movement; including James Hunter, Rednap Howell, William Butler, and Herman Husband. Husband, a Quaker and follower of Benjamin Franklin, circulated <sup>[3]</sup> political pamphlets advocating peaceful reform.

## Violent resistance

Discouraged over failing to secure justice through peaceful negotiations, the reformers took a more radical stand. Violence, lawlessness, and terrorism reigned. When the government retaliated against them, the Regulators defiantly refused to pay fees, terrorized those who administered the law, and disrupted court proceedings.

It fell to royal governor William Tryon <sup>[4]</sup> to bring the backcountry revolt to a speedy conclusion. In March 1771, the governor's council advised Tryon to call out the militia <sup>[5]</sup> and march against the rebel farmers.

Volunteers for the militia were mustered <sup>[6]</sup>. When the expedition finally got under way, Gen. Hugh Waddell <sup>[7]</sup> was ordered to approach Hillsborough by way of Salisbury, with Cape Fear and western militia at his command. Tryon and his army proceeded more directly toward Hillsborough. Waddell, with only 284 men, was challenged on his way by a large groups of Regulators. Since he was outnumbered, the general decided to turn back. On May 11, Governor Tryon and his forces left Hillsborough intending to rescue Waddell. After resting on the banks of Alamance Creek in the heart of Regulator country, Tryon gathered his army of approximately a thousand men. Five miles away, 2,000 Regulators had assembled.

## The Battle of Alamance

The battle began on May 16 after the Regulators rejected Tryon's suggestion that they disperse <sup>[8]</sup> peacefully. Lacking leadership, organization, and adequate arms and ammunition <sup>[9]</sup>, the Regulators were no match for Tryon's militia. Many Regulators fled, leaving their bolder comrades to fight on.

The rebellion of the Regulators was crushed. Nine members of the king's militia were killed and 61 wounded. The Regulator losses were much greater, though exact numbers are unknown. Tryon took 15 prisoners; seven were hung 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 <sup>[10]</sup> to the royal government.

The War of the Regulation illustrates how dissatisfied much of the population was during the days before the American Revolution. The boldness displayed by reformers opposed to royal authority provided a lesson in the use of armed resistance, which patriots employed a few short years later in the American War for Independence.

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- [Gov. William Tryon](#) <sup>[4]</sup>
- [James Hunter](#) <sup>[22]</sup>
- [Rednap Howell](#) <sup>[23]</sup>
- [William Butler](#) <sup>[24]</sup>
- [Herman Husband](#) <sup>[25]</sup>

**Places:**



<sup>[26]</sup>

A monument at [Alamance Battleground](#) <sup>[27]</sup> remembers those who died in the final, violent clash between the Regulators and the colonial government.

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**Primary Sources:**

<sup>[28]</sup> **N.C.'s Regulator Movement**

North Carolina

17 May 1771

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 Camp) who will come into Camp, 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 1771.

Wm Tryon

By His Excellency's Command  
Robt Palmer Secy.

God save the King.

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