

The Soldier's Relief Board during the Civil War

By Louise Pettus Fort Mill Times

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In the second year of the Civil War, the state of South Carolina created the Soldier's Relief Board which was charged with caring for the families of the men at the front. Andrew Baxter Springs of Fort Mill was removed from military service to head the agency.

Springs was allotted little money for the difficult task but he took his duties seriously and called on a network of people he knew from across the state, largely because he had served in the legislature and was a leading stockholder in the cotton mills at Graniteville.

In York County, Springs supplemented his charge with money from his own pocket and food from his plantation commissary. As conditions worsened, Springs got more and more requests. Some of the soldier's letters have survived as a part of more than 4,500 letters and documents in the Springs Papers of the University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection.

Sometimes soldiers wrote Springs about legal matters (Springs had studied law with Thomas J. Withers in Camden). On Oct. 7, 1862, a neighbor of Springs, A. M. Kee, asked Springs to write him and "tell me whether John G. Withers Estate will come in for a share in old Jemima Wither Estate or not. Tell me all about it and give me your opinion. . . "

Other times, the soldiers asked for favors of a different sort. Leroy Armstrong, a neighbor of Baxter Springs, was in the Confederate Army and old enough to have sons also in service, though not in the same company as their father.

On May 24, 1862, Armstrong wrote Springs from Camp Mangum near Raleigh, N.C. Typical of letter writers of the time, Armstrong opened with the words, "I seat my self this morning to write you a few lines . . ." After saying he was not very well Armstrong launched into his complaint, ". . . I have become very much dissatisfied in this place not as I have any thing against the company but I do not like Regiment we belong to and I want you to git me in Capt. Jones Horse Company as quick as you can." Capt. Jones was most likely Robin A.P. Jones of Mount Gallant plantation, Rock Hill.

In the last paragraph, Armstrong asks Springs if he has collected on Turner Barber's note. "Do not pay out any of it to any one except it is to my wife or without I come home or rite to you. . ."

On July 19, Leroy Armstrong seats himself to let Springs know that he is now feeling well and "I am getting that fat I jerk the buttons off my shirt by throwing my arms about." And then, "I want you Pleas to see Turner Barber and collect that note if you have not collected it as I cant get to come home to see him my self. . ."

On "the 4" 1862, Armstrong wrote again, "I seat my self this Evening to Drop you a few lines. . . and hope you will Pleas let me no T Barber has settled that note or not. . .I would like that you should collect it for me as I inlisted for the sake of the money. Barber is setting at home at his Ease and I am here undergoing all the hardships of this war and should like to have the money if you can git it out him pay your self out of it & pay the balance over to my wife. . ."

A little more than a month later, on Aug. 27, Leroy Armstrong was at Camp Lee Richmond when he responded to a letter sent him by Springs telling of collecting \$150 of the Barber note. "I want you to pay it over to my wife and when you collect the balance let me no and I will send you a Reciept to settel that Debt with Patterson & White as my wife stands in need of the money worse than I do."

In spite of occasional hot words in their wartime letters and times that A. B. Springs could not solve their problems, when the war was over, York County soldiers said that they were supplied as well, or better, than soldiers from other regions due mostly to the efforts of Baxter Springs of Springfield.

Louise Pettus is a renowned local historian. "Fort Mill History" is sponsored each month by the Fort Mill Downtown Association. Check them out on the Web at www.fortmilledowntown.com.