

Osborne, Alexander ^[1]

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1709–11 July 1776

Alexander Osborne, frontiersman, was born in New Jersey but spent his early years in Lancaster, Pa. He moved to North Carolina about 1749 and settled on the headwaters of Rocky River in Anson (now Iredell) County. There he built a log house named Belmont on his thousand-acre land grant, which in 1753 fell in [Rowan County](#) ^[2] when that county was cut off from Anson. Like many of the Scot-Irish who emigrated from Ulster in 1725–68 to settle on the frontier, Osborne possessed industrious habits, integrity, and a love of freedom. Religion and education were very important in his life.

His residence, Belmont (which was later rebuilt and also referred to as the Red House), was one of the earliest places of worship for Presbyterians in Rowan County before Centre Church was erected; it became the central meetinghouse of worship for a large area. [Hugh McAden](#) ^[3], the first Presbyterian missionary in North Carolina, spoke of being "at Osborne's"; the Centre Church was called "Osborne's Meeting House." Belmont also was the center of the military, educational, social, and civil life of the area. Osborne contributed to the establishment of Crowfield Academy (ca. 1760) near Belmont within the bounds of Centre congregation. This was a classical school where young men prepared for Princeton. His own son, Adlai, went from Crowfield to Princeton and on to an outstanding career in North Carolina. Alexander Osborne is known to have had a "well stocked library and a room for dancing on the second floor." His name is on a petition from Rowan County to Governor [Josiah Martin](#) ^[4] in regard to amending the Marriage Act so that Presbyterian ministers could conduct marriages.

Osborne represented his district as a member of the Council of the province in New Bern (1749 and 1759) and Brunswick (1762). He was a member of the Provincial Assembly meeting in Wilmington on 21 Mar. 1761. In 1749 he was appointed magistrate for [Anson County](#) ^[5]. He also served as justice of the peace in Anson and, though a Presbyterian, as vestryman of St. George's (Episcopal) Parish. As one of the original justices, Osborne held the first court in Rowan County. He remained on the court for many years, often presiding over its sessions.

Active in military affairs, Osborne constantly helped to protect the settlers from Indian attack. He served in the Fourth Rowan Foot (1754–55, 1758, and 1767). On 21 Aug. 1754, serving as a commissioner to the Indians, he and fellow commissioner James Carter met with King Hagler of the friendly Catawba tribe and many of his chiefs and warriors. On 29 August they signed a treaty pledging to build the Catawba a fort for the protection of their old men, women, and children in times of war. During the [French and Indian War](#) ^[6], Osborne served as captain of a company. He was in direct communication with Governor [Arthur Dobbs](#) ^[7] and advised him about the exposed condition of the frontier. Had it not been for the protection of the Catawba fort and [Fort Dobbs](#) ^[8], built for the settlers' safety, together with a special company of rangers and patrollers, the settlers no doubt would have been the victims of many Cherokee attacks. For taking part in this war against the Cherokee, which virtually destroyed their power to make war, Governor Dobbs commissioned Osborne colonel of a regiment of foot in 1756.

In 1768 Colonel Osborne led an organized force to Salisbury to aid Governor [William Tryon](#) ^[9] in suppressing the Regulators. There, at a review of troops on 20 Aug. 1768, he read a letter from four Presbyterian ministers counseling harmony and submission on the Regulators' part. Osborne himself spoke in support of the government and of the liberties and properties of the inhabitants that were in danger if "these insurgents" were able to overturn the Hillsborough Superior Court. He thanked the governor for the trouble he had taken to preserve peace in the province. Continuing his involvement in the Regulator campaign, he went on to Hillsborough to attend a Council of War and was appointed by Governor Tryon to carry a proclamation of pardon for the insurgents to Salisbury. The proclamation was to be read at the head of the brigade and to be attached to the courthouse door on 2 Oct. 1768.

By 1771 Osborne and the Rowan militia had changed sides. He was active in the first movements towards independence and was a prominent member of the Rowan Committee of Safety. Not living to enjoy the independence he had worked for, he and his wife died within two days of each other, she on 9 July 1776. They were buried in Centre Church graveyard in [Iredell County](#) ^[10].

Osborne married Agnes MacWhorter, the daughter of Hugh (d. 1748) and Jane MacWhorter, who immigrated to America from County Armagh, Ireland, and settled in New Castle, Del., in 1730. Agnes's brother was Dr. [Alexander MacWhorter](#) ^[11], president of Queens Museum in Charlotte before the Revolution. The Osbornes left six children: one son, [Adlai](#) ^[12], who married Margaret Lloyd of [Orange County](#) ^[13]; and five daughters (Jean, Mary, Rebecca, Agnes, and Margaret), who married members of prominent families in their area. Alexander Osborne was an ancestor of Adlai Stevenson, vice-president of the United States, and his grandson, Adlai E. Stevenson, an ambassador to the United Nations.

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