

COMMENTARY

Blindness failed to stop McCorkle

■ Springs executive known as "Blind Coroner of York County."

Paul Gier McCorkle, during the years 1920-34, was widely known as the "Blind Coroner of York County."

McCorkle was born in Yorkville, the county seat, in 1863. At the time, his father was captain of "A" Company, 12th Regiment, S.C. Volunteers, and later was advanced to the rank of colonel. His mother was Elva Grier McCorkle, a native of the Steele Creek community of Mecklenburg County.

Young McCorkle attended Kings Mountain Academy in Yorkville, a prep school for the Citadel. What he did immediately after graduation we do not know, but at 27 he went to work for Leroy Springs in his mercantile store in Lancaster. He also lived in the Springs home (the house still stands in downtown Lancaster where it serves as Lancaster City Hall.)

When Colonel Springs built the Lancaster Cotton Mills in 1895, he made McCorkle his head cotton classifier. Springs had organized Leroy Springs and Co., a cotton-shipping company in 1886. With the building of the cotton mill, Springs expanded and built more offices. McCorkle was placed in charge of the cotton-buying operation with offices in Rock Hill, Chester and Charlotte, as well as Lancaster.

McCorkle played an important role in the expansion of Leroy Springs and Co. The growth had been small in the beginning, but expanded until, it is said, one year the company shipped more cotton into Liverpool, England, than any other firm in the world. Springs had seats on both the New York and New Orleans Cotton Exchanges, and was a powerful force



Nearby history

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in that world.

At the height of his career, in mid-June 1905, Paul McCorkle was driving a buggy in Chester when his horse was startled by a small dog. The horse panicked and ran. McCorkle kept control until the horse swerved on a bank, placing the horse on a higher level than the buggy occupants. The horse twice kicked McCorkle in the face. The face's small bones were shattered and, worse, McCorkle was permanently blinded.

McCorkle refused to let blindness stop him. He operated Col. Springs' cotton-classing office in Chester for six years before returning to York. He also was a grain merchant for some time.

Springs did not forget him and sent McCorkle a regular check (the Social Security Act had not yet been passed). When Leroy Springs died in 1931, his son, Col. Elliott White Springs, continued the checks for the remainder of McCorkle's life. Friends gave McCorkle a special watch that he used expertly. The watch struck the hours and minutes when a switch was manipulated.

Two wealthy Charlotte business men, E. D. Latta and John M. Scott, were admirers of McCorkle and sent him money. Latta left

McCorkle a bequest in his will.

McCorkle and his white cane were a familiar sight on the streets of York. He was a handsome man, equally recognizable with his white hair and "a booming voice and laugh." Described as "nonchalant" he negotiated the streets and business houses with such ease that except for the cane, many would not have suspected he was blind. One time a car hit him, and McCorkle brushed off the accident with the statement that it was his own fault — that he was not watching where he was going.

McCorkle performed so well as coroner that the man who replaced him as coroner was also blind.

McCorkle married Eileen Lemmond, who was 15 years younger than he. They had two sons. The older lived only a few months. The second boy, William Hart McCorkle, named for his grandfather, was born in 1900. He was educated at The Citadel and Union Theological Seminary in Richmond.

Dr. William H. McCorkle served as a U.S. Navy chaplain from 1942 to 1945. He emerged from World War II as the most highly decorated chaplain in the history of the U.S. armed services. In 1963, "Billy" McCorkle received the highest honor a Presbyterian minister can receive when he was named Moderator of the General Assembly.

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