

Vail, Jeremiah ^[1]

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Vail, Jeremiah

by William S. Smith, Jr., 1996

d. pre–10 Sept. 1741

Jeremiah Vail, local and provincial official, one of several of this name, began to be involved in a number of land transactions and other legal causes in [Chowan County](#) ^[2] beginning in 1697, when he bought 560 acres of land on Albemarle Sound; in 1709 he acquired 560 additional acres adjoining the property of [Edward Moseley](#) ^[3], his brother-in-law. In 1719 Vail engaged in land transactions with another brother-in-law, [John Lillington](#) ^[4], and was then identified as a mariner. He was a frequent witness to deeds, wills, and other documents in the 1730s.

Vail married Mary Lillington Swann, the widow of [Samuel Swann](#) ^[5], after 10 July 1707. They had seven children: Moseley, Mary, Jeremiah, Jr., Edward, Martha, John, and Sarah Elizabeth—neither the order nor the dates of their births are known. Because sons Jeremiah and Edward also had sons named Jeremiah, much of the data now available cannot be attributed with certainty to any one of them. The several contemporary persons of this name exemplify the difficulty frequently encountered by those who try to reconstruct the life of colonial North Carolinians. One Jeremiah Vail was a member of the Assembly in 1727, and another one served in 1755–60. The complications began in 1728, when one Jeremiah Vail was granted 320 acres of land on New Topsail Sound in [New Hanover County](#) ^[6]. In 1737 a Jeremiah Vail, Hanah Nuggent, Frances Tool, and William Bailey were charged with "stripping themselves naked and going into the water together in the face of the town." For this offense, the males were bound over to the next court, whereas the two females were sentenced" to be carried to the public whipping post and there to receive ten lashes on her back well laid." Insofar as the subject of this sketch is concerned, however, the swimming caper seems more the action of a younger man than of one probably near sixty.

In March 1743, at a time when many residents of the northern part of the colony were moving to the newly opened Cape Fear section, Jeremiah Vail, Jr., successfully petitioned the Council for 400 acres in [New Hanover County](#) ^[6] to which he had moved by 2 June 1740. Two years later he acquired another 400 acres by petition. Following the passage of a bill in the General Assembly in 1745 to regulate conditions in the county, Vail was hired to make the official survey of the recently chartered town of [Wilmington](#) ^[7]. His survey was designated by a law of 1754 as the official one of Wilmington. In 1749 Jeremiah Vail was named one of three commissioners to erect public buildings in New Bern as a seat of provincial government.

Vail was appointed in 1752 to be inspector of exported goods from the [Neuse River](#) ^[8] and was designated as well to serve as receiver of the impost or duty in [Carteret County](#) ^[9] for all goods, wares, merchandise, wine, and distilled liquors imported or brought into Carteret. Although he served with distinction in the [Assembly](#) ^[10] in 1753 as deputy clerk of the Council and as chairman of the Assembly committee of public accounts, by 1757 a bill was introduced into the lower house to replace him as receiver of duties on wine, rum, and other spirituous liquors and to more effectually oblige receivers of duties to account for and pay them. Despite his promise in December 1757 to pay in full the balance due on his duty accounts, the assets of his estate were sold in 1764 to satisfy public debts.

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