



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on May 17, 2014

## Government Agents Attempt to Seize Western Ranches — in 1771

*“I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging the future but by the past.”*

— Patrick Henry, March 23, 1775



There are many events in the history of the formation of this Republic that go unnoticed, unremembered, and unheralded. Today is a chance to remedy that and remember the Regulators.

As if cut from today’s headlines, patriot farmers and small ranchers in North and South Carolina led a rebellion against armed government officials trying to exercise control over western lands. History has dubbed the uprising the War of the Regulation, the final battle of which happened on May 16 in 1771.

The West in this case, of course, was not Nevada, Utah, and New Mexico, but the rural counties of the Carolina backcountry.

Historian James Whittenburg described the events as “the last and greatest of the social upheavals” that led to the War for Independence.

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As economic depression and extreme drought threatened to destroy the livelihood of the small farmers and ranchers that called western Carolina home, colonial bureaucrats appointed by the royal governor were financing the plans of wealthy merchants and lawyers to buy out the land owned by impoverished Scots-Irish settlers who were on the brink of bankruptcy.

A central part of the scheme was one that the farmers found most reprehensible and worthy of revolt. Knowing that the rural ranchers and planters were in dire economic need as a result of the drought and the depression, government-backed newcomers were offering pennies on the dollar for the formerly fertile farmlands. This would give the government monopoly control over valuable tracts of land, forcing independent-minded, strong-willed settlers into towns and away from the desirable acreage.

When the resentful farmers tried to stop the seizures in court, the lawyers used their superior legal knowledge to support their plan, increasing the frustration and firing up the tempers of the residents.

Deciding they had suffered long enough at the hands of a government that was not only deaf to their demands, but “cruel, arbitrary, tyrannical, and corrupt,” the ranchers and farmers formed a group called the Regulators.

The main goal of the Regulators was to replace corrupt officials with those who would end the overreach and reduce the tax burden that was crushing their efforts to regain a fiscal toehold over their land. The loyal colonial representatives of the crown were determined to flood the area with their cronies in a “perennial pursuit of gain.”



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Eventually, the government responded to the revolt, sending the militia to crush the uprising and hang the leaders.

Small skirmishes began breaking out in the western counties of North Carolina as the landowners began blocking access to the land by surveyors the royal governor had sent to divide up the land into tracts he could control and sell.

These confrontations culminated in the only full-scale battle of the War of the Regulation: the Battle of Alamance (battleground historic site shown) on May 16, 1771.

With a force numbering just over 1,000 troops, the royal governor, William Tryon, arrived in the area on May 9, about the same time as a smaller contingent of colonial soldiers commanded by General Hugh Waddell. Upon arriving at the flashpoint of the fighting, Tryon and Waddell realized they were outnumbered by the patriot force and they retreated.

On May 14, the men and officers of the colonial army set up camp in Alamance and a platoon was sent to find the Regulator location.

What they found was a unit of at least 2,000 Regulators encamped about 10 miles away. The band was without a clear leader and was poorly provisioned — not much of a challenge to the colonial army.

After a Regulator squad captured a couple of the royal governor's soldiers, Governor Tryon ordered the Regulators to stand down or they would be punished as traitors and rebels. The Regulators would not surrender, believing themselves to be justified in their armed defense of their lands, their families, and their way of life.

On May 16, Tryon himself shot the Regulator leader, Robert Thompson. The battle commenced, but ended relatively quickly after each side suffered less than a dozen casualties.

The government forces captured the Regulators and demanded they swear an oath of allegiance to the king of Great Britain and to the governor he had appointed. Seven of these planter patriots refused to take the oath and they were summarily executed for treason.

Among the obvious comparisons to the assault of the administration of the tyrant-in-training, Barack Obama, on the American West and the planters and farmers that call it home, there is one aspect of the Regulator War that is remarkable for its similarity to our own situation.

Edmund Fanning was "the man most detested by the Regulators." Relying on his ties to the "eastern oligarchy," Fanning became the most powerful government official in western North Carolina. Securing help from the royal governor to acquire political position, Fanning began straight away manipulating these connections and exercising despotic rule over the residents of the rural counties over which he was placed.

Historians record that it was Fanning's "haughty, despotic, and tyrannical spirit" that made him the center of the Regulator insurrection.

Academics are not alone in this assessment, however. In 1765, an anonymous Regulator from Orange County, North Carolina, wrote the following poem about Fanning and the reason for the fierce anger he stoked among the backcountry ranchers and farmers:

*When Fanning was first to Orange came  
He looked both pale and wan,*



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*An old patched coat upon his back,  
An old mare he rode on.*

*Both man and mare want worth five pounds,  
As I've been often told;  
But by his civil robberies  
He's laced his coat with gold.*

Consider this report of Senator Harry Reid's (D-Nev.) [history in his home state](#) as reported earlier by *The New American*:

Arriving in Washington in 1983 as Nevada's only representative, Reid declared a net worth of about \$1 million. At the latest count, he estimates his net worth at 10 times that, if not more. Since much of his portfolio is in real estate, estimates may vary with circumstances and timing and political maneuvering.

O'Neal [a reporter for Real Clear Politics] pointed out that over the years — especially since Reid became Senate majority leader in 2007 — he has built “a dizzying network of mutually beneficial political, personal and business alliances. These associations benefit Reid, his family, his close friends and, very often, the state.”

And this, regarding Reid's real and reprehensible role in the seizure of pasture land in rural Nevada:

Reid's efforts to clear the way for a Chinese company to build and operate a solar panel power plant, impacting directly one Clive Bundy, have been reviewed carefully elsewhere by writers at *The New American*. Warren Mass wrote, “Motivations are not always easy to prove, but in this case, Senator Reid's hand has shown up more than once.” He added,

The BLM's [Bureau of Land Management's] principal deputy director, Neil Kornze, previously served as Senator Reid's senior policy advisor. And we have noted [Harry Reid's son] Rory Reid's role as the chief representative for China's ENN Energy Group which sought to develop solar energy in Nevada.

Today, it seems, many patriots are content to vent their frustration on Facebook, rather than facing down the government forces that are violating the Constitution, the rule of law, and our God-given right to own property.

Perhaps, as we have just marked the anniversary of the final, fateful battle of the War of the Regulation, we should learn the lesson of the high cost of preserving liberty as taught bravely by the patriot planters of colonial North Carolina.

*Photo: Historical site of Battle of Alamance*

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