

Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements & Rosters

Pension application of John Swann (Swan) R10335

Sarah Swann

f30NC

Transcribed by Will Graves

3/23/11 rev'd 2/1/15 & 10/2/21

[Methodology: Spelling, punctuation and/or grammar have been corrected in some instances for ease of reading and to facilitate searches of the database. Where the meaning is not compromised by adhering to the spelling, punctuation or grammar, no change has been made. Corrections or additional notes have been inserted within brackets or footnotes. Blanks appearing in the transcripts reflect blanks in the original. A bracketed question mark indicates that the word or words preceding it represent(s) a guess by me. The word 'illegible' or 'indecipherable' or 'undeciphered' appearing in brackets indicates that at the time I made the transcription, I was unable to decipher the word or phrase in question. Only materials pertinent to the military service of the veteran and to contemporary events have been transcribed. Affidavits that provide additional information on these events are included and genealogical information is abstracted, while standard, 'boilerplate' affidavits and attestations related solely to the application, and later nineteenth and twentieth century research requests for information have been omitted. I use speech recognition software to make all my transcriptions. Such software misinterprets my southern accent with unfortunate regularity and my poor proofreading skills fail to catch all misinterpretations. Also, dates or numbers which the software treats as numerals rather than words are not corrected: for example, the software transcribes "the eighth of June one thousand eighty six" as "the 8th of June 1786." Please call material errors or omissions to my attention. Researchers should not rely solely on the transcripts but should review the originals for themselves. These transcripts are intended as an aid to research, not to be used in lieu thereof.]

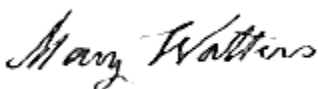
State of North Carolina Chatham County: On this 25 day of September 1846 personally appeared before the Honorable William H Battle one of the Judges of the Superior Court of Law and Equity for the State of North Carolina in open Court Frederick J Swann aged fifty-five years a resident of North Carolina in the County of Chatham who being first duly sworn according to law doth on his oath make the following Declaration in order to obtain the benefit of the provision made by the Act of Congress passed the 4th of July 1836 and the act Explanatory of said act passed March 3rd 1837. That he is the son of John Swan who was a soldier of the Revolution. That the said John Swan died in the year __and left a widow named Sarah Swan who died on the 25th day of June 1845 and that she remained the widow of the said John Swan to the day of her death. That she left three children named John Swan, Frederick J Swan and Maria Toomer. That of his personal knowledge he can say nothing of the services rendered by his father but must rely upon such proof as he may be able to make in his case. That he does not make this Declaration in order to obtain a pension But he makes it in order to obtain what was due his said mother Sarah Swan at the time of her Death. Sworn to and subscribed in open Court on the day and in the year first above written.

S/ F. J. Swann



Subscribed and sworn to before me in open court this 25th September
S/ Will. H. Battle, JSCL&E

[p 3: On July the 14th 1847 in Chatham County North Carolina, Mrs. Mary Walters, 77 gave testimony that she is the sister of Mrs. Sarah Swan and distinctly recollects the intermarriage of her sister with John Swan in the year 1782; that she was at the wedding at the house of Mrs. Dry on the Cape Fear River.



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[p 11: On April 19, 1847 in Wilmington North Carolina, A. J. De Rosset, 80, gave testimony that his sister the late Mrs. Toomer was a bridesmaid at the wedding of Sarah and John Swann; that he saw them living together as man and wife.]

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State of North Carolina Chatham County: This 24th day of October 1846 personally appeared before the Subscriber an acting justice of the peace in and for said County Archibald M. Hooper who having first been duly sworn doth depose & say as follows (viz.)

I Archibald Maclaine Hooper was born in Wilmington North Carolina on the 7th of December 1775 & was in that town from the occupation of the British forces to the evacuation. I subsequently when General Rutherford [Griffith Rutherford] arrive there with the Whig militia. I shall be 71 years of age on the 7th December 7th 1846. I have been twice applied to to make a deposition relative to the revolutionary services of the late John Swan Esquire of New Hanover County. On the first application I refused because I was unable to state any facts relative to such services from my own knowledge. On the second backed by William Stedman Esquire being assured that traditional testimony would be available I consented to give my deposition.

Reference being made by the agent George Luther to the affair of the Big Bridge¹ I knew nothing but what I had caught from the general & I presume the vague Communications of revolutionary witnesses namely that there had been at or near that place a skirmishing between the Royal veterans & the Whig militia & that Colonel Brown [Thomas Brown] was badly wounded. I made inquiry into the details & having no doubt of their verity I will give an account of the affair as it may tend to explain & elucidate my evidence.

Wilmington was a British Garrison from January 29 to November 14, 1781. During this period Major Craig [James Craig] the Commandant, stationed a company of about 90 men at the Big Bridge ten miles from the town. Colonel Thomas Brown who had signalized himself by surprising & carrying the British post at Elizabethtown Bladen County & who had the command at this time of about 300 militia conceived the project of surprising and capturing the British force stationed at the Big Bridge. With this view he employed Colonel Campbell Captain Jones & Mr. Swann to reconnoiter the position; & found that the officers & privates were off their guard i.e. the former bathing in the river at the foot of the declivity behind & North of the house; & the latter either bathing or washing clothes on the margin. Their arms were stacked in front or to the South of the house & guarded by sentinels.

In this State of things Colonel Brown soon formed his plan. This was that his force into three divisions should advance simultaneously – The Topsail Company under Colonel Campbell, another Company on George Moore's road & a third under William Jones, on the Wilmington Road; that they should meet at the foot near the bridge & that the united forces should from thence proceed with the greatest celerity to the encampment, cut down the sentinels, seize the stacked arms & surprised & captured the whole force. Colonel Brown himself led the division on the George Moore Road sanguine of success his conduct which yet in this as in every other instance alike marked by the extremes of caution & daring. He submitted his plan to his staff composed of Colonel Campbell, Captain Jones & Mr. Swann the latter of whom executed during the progress of this enterprise the duties of an Aid-de-Camp. The two former approved; the last opposed it. Mr. Swann was the youngest & in fact, only not a stripling. He was brave active & adventurous & though young had acquired experience in the modes of attack & retreat. He proposed another plan which he deemed it more feasible. It was that a selection of from 6 to 20

¹ Deponent is describing the Battle at Heron's Bridge, January 30, 1781
https://www.carolana.com/NC/Revolution/revolution_herons_bridge.html

persons should be made from the Whig forces, who could be relied on for coolness and intrepidity & that this little band should proceed with the requisite secrecy caution & determination to the enemy's quarters, dispatch the sentinels, seize the arms & captured the soldiers will keep them at bay until the arrival of the advancing divisions should ensure success by their presence. This bold & perilous substitute for Colonel Brown's plan was rejected.

Upon the approval of the plan of the Commander he proceeded to execute it. The divisions led by their respective officers advanced towards the fork designated. An accident frustrated their purpose before they reached the point of junction: the Company on the Wilmington Road met a British foraging party & in opposition to the authority of their Captain, fired on it. Then seized with a panic they fled in spite of all his efforts to dispel that terrors. The firing was heard at the enemy's camp, the sentinels gave the alarm & the drums beat to arms. The Companies on the Topsail or Moore's road who were advancing & who were now in sight, halted. Colonel Brown whose courage & presence of mind were equal to any emergency, endeavored to recover them from the embarrassment & apprehension occasioned by the accident; & to form them into battle array. It was in vain. They continued in disorder.

In the interim the British veterans had formed & advancing upon the Whig Companies fired. An irregular contest was kept up by the bravest of the Whigs. Colonel Brown received a severe wound in his right elbow & a slight one in his mouth. He was so disabled by the wound in his arm and in so much pain as to be compelled to leave the field which he did after offering his sword to Mr. Swann & authorizing that Gentleman, Colonel Campbell & Captain Jones to rally those who were flying & to carry on the contest. The combat was continued for some time. The British attacked the militia in squads one squad commanded by Sergeant Campbell was aiming to cut down a militia man who was standing still, unarmed & who was evidently reduced by disease to an almost helpless condition. Mr. Swann who was mounted & rallying the Whigs about 20 paces distant, desired the Sergeant peremptorily not to injure the poor unresisting creature. The Sergeant raised his sword upon which Mr. Swann presented his gun & shot him dead upon the spot. While he was in the act of firing Mr. Swann's horse dashed off with him into the midst of the enemy. Surprised & disconcerted by the suddenness & impetuosity of the movement, no hand was raised to arrest him in his career. As soon as they recovered themselves they fired their pistols at him. Having a very fleet horse he kept about 25 yards ahead of his pursuers. As he approached the cavalry who were formed along the side of the road, they raised their swords and cut at him as he passed. Holding up his gun and fending off their strokes as he passed he heard distinctly the clicks of the sword on the barrel of his gun. He had yet to pass another line of the British forces. The infantry seeing him escape from the Cavalry unhurt, formed across the road to intercept him. As soon as he came near to them the whole line fired upon him but missed him. The firing affrighted his horse & turning him out of the road he broke into the woods. A Dragoon seeing that Mr. Swann was still unhurt & likely to escape pursued him. At some distance Mr. Swann came to a ridge or narrow pass between two bogs [?]. Here a "horsing log" as it is called in the phraseology of the Country people, that is broke off high up the butt end resting on a stump and the other end on the branches & thus extending from one bay to another seemed to present an insurmountable obstacle to his progress. To the pursuing Dragoon his capture must have appeared to be inevitable. He did not however hesitate or pause but putting spurs to his horse leapt over the trunk of the tree & cleared himself of the branches. The dragoon afraid to imitate him in this feat was obliged to follow him by a circuitous route. Meantime Mr. Swann rode through the narrow pass & overtook the fugitives. The Dragoon having rode round the bay at length came up to the retreating militia howling out "Fire. You damned rebel rascals." Not one of the flying party raised a gun. Mr. Swann having discharged

his as related & having no time to reload could not permit [?]² the insolence of the Dragoon so he rode off with impunity. Major Craig the Commandant of the Garrison offered a reward for Mr. Swann in consequence of the part he took in the attack on this post.

I believe the foregoing narrative to be substantially true. It is probably not a full, though a correct account, in matters of this sort much is often lost by the want of skill in the first relaters. Very recently I drew out the details of that enterprise in conversation with some gentlemen descended from the old families of Cape Fear before I entertained no distinct views of it. A confused idea of skirmishing at the Big Bridge & the wound received by Colonel Brown was all that was preserved in my memory. The latter fact was indeed deeply impressed because in the society of that revolutionary veteran there was at different times references to it & I had reasons to think it occasioned him pain & inconvenience to the end of his life.

And reflecting on the little traditionary matter relative to Mr. Swann which it is in my power to state on oath, I at first thought that one disjointed fact was in connection with this affair. More reflection & some discussion with gentlemen from Cape Fear showed me that I was mistaken. The fact is that while Wilmington was a British Garrison, Mr. Swann was pursued by an officer of dragoons & owed his life to his presence of mind & agility. The only points of resemblance between the fact in the affair at the Big Bridge & the latter were that Mr. Swann shot an officer of dragoons in each instance & that in each instance he escaped uninjured. The latter instance will be understood when I state that desiring the maintenance of the British Garrison in Wilmington it was the practice of active & patriotic inhabitants of the vicinity to make stealthy approaches towards the outpost, at or near the Little bridge about two miles from the town & pick them off as it was expressed & instantly ride away at full speed. In this practice they were sometimes discouraged & pursued. Mr. Swann was in this predicament in the case specified by me. He was discovered & pursued by an officer of dragoons. Finding that the officer was gaining on him rather rapidly he turned round on his horse then at full speed & taking aim shot his pursuer. His presence of mind dexterity & horsemanship must have saved his life on that occasion he having at the time no weapon but his gun. I heard this incident related many years ago & afterwards by Mr. Swann himself. My mind at the time must have been engrossed with the part which is most striking (to wit) the narrow escape of Mr. Swann in so imminent a peril & the previous particulars hardly noticed or faint at first must be defaced by the lapse of time. Having mentioned this exploit in what I deem its true connection, I will add that Mr. Henry Walters, with whom I was intimate & had family ties related to me that during the period in which Wilmington was a British Garrison, he was associated with Mr. John Swann in efforts to annoy the enemy – that they used to fire with deadly aim on the sloops of war which sailed up the Cape Fear River above Wilmington for hostile purposes. These two specifications relative to Mr. Swann's revolutionary service are the subjects of my deposition. I will add further that I was acquainted with Mr. John Swann from about the 19th year of my age to the period of his death. He was in unassuming unostentatious gentlemen of undoubted honor & veracity. I felt for him always a very high respect & some regard. He was not within my traditionary knowledge attached to any Corps, but I am warranted in that knowledge in stating that he was as a volunteer brave, active & daring; & that he gallantly state his life on any occasion in which he could render a service to the cause of liberty & his Country.

This deponent further saith that he was personally acquainted with Mrs. Sarah Swann who died at the house of the Honorable John D Toomer sometime during the year 1845 & that

J. Perdue

she was the widow of the said John Swann & that she remained a widow until her death. He further saith that he is personally acquainted with Major Frederick J Swann & that he is the son of the said John & Sarah Swann

North Carolina Chatham County Archibald M. Hooper, being sworn on the Holy evangelist deposeth that the specifications of the four last paragraphs are true as stated by him & the other facts collected and narrated by him are also substantially true to the best of his knowledge & believe

Sworn to & subscribed before me

S/ O. Stedman, JP

S/ A. M. Hooper



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State of North Carolina New Hanover County

This day personally appeared before the Subscriber an acting Justice of the peace for said County Dr. A. J. Derosset, age, in his Eightieth Year, who being first duly sworn doth depose and say as follows. Viz. I have known the late John Swann Esq. when quite a young man & before his marriage with his wife lately deceased & while this Town (Wilmington North Carolina) was a Garrison under Major Craig afterwards General Sir James Craig. Mr. Swann was out with a small band of patriotic young man annoying the enemy upon every opportune occasion – but whether he belonged to any organized body of troops I cannot tell. I know that he was in the battle which took place about ten miles from Town near the Bridge or ferry on main N. E. Road; & remember well hearing from his companions an exploit he performed in that skirmish. Mr. Swann rode a very spirited young blooded horse, which ran away with him during the firing, and carried him into the midst of the enemy, – as soon as able to [he] rein'd up his horse, slapped spurs to return to his own men, was pursued by a Dragoon Officer whose name I have forgotten, & who coming up with him, raised his weapon to cut him down. Mr. Swann drew his pistol and fired it over his shoulder at the enemy who fell mortally wounded, & thus saved his own life & regained his station amongst his friends – without any knowledge whether he was enrolled in any Corps, I have no hesitation in stating that he was actively engaged during the controversy from his earliest manhood to close of war. I am also under the impression that Mr. Swann had been captured & paroled before the peace took place. I am now in my eightieth year & lived in the neighborhood of Mr. Swann's Father & was indeed for a time residing in the family & that of his uncle Col. Samuel Swann. Where Mr. John Swann received his education I do not remember, but am under the impression that it was at the North perhaps Philadelphia. He returned immediately home upon leaving the Seminary I believe. If he served at Red Banks or elsewhere, I was not aware of it, – but he might have done so without my knowledge. I was then quite young and small for my years.

S/ A. J. DeRosset

