



A Bountiful Country Christmas

Dec 23 1990

19th-Century Springs Family Went All Out For Holidays At Home



Nearby
History

**Louise
Pettus**

A lovely home built by John Springs III for his bride was completed around 1808 just north of the present town of Fort Mill. The land was inherited from his father, Richard Springs.

John Springs, always a gracious host, loved to have the families of his brothers and sisters, as well as his own, around him on special occasions. It soon became the custom to have a family reunion at Christmas time.

The house was large, with a hall that stretched from front to rear and a cross hall with a stairway that led to the second floor. Double parlors with double doors opened onto both halls and onto the piazzas.

To the rear of the parlors was Springs' library, a room called "the mother's room," a large dining room and pantries. Kitchens were always built away from the main house to protect from fire.

There was an attic and a full basement. Not far from the house was a brick office building from which Springs managed his many enterprises. In the building there

were two spare rooms for guests.

At Christmas all the space was needed. Every room was full and pallets covered the floor. Always John Springs rose at the crack of dawn, and Christmas was no exception. Guests remembered that he would tap on each door and hand into the room a silver loving cup filled with brandy and rum from which each guest, including the children, had a sip.

There were gifts for everyone. Springs always selected the gifts himself and wrapped them. The slaves, except for the kitchen workers, had the day off and each received a gift.

Large iron pots bubbled in the fireplaces. There were sugar-cured hams, freshly baked bread, turkeys on the spit, roasted sweet potatoes and all manner of pastries. The cakes and pies, baked ahead of time, filled the sideboards and more waited in the pantries.

After breakfast and gift-giving, the guests amused themselves in different ways. If the weather was suitable, the men and boys often went hunting. There were horses for all who wanted to ride. Snow was rare but sleighs were available.

Inside the house there were games and dances. The piano was rarely silent. The young people had all had instruction in music and there were always some who wanted to show off their skills.

Some of the dances were borrowed from the slave quarters and led by a fiddler. A favorite dance included the chant "Chicken pie in the pepper row, Master and Missus told me so." The "Pigeon Wing" and the "Turkey Trot" were too much fun to be reserved for corn shuckings.

Springfield is supposed to have taken three years to build. Springs hired skilled workmen to execute his own design and carefully collected the best of materials for the large wood-frame building. The roof's shingles are said to have lasted 76 years.

One day he took from his pocket six large acorns and told a workman that he wanted him to carve the acorn design to ornament the eaves of the house. Then he planted the acorns — two in front of the house and four in the back. All grew into tall oaks.

With purebred horses and cattle, wide fields, fine hounds and peacocks on the lawn, Springfield was known far and wide as a model plantation.

John Springs willed the plantation to his son, Andrew Baxter Springs, who continued the custom of open house at Christmas.

The house, owned by the Close family, today serves as headquarters for The Springs Co. It is on U.S. 21 Business several miles north of Fort Mill.

Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop College.

Louise's Spring
Inc.