

A MAJOR EARTHQUAKE REPORTED BY JOHN SPRINGS

—John Springs III kept a “plantation book” from 1811-1847. His house was called Springfield and still stands north of Fort Mill on Business #21.

The entries in his plantation book are generally about crop plantings and harvestings, the sale of cattle and illnesses in his family. However, an entry made on February 8, 1812 reports an unusual event:

“This Night we felt sensibly another severe shock of an earthquake (there being as many as two or three experienced shortly before this). The fowls in the fowl house came off their roosts and made a considerable noise, so much so, that I thought something had got in among them. It took place as near as I could guess in the latter part of the night I being fast asleep when wakened I felt my bed rock very considerably, as I thought in the direction from E to W.”

The quake felt by Springs was one of three earthquakes that centered around New Madrid, Missouri in 1811-1812. Each of the three on the Richter scale were 8.0 in intensity. Five towns in 3 states vanished completely. The Mississippi River cut new channels. They were the most violent earthquakes ever recorded in North America.

This area felt another violent earthquake 75 years later. About 10 p.m. on August 31, 1886 a powerful 30-second shock roused Mrs. Esther White then living in Springs Industries' Founders House on White Street.

A week later Mrs. White described the “night of horror.” She and her husband, Capt. Sam White, had guests, N. B. G. Chafee and his small son Otis as well as young daughter, Grace, and Mrs. White's sister, Addie White.

Mrs. White wrote, “I . . . was reading in bed, where, without a second's warning, the windows began a fearful shaking. The bed it seemed was rocking. I rushed from the room to find the whole house in tremor”

Everyone rushed outside for fear that the house would collapse on them. “Our neighbors across the way, Brevard [Springs] & Carrie with Baxter their ten months boy, [had] window panes shattered, books falling, clock stopped, the canopy over their bed swinging to & fro; their hanging lamp with crystal pendants playing music in the air — all of which unaccountable sounds drove them from the house, taking refuge with us, & for two nights we spent watching together, awaiting with anxiety and suspense the light of day. The earth even yet seems in commotion, & slight reverberations & shocks are felt repeatedly thro the days and nights.”

In Rock Hill the top 3-feet of bricks were shaken from the chimney of John Ratteree's home. Goods flew off the shelves of Frew Bros. store and W. L. Roddey & Co. Panes of glass were shaken from windows.

People in Yorkville felt the first shock at 9:45 p.m. The tremor was accompanied by a roaring sound. There were 5 more shocks; the last came at 4:00 a.m.

The epicenter of the quake was in Summerville, 22 miles north of Charleston. Summerville was pretty much wiped out and Charleston itself was

severely damage. Ninety-one people were killed. It is estimated that less than 100 houses in the city were left fit to be occupied. Fire broke out in 5 different places.

In every town and city it was reported that a considerable number of the citizens thought the world was coming to an end. Others became dizzy or developed violent headaches. Also there were those who claimed that the tremors affected their joints, "as if attached to a galvanic battery."

Later it was discovered that the tremors of the 1886 earthquake were felt as far away as Bermuda, Canada, Chicago and New Orleans.

Since 1886 there have been three U. S. earthquakes more powerful than the Charleston earthquake, two in San Francisco and one in Alaska.