

Harrington, Henry William ^[1]

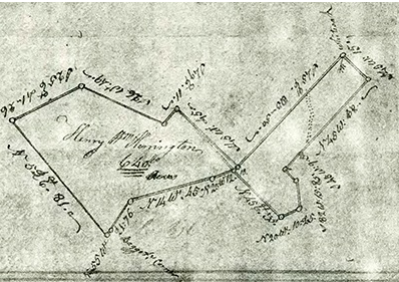
Harrington, Henry William

by Henry A. Robertson, Jr., 1988; Revised September 2022

12 May 1747–31 Mar. 1809

Henry William Harrington was a brigadier general in the [American Revolution](#) ^[2], a plantation owner, and a legislator who was born in London.

He emigrated first to Jamaica, but after a short time moved to South Carolina where he settled on the Pee Dee River across the river from Cheraw and later at Welch Neck. He was interested in education and other improvements. He became active in the church and public affairs, serving as vestryman and warden of St. David's Parish at Cheraw Hill and as a member of the first grand jury of the county, and later as deputy clerk of court. In August 1775, Harrington was commissioned captain of a volunteer company of foot and named chairman of the Committee of Observation for St. David's as he was a prominent member of the Whig party. His duties involved reporting on the state of the [colonial militia](#) ^[3], measures of defense, the authority of the [Committee of Safety](#) ^[4], and saltpeter manufacturing for the colony. In March 1776, when the [Provincial Congress](#) ^[5] dissolved the king's Privy Council for a Legislative Council, Harrington was elected [sheriff](#) ^[6] for the Cheraw District. In June of that year, he marched his company of foot to Haddrell's Point near Charles Town to take part in the campaign against Sir Henry Clinton, but saw no action; however, shortly thereafter he exercised his office of sheriff by receiving prisoners to be confined in the Cheraw District jail.



A 1779 survey map showing Henry William Harrington's 640 acres in Anson County. Image from the North Carolina Digital Collections.

^[7]On July 31, 1776, at the age of twenty-nine, Harrington married Rosanna, daughter of Rosanna Piper and Major James Auld. James and Rosanna settled in [Anson County](#) ^[8], N.C. After Harrington's marriage, he left South Carolina to live on the east side of the Pee Dee a few miles from the border of the North and South Carolina. In 1779, [Richmond County](#) ^[9] was formed from part of Anson County, and on November 25, 1779, Harrington was commissioned a colonel with command of Richmond County's militia. The following spring he helped defend the coast of South Carolina under the command of General Benjamin Lincoln. Before the city of Charles Town fell in May 1780, he had returned to North Carolina to sit in the Assembly. Harrington had left Charles Town "with the advice and unanimous consent of the Lieut-Governor and Council, and by General Lincoln's order" to carry a request for the aid of the North Carolina militia, according to a letter he wrote to his wife from Georgetown on April 30, 1780.

In June 1780, he was promoted to brigadier general of the Salisbury District in the absence of General [Griffith Rutherford](#) ^[10]. This was a temporary appointment, and the [Board of War](#) ^[11] instructed him to use his best judgment until an older and more experienced officer could be named. Harrington's headquarters were in the area of Cross Creek (Fayetteville), and his principal mission was supplying the provisions as well as the protecting those supplies. Harrington held this command for only five months. The General Assembly named Colonel [William Lee Davidson](#) ^[12] to command the Salisbury District with the rank of brigadier general. Harrington received this news in late September. He had excellent recommendations but western interests had prevailed in the Assembly. He was determined to resign but chose to remain with his troops because of news of an enemy advance towards their position. By November 1780, he wrote to the Board of War that "the time I waited for is now arrived, and I have the happiness to know that the last of our foe has been obliged to retreat, and that by our own exertions." He was content to relinquish his command, saying, "so this my country is but faithfully served, it is equal to me whether it be by me or by another." He enclosed his commission and stated that he would remain at his post until relieved.

During the final weeks of his service, Harrington, from evidence supplied in letters from Francis Marion and General William Smallwood to General Gates, was reluctant to commit his troops until his successor had arrived. Marion said he had asked him "to spare me his horse to endeavor to remove the post at King's Tree . . . but from what I know of the General I do not expect he will part with them," adding that "Harrington has not done any service with the troops he commands." Marion was concerned because Harrington had written to Gates regarding a regiment under his command and he did not believe that Gates had intended that he should serve under Harrington. General Smallwood proposed certain military positions, with Harrington's force drawn up midway between the Pee Dee and the continental encampment for the purpose "of cooperating with us occasionally, suppressing the Tories, or covering such supplies as might be necessarily drawn from the settlements."

Harrington submitted his resignation on November 3, 1780. However, General Gates asked him to remain in the army. He had served efficiently and honorably, but he declined. He wrote: "I would, with pleasure, continue to serve my country and think myself honored by your orders, but a brigadier's commission, without either District or Brigade, . . . cannot with honor be held. After what the Assembly have done in favor of another, it would appear like begging both commission and brigade; that in justice to myself I cannot think, even for a single moment, of altering my resolution."

When Harrington returned to his home, he sat in the General Assembly in January 1781. He had suffered greatly during the military campaigns. His home near Hailey's Ferry was plundered by the British. His enslaved people, possessions, and livestock were confiscated. His wife, Rosanna, and her children sought refuge with friends in South Carolina. In July 1780, Harrington had requested a flag of truce for Colonel John Donaldson and Lieutenant Reuben Wilkinson to enter Charles Town and escort his wife and family home. She returned, but the [fall of Camden](#) ^[13] to the enemy forced her to flee again, this time to Maryland. On the way, her party was attacked by the Tory Captain John Leggett, and her household goods were stolen or destroyed. The general's personal papers and much of his library were lost in this raid. The Harringtons' young daughter, Harriet, also died from difficulty of the journey. Rosanna Harrington returned to her father's home in Anson County while her brothers pursued Leggett and his soldiers. They could not overtake them and none of her property was recovered.





Henry William Harrington' gravestone located in Diggs, Richmond County. Image courtesy of Findagrave.com.

^[14]After the war, Harrington sued for the return of an enslaved person captured in the raid at Hailey's Ferry. The enslaved person was then enslaved by a Captain Campbell, a former British officer who settled on the Pee Dee. The enslaved person had been sent to Jamaica but Captain Campbell had him returned to Harrington. Harrington also sued and obtained judgment against Leggett, who had transferred title to his lands to another to avoid confiscation. The land escheated to the state and Harrington was given title. However, he gave Leggett's daughters title to their land when he learned of their poverty.

The Harringtons left Hailey's Ferry when the war ended and moved farther down the river. He represented Richmond County in the Assembly and in the senate at Hillsborough in 1783 and at New Bern in 1785. In 1787, he was nominated as a delegate to Congress but was defeated. He was appointed trustee of [Salisbury Academy](#) ^[15] in 1784 and a trustee of [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[16] in 1789. He served at The University of North Carolina until 1795. In 1791, he was one of the commissioners to fix the seat of government. He had contributed his services and part of his personal fortune to the cause of defense. He continued to devote his time to the state and county, although he preferred the his life as a plantation proprietor and enslaver. Harrington has been called Richmond County's leading citizen after the Revolution, when he held various positions such as chairman of the county court, administrator of estates, and bondsman for guardians, administrators, and officials. He owned large tracts of land and a sizeable number of 60 enslaved people, according to the [1790 Census of the Fayette District of Richmond County](#) ^[17].

Nine children were born to Rosanna and Henry William Harrington, four dying in infancy. The oldest son, named for his father, served in the navy during the [War of 1812](#) ^[18] and later was prominent in the legislature. Another son, James Auld Harrington, graduated from The University of North Carolina in 1808 and became a farmer and enslaver in South Carolina.

General Harrington died at home at age sixty-two and was buried in Wolf Pit Township, Richmond County, in the family graveyard overlooking the Pee Dee River. [A marble slab marks his grave](#) ^[14].

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"Henry William Harrington headstone." Grave. Findagrave.com. Photo taken January 28, 2022 by user Gerald. Available online at <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/79987917/henry-william-harrington> ^[14] (accessed September 12, 2022).

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Origin - location:

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1 January 1988 | Robertson, Henry A., Jr.

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