

Charity became heavy burden

Civil War-era Springs family found itself caring for many needs

Andrew Baxter Springs (1819-86) was one of York County's best-known and respected men in the winter of 1867-68. He owned Springfield plantation north of the small town of Fort Mill and was one of York County's representatives in the S.C. legislature.

It should have been a happy time for a man in his prime, but Springs' correspondence shows he was besieged by requests for money or favors of various kinds.

Two years after the end of the Civil War, the state was in economic despair. Springs had never believed that secession from the Union was a wise move. But when South Carolina seceded, he had volunteered. The next year, the S.C. legislature withdrew him from military service and drafted him for the post of commissioner of the Soldier's Relief Board.

Springs' duties were to gather

NEARBY HISTORY

Louise Pettus



food and other supplies for York County men on the front and to care for the soldiers' families when in need. The state gave him a token budget, which he supplemented out of his pocket and from his plantation commissary.

One of every four York County servicemen had been killed or wounded.

When the war ended, Springs did not feel he could withdraw support for the poor widows and children of his neighborhood, so he still let them have goods for which he knew he probably would never be repaid.

And he had numerous relatives who had needs. His uncle Clark Springs was handicapped. Clark Springs had spent many years as a student at the Cedar Springs School for the Deaf and Dumb, supported financially by Baxter Springs' father, John Springs III. Clark had become a teacher in the institution but just before the Civil War began, he

left it to marry and buy a small farm. After the war, there were too few pupils in the institution, and the farm did not pay off. Baxter Springs was the old man's sole support.

While Baxter Springs was in Columbia attending sessions of the legislature, his wife, Blandie, and his overseer, Eli Bailes, tried to keep the plantation going.

One of Blandie's letters to her husband reveals the constant demands of others on Springs' resources. Blandie wrote that a Mr. Whitaker of York had stopped at Springfield. She started by saying that she should have charged him but he was from their district and she didn't.

"He was dreadful particular about his horse. Eli had given him as much as the other horses. He [Whitaker] said he had nothing to eat and got a great deal of corn and fodder. I did not like him much - offered to pay when he left. I said I had no change to make, he said he would rather I take a dollar." It was a Confederate dollar, now worthless.

Blandie wrote, "Dr. W- has just come, was here three days ago. Oh, I am tired of the sight of him and he is always to dinner

and I keep trotting. All the time, I believe Laura believes she cannot live without him." Laura Springs was a niece of Baxter's who had been at Springfield for months.

Blandie wrote that Laura was eager to marry in the winter because she had a decent winter wardrobe and had nothing but old clothes for spring and summer. Also, there was another girl in the house. "Bennie is still here - did not want to go to the party - she is very unhappy. I really feel sorry for the child."

Besides the two girls, Blandie had seven sons ages 6 to 15 to look after. The oldest, Eli Baxter Springs, was at Bingham Military Academy in North Carolina, but still he wrote frequently, each letter stating that the food was terrible and he was hungry, would his mother please send "two cakes, some fried chicken, cherries and strawberries?"

To be continued

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