

## HOT SPOTS ON THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION

The “Revolution” of 1776 was an attempt at restoration not rebellion. The colonists were fighting for the rights which were guaranteed to them as Englishmen through the British Constitution. The British Constitution consisted of liberty charters such as the 1100 Charter of Liberties, 1215 Magna Carta, the Petition of Right of 1628, The Grand Remonstrance of 1640 and the English Bill of Rights of 1689.

The journey to 1776 was a long road spanning several decades of discontent, petition, turmoil and sometimes violent confrontation. Contrary to popular rhetoric, the founders were not a band of hotheads itching to shoot someone or longing to start an armed conflict with their government on a whim. They didn't just grab their muskets and start shooting. They petitioned and petitioned and petitioned until it became clear that the government would not correct its course. A brief look at a basic timeline shows that Independence was a long, drawn-out affair.

### Timeline

- 1651 Navigation Acts
- 1733 Molasses Act
- 1751 Currency Act #1
- 1754-1763 French Indian War
- 1759 Jan Enfield Riot
- 1764 Hovering Act
- 1764 Currency Act #2
- 1764 Sugar Act
- 1765-1771 Regulators Uprising
- 1765 Quartering Act
- 1765 Feb Stamp Act

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- 1765 Aug 14, Stamp Act Protest Boston Commons
- 1765 Oct Stamp Act Congress (NY)
- 1765 Oct 19 Declaration of Rights and Grievances
- 1765 Oct 31 Non importation agreement (NY)
- 1765 Dec 1, Stamp Act Protest Bowling Green
  
- 1766 Feb 20 Parliament Votes to repeal Stamp Act
- 1766 March 18 Stamp Act Repealed & Declaratory Act Passed
  
- 1767 The Townshend Acts
  - 1. The New York Restraining Act
  - 2. The Revenue Act
  - 3. The Commissioners of Customs Act
  - 4. The Indemnity Act
  - 5. The Vice-Admiralty Court Act.
  
- 1768 Feb Massachusetts Circular Letter
- 1768 Aug 1 Boston Non-importation agreement
- 1768 Oct 13 Journal of Occurrences
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- 1770 Jan 19 Battle of Golden Hill (NY)
- 1770 March 5 Boston Massacre
  
- 1771 May 16 Battle of Alamance (Regulators)
  
- 1773 Tea Act
  
- 1774 March Boston Port Act
- 1774 May Massachusetts Govt Act & The Administration of Justice Act
- 1774 June Quartering Act #2 & The Quebec Act
- 1774 August 25-27 New Bern Resolves (NC)
  
- 1775 April 19 Battles of Lexington and Concord

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- 1775 May 31, Mecklenberg Resolves
  - 1775 June 19, New Hanover Association
  - 1775 June 30, Cumberland County Resolve
  - 1775 July 1 Pitt County Resolves
  - 1775 14 August Tyron Rresolves
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- 1776 April 12 Halifax Resolves

This long train of abuses included FOUR major flare ups that had a significant influence in shaping the minds of the founders toward an open conflict to gain their liberty:

1. The Regulators War
2. The Liberty Pole Skirmishes and the Battle on Golden Hill
3. The British Occupation and The Boston Massacre
4. The Gaspee Affair

Part 1.

### **Regulators Movement and the Battle of Alamance**

The War of Regulation or the Regulators Movement was an uprising in North Carolina during the years 1765 to 1771 in which citizens took up arms against public officials.

Drought hit North Carolina in the 1750s and caused many farmers to be in debt. A large population increase brought merchants and lawyers from the east, and the population became dependent on the merchants' goods. The new lawyers from the east took advantage of the indebted farmers in the courts. A cabal of elite public officials levied taxes and collected fees and fines in order to enrich themselves on the backs of the poor locals. Sheriffs and courts would shake down the locals and jail debtors who could not pay.

The North Carolina economy ranked last in the colonies and was mocked for not having a prosperous seaport like Boston or New York. So, the King sent Governor Tyron, an experienced military colonel, to squeeze more money out of North Carolina. The governor is known for the palatial Tyron's Palace in New Bern which was built with public funds. The ornate mansion was built to say, "North Carolina is prestigious" and to lord over the residents and intimidate them. The residents saw the structure as a sign of corruption, built with the money stolen from the population through excessive fees to register deeds and conduct legal business. This oppression carried on daily, most heavily throughout the counties of Rowan, Orange, Anson, Granville and Cumberland. By 1765 the locals banded together to resist these actions which they saw as tyrannical and corrupt. The resistance was known as the Regulator Movement led by Redknap Howell, James Hunter and Herman Husband. The leaders of the Regulator Movement continually attempted to have their grievances heard to no avail. Being ignored and constantly harassed eventually drove them to violence.

East of Rowan, in Orange County, regulators marched on the county seat in Hillsborough, and forcibly closed the courts to keep taxes and public debts from being collected. This march was prompted by anger at Edmond Fanning, who was the clerk of court, judge and leader of the militia. Holding all these positions enabled Fanning to file bogus claims in court, then arrest you and throw you in jail.

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Many skirmishes occurred for the next five years in nearly every western county where the officials and their corrupt sheriffs were fleecing the people. Even [Governor William Tryon](#) wrote in 1767 that "the sheriffs have embezzled more than half of the public money ordered to be raised and collected by them."

In 1768 The regulators marched on the colonial court in Hillsborough and dragged the corrupt officials including Edmund Fanning and presiding judge Richard Henderson, into the street and beat them. Fanning was beaten so badly that he was nearly blinded.

In 1770 the regulators went so far as destroying the home of Judge Fanning and burned down the barn of Judge Henderson. They also destroyed the shops of the merchants they saw as interlopers and went on a general rampage through the town.

A Farmer and regulator leader, Herman Husband was arrested by Edmund Fanning for what the regulators saw as an unjust debt. Regulators gathered to spring Husband from jail.

The Regulators surrounded the court and demanded the officials to "disgorge their unlawful fees." The officials scared out of their wits, promised to investigate and reimburse the citizens.

On word of the protests Samuel Johnston of Edenton and the Assembly passed The Johnston Riot Act. Which the regulators mocked as the "riotous act."

It all culminated in the Battle of Alamance in 1771

When the judges informed Governor Tryon that they could not hold court without his protection, Tryon declared martial law and began marching on Hillsborough.

### **Battle of Alamance 1771**

A bounty of 40 shillings was offered for any regulator, and militiamen assembled at New Bern and on 22 April began marching toward Hillsborough. By 3 May, when the troops reached Smith's Ferry in Johnston County, the Tryon's militia had grown to over 1,000 men. Gen. Hugh Waddell was marching from Cape Fear with nearly 300 men when he met several thousand regulators at the Yadkin Valley and was forced to retreat to Salisbury.

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On 11 May Tryon led his force through the heart of regulator country from Hillsborough to Salisbury and three days later, encamped on Alamance Creek. Three miles to the west, over 2,000 Regulators gathered on the plantation of Michael Holt.

On May 16th, 1771 after many failed attempts to negotiate and Tyron refusing to listen to the regulators' greivances, Tryon directed the militiamen to move toward the Regulator encampment.

Tyron ordered the Regulators to disperse within the hour. The Regulators retreated into a wooded area leaving Tyron's 1,000 men in in the clearing about 25 yards away.

Tyron gave the order to fire, but the militia hesitated. The governor repeated his command, shouting "Fire, fire on them or on me!" and the battle began.

Most of the Regulators were too poor to even own weapons, thinking their larger numbers would force the Governor to hear their grievances. They were no match for the governor's men and artillery, which included two cannons and four swivel guns.

Initially the militia fell back under fire. Some Regulators rushed forward and seized one of the cannons, but with no ammunition or skill in firing it Tyron's men soon dislodged them.

And the regulators fled.

Tyron reported 9 militiamen killed and 61 wounded. Regulator casualties were more numerous: estimates range from 9 killed and an undetermined number wounded to as high as 300 killed and wounded.

Tyron took 15 prisoners, one of whom was hanged on the battlefield that evening. In trials at Hillsborough, 12 Regulators were found guilty of treason; 6 of these were executed and the others pardoned. On the day following the battle, Tyron offered to pardon all Regulators who would swear allegiance to the Crown. Within six weeks, more than 6,000 backcountry settlers had taken the oath and received pardons from the new royal governor, Josiah Martin.

Initially the militia was heralded as heroes and the regulators were labeled as rebels and insurgents. But Newspapers around the colonies used the occasion to highlight British oppression and began to question the methods used by Tyron and his forces. In the midst of oppressive acts of the British parliament and the travesty of what became known as the Boston Massacre, the regulator incident just added more fuel to

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the fire of resentment toward great Britain and the determination for the oppressed children of America to be independent of the mother country's tyrannical rule.