

Elliott White Springs (1896-1959), World War I flying ace and stunt pilot, industrialist, creator of the famous Springmaid advertising campaign, author (seven books and numerous maga-



Nearby history

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zine articles) and farmer, was interested in anything that had a motor.

A born tinkerer, he played with cars, planes and trains, often redesigning them to suit his whimsical brand of humor.

Springs loved to get something cheap and then turn it into something with which he, along with friends, family and employees, could have fun. When surplus war materials were made available after World War II, Springs had a heyday.

A lot of the military surplus went to Springs Recreational Park on the east bank of the Catawba River. Many folks still remember the park as a fun place to be on a Saturday afternoon in the summer. There were surplus planes for kids to play on and in. Especially remembered is a miniature railroad train that looped its way on a mile of track through the park.

In 1902, his parents had taken Elliott to the Charleston Exposition, which had a miniature train built by the American Locomotive Works. The boy was so delighted with the train that he never forgot it.

In 1938 when he heard that the little train was still being run, he tried, unsuccessfully, to buy it. Finally, after the war, he acquired the miniature engine that had been at Charleston. He also acquired two more engines, one of them used at the Jamestown Exposition of 1907. Springs added four coaches and two flat cars. He directed his foundry at Lancaster to build a turntable. He added a roundhouse, water tank and station. Each of the coaches carried eight passengers. Springs loved to don an engineer's cap and take over the throttle, to the delight of his passengers.

Industrialist's hobby was fun for all

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Community benefits with Spring's park.

Springs already owned the Lancaster and Chester Railroad (inherited from his father), which hauled cloth and cotton between the Springs mills in Lancaster and Chester. At the end of World War II, when Springs was equipping Springs Recreational Park with surplus war vehicles, he purchased a fleet of used U.S. Army diesel engines that had seen service in Italy. With that purchase, Springs could boast that the L & C was the first S.C. railroad to be 100% "dieselized."

Even before World War II, Springs had begun his collection of used railroad cars. In 1939 he purchased a private Pullman car called the "Loretto," which had been built in 1901 for Charles M. Schwab. The Pullman was refurbished in New York before it was brought to Fort Mill and placed on a spur track.

A non-bylined Charlotte Observer article, undoubtedly written by Springs himself, said about the transaction: "Elliott Springs, who is president of a railway as well as a cotton mill, was recently crowded out of his Fort Mill office by a growing army of clerks, and has found refuge by taking up his quarters in a private car, which he bought for a song and two whistles just in time to cheat the scrap-iron dealers."

The "song and two whistles" turned out to be just \$2,300, an unbelievably low price for the luxuriously equipped, though aging, 81-foot car.

Loretto, Springs wrote, featured "a new coat of green paint and a polished brass observation platform," Cuban mahogany woodwork, "two luxurious bedrooms with connecting marble bath between . . . cut glass chandeliers . . . marquetry Cupids and gilded ceiling."

Some additions made by Springs were new seat covers made by the Springs Cotton Mills, air-conditioning and connections for local water, sewer, electric and telephone lines, all of which could be disconnected and the car "moved to any plant where the attention of the president is required."

For 40 years, the Loretto stayed stationary in Fort Mill. The car was used as temporary living quarters by Anne and Bill Close while their home was being built.

In 1979, Springs' heirs, the Close family of Fort Mill, donated the private Pullman to the Spencer Railroad Museum at Landis, N.C.

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