

FORT MILL TIMES

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A.B. Springs in the winter of 1867-'68

By Louise Pettus Fort Mill Times
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Andrew Baxter Springs (1819-1886) was one of York County's best known and respected men in the winter of 1867-1868. He owned Springfield plantation north of the small town of Fort Mill and was one of the York County representatives in the state legislature.

It should have been a happy time for a man in his prime, but Springs's correspondence shows he was besieged by requests for money or favors. Two years after the end of the Civil War, the state was in economic despair.

Baxter Springs had never believed secession from the Union was a wise move. But when South Carolina seceded, he volunteered. The next year the state legislature withdrew him from military service and drafted him to be commissioner of the Soldier's Relief Board.

Springs's duties were to gather food and other supplies for York County men on the front and to care for the soldiers' families when in need. The state gave him only a token budget, which he supplemented out of his pocket.

One of every four York County servicemen had been killed or wounded. When the war ended, Springs did not feel that he could withdraw support for the poor widows and children of his neighborhood, so he let them have goods that he knew would not likely ever be paid for.

And he had numerous relatives with needs. His Uncle Clark Springs was handicapped. Uncle Clark had spent many years as a student at the Cedar Springs School for the Deaf and Dumb, supported financially by Baxter's father John Springs III. Uncle Clark had become a teacher in the institution, but just before the Civil War began he left it to marry and buy a small farm that seemed sufficient to support him, his wife and her sister. After the war there were too few pupils in the institution and the farm did not pay off. Baxter was the old man's sole support.

While Springs was in Columbia attending sessions of the legislature, his wife Blandina and his overseer, Eli Bailes, tried to keep the plantation going. One of Blandina's letters to her husband reveals the constant demands of others on Springs' resources. Blandina wrote that a Mr. Whitaker of York had stopped at Springfield. She started by saying that she should have charged him, but he was from their district and she didn't.

"He was dreadful particular about his horse. Eli had given him as much as the other horses. He [Whitaker] said he had nothing to eat and got a great deal of corn and fodder. I did not like him much - offered to pay when he left. I said I had no change to make, he said he would rather I take a dollar." It was a worthless Confederate dollar.

Blandina wrote, "Dr. W- has just come, was here three days ago. Oh, I am tired of the sight of him and he is always to dinner and I keep trotting. All the time, I believe Laura believes she

cannot live without him." Laura Springs was a niece of Baxter's who had been at Springfield for months.

Blandina wrote that Laura was anxious to marry in the winter because she had a decent winter wardrobe and had nothing but old clothes for spring and summer. Also, there was another girl in the house.

"Bennie is still here - did not want to go to the party - she is very unhappy. I really feel sorry for the child. In November, Blandina wrote, "I think it doubtful about her [Bennie] going until January."

Besides the two girls, Blandina had seven sons aged 6 to 15 to look after. The oldest, Eli Baxter Springs, was away at Bingham Military Academy in North Carolina, but still he wrote frequently, each letter saying the food was terrible and he was hungry - would his mother please send "two cakes, some fried chicken, cherries and strawberries?"

To be continued Feb. 15.

• *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.fortmilldowntown.com.*