

Rowan, Matthew ^[1]

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by H. Kenneth Stephens, 1994

d. April 1760

See also: [Matthew Rowan](#) ^[2], Research Branch, NC Office of Archives and History,

Matthew Rowan, colonial official and acting governor, of Scottish descent but born in Ireland, was the son of the Reverend John Rowan and his wife, Margaret Stewart of County Antrim, Ireland. It is not clear when Rowan arrived in North Carolina, but he first appeared in the records in 1726 as a church warden in [Bath](#) ^[3], where he was a merchant who also had an interest in [shipbuilding](#) ^[4]. An affidavit of about 1729 notes that Rowan was sent to the colony (in 1724?) to build one or two ships for some persons in Dublin and that he "is now run away with one of them loaded with enumerated goods contrary to the Acts of Trade."

He relocated in the [Lower Cape Fear](#) ^[5] and resided at Rowan (now called Roan) plantation, near the modern community of Northwest in [Brunswick County](#) ^[6]. He resided there until his death, which occurred between the dating of his will on 18 Apr. 1760 and his failure to attend a meeting of the Council scheduled to be held four days later.

In 1742 Rowan married Elizabeth, widow of his brother Jerome. There were no children from this union, but she had four daughters (Elizabeth, Anna, Esther, and Mildred) from her previous marriage. Matthew Rowan, nevertheless, was the father of a son by Jane Stubbs of Bath. Although they were never married, Rowan did not hesitate to acknowledge his son, who was known as John Rowan. John, who was a mariner in Barbados, received a considerable portion of his father's estate.

In 1727 Matthew Rowan became a member of the [Assembly](#) ^[7], and in 1731 he was named to the [Council](#) ^[8], where he served until his death. In 1735 he was a member of the team that surveyed the [boundary](#) ^[9] between the two Carolinas, and in 1737 he was appointed [surveyor](#) ^[10]-general for North Carolina. In 1750–51 he served as receiver-general for the colony. Following the death of acting governor [Nathaniel Rice](#) ^[11] on 29 Jan. 1753, Rowan, as president of the Council, became acting governor, serving until the arrival of Governor [Arthur Dobbs](#) ^[12] at New Bern on 31 Oct. 1754. It was formally noted that Rowan's brief term as governor was agreeable to both the people and British officials. As chief executive he attempted to reorganize the colony's military force in light of the [French and Indian War](#) ^[13] then under way but was unsuccessful. This failure was considered more a reflection of conditions in the colony than of Rowan's leadership.

It was also during his administration that a large new country was created on the frontier and named [Rowan](#) ^[14] in his honor. Following the arrival of the new royal governor, Rowan resumed his position on the Council. It is believed that he was buried on his Brunswick County plantation, although the grave is not marked.

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