

# The Regulators organize

Regulators Advertisement No. 4, January 1768, from the *Colonial and State Records of North Carolina*, Volume 7, pp. 671–672.

## As you read...

### Civil disobedience

This document, dated January 1768, is a “subscription” to a political organization — a list of men signing on to membership in the organization. It is one of the earliest documents that survives from the “Regulation.” The subscribers agreed to resist paying taxes and fees they considered unlawful and to petition their representatives to change laws they considered unfair.

Backcountry residents in various counties formed associations and wrote petitions in 1768. Compare this document with the address from inhabitants near Haw River (Orange County) and the report of the regulation in Anson County. What similarities do you see? What differences? Are the charges made against colonial officials the same in each case? Do the authors of the documents cite similar political principles? Do any of them seem violent, or willing to use violence?

### Meanwhile, in the Revolution

Remember that this was happening in 1768, three years after the protests against the Stamp Act. You might compare the language and ideas in this document and those linked above to the language and ideas of the Stamp Act protests. Interestingly, the people who protested the Stamp Act in North Carolina were mostly eastern elites — the same people the Regulators were protesting *against!*

We the under written subscribers do voluntarily agree to form ourselves into an Association to assemble ourselves for conferences for regulating<sup>1</sup> publick Grievances & abuses of Power in the following particulars with others of like nature that may occur

1. That we will pay no Taxes until we are satisfied they are agreeable to Law and Applied to the purposes therein mentioned<sup>2</sup> unless we cannot help and are forced.
2. That we will pay no Officer any more fees than the Law allows unless we are obliged to it and then to shew a dislike to it & bear open testimony against it<sup>3</sup>.

3. That we will attend our Meetings of Conference as often as we conveniently can or is necessary in order to consult our representatives on the amendment of such Laws as may be found grievous or unnecessary<sup>4</sup> and to choose more suitable men than we have heretofore done for Burgesses<sup>5</sup> and Vestry men<sup>6</sup> and to Petition His Excellency our Governor the Honble<sup>7</sup> the Council and the Worshipful House of representatives His Majesty in Parliament &c. for redress of such Grievances as in the course of this undertaking may occur and to inform one another & to learn, know and enjoy all the Priviledges & Liberties that are allowed us and were settled on us by our worthy Ancestors the founders of the present Constitution in order to preserve it in its ancient Foundation that it may stand firm & unshaken<sup>8</sup>.
4. That we will contribute to Collections for defraying necessary expences<sup>9</sup> attending the work according to our abilities.
5. That in Cases of differences in Judgment we will submit to the Majority of our Body.

To all which We do solemnly swear or being a Quaker or otherwise scrupulous in Conscience of the common Oath do solemnly affirm<sup>10</sup> that We will stand true and faithful to this cause until We bring them to a true regulation according to the true intent & meaning of it in the judgment of the Majority.

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## On the web

### The Regulation in Anson County

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4249>

Rules and Resolves entered into by the Anson Mob. Vizt Whereas the Tax for the present year is very high part of which, unseen seem to many unlawful and unnecessary, that together with the great scarcity...

### Address from inhabitants near Haw River

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4250>

The request of the Inhabitants of the West side of Haw river to the Assembly men and Vestry men of Orange County Whereas the Taxes in the County are larger according to the number of Taxables than adjacent...

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## Notes

1. The “Regulators” took their name from the idea that they were trying to “regulate” the government. Here, *regulate* means to make regular or correct — so, the subscribers intended to *correct* the grievances and abuses of power suffered by colonists.
2. Here, they say that they will refuse to pay taxes “until we are satisfied they are agreeable to Law” — until only the legal amount is collected, and until all taxes they pay go for their intended purpose and are not taken by local officials. This is really where the Regulation began — with organized refusal to obey local officials of the colonial government.

Are the Regulators stating an intention to break the law, or to uphold it? Since they talk about *regulating* grievances, they seem to consider their actions to be within the law. But as you might guess, colonial officials wouldn't see it that way.

You might also ask why the author of the pledge used the word *until* and not *unless*. If they had refused to pay taxes *unless* they were "agreeable to Law," they would be saying that some taxes were collected properly and could justly be paid. But by saying *until*, they implied that *all* tax collection was corrupt, and wouldn't be fixed until some time in the future. It's a small word, but it makes a big difference in the meaning of the sentence!

3. In the first two items, the men say they will refuse to pay unlawful taxes or fees *unless* they are forced (or "obligated") to do so. They don't say how much they would resist or how much force would be required to make them pay. They do say that if they are forced to pay, they will "shew a dislike to it & bear open testimony against it."

How do you suppose they might do that? What sorts of interactions do you imagine took place when tax collectors knocked at the Regulators' doors? What do you think of this civil disobedience — how serious do you think they were about standing up for their rights?

4. They intend to pressure their representatives in the colonial Assembly to change the laws — and, if their representatives won't help them, they'll vote them out.
5. The colonial house of representatives was also called the house of *burgesses*. (The lower house of Virginia's legislature was also called the House of Burgesses.)
6. *Vestrymen* were public officials who oversaw the affairs of the Church of England. Before the Revolution, the Church of England was the official, government-supported church of the colony of North Carolina.
7. Honorable.
8. The English Constitution is the collection of all important laws passed by crown and Parliament, especially Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights of 1689. Many of the "liberties" — what we would call "rights" — that Englishmen held dear came from these documents. Two of those rights are mentioned (and used!) here — the right to petition their representatives and governor for redress of grievances (to ask them to change unfair laws or to correct abuses of power) and the right to assemble peacefully. It may be difficult to imagine being jailed for gathering together in a group with a political purpose or for writing a polite letter to a member of Congress, but the English had only recently won these rights, and the colonists were proud of their heritage as Englishmen and aware of how easily their liberties could be taken away.
9. What sort of "necessary expenses" do you suppose the Regulators might have had in carrying out their pledge?
10. Quakers (see <http://www.learnnc.org><http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-colonial/1969>) are forbidden from swearing an oath but must affirm instead. Disputes over oaths and affirmations led to Cary's Rebellion (see <http://www.learnnc.org><http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-colonial/1971>) in 1711.