

# The John Langford Letter

written near Lorena, Lexington County, South Carolina  
05 May 1874

**The John Langford Letter was transcribed from the Lyman C. Draper Manuscripts Collection of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. The John Langford Letter is found in Volume 6VV of the Draper Collection.**

Mr. L. C. Draper

Dear Sir:

As far as my memory goes, Lord Rawdon and Col. Cruger, both belonging to the same army, camped at Juniper (creek) but in the morning separated. Rawdon kept up the direct road to Ninety Six, and Cruger took up the Lee's Ferry Road.

Col John Hampton who commanded the Americans, had spies out and engaged him at Weavers' Old Field, to the Big Hollow Creek, crossed, and eluded the fight in what is called Vansants' Old Field. They killed several. I recollect of seeing places shown me by an old lady who said that she and a Miss Weaver went and buried them at three places. There was another place in the Vasant Old Field under a large elm tree, where they (the British) deposited their sick and wounded during their stay there. Several of the wounded died and were buried under the elm tree. The next morning they took out two men (Thomas and Sylvester Stokes) and hung them to a post oak, and while hanging, the British took fright and ran off and left them hanging. In about three months after, my father (sic. actually it was Mr. Vasant) cut them down and buried their bones.

I have made inquiry of an old gentleman of the name of Vasant, who has given me a description of the fight at the Weavers' Old Field between the Americans and British. He says the British were commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Cruger (error, L.C.D.) and as well as my memory serves me, I have heard my stepfather William Calk say that the British were six hundred strong, and the Americans under Colonel John Hampton, one hundred sixty strong. The numbers killed and wounded is uncertain. Mr. Vasant says he has seen four British graves that the occupants were said to have been killed in the fight, and four American graves, and the two that he says were left hanging so long on the post oak.

My great uncle Jacob Presnell was in the fight, posted by a tree firing at the British, saying, "Dam' em, let 'em come on!" Hampton, seeing he was outnumbered, called a retreat, saying, "Boys, follow me!" Presnell, not hearing the order, stood his ground till the enemy was close to him; then looking back for his commander and men and discovering they were gone, he jumped on his unbridled pony, but the animal would not move a step; when he jumped off, seizing one hand in the

pony's mane, and holding his rifle in the other, and kicking the wild pony in the side, and keeping on the side not exposed to the enemy, regaining his party in the Hollow Creek Swamp.

I have seen my great uncle Jacob Presnell many a time at my father's house. He departed this life at the age of seventy-five years, when I was about twelve or thirteen years old.

The distance from Juniper to the Battle ground is about six miles.

The British that kept the Lee Ferry Road, about five or six miles from the field of Battle, came upon an old man named Palmer, whom they killed without Mercy. Thus on to Ninety Six, staining their hands with American blood at every opportunity.

In one of your letters you ask on what road the fight took place. As well as my memory serves me now, it took place about the junction of the Hampton and Water's Ferry Road with the Lee Ferry Road, which is one mile over from the junction or crossing to Hollow Creek. My father and uncle were not in the fight, so my grandfather Calk told me.

Before the fight between the British and Hampton commenced, so I have been told, my great uncle Jacob Presnell and Jacob Vansant (the father of the gentleman who has given me some information about the fight, as already given) captured a tory and had him in the Hollow Creek Swamp. (His name was Jerg Martin Caughman, G.). James and William Calk came to Presnell and Vansant, and James Calk said, "Boys, I'm hungry - I want some dinner." Presnell and Vansant said, "Where can we get something to eat?" Calk replied, "Captain Butler has a party of sixty men and plenty of cattle at the Big Lick." Thus the prisoner learned of Butler's party and where encamped. These men, at least Presnell and Vansant, joined Hampton in the fight at Weavers' Old Field, and there in the confusion and retreat, their prisoner was retaken by the enemy.

Captain Butler and party had been out in a hard rain and were all very wet and their guns out of order, and Butler had gone to the house of a Mr. Carter to get something to eat, and he and his men to dry themselves and put their guns in order. One of Butler's Lieutenants, more cautious than his superior, advised that they should go to some secret place in the forest or swamp, but the advice was unheeded.

The Tory prisoner who had escaped from Presnell and Vansant, gave information of Butler and piloted an company of British and Captain Cunningham's Company of Tories to Big Lick and surprised and massacred Captain Butler and all his men. Butler surrendered, but no quarter was shown. Two men only escaped, Benjamin Hughes and Bartley Blucher. Hughes ran off with the frightened cattle and hid himself under some driftwood that had caught against a pine log that lay across a branch or drain. And as they passed, the British and Tories thrust their bayonets into the drift but fortunately without touching the concealed fugitive. Blucher and Benjamin Hughes came out of Carter's house when ordered by the enemy, hugged together, each with his arms around the other's neck. They were asked their names, but would not tell. Rabun's skull was cleft with a saber and he died with his arms around Blucher's neck. I have heard my father say that Blucher never had his right mind afterwards. Hughes and Blucher alone survived to tell the doleful tale of this bloody massacre. Hughes afterward made a gatepost of the pine log that saved his life, the one which held the drift.

I remember hearing my father say that he remembered hearing the firing of the guns when Butler and his men were massacred. He and grandmother and uncle were going from a Mr. Gibson's in Lexington County to their home over the line in Newberry, their places of residence being about two miles apart and they then some ten or twelve (sic) from the bloody scene that enacted. (This was on 7 November 1781, Gandee).

My grandmother Calk (Nancy Presnell Langford, G.S.L.) was married to Grandfather John Langford before the Revolutionary War. Uncle Asa Langford was born in Virginia on the Elizabeth River, and my father was born in the State of Georgia, at or near a place then called Cambelltown, on the Savannah, twelve miles above Augusta, and my grandfather remained at the place (until his) death, caused by a six month's service in the defense of his country at the city of Savannah. After his term of service had expired, he returned to his wife and children, where he soon afterwards died, leaving a widow and two children, Asa, the elder, and my father James Langford. So I have been told by my grandmother. Grandfather was wounded at what was called the Battle of the Regulation (1771) in Virginia (really in North Carolina - *Draper*). He was on the side of Liberty and his life was saved by getting water in the road where it was dry and dusty the day before - the little pool had risen during the night without rain. Shortly after this, grandfather moved to Georgia. After his death, grandmother's father, Daniel Presnell came and took her and the children back to Virginia. Shortly afterwards, great grandfather Presnell emigrated to South Carolina and settled on Buffalo Creek in Newberry County about a half a mile from great-grandfather Langford, bringing his family, grandmother and children, which was all done in the time the Revolution. At the breaking out of the war, father was about six years of age, and Uncle Asa between eight and nine.

You asked me to give you an account of other encounters that took place in the surrounding country. David Humes, Benjamin Sullivan and Luther Holmes came on a parcel of Tories on the war path from Orangeburg to Ninety-Six, at Poplar Springs, taking breakfast and their horses hobbled at grass. Hearing the Whigs coming, the Tories jumped on their horses without stopping to cut or loosen the hobbles. Sullivan soon overtook one whose name proved to be (John) Snellgrove and captured him, while Humes captured one Kennmore, who were jerked off their horses and carried to Senterfeits' Spring, and hanged Kennamore with a grape vine and left Snellgrove on his horse with his feet tied under the horses belly. Hopping Jack (Snellgrove) said the grape vine brook, and down came Kennamore who ran off with one of the Whigs after him, and shot and killed him about a quarter of a mile from the place of the hanging. Hopping Jack said, "Old Black's Head (Snellgrove's horse) was for Inman's Island, and he stuck spurs and kep them a digging until he landed safely in the Island. I have heard the old man say, "Poot, begod, I was safe then."

Poplar Springs and Senterfeits' Spring are now owned by Mr. John Price. The two springs are but half a mile apart, one on the south side of the Holly Ferry Road, and the other on the North, lying east and west of the other.

I will now give you an anecdote or daring deed of James Calk, already mentioned, and what brought him and his brother William Calk from the lower country to the upper:

If I mistake not, the affair took place in the County of St. Matthew's (present Calhoun County). The command that belonged to was attacked by a company of British. James and William and their cousin Dixy Ward were taken prisoners and were being conveyed to the British Post of Monck's Corner. James Calk and the pony he was riding made such a unmilitary

appearance that he was not disarmed, and the British captain, who rode up by the side of James Calk and began making fun of him by asking what such a tallow-faced fellow as he was could do - he could not understand what sort of people the Americans were to put children and colts into the field expecting them to do proper service. Nettled by this insolence, young Calk instantly drew his sword and gave the Briton a blow just above the ear, laying him in the road weltering in his gore, while he, putting his spurs to his pony, dashed through the guard and made his escape by lying down on his pony and galloping off the old field pine limbs which hung so low to the ground that the British could not pursue him, and not thinking to shoot until he was fairly beyond their reach, he made his escape unhurt. His brother and the rest of the prisoners made their escape that night and if I mistake not, the Captain carried to Monck's Corner, and in time, recovered.

After the escape of the Calks and their friends, they got together and came up the country and joined Captain Walter's Company of mounted rifles, and that caused the Calks to be in on the fight at the Weavers' Old Field between Colonel Hampton and Lord Rawdon's forces.

And James Calk did another daring deed at Eutaw Springs. he went with Captain Waters from the up-country to serve with his countrymen in that memorable struggle, and when the fight brought on he was eager for the contest, and misunderstanding some order of his commander to charge, he put spurs to his horse with drawn saber, shouting at the top of his voice, "Ye-hoo! by God, let's charge 'em boys!" dashing through the British lines alone, and cutting a British Captain's cap off just above his head, and wheeling his horse, came back through the British lines and regained his command unhurt, though many a shot was fired at him. I have heard this stated for fact by his brother, William Calk, and by Stephen Cumbo of Colonel Samuel Hammond's Command. After the war, James Calk was a great hater of Tories, and had many sore combats with them, and sometimes being overpowered would get the worse of it. He was unconquerable as long as he lived. I was at the old man's funeral. The discourse was preached by a Methodist circuit rider by the name of Wethers, as well as my memory serves me. Excuse my long delay and bad spelling and unconnected accounts of these several encounters for when I received your November letter.....(reason not given