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*Alamance.* Lue Simopoulos, producer.

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**North Carolina History**

From 1765 to 1771, the Regulation Movement erupted throughout backcountry North Carolina as colonists aired their grievances against both the royal governor and the provincial gentry, culminating in the Battle of Alamance. Their story has always been presented as a prelude to the War for Independence that began less than four years later. Although the underlying causes for dissension may have been similar in both instances, the Regulator saga deserves some individual attention. <cite>Alamance</cite>–the first of a proposed fifteen-part television series on North Carolina history–retells the Regulator narrative emphasizing the process of rebellion, the individual motivations of the primary actors, and the tensions between notions of wilderness and civilization that were foremost in the minds of Englishmen during the late 1700's. <p> The story opens in May 1771 with two strangers wandering upon Herman Husband–a leader of the movement–in the Virginia wilderness. The rest of the documentary is Husband's recounting of the events leading to his flight to Virginia. It is in this initial scene, however, that the framework is set for the narrative. Husband explains that Governor Tryon is out of touch with North Carolina; that his aide–William Fanning–loves money and power; and that the targets of these two men are the simple farmers who share the survival load in the backcountry. <p> Throughout the drama, these three stereotypes are constantly reinforced by the characters' actions and Husband's narration. It would be easy for any critic to slip into a condemnation of the portrayal of Tryon, Fanning, and Husband as simplistic. Fanning, in particular, is a one-dimensional character driven by the promotion of his own wealth. When asked how he likes Tryon's new mansion in New Bern, Fanning replies, "I see what I want." His ambition is not only questioned by the backcountry farmers who resent his power, but the governor as well. <p> In contrast to Fanning, the other two major characters are far more complex. Struck by an infant child's death, wearied by the difficulties of ruling a diffused population, and frustrated by the corrupt practices of backcountry officials (including Fanning), Governor Tryon represents the complexities of colonial America's royal rule. The construction of Tryon's "palace," the French pastries, and the harpsichord music at the reception show that civility would eventually stabilize the disruptive forces of wilderness life, including the rebellious farmers. <p> Herman Husband emerges as the most complex character. Obviously uneasy with his role in the rebellion, Husband is an introspective and honest man who questions his fellow Regulators' violence plus the injustice of building a governor's mansion in New Bern when most farmers could not afford a horse. Despite his attempts to remain above the fray, Husband's association with the Regulators makes him a target for Fanning. Occasionally, the film slips into a Robin Hood storyline, especially when a band of farmers rob two tax collectors on the road. Still, Husband is no Robin Hood. He is clearly uncomfortable with the thought of challenging the government, since he is an elected member of the colonial assembly. Unfortunately, the political relations between royal governor and representative assembly are conspicuously missing from this story's version. <p> Despite the complexities of Tryon's and Husband's characters, however, it is Fanning who dictates the film's action. The governor seems

reluctant to react to Regulation petitioning until Fanning pushes for military intervention. Tryon responds with an exasperated "Wilderness!" and concludes that he can only move onto the governorship of New York "... if I leave North Carolina in peace." Similarly, Husband seems confused about his leadership role until, upon his arrest, Fanning threatens him. Husband suddenly awakens to a "government who worshiped no god but themselves." Still, at the April 1771 Battle of Alamance, Husband's Quakerism restricts him from supporting armed rebellion. <p> A one-hour production cannot communicate the fullness of the story and, despite its successes, <cite>Alamance</cite> as history is more simplistic than it should be. The building of Tryon's Palace–while a serious issue–was minor compared to larger concerns over the political dominance of the coastal planter class, deep ideological differences over democratic self-rule, western boundaries with the Cherokee, and previous riots that had exploded in the backcountry. Most evident of this oversimplification is the battle scene itself that involves less than one hundred actors; the actual battle pitted some 2,000 Regulators against nearly 2,500 royal troops. The mere breadth of the Regulation movement is a missing factor in Alamance. <p> Still, the film is highly recommended. <cite>Almanace</cite> won a regional Emmy in February 1997, and with good reason. It is a provocative script that the actors skillfully bring to life. Filmed on location in the Carolinas, <cite>Almanace</cite> is aesthetically enjoyable and is a welcomed instructional tool for classrooms on both the secondary and college levels, plus an enjoyable documentary for anyone interested in colonial history. <p>



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