

Few, James ^[1]

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by Elmer D. Johnson, 1986

1746–17 May 1771

James Few, Regulator, was born in Maryland, the son of William Few, Sr., and Mary Wheeler Few. He was the brother of William Few, Jr. ^[2], who became a U.S. senator and judge. In 1758 the family moved to North Carolina and settled near Hillsborough. James Few married, probably in 1769, Mary Howard, and also settled near Hillsborough where he was a farmer and carpenter. The couple had twin children, William and Sally, born 9 Feb. 1771.

Few's role in the Regulator ^[3] disturbances is not clear. In 1768 his father had signed a bond for two leading Regulators, William Butler ^[4] and Herman Husband ^[5]. On the other hand, James Few's brothers William and Benjamin seem not to have been seriously involved. James Few was indicted in the May term of court in 1771 in New Bern for participation in the Regulator riot of the previous September. Because he had never been arrested, he was technically an outlaw at the time of the Battle of Alamance ^[6] on 16 May 1771. After the battle, in which Governor William Tryon ^[7]'s forces defeated the poorly organized Regulators, Few was hanged on or near the field of battle. Six other Regulators were hanged later after a military trial. The reason for Few's immediate hanging seems to be that he was the one "outlaw" taken during the battle, although several other theories have come down as local traditions. One of these is that Few was a religious fanatic, at least partially insane, who fought with such fury on the battle-field that the governor's troops demanded his life when he was captured. Another is that he was an enemy of Edmund Fanning ^[8], a government official in Hillsborough, who insisted that he be executed. Whatever the cause, Few's hanging seems to have been an unnecessary assumption of power on the governor's part, and even his apologists do not condone it.

Following the Battle of Alamance, William Few, Sr., moved his family to Georgia, taking with him the twin children of James and Mary Few. James's son William became prominent in Georgia and was the great-grandfather of William Preston Few ^[9], twentieth century president of Duke University ^[10].

References:

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Additional Resources:

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Biographies ^[18]

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Hillsborough ^[21]

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