

From Royalist to Revolutionary:

Gen. John Simpson
(1728–1788)

of

Pitt County, North Carolina

by Timothy Dean Hudson

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1. Introduction

In the several decades after they settled on the south side of Tar River along Cow and Cross Swamps in Pitt County, North Carolina in early 1756, [James Albritton Sr.](#) and most of his sons engaged in numerous business transactions with John Simpson. Between 1760 and 1774, Simpson and the brothers Thomas, Matthew, James Jr., Peter, George, and Richard Albritton witnessed numerous deeds of one another [1], while in 1769, Simpson and James Albritton Sr. transferred a total of 1480 acres of land between each other [2]. On 5 November 1771, James Albritton Sr. and his son, Peter, served as the chain bearers that assisted the Pitt County Surveyor in preparing a new land grant for which Simpson had applied [3].

John Simpson played a leading role both in the 1760 formation of Pitt County and in critical events in the region's early history. This article discusses Simpson's background and describes his activities in the numerous civic and military positions he held, as well as their connection to the Albrittons of Pitt County.

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2. Col. John Simpson

Unlike the Albrittons and most Tar River residents, John Simpson hailed from New England, born in Boston, Massachusetts on 8 March 1728. He had arrived in eastern North Carolina in the mid-1750s and settled in Beaufort County, where on 9 July 1757 he was commissioned as lieutenant in the Beaufort County Militia under Capt. John Hardee and Col. Robert Palmer [1]. In about 1759, local citizens elected Simpson as one of Beaufort's representatives to the Colonial Assembly [2], where in 1760 he introduced a bill to create Pitt County from the western portion of Beaufort [3]. The Assembly added Simpson as one of the commissioners appointed to set up the infrastructure for the new county's local government and approved the bill, establishing Pitt County established effective 1 January 1761. Shortly thereafter, the North Carolina Council appointed John Simpson as one of the first Justices of the Peace for the new County of Pitt [4]. Pitt County citizens elected John Simpson as one of their representatives to the Colonial Assembly continually during the 1760s, and he served through November 1769 [5].

On 20 November 1766, Gov. William Tryon appointed Simpson as Pitt County Register, the county official in Pitt responsible for recording all deeds and conveyances. He held this office through at least 1772 [6]. In conjunction with his position as Register, John Simpson was commissioned as Colonel of the Pitt County Militia [7]. On 13 March 1771, Gov. Tryon appointed Simpson as Pitt County High Sheriff [8]. During the 1773–1775 period, Pitt County residents again elected Col. John Simpson as their representative in the Colonial Assembly, and in December 1773, Simpson pushed a bill through the Assembly to lay out *“a Town on the Lands of Richard Evans in Pitt County by the name of Martinborough and for removing the Court House, prison and stocks into the said Town”* [9]. Throughout the 1760s, Simpson also worked as a merchant in Martinborough, Pitt County's seat of government, and although he owned vast tracts of land in Pitt County, he resided at Chatham, one of his plantations south of the Tar River, near Cow and Cross Swamps, and adjoining the plantations of our Albrittons [10].

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3. Pitt County & the War of the Regulation

A complex series of social events during the 1750s and early 1760s coalesced to create political dissent among many of the poor white residents of North Carolina's backcountry, the sparsely populated western counties located far from the colony's seat of government at New Bern. North Carolina's population base in this period remained focused across the Tidewater and Coastal Plain regions. With lower population, the backcountry region, then the counties of Granville, Orange, Cumberland, Rowan, Mecklenburg, and Anson, had less representation in the Colonial General Assembly, so the Tidewater and Coastal Plain representatives prevailed on most issues. The Colonial Assembly voted to tax all lands at the same rate, even though the backcountry lands were typically far less fertile than those closer to the coast. Many backcountry inhabitants had only arrived recently and found themselves cash-strapped and preyed upon by depraved local officials appointed by the Provincial Government. These poor whites in North Carolina's backcountry blamed their ills on Royal officials and not on their counterparts in the eastern counties, who typically supported their local officials. By the mid-1760s, the backcountry regions erupted in a poorly organized yet popular revolt. Although never a serious military threat to Royal authority, the 1765–1771 Regulator Movement had an unexpected effect upon the loyalties in North Carolina several years later, when the independence movement began across the American Colonies [1].

Royal Governor William Tryon further angered the backcountry folk when he convinced the Colonial Assembly to fund his new Governor's mansion in New Bern, now known as *Tryon Palace*. This stirred a group of citizens in Orange County to write a manifesto that sounded quite revolutionary: they demanded no taxation without adequate representation. Royal officials branded them rebels and insurgents, but the citizens referred to them as the "*Mob*," soon known as "*Regulators*" [2]. Discontent grew during 1768–1769, with numerous instances of blatant disregard for Royal authority. A mob of one hundred Regulators took property from the Orange County Sheriff in Hillsborough on 8 April 1768, and they shot up the house of Edmund Fanning, a native of New York, Yale graduate, and protégé of Gov. Tryon. As an outsider appointed to various posts and convicted of extorting a few locals, Fanning became a focal point of Regulator hatred. The activities of the Orange County Regulators motivated a group of Anson County Regulators to disrupt a meeting of their County Court. This latest anarchy prompted Tryon to authorize mobilization of the Anson Militia to apprehend the ringleaders [3]. By early 1770, sheriffs in many of the backcountry regions could not collect taxes due to armed opposition by Regulators [4].

The backcountry erupted in violence at the meeting of the Orange County Superior Court that began on Monday, 24 September 1770 in Hillsborough. Before the Court session began that

morning, a large group of Regulators appeared on the streets of town, *"shouting, hallooing & making a considerable tumult in the streets."* When the Court session began at 11:00 that morning, they poured into the courthouse, armed with clubs, whips, and switches, with only a few unarmed. The Regulators demanded the Court hear their cases, objected to juries seated in previous court session that had ruled against them, and threatened violence if the judge refused to seat new juries composed of Regulators. Judge Richard Henderson managed to get the Regulators to leave the courtroom, but as attorney John Williams approached the courtroom, they attacked him with *"wooden cudgels,...Clubs and sticks of enormous size"* and cow-skin whips. Williams managed to save his life by hiding in a nearby storehouse. According to Judge Henderson, the mob then attacked Edmond Fanning,

...with hideous shouts of barbarian cruelty, dragged him by the heels out of doors, while others engaged in dealing out blows with such violence that I made no doubt his life would instantly become a sacrifice to their rage and madness. However Mr Fanning by a manly exertion miraculously broke holt and fortunately jumped into a door that saved him from immediate dissolution.

As they beat Fanning, some of the Regulators told Judge Henderson his turn was next, but their leaders assured the judge that he would be safe, provided he held Court as they directed. During the riot, the mob severely beat at least six officials, while others fled to escape the violence. With great fanfare, the Regulators finally escorted Judge Henderson to his lodging in town, and about 10:00 that evening, he made his escape from town on a back road. The Regulators then broke into Fanning's home, destroyed every piece of his furniture with axes, tore his *"Mansion House"* down to its very foundation, destroyed the contents of his cellar and drank or spilled all of his liquor, dragged all of his clothes into the streets, destroyed all of his legal papers, and stole over £200 in cash from his home. After breaking the windows of all stores and houses in Hillsborough, the Regulators left town [5].

Judge Richard Henderson's escape without presiding over a Court session as demanded by the Regulators inflamed them against him. In retribution, a group of Regulators from Granville County near his home set fire to his stables, corn crib, and barn the night of Monday, November 12th while Henderson was away, killing several horses and destroying his supply of corn. The mob returned two nights later and set Henderson's home ablaze, and the destruction prompted Gov. Tryon to offer a £100 reward for apprehension of the offenders [6].

Emboldened by their perceived success at Hillsborough, the Regulators now began discussions of marching to the Provincial Capital at New Bern to lay their grievances before the Royal Governor. Judge Henderson and his brother reported this communication to Gov. Tryon on 19

November 1770 [7], who then began notifying the militia colonials of those counties that lay along the Regulators' path towards New Bern on the coast. On November 20th, Tryon wrote Col. John Simpson of the Pitt County Militia to inform him of the threat. Tryon instructed Simpson to assemble the Pitt County Militia Regiment

...on the first notice you can get that the Insurgents are on their march, and to obstruct and oppose them in their progress through the Country to Newbern, and even to repel force with force, but should you find it out of your Power to collect a sufficient number of men in time to effect that purpose, I must require you in case they do come down to follow them to Newbern with all possible expedition with your whole Regiment in order to protect the Legislature and preserve the Peace of the Government.

Tryon concluded his order with acknowledging [8]

...the grateful sense I feel for the honorable return you have made me of the Volunteers of Pitt County, an example worthy the imitation of every County in the Province at this important crisis.

Col. Simpson sent out scouts to learn more information on the Regulators' movements. He sent Robert Salter westward to Tarborough, in neighboring Edgecombe County and on the pathway towards the backcountry. Salter returned on December 2nd with information that Regulators enroute from Bute and Johnston Counties planned to prevent Edmund Fanning from taking his seat in the General Assembly. In response, Col. Simpson ordered the mobilization of several companies of the Pitt County Militia, directing them to meet him at the courthouse in Martinborough on Wednesday, December 5th to march to New Bern to help protect the Legislative body [9]. Upon receipt of Simpson's intelligence, Gov. Tryon stationed a detachment of the Craven County Militia in New Bern until they learned of the imminent arrival of the Regulators, and on December 4th, he ordered Simpson to keep the Pitt County Militia Regiment there at home [10],

...until the Regulators have passed you if you find it impossible to obstruct them, which however I hope you will be able to do agreeable to the instructions I gave you in my letter of the 20th last month.

On Wednesday, December 5th, 358 men of the Pitt County Militia Regiment reported for duty to Col. Simpson at the Pitt County Courthouse, mostly from the southern portion of the county, as Simpson observed *"the greatest deficiency of my men is from the upper part of this County."* He ordered the men to *"hold themselves in readiness with six days' provisions in order to march to New Bern if required,"* which allowed them to remain at their homes at night and find their own provisions until mobilized. Simpson wrote Tryon from his camp at the Pitt Courthouse that he had scouts operating in the neighboring counties to the west, and *"should the regulators attempt to come down shall endeavor to meet them"* [11].

Despite the alarm and intense preparations to confront the approaching Regulators with force there in Pitt County, Col. Simpson soon received intelligence that the disorganized Regulators had not yet left the backcountry. He ordered the Pitt Militia to stand down and informed Gov. Tryon, who replied on Friday, December 7th. Royal Governor praised Simpson's actions, writing,

I am much pleased with the active spirit you have shewn [sic] in calling your Regiment together on the alarm of the Regulators coming to Newbern as well as the alertness with which so large a Body of men then assembled on the short notice that was given them.

Gov. Tryon asked Simpson to warn his men to *"be in readiness to turn out again if circumstances should require"* [12].

Throughout December 1770 and January 1771, Gov. William Tryon heard accounts of the activities of the Regulators, plus denials by their leaders of any wrongdoing, even as groups of Regulators continued their threats to peace. In early February 1771, Tryon received intelligence indicating the Regulators had congregated at Hillsborough, again rioted, and now prepared to begin their march to New Bern to confront Royal officials. He wrote Col. John Simpson on February 7th to mobilize the Pitt County Militia Regiment to confront the mob and prepare to march to New Bern to support the Royal Government. By this point, the Regulators' weak and inept leadership had become apparent, and the seriousness of the threat is unclear [13].

In March 1771, Gov. William Tryon decided to confront the Regulators with force. On March 19th, he issued orders calling for militia volunteers in each county *"to march against the Insurgents,"* with one hundred volunteers requested from Pitt County [14]. On April 3rd, Gov. Tryon wrote Col. John Simpson, ordering him to have his militia ready by the 22nd and for them to march to the rendezvous point in Johnston County by the 30th [15]. Simpson issued £100 *"proclamation money"* to Capt. Robert Salter to help him raise a company of infantry from Pitt County to march against the Regulators, and Col. Simpson paid bounties of forty shillings to individual soldiers for joining the expedition [16]. Although he continued to organize and prepare the Pitt County Militia to participate in the expedition to the backcountry, Col. Simpson did not personally command the Pitt County soldiers in Tryon's army or accompany it on the journey westward. He placed Capt. Robert Salter in command of the Pitt soldiers [17].

Tryon's army left New Bern on Wednesday, April 24th for Johnston County and arrived on May 2nd. By Friday, May 3rd, all the troops from the New Bern and Neuse Districts had arrived, including Capt. Robert Salter's company from Pitt County, and Gov. Tryon reviewed the assembled army that day. Tryon and his army left Johnston County on Saturday, May 4th and reached the outskirts of

Hillsborough late on Thursday, May 9th. The men spent Friday refitting wagons, shoeing the horses, and preparing for the upcoming battle [18].

Gov. Tryon marched his army of eleven hundred men through Hillsborough on Saturday, May 11. Eager to press on westward, he ordered the men to ford the Haw River without incident on Sunday the 12th. The Regulators had intended to oppose the Royal Army's passage across the Haw, so their ignorance of its whereabouts illustrated their lack of an effective scout network [19].

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4. Battle of Alamance

On Monday, 13 May 1771, Tryon's army crossed the Great Alamance Creek, chose a secure spot to make camp on the west side of the creek, and waited as the Regulators gathered nearby. The farmers in the Rebel camp grew substantially over the next few days, and while one eyewitness report indicated that their force numbered 4,000 men, the actual number was probably between 2,000 and 3,000. Late on the night of Wednesday, the 15th, the Regulator leaders sent a petition to Tryon, attempting to convince him to listen to their grievances. No longer in a mood to negotiate, the Royal Governor had by now lost his patience and become determined for a fight [1].

On the morning of Thursday, May 16th, Tryon's army left camp shortly after 7:00 a.m. and marched towards the Regulators' camp, *"with drums beating & Colours flying."* He ordered his men to advance to within 300 yards of the Regulator camp, draw up battle lines, and he then sent demands to the rebels to surrender and submit to Royal authority. Their leaders *"rejected the Terms offer'd with disdain"* and called for battle, with the Regulators *"waving their hats and daring them [Tryon's men] to come on"* [2]. Tryon's officers petitioned him for a prisoner exchange, for the Regulators had captured two of their officers the night before. The Regulators agreed on the exchange but then delayed, causing Tryon to fear they planned to attack his flank. He cautioned the Regulators *"to take care of themselves, as he should immediately give the signal for action."*

Just before noon, Gov. William Tryon ordered his artillery to open fire, and the boom of his cannon signaled his whole front line to discharge their muskets. As the battle opened, the action *"was hot on both sides,"* with the Regulators initially gaining the advantage. Unable to face Tryon's men, the backcountry farmers took to the trees, fighting *"Indian style, hiding behind trees, rocks, and fences."* The Regulators' constant fire kept Tryon's militia force from the east pinned to the open road for nearly an hour. Tryon finally ordered his men to set fire to the woods, hoping to drive the farmers from their cover. Running low on ammunition and without effective leadership, the Regulators began to bolt. Tryon regrouped his men and ordered an advance, driving the Regulators from the trees and

...the whole Rebel Army fled in great confusion leaving behind them near 20 prisoners taken in the Field, seventy Horses with saddles, provisions and a small quantity of Ammunition.

Tryon's men pursued the fleeing Regulators for about a half mile beyond the battlefield, but they stopped at a house where they found their two captured officers [3].

The company of Pitt County Militia commanded by Capt. Robert Salter accompanied Tryon's army on the expedition to the backcountry and participated in the action at the Battle of Alamance. The Regulators killed one soldier in Capt. Salter's company and wounded seven others [4].

The Royal Army spent the next month methodically marching to former Regulator strongholds across the backcountry, destroying or confiscating property of the rebel leaders, burning their crops, dwellings, and barns, tearing down the fences on their farms and using them for firewood, overturning beehives, and cutting down orchards. Tryon's officers pilfered provisions from anyone suspected of assisting the Regulators [5].

On Monday, May 20th, Gov. Tryon decided he had appropriately intimidated and terrorized the backcountry into submission, and he issued a proclamation that promised a pardon to all Regulators who came to his camp, surrendered their weapons, and took an oath of allegiance to support the King. Although he captured and condemned twelve Regulator ringleaders to death, Tryon only hanged six [6]. By July 4th, over six thousand Regulators had taken the oath, *"so at this time the province remains in perfect tranquility"* [7].

The mid-1771 serenity across the North Carolina Province proved little more than a wisp, as events soon brought a return to political turmoil and unrest. Gov. Tryon had not even returned to New Bern following his successful expedition against the Regulators before learning of his promotion to the Governorship of New York, and he permanently departed New Bern on 30 June 1771 [8]. His successor, Josiah Martin, North Carolina's final Royal Governor, did not arrive until August 11th after a nineteen-day journey from New York [9].

Gov. Martin stepped into a difficult role even without the changing political winds that soon began blowing. Tryon remained personally popular with the elite of the Tidewater and Coastal Plain regions throughout his governorship, having seemingly cultivated personal friendships with most of their leading citizens. Gov. Martin did not enjoy these positive personal relationships with the easterners. Furthermore, while on a tour of the backcountry soon after his arrival in the Province, Gov. Martin allowed the former Regulators to convince him of the justness of their cause and their innocence of any wrongdoing. He worked to secure pardons for many of the leading Regulators, an endeavor that cemented friendships with the former backcountry Regulator leaders rather than the elite of the coastal counties. Many of the former Regulators that Martin befriended on his journey later became leading Loyalists [10].



5. Col. John Simpson & Pitt County Safety Committee

Actions of the British Parliament in 1773 and early 1774 led local regions in Virginia and other colonies to mobilize local organizations, called “*Safety Committees*.” These organizations formed a local shadow government, helping to maintain order within the local society and gradually wrestling control of the colonies from Royal officials. Most North Carolina counties in the Tidewater and central Coastal Plain formed such groups in mid-1774. The Pitt County “*freeholders*” met at Martinborough on 15 August 1774 and elected John Hardee as chairman. They resolved that as the

...Constitutional Assembly of this Colony are prevented from exercising their rights of providing for the security of the liberties of the people, that right again reverts to the people as the foundation from whence all power and legislation flow.

They elected Col. John Simpson and Edward Salter as their delegates to the Provincial Congress at New Bern

...there to exert their utmost abilities preventing the growing system of ministerial Despotism which now threatens the destruction of American Liberties...

This illustrates an incredibly fast transformation of political allegiance, as only three- and one-half years earlier, Col. John Simpson camped at the Pitt County Courthouse “*On His Majesty’s Service*” while mustering in the Pitt Militia to defend against an approaching Regulator mob headed towards New Bern to threaten Royal sovereignty [1].

Despite Gov. Martin’s strong objections, North Carolina’s first Provincial Congress met in New Bern on 25 August 1774, with Col. John Simpson and Edward Salter representing Pitt County. Although declaring their loyalty to the ruling House of Hanover, the Provincial Congress adopted resolutions that prohibited trade with Great Britain and laid the foundation for the establishment of a revolutionary government. They also appointed delegates to the Continental Congress and instructed all counties to form *safety committees* [2]. Some six weeks later, the Pitt County freeholders met on October 4th and appointed the Pitt County Safety Committee, including Col. John Simpson, Capt. Robert Salter, John Hardee, and Edward Salter [3]. They met at Martinborough a few weeks later, on October 27th, and selected Col. John Hardee as chairman and Edward Salter as clerk, and met again on November 3rd, when the group expressed sympathy for those affected by events in Boston and appointed a long list of local residents to assist St. Michael’s Parish of the local Anglican Church to collect funds to aid the Boston sufferers. They then appointed Col. John Simpson as one of the men to communicate with the Provincial Congress of their actions. The Committee met on November 17th to read an abstract of the proceedings of the Continental

Congress. Col. John Simpson and Capt. Robert Salter participated in all of these meetings of the Pitt County Safety Committee in October and November 1774 [4].

As directed by the Continental Congress, the Pitt County freeholders met on 9 December 1774 in Martinborough and held an official election for Pitt's Safety Committee. They elected twenty-one men to the Committee, including John Hardee, Col. John Simpson, and Capt. Robert Salter. At the December 17th meeting, they elected Col. John Simpson as their chairman, and he thereafter presided over Safety Committee meetings. Col. Simpson brought a copy of the proceedings of the Continental Congress "*held at the cittie of Philada*" in October 1774 to the meeting, passed it around, and read it to the assembled members [5]. On 11 February 1775, the Safety Committee appointed Col. Simpson to

...wright [sic] to the northward for a vessel in order to carry the donations of this county for the Relief of the Poor Sufferers of Boston.

At the meeting on March 10th, they elected "*Deputys*" to represent Pitt County at the next Provincial Convention, including Col. John Simpson. This meeting contained the first evidence that the Pitt County Safety Committee demanded strict support of the patriot movement by local residents. Charges were filed against Safety Committee member Amos Atkinson and local residents Solomon Shepperd and John Tison, claiming they

...had in many instances obstructed the contribution for the Relief of the Poor of Boston &c...

The Safety Committee ordered the men to appear at the Committee's next meeting, "*and Justifie themselves in that particular.*" Although Atkinson continued to act as a Safety Committee member, he and Shepherd did not address the charges filed against them until July 17th, when the Safety Committee officially exonerated them [6].

Despite repeated Royal Proclamations from Gov. Josiah Martin forbidding it, North Carolina's second Provincial Convention convened at New Bern on 3 April 1775. As before, Col. John Simpson attended to represent Pitt County, along with Edward Salter and three others. In his attempt to disrupt the Provincial Convention, Gov. Martin convened the General Assembly at New Bern on April 4th. Ironically, Pitt County's two representatives in the Assembly, Col. John Simpson and Edward Salter, were already in New Bern and seated at the Provincial Convention. This was the final Assembly convened by Gov. Martin in North Carolina [7].

The action of the Pitt County Safety Committee at its meeting on 1 May 1775 illustrates the increasingly firm grip that Col. John Simpson and the other committee members had on political thought across Pitt County. The Committee resolved that all members would "*strictly observe*" the resolves of the recent Continental Congress at Philadelphia and required each member to swear

to the same. They again filed charges against John Tison, who *"hath frequently spoken disrespectfully of the proceedings of the Congress in general and of this committee in particular."* If true, the Safety Committee resolved that Tison *"highly deserves to be stigmatised"* [sic], although they admitted his comments may have come from *"unguarded heat or Ignorance."* Professing it as *"the firm intention of this committee to proceed in their censures with charity and circumspection,"* they appointed a committee of three to *"remonstrate"* with Tison and ordered him to appear before the Safety Committee to answer the charge [8]. At the next meeting on May 20th, the Committee resolved *"That John Tison be advertised in the public papers."* This cryptic statement implies that the Committee took the unusual step of paying to advertise Tison's lack of support for the Patriot movement in the local newspapers [9].

Col. John Simpson continued to preside over all meetings of the Pitt County Safety Committee throughout May, June, and July 1775. On May 27th, Simpson collected money from five men to send in support of the Boston sufferers, and on June 10th, they decided to add members to the Committee. As such, they issued a notice to all Pitt County freeholders to meet in Martinborough at John Lesslie's home on June 23rd to hold an election. The freeholders elected numerous Pitt County men to the Safety Committee, including Thomas Albritton, the eldest of the seven sons of James Albritton Sr., together with these Albritton neighbors and associates: Robert Hodges, Mathias Moore, John Hatton, John Cason, Hillary Cason, and Samuel Barrow [10].

The following week, on July 1st, Col. John Simpson convened a meeting of the newly enlarged Pitt County Safety Committee. They approved a resolution expressing how *"the present alarming state of this Province and of all America"* had *"deeply affected"* the residents of Pitt County and Martinborough. They resolved that they

...will pay all due allegiance to his majesty King George the third and endeavor to continue the succession of his crown in the Illustrious house of Hanover as by law established, against the present or any future wicked ministry, or arbitrary set of men whatsoever...

However, they stated that

*...we are **determined** to assert our rights as men and sensible that by the late acts of Parliament the most valuable liberties and priviledges [sic] of America are invaded and endeavor to be violated and destroyed and that under God the preservation of them Depends on a firm **union** of the Inhabitants and a sturdy spirited observation of the Resolutions of the General [sic] Congress, being shocked at the cruel scenes now acting in the Massachusetts Bay and determined never to become slaves to any power upon earth, we do hereby agree and associate under all tyes [sic] of Religion, Honour, and regard for Posterity that we will adopt and endeavor to execute the measures which the General Congress now sitting at Philadelphia conclude on for preserving our constitution and opposing the execution of the several arbitrary Illegale [sic] acts of the British Parliament and that we will readily observe The Directions of our General Committee for the*

purpose aforesaid, the Preservation of Peace and Good Order and Security of Individuals and private property.

Thomas Albritton signed this resolution, along with eighty-seven other Safety Committee members [11]. The motivation behind this resolution remains uncertain, but it appears to have resulted from the extreme chaos across Pitt County caused by Col. Simpson's recent discovery of a covert British scheme to incite a deadly slave insurrection.

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6. Gov. Martin's Slave Insurrection & the Albrittons

Throughout early 1775, Gov. Josiah Martin worked ardently to neutralize the impact of the Safety Committees that operated so effectively throughout the Tidewater and inland Coastal Plain regions. He described the citizens there as *"for the most part infected with the ill spirit that prevails in the adjacent Provinces of Virginia and South Carolina,"* and complained about the Safety Committees arming men, electing officers, and forming independent companies *"under my nose."* Confounded by the firm grip on local power the Safety Committees in the eastern counties exerted, he relished in the support of the backcountry counties, where the former Regulators retained their staunch support of the Crown, and *"where the People are in General well affected, and much attached to me"* [1]. The eastern Patriots learned of his plans to raise an army in the backcountry, *"for the purpose of disturbing the internal peace of this province,"* and charged that Martin *"...in all probability he intends kindling the flames of a Civil war"* [2].

Gov. Martin's frustration over the increasing control manifested by the local Safety Committees in North Carolina's eastern counties apparently prompted him to covertly formulate and implement plans to instigate an extensive slave insurrection in mid-1775 in Pitt, Beaufort, Craven, and Edgecombe Counties. Col. John Simpson described it as

...a deep laid Horrid Tragick [sic] Plan laid for destroying the inhabitants of this province without respect of persons, age or sex.

British covert agents recruited the cooperation and allegiance of slaves on some of the larger plantations in Beaufort and Craven Counties along Pamlico Sound, then spread inland to Pitt and Edgecombe during the early months of 1774. The agents secretly supplied both male and female slaves with arms and ammunition, and they concocted a general plan for the slaves to murder their owners on a specific night and then head to the backcountry. Following their discovery of the plot, Col. Simpson's men scourged Pitt County for several weeks, and he reported that upon interrogation,

...from whichever part of the County they come they all confess nearly the same thing, viz^t that they were one and all on the night of the 8th inst [July] to fall on and destroy the family where they lived, then to proceed from House to House (Burning as they went) until they arrived in the Back Country where they were to be received with open arms by a number of Persons there appointed and armed by Government for their Protection, and as a further reward they were to be settled in a free government of their own.

Pitt County Safety Committee Clerk Edward Salter learned of the nefarious plot from Mr. Bayner of Beaufort County, apparently confessed to him in late June or early July by a male slave belonging to Capt. Thomas Respass of Beaufort. Salter immediately dispatched an express rider to deliver the news to Col. John Simpson in Martinborough, who promptly sent off an express rider

to Tarborough, *"to alarm the inhabitants there"* [3]. He then called an emergency meeting of the Pitt County Safety Committee, appointing over one hundred local men as *"Patrolers,"* organized into eleven companies to operate in their local neighborhoods to apprehend armed slaves. Col. John Simpson himself lived south of the Tar River, along Cow Swamp near the home of the late James Albritton Sr. Simpson's company of eleven men included Albritton's sons, Thomas, Richard, and George Albritton, as well as their neighbor, Abraham Adams. The Safety Committee clearly specified the Patrolers' duties:

...to Search all suspected places &c. and finding any Negro Slave or Slaves from their Masters Lands without a pass from his Master Mistress or Coroner to take the said Slave or Slaves and give them Thirty nine Lashes or Less if they think proper, and if any Negro Slave be found with any fire arms or ammunition in his or her possession that the said Patrolers may seize and take away any such arms and sell them at Public Sale, first being advertised ten Days—the money arising from such sales to be paid into the hands of the Churchwardens of St. Michaels Parish for the use and benefit of said Parish.

The Clerk was ordered to furnish each company of Patrolers with a copy of the resolution for them to use as a *"Rule of their conduct"* [4]. Before heading out to confront the threat, the Safety Committee decided to further clarify the authority and discretion available to the Patrolers, approving a resolution stating,

...that the Patrolers [have power to] shoot one or any number of Negroes who are armed and doth not willingly surrender their arms, and that they have Discretionary Power, to shoot any Number of Negroes above four, who are off their Masters Plantations, and will not submitt [sic]. And the Damage that Owners of any Negro who shall be killed or Disabled in consequence of this Resolve to be paid by Poll Tax on all the Taxable Negroes in the County.

Col. Simpson then adjourned the Safety Committee so the Patrolers could head out and scour the countryside [5].

The Patrolers then separated to their individual neighborhoods, *"to sound the alarm thro this country and to apprehend the suspected heads."* Col. Simpson reported that by nightfall, they *"had in custody and the goal near forty under proper guard."* The next day, Sunday, the Safety Committee interrogated those involved. According to the intelligence Simpson gathered, the plot began with Capt. Johnson, an English sea-captain, in consort with a slave belonging to Capt. Nathan Blinn of Bath. The Safety Committee sentenced five slaves considered ringleaders to be whipped. The Committee met again on Monday to mete out additional punishment to slaves they deemed guilty. Col. Simpson reported that they

...ordered several to be severely whipt and sentenced several to receive 80 lashes each to have both Ears crop^d which was executed in presence of the Committee and a great number of spectators.

That afternoon, an express arrived from Col. Blount informing them of a large group of armed slaves on the Craven and Pitt County line and requesting men and ammunition to defeat them. Col. Simpson promptly sent both, plus he posted guards on the roads several miles out from Martinborough. Over the next week, Simpson sent multiple companies of “*Light Horse*,” or mounted militiamen, who scoured the county, finding groups of slaves from across the region implicated in or knowledgeable of the deadly plot. Several reported that they heard Capt. Johnson, the instigator, say that after the owners were slaughtered that summer, “*he’d return in the fall and take choice of the Plantations upon this River.*” But Col. Simpson wrote,

But as it hath pleased God to discover the plot, It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed; Let us therefore Beseech Him to continue our very present help in every time of need.

Simpson requested assistance from the Craven County Safety Committee to “*circumvent the operation of the aforementioned accursed plan or we shall become an easy prey*” [6].

The slave insurrection immediately became public and caused a sensation, with the Patriots openly charging Gov. Josiah Martin “*with instigating the intended insurrection*” [7]. North Carolina Continental Congress delegate Joseph Hewes wrote that Gov. Martin’s administration “*has even tried...to raise the Negroes against us*” [8], while on July 21st, British Indian agent John Stuart wrote to his superior in London from St. Augustine, Florida about the recent situation in North Carolina, saying

...it was given out that the Negroes were immediately to be set free by Government and that Arms were to be given them to fall up on their Masters [9].

It remains somewhat unclear if orders for the planning and implementation of the slave insurrection came directly from Gov. Martin himself. In a letter he wrote to his superior on 30 June 1775, he referred to

...a most infamous report had lately been propagated among the People, that I had formed a design of Arming the Negroes, and proclaiming freedom to all such as should resort to the King’s Standard.

Martin did not deny the rumor that he himself instigated the plot [10].

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7. Col. Simpson Leads Pitt County Towards War

Following the chaos of slave insurrection, the Col. John Simpson continued to oversee regular meetings of the Pitt County Safety Committee during the latter portion of July, transacting regular business on July 17th [1] and holding a general freeholders meeting on the 29th to elect delegates to the upcoming Provincial Convention scheduled in Hillsborough [2]. On August 23rd, the Safety Committee met and approved this resolution:

We the subscribers professing our allegiance to the King and acknowledging the constitutional executive power of Government, do solemnly profess and testify and declare that we do absolutely believe that neither the Parliament of Great Britain nor any member or constitutional branch thereof have a right to impose taxes upon these colonies to regulate the internal policy thereof and that all attempts by fraud or force to establish and exercise such claims and powers are violations of the peace Security of the people and ought to be resisted to the utmost, and that the people of this province, singly and collectively are bound by the acts and resolutions of the Continental and provincial Congresses, because in both they are freely represented by persons chosen by themselves and we do Solemnly and Sincerely promise and engage under the sanction of virtue, honor, and the sacred love of liberty and our country, to maintain and support all and every the acts and resolutions and Regulations of the said Continental and provincial Congresses to the utmost of our power and abilities.

Along with seventy-five other Pitt County residents, Peter Albritton signed the resolution [3].

As the summer of 1775 turned into fall, the impasse between the Royal Gov. Martin and the county Safety Committees began to interfere with the local government infrastructure, leading the Safety Committees to begin operating both as a local court system and police force. In September, under Col. John Simpson, the Pitt County Safety Committee oversaw the preparation of a census of each district in the county, following instructions of the Provincial Congress [4]. Unscrupulous merchants hoarded salt during times of difficulty, and to ensure fair pricing, throughout the winter of 1775–1776, the Pitt Safety Committee maintained strict laws on the importation and pricing of salt, ordering in December that no merchant or trader sell it for more than five shillings a bushel. In February, the Committee had salt imported and divided into “*small parcels*” for use by local families, “*according to their present necessity*” [5]. In October, the Safety Committee began issuing permission for local citizens to file lawsuits, and in a sign of the increasingly dire political situation, they formed a Select Committee of Secrecy, Intelligence, and Observation [6].

In November 1775, Col. John Simpson, Capt. Robert Salter, and Edward Salter contracted with sea captain Paul White to import “*Powder & Ball*” from the West Indies on his sloop, “*Temperance*,” to stockpile in Pitt County for anticipated military action. As Capt. White sailed the “*Temperance*” into the inlet on Ocracoke, one of North Carolina’s barrier islands, a Royal cutter belonging to a British warship detained the vessel as a prize. Some of Capt. White’s men managed to transfer the

ammunition from the “*Temperance*” to smaller boat and deliver it across the Pamlico Sound and then up the Tar River to Col. Simpson in Pitt County. Simpson obtained 717 pounds of powder and 1,782 pounds of lead in the endeavor, paying Capt. White £865 4s 8p using Pitt County Safety Committee funds. Since the powder and lead was for use of the Province, the Provincial Congress authorized reimbursing Col. Simpson and the Salters £860 4s 8p [7]. However, Simpson used £18 5s 6p proclamation money from his own funds to pay the men to transfer the ammunition from the “*Temperance*” and deliver it to him across Pamlico Sound and up the river to Pitt County, and for use of the extra boat. The New Bern District Safety Committee reimbursed Simpson for his personal expenditure on 23 February 1776 [8].

Under Col. John Simpson, during the fall of 1775, the Pitt Safety Committee maintained strict control over those speaking against the Patriot movement, apparently stamping out any public support for the British Crown. On Monday, October 2nd, they held a literal trial for John Tison, charged with acting “*in many instances prejudicially [sic] to the Just Rights of America.*” Tison was forced to sign a full confession and promise to “*conforme to the Association as far as I have seen, that is now in this County*” [9]. Despite his confession, Col. Simpson filed Tison’s case with the New Bern District Safety Committee [10]. The next spring, several men accused local resident Arthur Moore Sr. of speaking against the Patriots, leading Col. Simpson to order Moore’s incarceration in the Pitt County “*jaol*” before sending him to appear before the Provincial Congress in Halifax, North Carolina. Later, they allowed him to “*have the Liberty of this Town,*” presumably indicating he was released to roam within Martinborough [11].

The military action in New England at the April clash at Lexington and Concord and the June 17th Battle of Bunker Hill inflamed the Southern colonies, and at their meeting in Hillsborough beginning in August 1775, the Provincial Congress authorized creation of companies of Minutemen in each county, commissioning John Simpson as Colonel of the Pitt County Minutemen, Robert Salter as Lt. Colonel, and George Evans as First Major [12]. By early January 1776, military conflict appeared imminent, and on January 23rd, the Pitt Safety Committee authorized Maj. George Evans to raise a company of volunteers to train and serve for twelve months with funds provided by the Provincial Congress [13]. Due to this exodus of men of military age from the Tar River region, many of the men appointed as Patrolers the previous summer had “*gone into the army for the services of their Country.*” On February 13th, the Pitt Safety Committee approved the addition of numerous new Patrolers, including “*Jas. Alberton.*” Although Solomon Albertson lived in Pitt

County during this period, there is no record of any other “*Alberton*” or “*Albertson*” males in the region during this era. This new Patroller is probably James Albritton Jr. [14].

Col. John Simpson convened his final meeting of the Pitt County Safety Committee at Martinborough on Saturday, 23 March 1776, when they voted to supply “*the company of the Minute & Militia men*” with corn at the cost of 13s 4d per barrel. Col. Simpson’s obligations kept him occupied elsewhere for most of 1776, and others chaired the Pitt County Safety Committee meetings in April, June, and July. By mid-1776, the Safety Committee effectively operated as the local court system, administering justice by settling disputes, bringing suits to trial, etc. In the last recorded meeting of the Pitt County Safety Committee, the group convened at Martinborough on 23 July 1776, several weeks after the official signing of the Declaration of Independence [15].

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8. Gen. John Simpson's Statewide Service

On 19 December 1775, the North Carolina Provincial Council appointed Col. John Simpson to the New Bern District Safety Committee, and on 16 January 1776, he took the oath of allegiance as prescribed by the North Carolina Provincial Congress. As long as they continued to function, Col. Simpson served on both the New Bern District and Pitt County Safety Committees [1]. On 23 December 1775, he received a commission as Justice on the Pitt County Court of Pleas & Quarter sessions [2], and by late 1776, he had become a member of a North Carolina Military Court that served to advise the Governor [3]. After the Provincial Congress issued orders to draft men of eligible military age, Simpson ordered general musters of the Pitt Militia to provide soldiers for the general war effort, despite being hampered by his own illness in 1777 and his difficulties securing firearms for his new recruits [4].

Pitt County citizens again elected Col. Simpson as their representative to the North Carolina House of Commons for 1777–1778 [5], but his appointment to the North Carolina Governor's Council on 14 August 1778 necessitated his resignation from the General Assembly on August 17th [6]. Col. Simpson served on the Governor's Council from August 1778 through February 1780, attending every meeting of the Council during this period [7].

In 1780, Col. John Simpson received a commission as Brigadier General. Although he actively worked to supply troops from Pitt County and the surrounding region in support of the Patriots throughout the Revolutionary War, he did not himself see active military service [8]. In 1780, the Pitt County citizens elected Gen. Simpson as one of their representatives to the North Carolina House of Commons, and he served in this capacity in 1781 [9] and 1782 [10]. In 1786, the citizens elected Gen. Simpson as their State Senator, and he served in the Senate during the North Carolina General Assembly session that began in November 1786 [11].

In 1786, the North Carolina General Assembly named Gen. John Simpson as trustee of the Pitt Academy, established in what was formerly known as Martinborough, now re-styled by the General Assembly as "*Greeneville*" (later modernized to "*Greenville*") [12].

Gen. John Simpson died on 1 March 1788 and is buried near his home in Pitt County, south of the Tar River near Chatham, his home plantation [13].



Notes

1. Beaufort County NC Deed Book 3, pp. 459–460 (Edward Cannon to Matthew “Albriton,” 25 January 1760). Pitt County NC Deed Book B, pp. 441–442 (Thomas Albritton to John Brooks, 7 July 1763); Deed Book C, pp. 134–135 (Francis Buck to Peter “Albrittain,” 20 June 1764); Deed Book C, pp. 464 – 465 (Jacob Taylor to Mathew Albritton, 20 April 1767); Deed Book E, pp. 73–74 (John Williams (Wrestler) to John Simpson, 28 March 1768; witnessed by Mathew “Alberton”); Deed Book D, pp. 31–32 (Robert Webb to Peter “Albrittain,” 8 April 1768); Deed Book D, pp. 65–66 (Mathew “Albrittain” to Nathaniel Pettit, 10 February 1769); Deed Book E, pp. 269–270 (John Simpson to John Fulford, 24 November 1772; witnessed by Matthew Albritton); Deed Book F, pp. 75–77 (Thomas, James, Peter, and Mathew Albritton to George Albritton, 25 May 1774; witnessed by Richard Albritton and John Simpson). On 15 October 1777, Nesby Mills Jr. sold land to Col. John Simpson, with James Albritton Sr.’s grandson, John Albritton, witnessing the transaction (Pitt County NC Deed Book F, p. 323).
2. Pitt County NC Deed Book D, pp. 67–71 (five transactions between Simpson and James Albritton Sr., 4 March 1769).
3. North Carolina Grant Book 20, p. 708, Grant #119, #141; Grant Book 20, p. 709, Grant #121, #143. Issue date on both grants: 14 November 1771 (Col. John Simpson, land surveyed 5 November 1771).

Col. John Simpson

1. Ashe, Samuel A., ed. *Biographical History of North Carolina: From the Colonial Times to the Present*. Vol. IV. Greensboro, NC: Van Noppen, 1906, pp. 390–391 (John Simpson).
2. Saunders, William L., ed. *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*. 10 vols. Raleigh, NC: Josephus Daniels, 1890. Vol. VI, pp. 359, 362, 366, 396, 427; XXII, p. 393. John Simpson appeared and was seated as one of the representatives from Beaufort County on 24 April 1760. On 21 May 1760, he and Beaufort’s other representatives petitioned the Royal Governor, “*that there wants a Sheref for the Said County, their Being no Corte lately held there...*”
3. Saunders, Vol. VI, pp. 454, 456, 470, 486, 488, 493, 514. John Simpson was present in the Colonial Assembly at its sessions in April–May and in November–December 1760. He worked to secure passage of the bill creating Pitt County throughout November 1760.
4. Clark, Walter, ed. *The State Records of North Carolina*. 16 vols. Goldsboro, NC: Nash Brothers, 1904. Vol. XXIII, pp. 531–534 (Laws of North Carolina Passed in 1760, Chapter III; “*An Act for Erecting the Upper Part of Beaufort County into a County and Parish, by the Name of Pitt County...*”). Saunders, Vol. VIII, p. 343. The North Carolina Council met at Wilmington on 5 December 1760 with the Governor and appointed the first Pitt County Justices of the Peace.
5. Saunders, Vol. VI, pp. 1092, 1099, 1148, 1152–1153, 1164–1165, 1125, 1128, 1266, 1272–1273, 1275, 1281 (1764); VII, pp. 53–54, 80 (May 1765), 342–343, 353 (November 1766), 567, 586, 592, 596, 632, 647, 662 (December 1767–January 1768), 953, 964 (November 1768); VIII, pp. 101, 105–107, 110, 132, 146, 302–303. On 7 February 1764, the Clerk of the Crown presented “*Certificates of the Writs for Electing Representatives*” for Pitt County, indicating that George Moy[e] and John Simpson were elected. On 5 November 1764, “*Mr. John Simpson and Mr. George Moy, the two members for Pitt County appeared and took their Seats in the House.*” On 24 November 1768, the House of Commons found John Simpson “*guilty of a high misdemeanor, and that his conduct in preventing the sitting of the Inferior Court of Pitt County is greatly injurious to the Public and detestable to this House, Therefore it is further Resolved that the said John Simpson do appear at the Bar of this House, and there receive for such his Conduct a severe censure and reprimand from Mr. Speaker.*” Simpson appeared at the Bar and received his censure and reprimand. There is no further information regarding this incident, but it may have resulted in either his defeat in late 1769 or prompting him to not run for reelection. On 5 December 1769, Richard Evans and Alexander Stewart took their seats as Pitt County representatives in the Colonial Assembly’s House of Commons.
6. Ashe, p. 391. Saunders, Vol. VII, pp. 487–488 (Duties of North Carolina County Registers); IX, pp. 297–299 (North Carolina County Officials, undated). This list shows John Simpson serving as both Pitt County Register and Militia Colonel.
7. Saunders, Vol. VIII, p. 262; It is unclear precisely when John Simpson received his commission of Colonel of the Pitt County Militia. He may have received it concurrently with his appointment as Pitt County Register. He served as Militia Colonel and the Pitt County authority on military and security matters by late 1770, when he warned Gov. Tryon of reports that the Regulators would march to New Bern. An undated chart of North Carolina officials shows Simpson serving as Pitt County Register and Colonel, but this appears dated later, circa 1772.
8. Ashe, p. 392.
9. Sanders, IX, pp. 396, 398, 417, 447–448, 588, 723, 729, 733–735, 770, 837, 843, 848, 855, 874, 888, 907, 917, 951, 1187–1189. These records show that John Simpson served in the Colonial Assembly in January and December 1773, March 1774, and April 1775.
10. Pitt County NC Deed Book B, pp. 388–390 (James Shields to John Simpson, 8 April 1763); NC Deed Book C, pp. 72–73 (John Simpson to Paul Herrington, 18 May 1764); NC Deed Book C, pp. 237–238 (John Taylor to John Simpson,

1 April 1765); NC Deed Book D, pp. 67–71 (five transactions between John Simpson and James Albritton Sr., 4 March 1769). All of these documents list Simpson's occupation as "Merchant."

Pitt County & the War of the Regulation

1. DeMond, Robert O. *The Loyalists in North Carolina During the Revolution*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1940, pp. 34–35.
2. DeMond, pp. 37–38.
3. Sanders, VII, pp. 702–706, 722–728.
4. Sanders, VIII, pp. 178, 192–195.
5. Sanders, VIII, pp. 232–235, 241–247. Demond, pp. 41–43.
6. Sanders, VIII, pp. 258–259.
7. Sanders, VIII, p. 260. Richard and Thomas Henderson reported that "it was generally believed in the County of Granville that a large body of those who call themselves Regulators would come down to Newbern at the ensuing Sessions of the Assembly in order to intimidate and over-awe the assembly in their proceedings."
8. Sanders, VIII, p. 681. Tryon also ordered Simpson to "load as many carriages with Provisions as will subsist your men for one week at the rate of one pound and a half of meat and one pound of flour for each man per day."
9. Sanders, VIII, p. 262. Clark, XXII, pp. 408–409.
10. Sanders, VIII, p. 682. Clark, XXII, p. 409.
11. Clark, XXII, p. 410. Col. Simpson headed his letter to Gov. Tryon, "On His Majesty's Service." Less than four years later, he would serve as the chairman of the Pitt County Safety Committee advocating liberty from Britain's rule.
12. Sanders, VIII, p. 682.
13. Sanders, VIII, pp. 688–689, 695–696. The Regulators congregated at Hillsborough on February 16th, causing "The Inhabitants flying into the Woods. They kept Master of the Town till two o'clock at noon when they marched out in Triumph drums beating without any injury to the Town."
14. Sanders, VIII, p. 697. All combined, Gov. Tryon requested 2550 volunteers for his army.
15. Sanders, VIII, p. 702. Upon their arrival in Johnston County, Tryon ordered the Pitt County Militia to join those of other counties lying on the Neuse River and await further orders.
16. Clark, XXII, p. 409. Capt. Robert Salter signed a receipt to Col. John Simpson for £100 on 13 April 1771, and on April 26th, just a few days before the soldiers left Pitt County, Benjamin Randall signed a receipt to Col. John Simpson for forty shillings, "as bounty on the Service the Expedition against the Insurgents."
17. Ashe, p. 392.
18. Clark, XIX, pp. 837–840.
19. Kars, Marjoleine. *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, pp. 197–199. Clark, XIX, p. 840.

Battle of Alamance

1. Clark, XIX, pp. 840–842. Kars, p. 199. "Boston-Gazette" (Boston, MA), 21 October 1771, pp. 2–3 (letter reprinted in Sanders, VIII, pp. 643–648). The letter published in the "Boston Gazette" by a man in North Carolina to his friend in New Jersey seems highly partisan and critical of Tryon. He makes statements regarding Tryon's actions that other records contradict.
2. Clark, XIX, pp. 842–844. Kars, p. 199.
3. Clark, XIX, p. 844. Kars, pp. 199, 201.
4. "Carolina Sentinel" (New Bern, NC), 15 March 1828, p. 3, column 1. The newspaper published an extract of a letter written at "Newbern" on 27 June 1771, titled, "The following is the return of the killed and wounded among the loyalists in the action between them and the regulators at Almance [sic] on May 16...from Pitt county, capt. Salter, 1 k. 7 w."
5. Kars, pp. 202–204.
6. Clark, XIX, pp. 845–850. DeMond, p. 46. Kars, pp. 204–205.
7. Sanders, IX, p. 9. James Hasell wrote on 4 July 1771 that, "The Troops that marched from hence with the Governor against the Insurgents returned here."
8. Clark, XIX, pp. 853–854. While camped at Hillsborough, Gov. Tryon summoned his field officers to his tent to inform them of his promotion. The Governor "then expressing the warm sense of his gratitude for their gallant service and those of the men under their command and receiving in return from those gentlemen the most affectionate expressions of Regret and Esteem, they left his tent."
9. Sanders, IX, pp. 16–17. King George III had officially appointed Martin as North Carolina's new governor on 19 January 1771, but illness detained Martin in New York. This caused him apprehension, which he described in a letter to his superior, Lord Hillsborough, dated 15 August 1771. Martin wrote that he felt "under the apprehensions of being suspected of delinquency highly aggravated by seeing Gov^r Tryon in my place, engaged in quelling at the

expen[n]ce [sic] of great fatigue & toil a dangerous insurrection at a time, that I found myself utterly incapable of relieving him from ye difficult situation, to which honour & duty pressingly called me."

10. DeMond, pp. 46–48.

Col. John Simpson & Pitt County Safety Committee

1. Sanders, IX, p. 1030. Clark, XXII, p. 410.
2. Sanders, IX, pp. 1028–1029, 1042.
3. Sanders, IX, p. 1075. The Pitt County freeholders specified that any five of the following list would constitute the Pitt County Safety Committee: John Hardee, John Simpson, Robert Salter, Edward Salter, William Bryant, Edmond Williams, Benjamin May, George Evans, and Amos Atkinson.
4. Sanders, IX, pp. 1079, 1080–1081, 1088.
5. Sanders, IX, pp. 1095 (9th), 1100 (17th). The listed pages give the Proceedings of the Pitt County Safety Committee meetings held in Martinborough on these dates in December 1774.
6. Sanders, IX, pp. 1126 (February 11), 1154 (March 10); X, p. 99 (July 17). These pages give the Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings in 1775. On July 17th, "*Capt. Amos Atkinson appeared in this Committee and Regularly Cleared himself of the Accusations Lodged against him on the Tenth of March 1775. Also Mr. Solomon Shepard was Acquitted at the same time of aforesaid Allegations.*"
7. Sanders, IX, pp. 1178–1181, 1187–1189. DeMond, p. 67.
8. Sanders, IX, p. 1240. This comes from the Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings of their 1 May 1775 meeting.
9. Sanders, IX, p. 1266. This comes from the Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings of their 20 May 1775 meeting.
10. Sanders, IX, p. 1281 (May 27); X, pp. 14–15 (June 10), 37–38 (June 23). Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings from the indicated meetings in May and June 1775.
11. Sanders, X, pp. 61–62. Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings from the meeting of 1 July 1775.

Gov. Martin's Slave Insurrection & the Albrittons

1. Sanders, IX, p. 1256 (Gov. Josiah Martin to Earl of Dartmouth, 18 May 1775); X, pp. 45–46 (Gov. Josiah Martin to Earl of Dartmouth, 30 June 1775).
2. Sanders, X, p. 124 (Wilmington Safety Committee Proceedings, 31 July 1775).
3. Sanders, X, pp. 94–95 (Col. John Simpson to Col. Richard Cogdell, Chairman of the Craven County Safety Committee, 15 July 1775). The few records leave it uncertain if Col. Simpson learned of the plot on July 8th, or if it were discovered in late June and prompted the passage of the resolution approved by the Pitt Safety Committee on July 1st.
4. Sanders, X, pp. 63–64 (Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings). The precise date of this action is unclear, presumably due to the emergency situation caused by the discovery of the planned insurrection. Although included as minutes of the Safety Committee meeting that occurred on July 1st, this resolution clearly resulted from a later meeting. From the proceedings of July 8th and the letter Col. Simpson wrote on July 15th of the discovery of the insurrection, this emergency Safety Committee meeting occurred on Saturday, July 8 (see pp. 87, 94–95).
5. Sanders, X, p. 87. This resolution is the only item shown in the Proceedings of the Pitt County Safety Committee at their meeting on Saturday, July 8th. However, the appointment of the Patrolers and other resolution on pp. 63–64 almost certainly occurred that same day. Col. Simpson adjourned the Safety Committee until Monday, July 17th.
6. Sanders, X, pp. 94–95 (Col. John Simpson to Col. Richard Cogdell, Chairman of the Craven County Safety Committee, 15 July 1775). Ashe, pp. 393–394.
7. Ashe, p. 394.
8. Sanders, X, pp. 85–86 (Joseph Hewes to Samuel Johnston, 8 July 1775). Hewes' letter to Samuel Johnston was dated July 8th, which makes it slightly unclear if he referred to the slave insurrection in Pitt, Beaufort, and Craven Counties that Col. Simpson handled. The dates of the documents of Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings are unclear and could have occurred between late June and July 8. There is no other known slave insurrection in North Carolina during this period, so Hewes presumably refers to the one in Pitt County.
9. Sanders, X, pp. 117–119 (John Stuart to Earl of Dartmouth, 21 July 1755).
10. Sanders, X, p. 43 (Gov. Josiah Martin to Earl of Dartmouth, 30 June 1775).

Col. Simpson Leads Pitt County Towards War

1. Sanders, X, pp. 99–100 (Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings, 17 July 1775).
2. Sanders, X, pp. 121–122 (Pitt County Freeholders and Safety Committee Proceedings, 29 July 1775). The Pitt County freeholders elected Col. John Simpson, Capt. Robert Salter, James Latham, William Bryant, and James Gorham to represent the county at the Provincial Convention held at Hillsborough.
3. Sanders, X, pp. 221–222 (Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings, 23 August 1775). Among the men who signed the petition with Peter Albritton were Solomon "*Albertson.*"

4. Sanders, X, pp. 255–256 (Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings, 23 September 1775). Secretary of State Records, State Archives of North Carolina. SSXVIII, Recordkeeping (Misc.): Tax Lists, Box 2, 1775 Pitt County NC Tax List. The document is mis-labeled as a tax list, but it is actually a census of Capt. William Burney's District and of Capt. Lanier's District in Pitt County. Capt. Lanier's list is titled, "*A List of the Inhabitants of Pitt County Taken by order of the Continental & Provincial Congress August 25th: 1775.*" The back of Capt. William Burney's list reads, "*Capt. Willm. Burney List of Inhabitants, 1775,*" while the front heading of the list is "*A list of all of Capt. William Burney's Company.*"
5. Sanders, X, pp. 346–347, 451 (Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings, 10 December 1775 and 13 February 1776).
6. Sanders, X, pp. 295–296 (Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings, October 24, 25, 1775). Throughout this period, the Pitt Safety Committee issued permission for citizens to file lawsuits. In the last Safety Committee meeting whose proceedings have survived, held on 23 July 1776, issuing such permission was the only action taken by the Committee.
7. Sanders, X, pp. 321, 346–347 (Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings, November 11 and December 10, 1775); pp. 349, 354 (North Carolina Provincial Congress Proceedings, 21 December 1775).
8. Sanders, X, pp. 459, 462 (New Bern District Safety Committee Proceedings, 23 February 1776).
9. Sanders, X, p. 261 (Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings, 2 October 1775). Earlier, on 9 September 1775, the Safety Committee ordered "*That John Tyson Esq. meat [sic] the next sitting of Committee to answer The Different Allegations lodged against him and that James Lanier write said Tyson to Inform him of next meeting*" (Sanders, X, p. 243).
10. Sanders, X, pp. 422–423 (Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings, 23 January 1776).
11. Sanders, X, pp. 494, 499 (Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings, March 23 and April 23, 1776).
12. Sanders, X, pp. 164, 204, 206 (Proceedings of the North Carolina Provincial Congress, 9 September 1775). James Armstrong was commissioned as Second Major. Evans later served as Pitt County Clerk, with his beautiful handwriting evident in the deed books of the 1790s. For some reason, the Provincial Congress approved these appointments, reaffirming these commissions on 22 April 1776 (Sanders, X, pp. 529, 532).
13. Sanders, X, p. 422 (Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings, 23 January 1776).
14. Sanders, X, p. 451 (Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings, 13 February 1776). Also appointed as Patroler this day was Robert Hodges, another resident of the Grindle Creek area near where James Albritton Jr. lived (see their households on the 1790 Pitt County NC Federal Census). Solomon Albertson signed a Safety Committee resolution in August 1775 and lived in the region from the early 1770s until after 1800. He is a distinct man, with no apparently familial connection to the Albrittons of Pitt County. No other male Albertson besides Solomon appears to have resided in Pitt County during this period, according to the surviving records.
15. Sanders, X, pp. 494, 499, 618, 670 (Pitt County Safety Committee Proceedings, March 23, April 23, June 29, and July 23, 1776).

Gen. John Simpson's Statewide Service

1. Sanders, X, pp. 349–350 (North Carolina Provincial Council Proceedings, 19 December 1775); p. 414 (New Bern District Safety Committee Proceedings, 16 January 1776).
2. Ashe, p. 395.
3. Clark, XI, p. 357; XV, p. 683 (both proceedings from State of North Carolina Military Court, Kingston, 1 December 1776).
4. Clark, XI, p. 535 (Col. John Simpson to Gov. Caswell, 26 July 1777); p. 556 (Col. John Simpson to Gov. Caswell, 4 August 1777). Simpson wrote his letters from his Pitt County plantation known as "*Chatham,*" named after William Pitt's earldom.
5. Clark, XII, pp. 816, 822–823.
6. Clark, XII, pp. 784, 786, 790, 857, 869, 879; XIII, p. 636. John Simpson continued to serve as Pitt County representative as late as 3 August 1778, but on August 17th, "*On motion, resolved, that Mr. Speaker issue a writ of election to the county of Pitt to elect one member of this House in the room of John Simpson, Esq., whose seat is vacated by his acceptance of the appointment of a Councillor.*" On Thursday, 21 January 1779, "*The Sheriff of Pitt County certifies that James Gorham, Esqr., was duly Elected as a Member of the House of Common for the said County, in the room of John Simpson, Esquire...*"
7. Clark, XV, p. 717; XXII, pp. 910, 935, 938–939, 947, 949, 951, 953–959, 962, 964–967. John Simpson participated as a member of the Governor's Council on September 9, October 15 and 27, November 7, December 1 and 4, 1778; January 4, February 15, September 7, June 2, September 9, October 15 and 18, November 18, 1779, January 1 and 4, February 11 and 16, 1780. There are no records of the Governor's Council after February 1780.
8. Ashe, p. 395.

9. Clark, XVII, pp. 635, 637–638, 670, 700, 705 (Senate and House Journals, from January 27 to June 23, 1781). On 29 January 1781, “...and Mr. John Simpson, the Member for the County of Pitt, appeared and took their seats.”
10. Clark, XVI, pp. 1–2, 29, 49, 127, 130, 153, 156, 165, 167; XIX, p. 79. John Simpson and James Gorham were seated in the House of Commons for the session lasting from April 16 through May 18, 1782.
11. Clark, XVIII, pp. 1–2, 24, 59, 61, 134–135, 154, 161, 161 (Journal of the Senate beginning 20 November 1786).
12. Clark, XXIV, p. 867 (1786 Laws of North Carolina, “An Act for Establishing an Academy at the Place Heretofore Called Martinborough, In the County of Pitt”).
13. Ashe, p. 395.

