

# HANS HEINRICH (JOHN HENRY) FELDER



*5<sup>th</sup> Great Grandfather of Compatriot Larry Joe Reynolds*

In the early settlement of Orangeburg Township, the names of a multitude of Swiss immigrants made up the rolls of the newly arrived lot. Optimistic with the prospect of a new life, the Swiss arrivals hoped to mimic the success of other Swiss townships in the new Carolina like Purrysburg on the Savannah. One of the arriving hopefuls was Swiss immigrant Hans Henry Felder. Felder was one of the several boatloads of German and Swiss natives to come to the area of current day Orangeburg in the 1730's.



By 1747, Felder had begun to lay his roots in the area near St. Matthews Parish. Felder began a family by marrying Mary Elizabeth Shaumloffel and fathering seven sons. The roots took even greater hold as Felder served as Justice of the Peace and Justice for the Quorum in the area. In 1763, Felder remarried and added another five children to his household. A good number of deeds and other civic documents attest to Felder's role in the post-settlement era of Orangeburg district. Felder had cut his own little niche in the new America and was making the most of it. However, the last third of the 18th century would force the father of twelve to consider issues that lie beyond the confines of his home district.

In 1775, the Crown responded to rising malcontent in the Colonies by ordering the blockade of the port of Boston. In the fallout from this and other actions, Felder joined fellow Independence minded "Whigs" in enforcing the Continental Association. The rather matter of fact name of the organization says little of its importance. The Association was one of the first steps in severing the ties with the British Crown and called for the dissolution of ties with the King. In 1775, Felder joined fellow "Patriots" in being elected to join the Second Provincial Congress from St. Matthews Parish. While a member of the body, the now historic Constitution for the Independent South

Carolina was passed. There was no doubting where Henry Felder stood in the coming Revolution. The Swiss would cast his lot with the Independence movement.

Felder's initial participation in the war was in supplying the fledgling Whig government with much needed Gunpowder. However, the Swiss would not allow his role to be that of just collaborator. Felder enlisted the help of his seven sons and others as a militia company for the area. Felder held the rank of Captain of the Whig body. As in most cases of these "Americans versus Americans" scraps in the South Carolina backcountry, few official records survive. Colonel Paul Felder recounted an old Barnwell district native telling him of whipping an Tory detachment at Holman's Bridge on the South Edisto River while a member of Felder's company. Apparently in some of the forays John Felder (Henry's son) was captured and later shot down while escaping from his British captors. The exact facts or validity of the fight at Holman's bridge is uncertain, however they were hardly uncharacteristic of most of the fighting that Felder would have seen in his district. Many a scrape occurred in the South Carolina countryside. There were no scarlet coats blazing in the sun or grand armies in these scrapes. Mostly personal encounters of a few adversaries and small skirmishes. Orangeburg Historian Alexander Salley noted only that Felder's company was probably a member of Colonel Rowe's regiment of South Carolina militia.



Apparently, Felder's Whig loyalties/participation was enough to draw the ire of his Loyalist adversaries in the area. In 1778, Loyalists looted and torched his home in St. Matthews's parish. In the civil war that was the Revolution in SC, this was hardly an unusual occurrence. Felder however had an opportunity to avenge his Loyalist adversary's depredations in 1781. May of 1781 was beginning to show the Whigs of Carolina gain the upper hand. Although large victories were reserved for Cowpens and Kings Mountain, the Whig militia of General Thomas Sumter, Francis Marion and the detached Continentals of Harry Lee were beginning to take advantage of the strung out British lines of supply. For over a week during the previous month, Brigadier General Francis Marion and Lt. Colonel Henry Lee of the Continentals laid siege and finally forced the surrender of Fort Watson on the Santee. On May 12th the duo struck again by capturing the British post at Forte Motte after a four day siege.

Like domino's the British line of forts guarding their supply lines were falling. Brigadier General Thomas Sumter hoped to make his own dent by moving on Orangeburg on May 11, 1781. Captain Felder is reported to have guided the famed South Carolina partisan's approach to the town and his two guns (now on display at the Square in Orangeburg) are reported to have been used in the siege.

The 70 Loyalist militia and twelve regular British troops garrisoning Orangeburg took refuge in the town jail to contest Sumter's occupation of the town. In 18th century warfare, a good strong structure such as a brick building, or even log fort could be reasonably defensible by even a small force. Providing that the enemy did not have artillery to blast a breach through its walls. Sumter's guns made any attempt to hold the town in vain when the Gamecock placed his artillery in position to fire on the barricaded Loyalists manning the Jail. Sumter's artillery opened fire and quickly blasted a few breaches in the jail walls. With the wall breached, Sumter's men now only had to simply swarm through and overwhelm the garrison. However, an assault with the always unpredictable militia would be unnecessary. The British Colonel in command of the post realized his

precarious situation and ordered the white flag of surrender displayed. Almost as quickly as it had begun, the siege of Orangeburg was over. With the mostly bloodless affair complete, Sumter's forces had broken yet another link on the chain holding the British posts together. For Henry Felder. There had to be a tad bit of a feeling of retribution for the Loyalists burning his home three years earlier.

However, the fickle nature of the war in South Carolina took an even further swing. Sumter's command moved from the town of Orangeburg with view of laying siege to the British post at Fort Granby (present day Columbia). However, Henry Lee's continentals had moved to the area while most of Sumter's men were besieging Orangeburg and on May 15th forced the surrender of the post, much to Sumter's chagrin. Nevertheless, Orangeburg would once again fall back into British hands after the evacuation of Ninety-Six and Camden when Lord Rawdon's forces moved into the area. Sometime between the capture of Orangeburg by Sumter and the end of the war, Henry Felder's final battle with the hated Loyalists would come to fruition.

Around the close of the war, Henry Felder received word from his old comrade Samuel Rowe that the Loyalists were going to make another house call on his residence. Felder barricaded himself, his sons, and an overseer named Fry in his home to fend off the Tories. In the character of war common to the South Carolina countryside, the Loyalists made their expected arrival and tried to overwhelm Felder and his small garrison. With his wife and servants loading their weapons as they fired, Felder's posse beat back the attack of the King's men. The Loyalists finally had enough and slipped away from Felder's home after taking as many as 20 men killed (if one believes the story, however unbelievable). Whether this was an actual retreat or simply a ploy to draw Felder out of the house is unknown. However, Felder sent his sons via a back path to ambush the retreating Loyalists.

The Tories however turned back before reaching the ambushade and resumed their attack on Felder's house. Realizing there is more than one way to skin a cat, the Loyalists fired a load of hay under Felder's shed. The shed's proximity near the house soon caused the expected conflagration and Felder's house went up in flames. The ploy was obvious. Fire the house, draw the defenders out, and put them to the sword. Escaping from the flames, the Swiss threw on his wife's clothes to escape the Loyalist trap. As Felder attempted to scale the yard fence, he was cut down by the Tory bullets. His boots had given him away. Felder's Swiss perseverance however would not fail him even close to death. Felder denied his bitter enemies the pleasure of capturing his dead body and managed to make his way a few hundred yards before his wounds got the better of him. One of his nearby servants, chopping wood, came to his assistance and he was carried to a safe place. However, the Loyalist bullets had served their purpose. A few days after the skirmish, Felder died of his wounds.



Felder's last fight is relayed to posterity by his surviving family members and the slave who came to his assistance after wounding. The killing of twenty Loyalists of course comes via these stories and the account of the skirmish comes from the surviving members there. The overall truth of the story is unknown. Even the time of death of

Felder has been a source of some disagreement although some put the death in 1780. This would seem to conflict with the account of Felder's aiding in the capture of Orangeburg (Orangeburg was captured in May of 81). One probable theory holds that the Felder who helped Sumter in his capture of Orangeburg was actually Felder's son Henry Felder. This would make Hans Henry Felder's reported death in 1780 entirely possible. Few distinctions could have been made in most surviving information that show clearly just which "Captain Henry Felder" was involved in the capture of Orangeburg. After all Felder's son, Henry, followed his father's footsteps and commanded the company after his death. Of course, this would necessarily mean that Hans Henry Felder did not take part in the capture of Orangeburg, however his company (commanded by his son Henry Felder) did. Of course, there is also the possibility that the 1780 death date of Felder is mistaken. Only painstaking research and maybe some information stored away in a dusty library somewhere can tell for certain. These questions if nothing else, help to keep Felder's many descendants guessing as to his life. However, one could note with certainty that Captain Hans Henry Felder can be remembered as one of Orangeburg District's most dedicated Whigs in the American Revolution.

*Sources: The History of Orangeburg County: Alexander Salley.*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Another of Henry Felder's Great Grandsons, Clarence Felder, Wrote, Directed and Stared in a movie about Henry, All for Liberty. This movie has been made into a DVD that you can purchase many places, however you can also watch the complete movie for free on YouTube by clicking: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNo1PgCIKsY&list=RDCMUCZEQZQ8HhFbyFjXUT46XH8g&start\\_radio=1&t=429s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNo1PgCIKsY&list=RDCMUCZEQZQ8HhFbyFjXUT46XH8g&start_radio=1&t=429s)