

Biographical Notes for THE REGULATORS

NORTH CAROLINA ANCESTORS

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NOTE : A generic college essay submitted as sample a history essay. The author's name is known .

The Regulators of North Carolina: Outraged Opressors

The history of colonial North Carolina is bombarded with frequent strife and turmoil.

The people of North Carolina, because of a lack in supervision from the British monarchy, learned to possess an independent spirit.

The colony remained isolated from the rest of the country because of several geographical conditions such as poor harbors, the absence of navigable rivers, numerous swamps, and bad road conditions. Due to these conditions, communities throughout North Carolina became widely seperated. The colony was initially set up by the Lords Proprietors, an English founding company that helped finance early American exploration. When North Carolina was freed from British proprietorship, the Granville family, descendants from the original Lords Proprietors, continued to hold their land rights. This area, which became known as the “Granville District” was the scene of many disputes over land grants, taxes, British support, and a great deal of lesser issues.

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Settlers in the back country (Piedmont) felt particularly oppressed by the laws drawn up by an assembly largely composed of eastern landowners. “Local” officials in many counties, particularly in the western segment of the back country were not local men at all, but friends of the royal governor, William Tryon. These so-called “friends” often collected higher fees than authorized by the law while obtaining tax money or

divided a single service into many services and charged fees for each. Lawyers who followed the judges around the colony also fell into the same habit.

The citizens of Anson, Orange, and Granville counties were the first to make themselves heard. In 1764, this band of citizens, referred to as the “mob” created a number of local disturbances until Governor Arthur Dobbs passed a proclamation forbidding the collection of illegal fees, the practice that the people complained of the most. Their protests were calmed only temporarily. However, the effects of the new law wore off soon enough and sheriffs and other county officers returned to their old dishonest practices. Citizens complained largely in part because money was so scarce; local trading was almost limited to barter. Often, property was seized and resold, and citizens felt that their property was being sold to a friend of an official for much less than its true value.

(1) People among the Granville District were anxious to revolt and needed only a leader to provide the spark that led to the fire of the War of Regulation. A man named Hermon Husband became actively involved and was referred to as a leader several times, despite the fact that he was often nothing more than an agitator. Husband reprinted patriotic flyers with messages dealing with taxation without representation hoping that citizens would call for reform. However, at no time during the Regulation was there an actual leader.

(2) Orange County was an early center of Regulator activity. Colonel Edmund Fanning, holder of numerous offices in the county including the prominent Clerk of the Recorder's Court at Hillsborough, became a prime target along with Royal Governor William Tryon, who took office in 1765. Tryon was hated because he aimed to use taxes to build Tryon Palace in New Bern, a very costly residence for himself, as well as the seat for the colony's government. The Regulators, “who named themselves after a group of country reformists in South Carolina” (3) shortly after Tryon's announcement to build the palace, had no sympathy with the governor's desire for a fancy residence.

The War of Regulation was not limited to Orange County. Outbreaks of violence during the collection of taxes in Anson County and several riots throughout the Granville District were sure signs of what was to come. A group of men, apparently enthusiastic over the success of the Sons of Liberty in resisting the Stamp Act, called citizens together to determine whether they were being treated justly or not. Edmund Fanning denounced this meeting. Little was accomplished at the meeting, but this is where the Regulators proclaimed themselves as a radical political group.

Minor oppositions continued to occur until the spring of 1768 when the sheriff of Orange County announced he would be collecting taxes at certain areas of the colony only, and if colonists did not pay at these particular locations a charge would be incurred. This occurred at about the same time Tryon gave word about the construction of Tryon Palace. This was very inconvenient for the settlers for two reasons. The widely scattered population made it difficult to arrive at these tax stations. Lack of money was also a concern. Opposition to these moves influenced people to join the Regulator association. The Regulators declared their purpose in a proclamation soon after claiming they would:

“assemble ourselves for conference for regulating public grievances and abuses of power, in the following particulars...that may occur:

(1) We will pay no more taxes until we are satisfied that they are agreeable to law, and applied to the purposes therein mentioned, unless we cannot help it, or are forced.

(2) We will pay no officer any more fees than the law allows, unless we are obliged to do it, and then show our dislike and bear open testimony against it.

(3) We will attend all of our meetings as often as we conveniently can...

(4) We will contribute to collections for defraying the necessary expenses attending the work, according to our abilities.

(5) In case of differences in judgement, we will submit to the judgement of the majority of our body.

(6) The Regulators” also did not allow drinking of alcohol at their meetings because they knew that different opinions could result in an internal clash.

At an unfortunate moment with feeling between the two opposing sides at a peak, officials in Hillsborough seized a Regulator's horse, saddle, and bridle and sold them for taxes. Outraged, a band of Regulators rode into Hillsborough, rescued the horse, and before leaving town, fired several shots into Edmund Fanning's house. Fanning, who was in court in Halifax, immediately ordered the arrest of three Regulators who played a big role in the Hillsborough horse incident, William Butler, Peter Craven, and Ninian Bell Hamilton. Citizens of Orange County were very sympathetic with the Regulators. Hermon Husband was chosen as one of two delegates to meet with officials to discuss the incident. Before the meeting could be held, Fanning gathered a handful of armed men and assisted the sheriff in arresting William Butler and Hermon Husband. The two men were charged with inciting the people to rebellion and were confined in the Hillsborough jail. Enraged by the officers, the following morning seven hundred men, some of whom were not Regulators, went to Hillsborough to rescue the prisoners. County officials, becoming alarmed, released the prisoners in time to speed them away to meet the approaching mob of men. The governor's secretary informed the protestors that Governor Tryon would receive their petition to investigate conditions in Orange County and would see that they received fair treatment at the hands of county officials. Due to this incident, support for the Regulation movement spread

(7). The Regulators pursued their purpose with tremendous force. They often broke into courts of justice, drove judges from the bench and set up mock trials. They dragged unoffending attorneys through the streets almost until death and publicly assaulted peaceful citizens who refused to express public sympathy for the Regulation. In September, 1770, Judge Richard Henderson was presiding over the superior court in Hillsborough when a mob of one hundred fifty Regulators, led by Husband, armed with sticks and switches, broke into the courthouse, attempted to strike the judge, and forced him to leave the bench. They next attacked and severely whipped John Williams, a practicing attorney. William Hooper, who later would be a signer of the Declaration of

Independence and an assistant attorney general was dragged through the streets to be humiliated and violently abused. Edmund Fanning was pulled from the courthouse by his heels and dragged from the courthouse before being brutally whipped. The mob then broke into Fanning's house, burned his papers, destroyed his furniture, and demolished and burned the building. Many others were whipped as the Regulators rioted through the streets of Hillsborough. Windows of private homes were broken and the inhabitants of the town were terrorized. Court was adjourned when Judge Henderson was unable to keep order.

(8). The assembly of Governor Tryon set about at once to draw up a series of reform measures. Acts were passed dealing with the appointment of sheriffs and their duties, fixing attorneys' fees, regulating officers' fees, providing for more speedy collection of small debts, and the creation of the counties of Wake, Guilford, Chatham, and Surry in the areas of the region where the Regulators were the most numerous. These laws were designed to meet the demands of the Regulators, but while the assembly was vigorously passing these laws word arrived that the Regulators had assembled in Cumberland County and were preparing to march to New Bern, the current capital of North Carolina and residence of Royal Governor William Tryon. A complete change came over the assembly and thoughts turned toward punishing measures

(9). The assembly adopted the "Johnston Act" introduced by Samuel Johnston, who would later be a member of the Continental Congress and a senator from North Carolina in the First Congress of the United States. This act was to be enforced for one year only. It stated that the attorney general could prosecute charges of riot in any superior court in the province. All who avoided the summons for court for sixty days were declared and liable to be killed for treason.

In addition to these drastic steps, the governor was allowed to call the militia out to enforce the law. The Regulators, as anticipated by the governing authorities in North Carolina, reacted with defiance. To promote and strengthen their organization they sent messengers to nearly every county to encourage supporters and organize those who would join them. The people of Rowan County were extremely cooperative due to their hatred of the Johnston Act (9). Governor Tryon, in March 1771, ordered a term of superior court to be held in Hillsborough, but judges filed a protest with the council. Under the riotous conditions existing in that part of the province, they felt that they could not hold court with any hope of prosecution. They also feared for their personal safety because of what previously occurred in Hillsborough in the case of Judge Richard Henderson.

After this appeal had been made, the council decided that it was time to take a stand against the lawlessness of the citizens (10). Protest from the Regulators came strongly, but Tryon paid no attention. On March 19, 1771 he called for volunteers for the militia and when enlistments began slowly he offered a payment of forty shillings. The offer helped tremendously, and on April 23 the troops got under way. Guns, ammunition, and other equipment for these troops had been sent at Tryon's request from Fort Johnston on the Cape Fear River. General Hugh Waddell had already been ordered to march to Salisbury to halt the advances of the Rowan Regulators, to retrieve the western militia,

and march to Hillsborough from the west. At the Johnston County Courthouse troops from Craven, Carteret, Orange, Beaufort, New Hanover, Onslow, Dobbs, and Johnston were joined by the Wake militia. They made their way to Smith's Ferry beside the Neuse River where Tryon reviewed the troops on May 3, 1771. There were 1,068 men; 151 were officers. Pleased with his recruitment, he broke camp and advanced toward Hillsborough. General Waddell and his 284 officers and men were approaching Salisbury from the Cape Fear River. Governor Tryon and the militia reached Hillsborough on May 9. General Waddell left Salisbury that same day, but while crossing the Yadkin River he was met and stopped by a large group of Regulators. Waddell retreated back to Salisbury. Intending to help General Waddell, Tryon left Hillsborough on May 11 leading the militia through the heart of "Regulator country." On the fourteenth day they reached the banks of Alamance Creek where they rested for a day. On May 16, 1771, Tryon ordered his army into battle formation.

The companies from Carteret, Orange, Beaufort, New Hanover, and Dobbs counties, plus the artillery, were in the lead, followed by companies from Onslow and Johnston. With these troops Tryon set out to destroy a large body of Regulators reported assembled five miles ahead. The Regulators, estimated at about 2,000, were waiting for Tryon's confrontation. They lacked adequate leadership, a clear purpose, efficient organization, and even sufficient arms and ammunition for battle. The Regulators must have felt that simply by making a display of force they could frighten the governor into granting their demands. Among their number were many noisy and restless individuals and many who seemed not to realize the seriousness of the situation lying ahead. Earlier that week, some of the Regulators captured Colonel John Ashe and Captain John Walker of Tryon's militia while they were scouting, severely beat them, and made them prisoners.

So careless were the Regulators and so unaware of the situation most of them were wrestling and playing around when an older soldier who happened to be among them warned them to expect an attack at any minute. Shortly after, the firing began. Before the shooting began, the Regulators were given a choice to retreat and dissolve their group or be fired upon. In the one hour they had to decide few were considering their lives. The Regulators gave no response and, thus, the Battle of Alamance began. Tryon's well-equipped troops soon put the Regulators to flight. The Regulators had no officer higher than captain and each individual company fought independently. Tryon's artillery fire was very effective in the beginning, but many Regulators later found refuge behind trees and rocks.

The Regulators were deserted by many of their own comrades and took early leave of the battlefield. The Battle of Alamance lasted two hours. Tryon's forces lost nine to death and sixty-one wounded, while the Regulators lost the same number killed and had a large, but undetermined number of people wounded. Tryon took about fifteen prisoners and executed one on the spot with the idea of striking terror into the hearts of the Regulators. This action, I believe, was uncalled for because of the decisive military defeat. Despite his evil display of character during the battle, Tryon had his own surgeons treat the wounded Regulators (the entire battle has been summarized from source #11).

The Regulators attempt to secure reform in local government by force apparently failed completely. The Regulators were compelled to retreat from society and live life in the wilderness. Many migrated, some going to Tennessee and down into the Mississippi River Valley. Others followed Daniel Boone's trail into Kentucky. In fact, by 1772, just one year later, about 1,500 of the former Regulators left North Carolina (12).

The importance of the Battle of Alamance and its proper place in American history have been topics of discussion not only in North Carolina, but across the country. I gathered this fact from the area from which my sources came. I noticed that the efforts of the Regulators is very similar to that of the colonists efforts to gain independence, only on a much smaller scale. The War of Regulation should be regarded as one of the primary thrusts of North Carolina's role in the Revolutionary War. Because of the research I have done I am encouraged to find out more about the history of North Carolina. The Battle of Alamance should be covered in every American history course simply because it illustrates the desire for independence many colonists had during this time period.

The Regulators Petition

The North Carolina Regulators, almost 2,000 in number, had signed a petition now referred to as [THE REGULATOR'S PETITION](#)

Two of Presley men were among the signers, brothers Thomas and John. (last names misspelled) After this movement, Thomas, along with Andrew Sr. and Andrew, Jr., were involved with the militia and rendering supplies to the patriots in Kershaw County, South Carolina.

Alamance Battleground, where the War of the Regulation took place.



Revolutionary War Patriots



Sources of Information

Endnotes

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