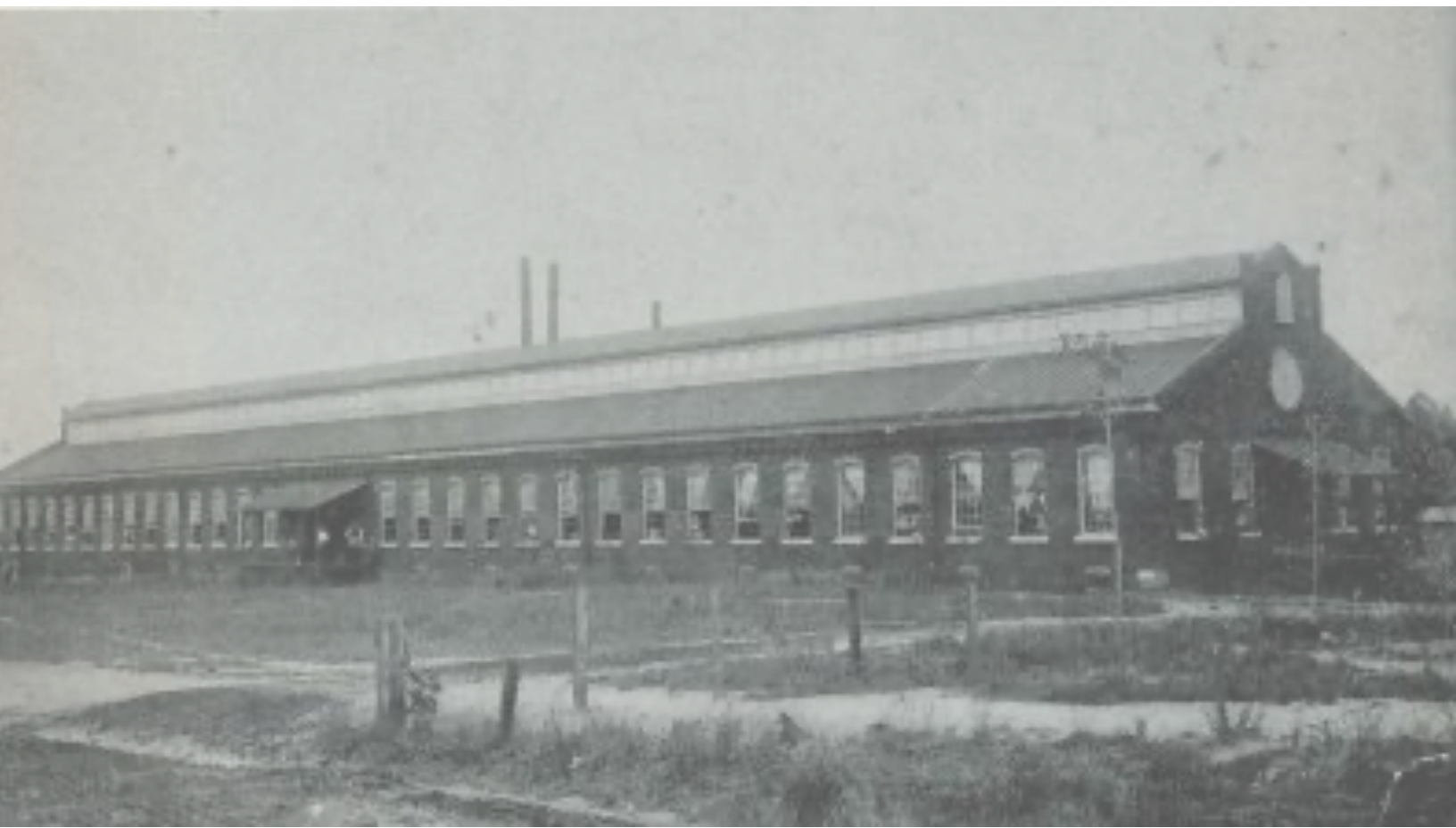


The Fabric of the Community

The story of a family and their community



Nathan B. Gilson

Author Acknowledgements:

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Thank you to the Springs-Close Family, who have made historical preservation such a large priority. It is my hope that this project helps tell the story of your family to those of us who live in the community you, your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents helped to build. We all live more in your debt than we probably realize.

Thank you Louise Pettus. Your historical research and meticulous gathering of sources was invaluable to this project.

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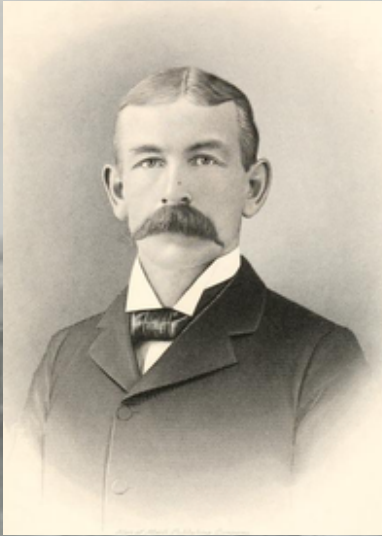
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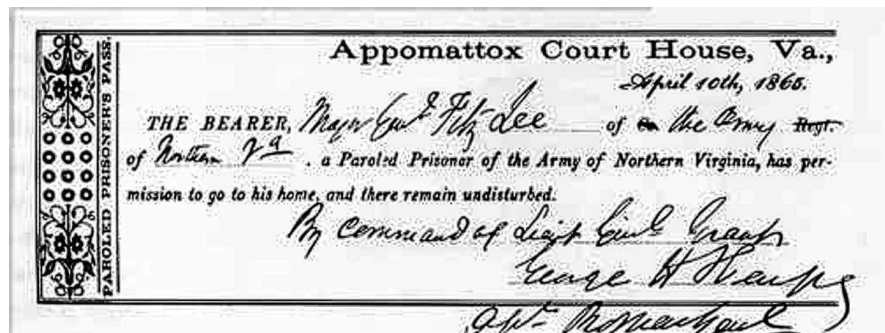
Leroy Springs



Samuel Elliott White

New Beginnings

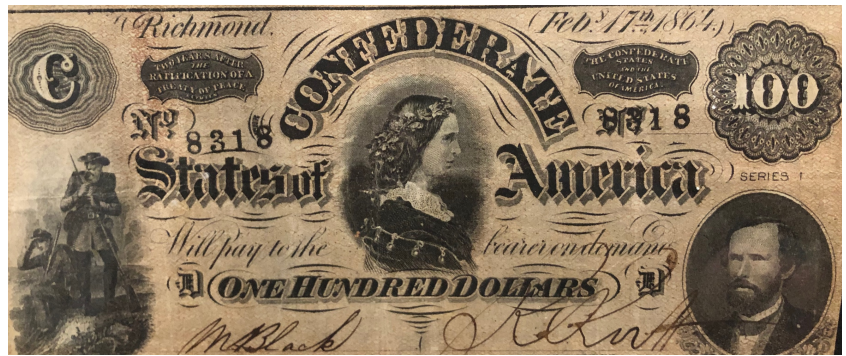
Captain Samuel Elliott White returned from the War Between the States, holding one of thousands of passes signed at Appomattox giving the bearer safe passage home. A copy of one of these notes hangs in the family game room of his old house, built by his grandfather.



A copy similar to this hangs in the gameroom at the White Homestead. Captain White would have needed it because his only clothes were probably his uniform, and anyone who found him would need to know he wasn't still fighting.

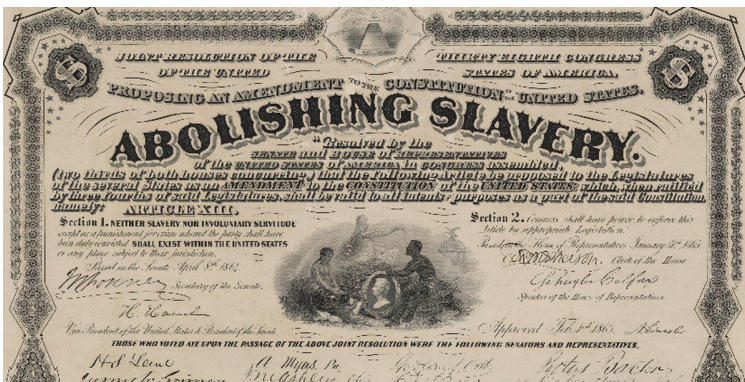
The Confederacy was no more, and America was about to begin a new chapter. In the South, this meant Reconstruction, a brief period of time in which the government, mostly Northerners, tried to get the South

back on its feet after a devastating war. Most of the Southern economy had been based on farming, plantations and slavery and needed to be rebuilt. This was the goal of Reconstruction, but it ended quickly, leaving the actual rebuilding to the people living in Southern communities.



Confederate notes like this one were actually promises to repay a loan after "ratification of a treaty of peace with the United States." Since that never happened, the notes became worthless. If the family had held on to them for about 100 years, collectors would have bought them because they are rare.

Captain White's inheritance from his father had collapsed with the economy. The Whites had been a prominent family in the community, but much of the value of their property had been used to help fund the Confederate war effort. People supporting the confederacy bought



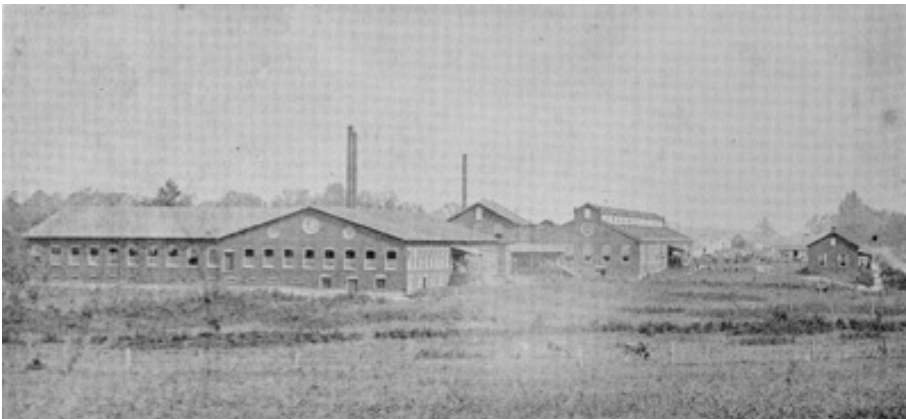
The 13th Amendment made slavery illegal in the United States.

bonds, with a promise that the Confederacy would pay back with interest, the loan two years after the ratification of a peace treaty between the United States and Confederate States of America.ⁱ

Almost half of Samuel White's inheritance was paid back in these notes.ⁱⁱ The peace treaty never happened, and the loans were never paid back. 140 enslaved people were also listed in White's father's will.

Fortunately, since people were never intended to be property, they had been freed by the 13th Amendment and were not a part of White's inheritance either.

Rebuilding the Fort Mill community, and hundreds of similar communities throughout the South, was left up to men like Samuel White. Samuel White's goal behind the founding of the Fort Mill cotton mill was to bring steady work and boost the struggling economy of Fort



Springs Cotton Mill

Mill.ⁱⁱⁱ White eventually raised money from seven prominent men and one woman in the community, including Leroy Springs, to start a

cotton mill. The mill immediately began to serve its purpose in boosting the local economy. Less than one year after its opening, it had doubled the size of the town to 900 citizens.^{iv}

Yet, in some ways, White was a link to an ugly past tainted by slavery. He erected a monument in Fort Mill, in what is today called "Confederate Park", that was dedicated to the "faithfulness and fidelity of the slaves of the South."^v The monument wasn't directly meant to celebrate slavery. Whether or not he meant to honor or put down the memory of the people, when White commissioned the monument in the

1890's it served as a painful reminder of a past which hadn't fully disappeared in the South. Despite the monument's words, it is uncertain how many slaves really saw their actions as defending the Confederacy. There were some who had some affection for the families they were owned by, having raised the family's children and cared for them. However, there were also many others who certainly longed for freedom and would have fought against the Confederacy, rather than for it. Some may have recognized and defended innocent women and children, but it is doubtful that many saw this as their own way of contributing to the



White's monument to the faithful slaves is a highly controversial monument today.

Confederate cause. For most, just like slavery itself, it was probably because they were never given a choice.

White's only daughter, Grace married Leroy Springs in 1882.^{vi} In the early 1900's, as the Progressive Era dawned in America, Leroy took over the operations of the Fort Mill Manufacturing Company. In 1911, White died, leaving his estate to his grandson, Elliott Springs, his only

surviving heir.^{vii} His death was marked by many in the community, incorporating a special train ride to his burial place in Fort Mill.^{viii} The mill that Captain White started undoubtedly built the community of Fort Mill, earning him the title of “Father of Fort Mill.”^{ix} It was this legacy, in the hands of his son-in-law and grandson, which would help Fort Mill move into the future.

The Progressive Era was a major time of change in American history. From 1900 to 1930, social change was beginning to happen that



Cotton mills employed whole families, including children. Children were smaller, and better able to inspect and repair the machines, which had many small parts placed close together.

started to break down barriers of color, gender, and class in the country. It was also a time of increasing government involvement in companies and eventually in people’s personal lives. The Old

South, dominated by plantations and farms, was slowly giving way to a New South which involved industry, in particular cotton mills, as a major part of its economy. In 1910, 62% of all people employed in industry in South Carolina worked in a cotton mill.^x From 1900 to 1910, the number of acres used to grow agricultural products actually shrunk.^{xi}

Under the control of Leroy Springs, the cotton mills of the Lancaster, Fort Mill, and Chester areas turned the communities into examples of the New South, and what it could be. Leroy Springs had constructed the Lancaster Cotton Mill himself, and when added to White's mills, Springs now controlled the destiny of the entire region's economy. By 1914, the Lancaster Cotton Mill was presumably the largest in one building anywhere in the world.^{xii} Leroy also continued to add to his mills, buying all of the stock in White's Fort Mill mills and adding an addition mill in Eureka in 1913.^{xiii}



It was also said by one photographer in 1908, to be “one of the worst places I have found for child labor.”^{xiv} At the time, child labor was not illegal.

One observer noted that the Lancaster mill was one of the worst he had seen for child labor. Many children who started working in the mills young got promoted to managers and supervisors by their early 20's, so there was an advantage to them in starting younger.

It wasn't made illegal for children under the age of 16 until the Fair Labor Standards Act, which wasn't passed until 1938. Despite this, Elliott Springs asserted strongly in a 1934 letter that none of the Springs Textile Mills employed anyone under 16 except for one girl who had lied about her age in a plant he had

just bought.^{xv} He noted in the same letter that family Bibles were the only way to check ages of children, since official records of birth often didn't exist at the time.^{xvi} It is clear that at some point, Leroy Springs voluntarily began to employ only adults, despite no laws preventing it.

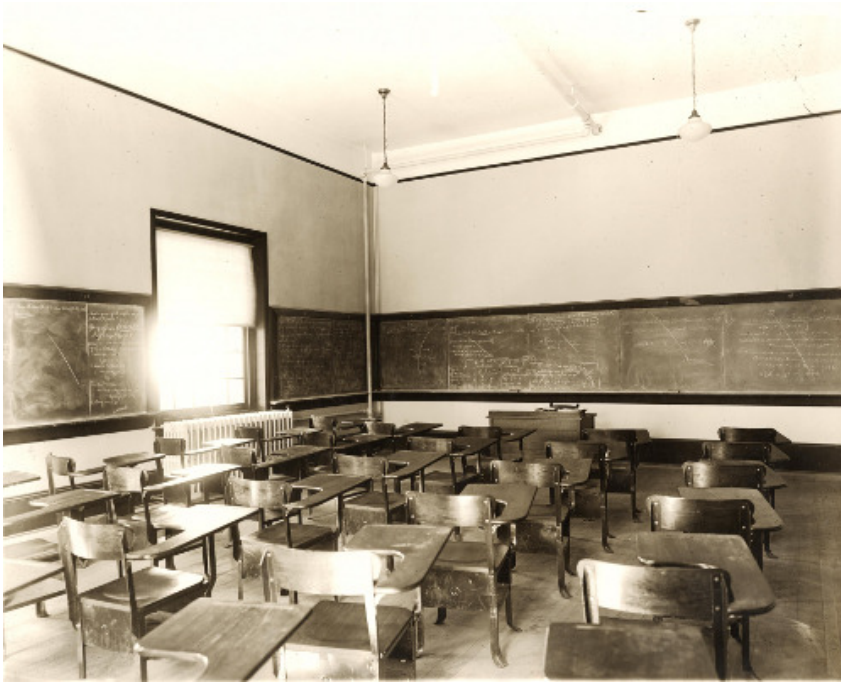
Leroy Springs' mill towns were constructed in ways that made real improvements in the lives of his employees. It was normal for families to live in homes built by the mill, and Leroy's villages left big enough back yards for gardens and chickens.^{xvii} Some of the chickens were raised to be used in fights, commonly known as "gamecocks" which was a popular and bloody sport in South Carolina.^{xviii} In 1903, when flooding ruined some mills in North Carolina, the Lancaster plant hired about 250 additional workers who would have otherwise been out of work.^{xix} Of course, Leroy Springs and his company also benefitted from the extra



Mill villages, like this one in Anderson, SC, often constructed identical homes for employees to live in. The mill also often ran stores that gave people the opportunity to buy items ahead of their paychecks. The stores usually helped make money for the mill operator, although Leroy Springs closed his in the 1920's because it was not making money. The village homes were important for employees who had often moved from the countryside with very little possessions and only a small amount of money.

labor, which helped grow the value of the company from \$150,000 in 1895 to \$2,500,000 in 1914.^{xx} Mill cottages had wells for clean water and electricity, which were virtually impossible to find in many small towns and villages scattered throughout the South at the turn of the century.

Leroy Springs was a consistent advocate for policies that would improve the standard of living for the people of his community. Springs fought for laws that would require every child in South Carolina to attend school, so that everyone would have an education.^{xxi} He also supported “public financing of literacy programs for everyone.”^{xxii} Captain White



A college classroom in Charleston, around 1900. In many places like Fort Mill, schools were small, and children from multiple grades would learn together. After learning basic math, reading, and writing, most stopped school to work in agriculture or a cotton mill.

had built a cotton mill to help fight poverty in his community, and now Leroy argued for public education for the same reason. Ahead of his time in South Carolina, Springs also argued that the government-funded literacy program should apply to people of all

racess. Leroy wasn’t content to wait for South Carolina laws to meet the needs of his employees. He sent his superintendent door-to-door in

Lancaster to make sure that every child had what they needed for school. Any family that couldn't afford it got supplies for free from the mill store.^{xxiii} Despite the efforts of Springs and others, 18% of all South Carolinians and 29% of blacks in the state couldn't read in 1920.^{xxiv}

Samuel White had given the town of Fort Mill its identity, and Leroy Springs had done the same for Lancaster. From Reconstruction to World War I, the two men worked to reduce poverty and bring employment, education, and opportunity to their communities and the surrounding areas. In 1917, as America became directly involved in World War 1, Leroy's son, Elliott, would head off to fight in the war, adding his own chapter to the history of the family, the community, and in fact, the world.



The White Homestead, home of Samuel Elliott White. This photograph was taken around 1900 and is what the home would have looked like as he was living in it. The home is located Northwest of the town of Fort Mill.

Author's Note: Anywhere in this research project where you see the word "ibid" it means that the citation came from the same source that is listed directly above it.

ⁱ Personal collection

ⁱⁱ Pettus, Louise. *The White Homestead: The Story of a House, the People who lived in it, and the Land around it.* n.p, Fort Mill, South Carolina, n.d. 33.

ⁱⁱⁱ Doswell, Marshall. "The Founders: Samuel Elliott White and Leroy Springs." In *The Legacy: Three Men and What They Built.* n.p. 1987. 7

^{iv} Ibid. 8.

^v "Special to the Observer. "Death of Capt. S. E. White." *The Charlotte Observer*, March 5, 1911. 5.

^{vi} Ibid. 9.

^{vii} Special to the Observer. "Death of Capt. S. E. White." *The Charlotte Observer*, March 5, 1911. 5.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Doswell, Marshall. "The Founders." 10.

^x Supplement for South Carolina of the 1910 US Census, Department of Commerce and Labor, 1910. 686.

^{xi} Ibid, 608.

^{xii} Doswell, Marshall. "The Founders." 15.

^{xiii} Washington Special to the Charlotte Observer. "Colonel Springs Revives Mill Men." *The Lancaster News*, April 11, 1913. 1.

^{xiv} Hine, Lewis Wickes. "The Lancaster Cotton Mills S.C. One of the worst places I have found for child labor. Location: Lancaster, South Carolina." Photograph. Library of Congress. 1908.

^{xv} Springs, Elliott. "Letter to Owen Simmons, Compliance Committee, The Cotton Textile Institute. January 15, 1934." In Springs, Elliott. *Clothes Make the Man.* J.J. Little & Ives: New York, 1946. 68.

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} Pettus, Louise. *The Springs Story: Our First 100 Years.* Springs Industries, Inc.: Fort Mill, S.C. 1987. 49.

^{xviii} Ibid.

^{xix} Ibid. 57.

^{xx} "The Lancaster Cotton Mills." Advertisement. 1914. In *The Springs Story*, 56.

^{xxi} Elisha, Walter Y. "Standing on the Shoulders of Visionaries." Speech. 1993 South Carolina Meeting, The Newcomen Society, Rock Hill, S.C. 1993. 15.

^{xxii} Ibid.

^{xxiii} Ibid.

^{xxiv} "Table 7—Illiteracy, for the state, urban and rural: 1930 and 1920" in *Population, Volume III.* U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1930. 780.



Captain Elliott White Springs

Warbird

The United States was hesitant to allow itself to be brought into World War I. The causes of World War I were complicated and had little to do with America. As a result, for the first three years of the War, the United States maintained a position of neutrality while millions of German, French, Russian, Austrian, and British soldiers died in the fighting. Trench warfare was the main feature of the War, but new technology also allowed for the creation of fighter and bomber planes. Planes were a big enough feature of fighting that the British created the Air Force as a separate branch of their military. It was at this time that Elliott



JOHN BULL USES THE AMERICAN FLAG FOR PROTECTION—
From the American (New York)
March 1915

White Springs volunteered as a pilot to serve with the Royal Flying Corp. This group is known today as the Royal Air Force (R.A.F).

By mid-1917, which is when Springs had signed up, the Americans had officially joined the Allied Forces against the Germans. Much of what



Grider (left), Springs (center) and Laurence Callahan (right) were all featured in *War Birds*.

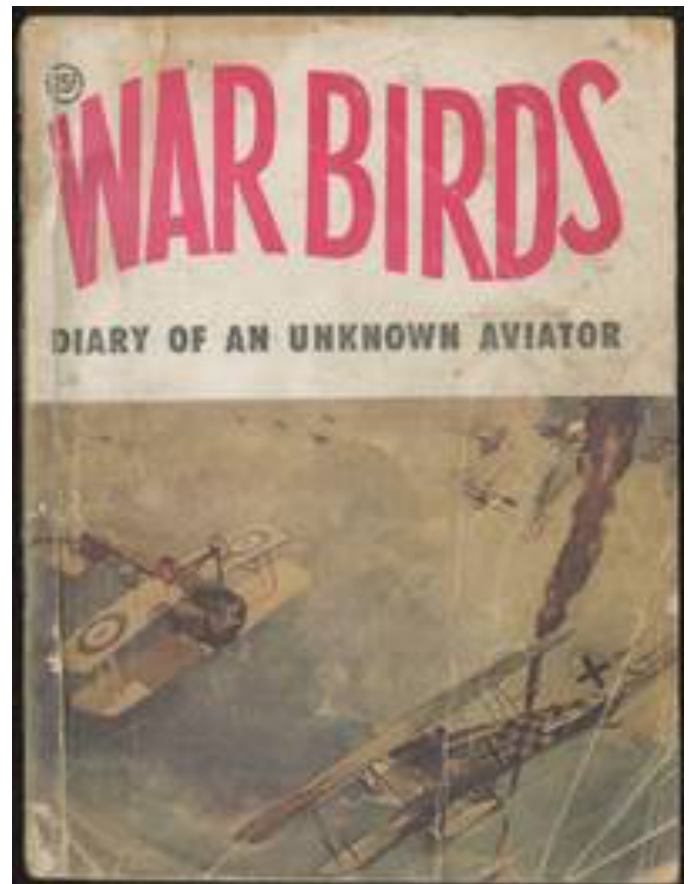
we know about Springs' experiences in the War come from a diary co-written by one of his closest friends and Springs. He published it after the War. It was called *War Birds: Diary of an Unknown Aviator*. His 1951 version of the book admitted that the main author of the diary was John MacGavock Grider, although

the initial publication had been intended to be anonymous. The book gave very honest details about Spring's activities, adventures, and the unique stresses and characteristics of pilots during the War.

One of the main reasons why America had joined the war was due to unrestricted submarine warfare by the Germans. The Germans had warned the Americans to stop trading with the British, but the Americans continued to trade anyway. As a response, the Germans sunk every boat

they could find, including passenger ships like the *Lusitania*. After two years of diplomatic back and forth, the Americans finally decided they had enough and declared war. As Springs and Grider crossed the Atlantic Ocean, Grider's journal made it clear that submarines were a major threat to every ship crossing.ⁱ The signal to abandon ship was 5 blasts of the ship's horn, and when 3 blasts happened on September 29th, the ship's barber was so scared he couldn't finish cutting one man's hair.ⁱⁱ The convoy made it across the ocean without incident.

When they crossed to begin their service, Grider was 25 and Springs was 21 years old. One of the really remarkable things about the diary that Springs eventually published was how honest it was about the experiences of the pilots off the battlefield. There were unheroic stories of Springs sleeping in a dumbwaiter of a hotel and frightening a maid,ⁱⁱⁱ of parties and drinking, and frequently breaking military rules of all kinds.



Springs' book told stories of WW1 that made the characters appear heroic at times, and at others extremely irresponsible. The book told of heroic dogfights in the skies, but also parties and fights in bars. Springs' honesty was not popular with his father.

And yet, despite the antics, there was a serious side to the service as well. Pilots lived under constant threat of injury or death in training accidents. And throughout his journal, there are clear traces of the mental stress called “survivor’s guilt.” Pilots like Grider and Springs would have constantly wondered why they were the ones to survive while other men died in accidents or being shot down by German pilots. In one entry, Grider wrote “When I think of all the good men that have been killed and then see all the bums that are still hanging around town, it makes me mad. . . I feel sort of ashamed to be here still.”^{iv}

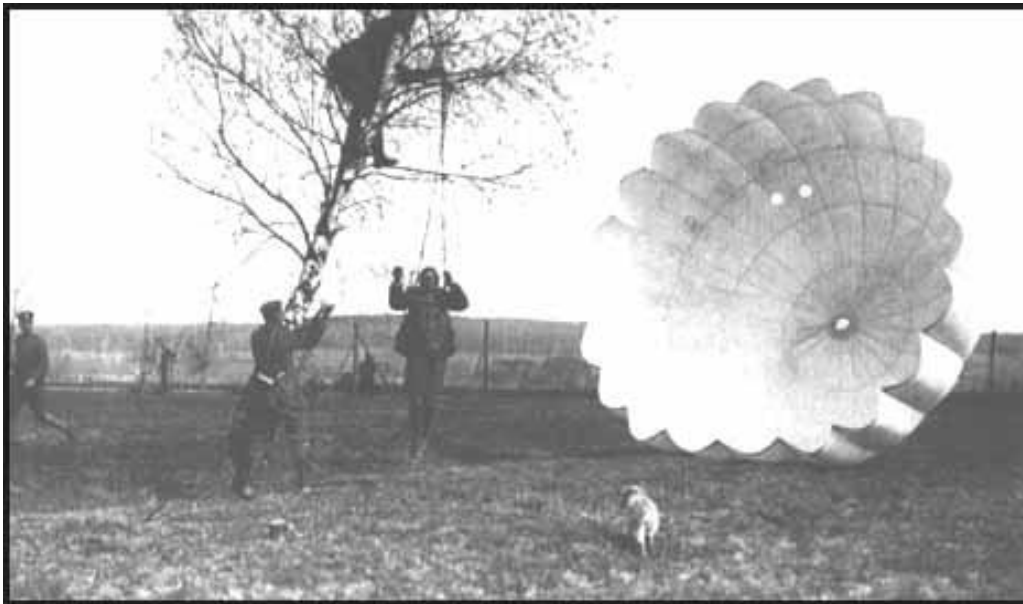


Training accidents were common as pilots learned how to operate new machines. Mechanical failures were also common, since planes were new technology. Sometimes pilots were unhurt, and other times badly injured or killed.

For American pilots especially, it was also true that they had no special hatred for the Germans. In one entry, Grider regretted the whole war: “What a nightmare this war is. . .both the Allies and the Germans pray to the same God for strength.”^v Many warriors, especially in the first World War, recognized that they had more in common with the men they were trying to kill, than they had differences. After a long battle with one pilot that nearly killed both of them, Grider wrote that the

German pilot “was a stout fellow, a good fighter and I hope he is still alive.”^{vi} War was an ugly business, but for most pilots, it was not personal.

World War I was a time of great innovation, and pilots often tinkered with their planes and experimented with other ideas as well. In 1918, there were no parachutes for aviators, which meant that many died in their airplanes when they had been shot down. After word got



A German pilot gets out of a tree after a parachute landing. Parachutes were not new technology but giving them to every pilot was a new idea in WW1. Elliott Springs was one of the first to argue for their use in the military as a way to save pilot lives.

to the aviators that the Germans had developed parachutes to be used in planes, Elliott began working on his own ideas.^{vii}

Grider was excited

about the possibility, since parachutes could save many lives, but the Army stopped Springs from testing his ideas.^{viii} When they were finally assigned a plane, pilots spent a lot of time making modifications to it in order to make the plane better.^{ix} Grider upgraded the cables on his plane, and completely changed the triggers for his guns to make it possible for him to fire both with one hand.^x The war was definitely a

time when Elliott Springs gained valuable experience in engineering and design which he would put to use to save his cotton mills from the



A plane crash during training. Pilot deaths in training were common.

Depression over a decade later.

For pilots like Springs and Grider, there was a long and dangerous training process. Although both men had been trained in the United States as pilots, those who were serving in the R.A.F needed to be trained again

by the British. Plane crashes were almost a daily part of training, and Grider's journal is full of entries that end with news of dead comrades. Sometimes it was just a nameless pilot ("An Australian Lieutenant was killed this morning flying a Pup")^{xi} and sometimes a close friend ("Clarence Fry killed himself by stalling a Spad. . .I thought a lot of Clarence.")^{xii} Because of how new the Airforce was, training was just as deadly as combat. Despite the risks, it is clear from Grider's journal that most American pilots were frustrated by the 6-month training process that prevented them from getting to the front and serving in combat sooner.



Elliott Springs in flight school at Princeton.

Once they were assigned to France, the global aspect of the war becomes very clear. Grider and Springs were assigned to a squadron that had “three Americans, two New Zealanders, two Australians, one South African, six Canadians, two Scots, one Irish, and six Englishman.”^{xiii} Despite being from eight different parts of the world, they were all in



The 85th Squadron in France, June, 1918. This photograph was taken just after Grider's disappearance. These are the men that Elliott Springs fought and flew with during WWI.

France to fight together against the Germans. A closer look at the regions also reveals the meaning of the phrase “The sun never sets on the British Empire” since all of the countries were or had at one point been, British

colonies. Chinese laborers were brought close to Dunkirk where Grider and Springs were stationed to dig trenches.^{xiv} Grider, probably like many Americans, found that his negative stereotypes of the British were all wrong. He noted that “The British will do more for us than for their own troops” and that every American “that has come in contact with the British will swear by them.”^{xv} In fact, he was disappointed with the Americans more than the British, because the British suppliers would sell

to American and British soldiers for the same price, but American suppliers would only sell to Americans.^{xvi}

Pilots had a unique view of the trenches and No Man's Land. Since Germany, England, France, and America all had large factories capable of using ammunition non-stop, the land between trenches was torn up by constant explosions. The men in the trenches occasionally had to charge across it to try to attack the enemy trench, which seldom worked and normally got lots of people killed. Grider described it as "a stretch of country forty miles square that's as flat as a piece of paper—no trees, no houses, nothing. . .we hear firing twenty-four hours out of the day. . .and down on the ground it looks as if some one had drawn a lot of pencil marks in a row. That's the barbed wire!" Entire villages and towns were levelled in nearly four years of constant fighting in the same place.



No Man's Land. The area between the trenches was devastated by almost constant warfare in the same location for four years.

Combat was an exciting and frightening experience. Ground-based guns, called “Archies” fired exploding shells up at planes in the sky. The exploding shells “ha[d] an awful sound when it’s close, like a giant clapping his hands and it has a sort of metallic click.”^{xvii} Enemy pilots like Richthofen (“The Red Baron”) were also well-known to the pilots. The



A German “Archie.” 1909

Red Baron had a reputation for being a good sport, but also ruthless, in one case following a wounded plane down to the ground and shooting the pilot while he was trying to land, hitting him three more times.^{xviii} In a forward to Clayton Knight’s book of famous illustrations depicting WW1

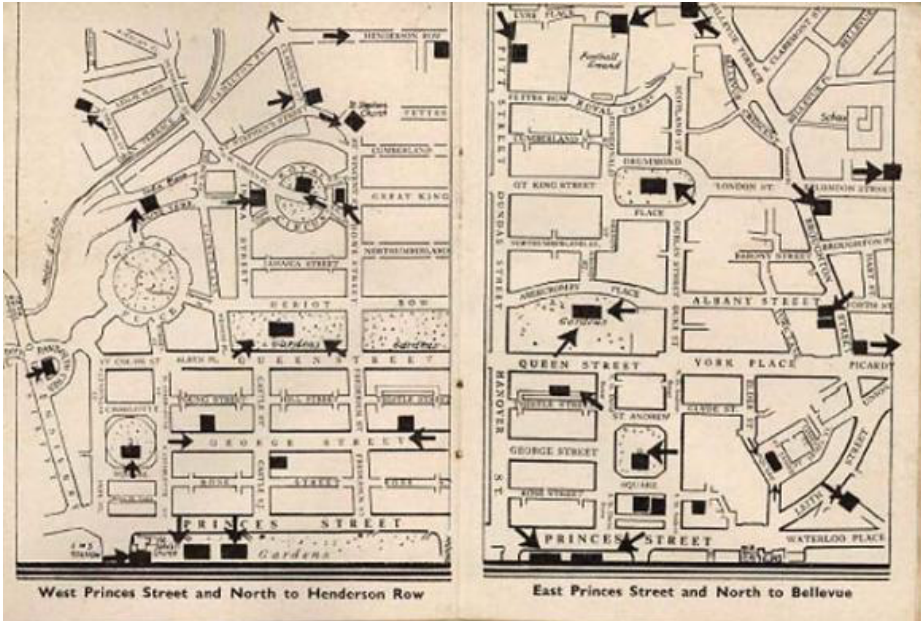
airplane combat, Springs wrote:

It was the most dangerous of sports and the most fascinating. It got into the blood like wine. It aged men forty years in forty days. Men came out of the trenches after three years. . .and became pilots. After their first fight in the air they felt the same grip on their hearts as the downy-faced youngsters facing their first adversary.

No words can describe the thrill of hiding in the clouds, waiting on human prey. The game is sighted, then a dive of five thousand feet, thirty seconds of diabolic evolutions, the pressure of triggers, soundless guns, an explosion, a pillar of flames. . .

What human experience can compare with it? No man could last six months at it and remain normal. Few could do it two months. The average life of a pilot at the front was forty-eight hours in the air, and to many that seemed an age.^{xix}

There were new dangers flying all the time. New inventions and ideas led to changes on the battlefield that were hard to predict. One



British Air Raid Map. This map shows the locations for citizens to go during an air raid. Bombing attacks in WW1 were aimed at the morale of the city more than strategic targets, but Grider noted in his diary that they were effective at scaring the people of England. It was during these raids that Grider and Springs talked about Springs' difficult relationship with his father.

time, Grider and Springs asked their commanding officer for permission to attack a balloon because they noticed the Germans left it up by itself. Upon closer inspection, it turned out the balloon was packed full of explosives so that “as soon as some sucker

dives on it, the Huns will explode it and that will be the last heard of him.”^{xx} It was a trick invented by the Canadians and used by the Germans.

Grider didn't survive the war. He flew over enemy lines on June 18th, 1918, was shot down, and was never seen again.^{xxi} Springs did, eventually earning the rank of Captain. On August 3rd, 1918 the *London Gazette* reported that Springs had earned the Distinguished Flying Cross for his heroic flying. It reported that he had “at all times shown the greatest determination and courage and his work as Flight Commander

in this squadron has been marked by a rare combination of cool judgement and most aggressive fighting tactics.”^{xxii} Later he was also awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for shooting down two aircraft and driving two others off in a single flight.^{xxiii}

Elliott Springs’s military service was distinguished and honest. Springs was one of the most successful American pilots of WW1, tallying 16 victories, enough to make him a flying ace three times over.^{xxiv} In a

war like World War 1, the “victories” (kills) were tracked to make heroes out of the fliers. Many soldiers serving in the trenches took heart from following the success of their favorite pilot, much as we follow sports teams today.

A tail section of a German plane shot down by

Springs hangs in the game room of the White Homestead, Springs’ eventual home. It was a keepsake sent to Leroy Springs. Elliott was shot down twice, badly injured but resilient, and continued to fight bravely until the end of the War. His distinguished service was definitely a source



The Distinguished Service Cross and The Distinguished Flying Cross

of pride for his community, but not always to his father. Elliott was a warrior with a poet's heart, and the painful transition from pilot to industrialist would show that the scars from his relationship with his father were much deeper than the wounds from the War.



*Elliott Springs (center) after a crash landing. Planes were all assigned teams of mechanics who helped to maintain the plane.
(left and right)*

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- ⁱ Springs, Elliott & John MacGavock Grider, *War Birds: Diary of an Unknown Aviator*. Liberty Magazine. 1951. 12-16.
- ⁱⁱ Ibid, 15.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, 42.
- ^{iv} Ibid, 84.
- ^v Ibid, 108-109.
- ^{vi} Ibid, 119.
- ^{vii} Ibid, 61
- ^{viii} Ibid, 62.
- ^{ix} Ibid, 83.
- ^x Ibid, 95.
- ^{xi} Ibid, 44.
- ^{xii} Ibid, 78.
- ^{xiii} Ibid, 90.
- ^{xiv} Ibid, 107.
- ^{xv} Ibid, 82.
- ^{xvi} Ibid.
- ^{xvii} Ibid, 100.
- ^{xviii} Ibid.
- ^{xix} Springs, Elliott. "Forward" in Knight, Clayton et. al. *Pilot's Luck*. David McKay Publishers, New York. 1929.
- ^{xx} *War Birds*, 115.
- ^{xxi} "OSCEOLA AVIATOR REPORTED MISSING". *The Arkansas Gazette*, July 13, 1918.
- ^{xxii} *Supplement to the London Gazette*, August 3, 1918. Online. <http://www.theaerodrome.com/aces/usa/springs.php>
- ^{xxiii} General Orders, No. 23, W.D., 1919. Online. <http://www.theaerodrome.com/aces/usa/springs.php>
- ^{xxiv} "Elliott White Springs." *The Aerodrome*. Online. <http://www.theaerodrome.com/aces/usa/springs.php>



Lena Jones Springs



Leroy Springs



Elliott White Springs

Battles of a Different Sort

The Great War ended on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, a day formerly remembered as “Armistice Day” and now known as “Veteran’s Day” in America. Despite the end of the War, there were significant challenges to the communities of the mill towns of South Carolina. The first global pandemic, the Spanish Flu, shut down the economy and killed many people. A boll weevil infestation further damaged the cotton crops in the beginning of the 1920’s. And the social changes of the Progressive Era continued to transform the country, many times with significant growing pains.

In the fall of 1918, the Spanish Flu ravaged Lancaster county. It is estimated that perhaps as many as 1/3 of all residents of the county contracted the disease.ⁱ Schools were closed and daily life was disrupted

for many people.ⁱⁱ Even doctors differed on how to deal with the disease,ⁱⁱⁱ and newspapers were full of home remedies,^{iv} most of which



The Recreational Club at Springs Mills. This building was converted into a temporary hospital in 1918. Lena Springs helped to run the operations.

were certain to fail to deliver as advertised. Lena Springs, Leroy's second wife, oversaw the creation of two emergency hospitals.^v Leroy drove citizens around to deliver milk to those who were too sick to get it themselves.^{vi}

Many people died, and Springs purchased cemetery plots for the mill families that couldn't afford them.^{vii}

In 1921 and 1922, boll weevil infestations made it extremely difficult for anyone involved in the cotton industry of South Carolina to make a profit. In 1921, it was estimated that the weevils destroyed \$610,000,000 worth of cotton, which is about \$8 billion in 2020.^{viii} The mills' machinery was unable to process the cotton with weevil lint, and many Southern communities were unable to sell cotton, or only at a reduced price due to low quality.^{ix} The weevil led to a "considerable reduction in acreage" used for growing cotton in 1921.^x By 1922, the shortages created in 1921 led to increased demand, preparing to launch the South into the "Roaring 20's."



Lacking the pesticides used today, farmers' crops depended on the weather and lack of large insect infestations.

The cotton mill businesses owned and run by Leroy Springs had survived the storms of pandemic and famine and become very successful. In 1923, he turned down an offer to purchase his mills for \$10 million.^{xi} This growth was in spite of the fact that China had begun



Railway station in Lancaster, SC. The Railroads were very important to transporting goods manufactured in the mills. Springmaid textiles became especially famous in the 1950's with Elliott Springs' infamous advertising campaign.

to emerge as a major competitor in the quickly globalized market of the 1920's, reportedly operating 2,000,000 spindles and 8,000 looms.^{xii} Leroy was a shrewd businessman, possessing what one company official

noted was an “aggressive, sometimes abrasive, personality that overwhelmed opposition.”^{xiii} In one case, his abrasive attitude led to Leroy Springs being shot by a man in downtown Charlotte because the man believed Springs had cheated him.^{xiv} Leroy used his keen business sense to take over several electric companies, railroads, banks, and insurance companies.^{xv}

The Springs family was in the middle of another national development of the 1920's: the women's suffrage movement. Leroy's first wife had lived to be only 33 years old and died when Elliott was only 10 years old. Her death was apparently the end of a long and painful

struggle, which no doubt left a strong impression on Elliott.^{xvi} Elliott was especially close to his grandmother and mother, both of whom he lost in the span of 4 years between 1903 and 1907.^{xvii}

Leroy's second marriage was to Lena Jones. Lena Jones Springs was very active in the Women's Suffrage movement and the Democrat Party. In 1924, Lena was nominated to be a Vice- Presidential candidate of the Democratic Party.^{xviii} Based on her interview, Lena was witty, intelligent, and diplomatic; in short, she was a powerful and winsome woman.^{xix} Her nomination wasn't intended to be taken seriously, it was a token nod to

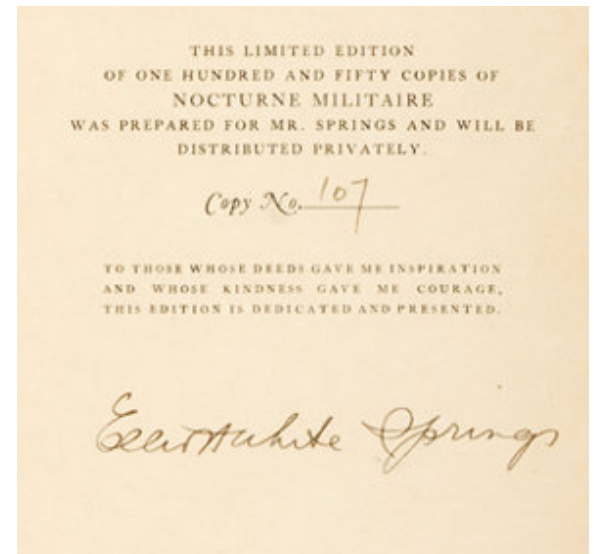
women and the movement, but that didn't mean that Lena wouldn't have been a good candidate. Her knowledge of the issues clearly surprised the interviewer for the *New*



Women didn't get the right to vote until the 19th Amendment was passed in 1920. This meant that Lena's nomination was in the first Democrat primary when women had the ability to vote.

York Times and was proof that women were just as able as men in the world of politics. Despite her success, the comments by her own husband that he would leave the country if Lena was elected Vice President, and the greater interest the writer had in Lena's clothing showed the obstacles women still had to overcome.^{xx}

Elliott Springs had lots of time to pursue his main ambition: becoming an author. In 1926, he published *War Birds: Diary of an Unknown Aviator*. The book was a huge success. Not only did it tell sensational stories about the war from Springs' perspective, but it also gave gritty details about the partying and escapades of Springs and his fellow aviators. Springs had a talent for writing and went on to publish numerous books during this time. Part of what made the books so appealing was his honesty about his relationship with his father. He wrote that he hoped he was killed so his father "would have a hero for a son and he could spend all his time and money building monuments to him."^{xxi} His greatest fear was that his father would make him "go down in a cotton mill and work five years as a day laborer and live in the mill village."^{xxii} In another entry, he claimed to have been in tears because his "father had shown one of his letters about. . ."^{xxiii} He wrote anyway, because he believed it was his duty, but he felt constant apprehension about it.^{xxiv} Naturally, Leroy Springs looked very bad in Elliott's books, and predictably did not appreciate the honesty nearly as much.



A limited edition signed frontpage of one of Elliott's books. Elliott's biggest goal was to be an author, not to work in his father's or grandfather's mills.

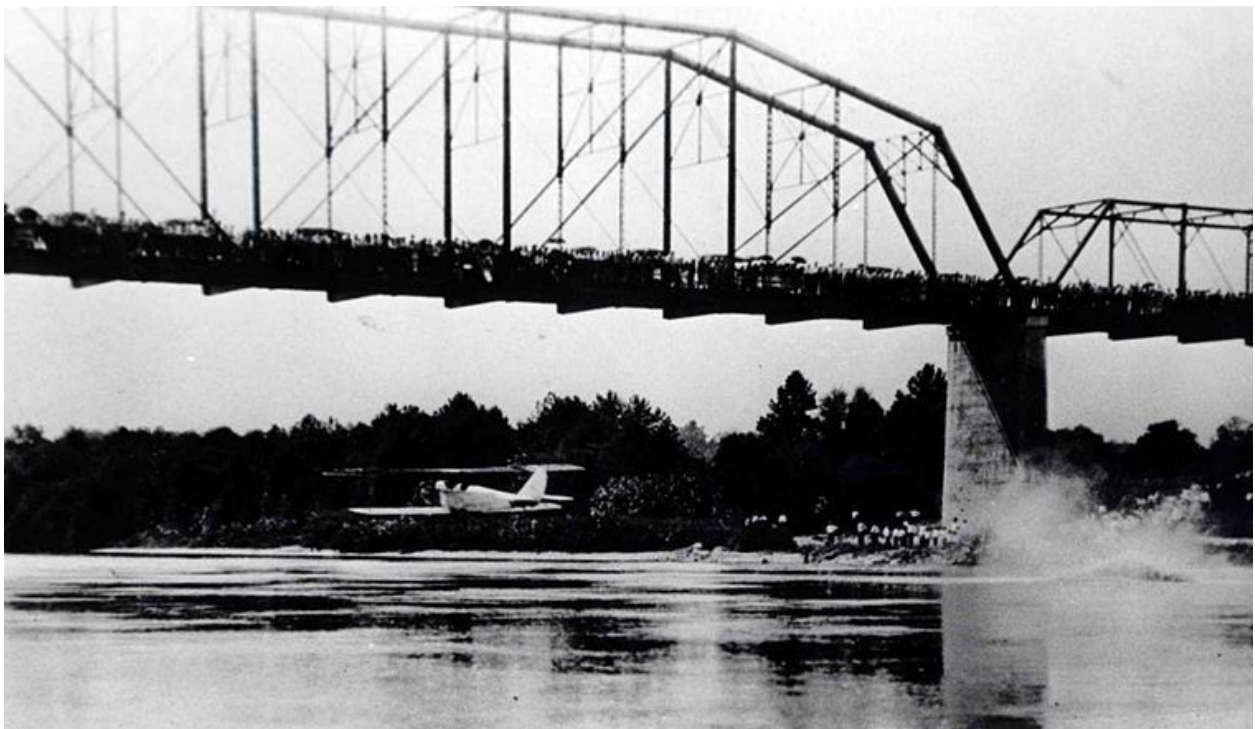
Elliott's writing revealed a very strained relationship between the father, Leroy Springs, and his son Elliott. According to Ann Evans, the Springs family archivist, Elliott never forgot his father deciding what to do with his mother's possessions. The tragic losses of his family in his childhood definitely affected Elliott's relationship with Leroy. Elliott had admitted in *War Birds* that he was very afraid that his father would make him work at the cotton mills, and that no matter what he did, it would never be enough for his father.^{xxv}



Grace White Springs. Elliott was very close to his mother and grandmother, both of whom died when he was young.

Leroy Springs certainly had high expectations for his son, and the publication of the book could not have helped things. Some of his desire, including his apparent plans to have Elliott start at the bottom of the mill and work his way up could be understood given Leroy's own work ethic. At one point, it was reported that Leroy had begun his career working in a grocery store, probably just to get experience working.^{xxvi} In a several letters to his son, Leroy credited his success to an intense attention to detail and passionate pursuit to put "your whole heart in it."^{xxvii} In part, his goal to have Elliott work up was probably a plan that he had made to help his son gain the same success he had enjoyed.

It is clear that Elliott was headstrong in his own way but tortured by a desire to gain his father's acceptance of his own pursuits. In "Clipped Wings," a story written by Elliott, and clearly about his relationship with his father, the main character argues with his father about joining the family business. The father, a business owner vows to only turn the business over to the son once he "prove(s) to me you're a man."^{xxviii} Leroy and Elliott were two ships passing in the night, both intensely dedicated to each other and their beliefs, and this led to conflict until the end of Leroy's life. Despite his love of writing, Elliott Springs dutifully agreed to fully commit to joining and eventually running the cotton mills in a letter to his father in 1926, stating "I realize fully that I cannot serve two masters. I am therefore going to give up writing."^{xxix}



Elliott White flying a plane under the Buster Boyd Bridge between North and South Carolina at Lake Wylie. Elliott's playful lifestyle led to his father's doubts about his ability to run the company successfully.

Elliott's transition to the mills was not a smooth one. The "Roaring 20's" were famous for parties and living large, and Elliott gained a reputation as a wealthy party-boy. In one famous golf match, Elliott Springs and Fiorello La Guardia each flew airplanes over a golf course from which each team's "drive" was dropped. The rest of the hole was played normally. These kinds of stunts were common, and most Americans expected that the good times would never end. Despite his previous promise to stop writing, Elliott continued to gain success as an author, and was normally identified in newspapers of the late 1920's as an "author" rather than a "businessman."

By the end of the decade, Leroy's health was failing, and Elliott finally got to see that although his father had definitely



The home owned by Leroy Springs in Lancaster, SC. The building was the town city hall until a few decades ago.

created a successful business empire, he had also taken a lot of risks. Leroy's management style worked for a man of his unwavering personality and instinct, but without him, the company suffered greatly. In 1929, the Stock Market crashed, and the good times of the Roaring 20's became the Great Depression. Leroy, always a businessman who took great risks, had made many risky investments toward the end of the

1920's.^{xxx} When the stock market crashed, the investments became worthless. Two years later, Leroy Springs died, and Elliott Springs took over the family empire. The fate of his grandfather's company, but even more importantly, of the thousands of employees who counted on work, now depended on whether or not Elliott could be as successful at business, as he had been as a pilot and author.



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- ⁱ Pettus, Louise. *The Springs Story: Our First Hundred Years*. Springs Industries, Inc.: Fort Mill, SC, 1987. 64.
- ⁱⁱ "Items of Local Interest". *The Fort Mill Times*, October 3, 1918. 3.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Pettus, *The Springs Story*, 64.
- ^{iv} "Influenza, Coughs and Colds Relieved by Ironized Paw-Paw," *The Lancaster News*, November 12, 1918. 2.
- ^v "MRS: SPRINGS DIES; LEADER OF WOMEN: FIRST OF HER SEX-PROPOSED IN A NATIONAL CONVENTION FOR THE U. S. VICE PRESIDENCY 1 .DOW .-;-...US!!/ ONE OF SUFFRAGE ADVOCATESM SHE STARTED EMERGENCY HOSPITALS IN INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, May 19, 1942. 19
- ^{vi} Pettus, *The Springs Story*, 64.
- ^{vii} Ibid.
- ^{viii} Ibid. 76.
- ^{ix} Ibid.
- ^x "Sunrise in the South." *The Fort Mill Times*. April 6, 1922. 1.
- ^{xi} "DENIES COTTON MILLS SALE.: LEROY SPRINGS WITHDRAW SOUTH CAROLINA PLANTS FROM NEW COMPANY." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Nov 28, 1923. 21.
- ^{xii} Foord, John. "INDUSTRY BRINGS NEW LIFE TO CHINA: DESPITE POLITICAL TROUBLES, THE NATION MAKES WONDERFUL STRIDES FORWARD. COTTON MILLS SPRING UP ABUNDANT SUPPLY OF DOCILE AND FAIRLY INTELLIGENT LABOR A FACTOR. FAITH IN THE CHINESE CHARACTER OF THE PEOPLE THE BEST GROUND FOR TRUSTING IN A REGENERATED COUNTRY." *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Sep 28, 1920. 24
- ^{xiii} Elisha, Walter Y. and Doswell, Marshall. "The Founders: Samuel Elliott White and Leroy Springs." Speech. Annual Meeting of Springs Shareholders, April 27, 2987. 17.
- ^{xiv} Special to The New York Times. "COTTON BROKER SHOOTS MILL OPERATOR DOWN: PISTOL SNAPS TWICE AFTER COLONEL LEROY SPRINGS IS WOUNDED OF CHARLOTTE, N.C." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Feb 21, 1928. 2.
- ^{xv} Elisha, Walter Y. et al. "The Founders", 16.
- ^{xvi} "Death of Mrs. Leroy Springs". *The Charlotte News*, May 1st, 1907.
- ^{xvii} Doswell, Marshall. "The Founders: Samuel Elliott White and Leroy Springs." In *The Legacy: Three Men and What They Built*. n.p. 1987. 10.
- ^{xviii} "What a Woman would do as Vice President: Mrs. Leroy Springs; Charming South Carolina Beauty and First of Her Sex Entered as Candidate at National Political Convention, Tells what She would do with such a Job." *The Washington Post (1923-1954)*, Aug 10, 1924. 1
- ^{xix} Ibid.
- ^{xx} Ibid.
- ^{xxi} *War Birds*, 101.
- ^{xxii} Ibid, 102.
- ^{xxiii} Ibid, 111.
- ^{xxiv} Ibid.
- ^{xxv} Ibid, 101.
- ^{xxvi} "A COTTON MILL MAGNATE: COL. LEROY SPRINGS ONCE CLERKED IN A GROCERY." *The Sun (1837-1994)*, Aug 20, 1912. 6.
- ^{xxvii} Springs, Leroy. "Letter to Elliott Springs, 1924." In Elisha, Walter Y. and Doswell, Marshall. "The Founders: Samuel Elliott White and Leroy Springs." Speech. Annual Meeting of Springs Shareholders, April 27, 2987. 16.
- ^{xxviii} Springs, Elliott, "Clipped Wings." McClure's, March 1927. In *The Springs Story*, 1987. 84.
- ^{xxix} Springs, Elliott. "Letter to Leroy Springs, 1926." In *The Springs Story*, 1987. 85.
- ^{xxx} Pettus, *The Springs Story*, 86.



Elliott White Springs

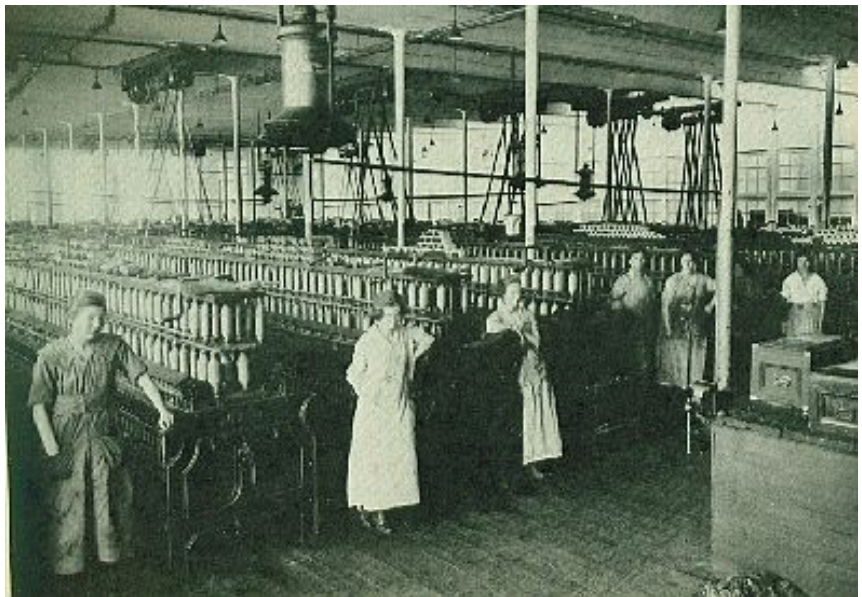
Hard Times

In 1929, the Stock Market crashed in New York City. People who had purchased stock in companies tried to sell it at the same time. They had to keep selling for cheaper and cheaper prices because very few people wanted to buy stock in companies when business was bad. The collapse in prices caused many companies to close. As companies closed, people lost their jobs, and there were no new companies starting, because the banks didn't want to give loans during hard times.

Elliott White Springs took full control of the Springs Cotton Mills in 1931, at the height of the Depression, upon the death of his father. Springs stepped in to continue the legacy of his grandfather, Samuel White, who had opened the first mills to give people a place to work.ⁱ

Elliot knew that the people in Lancaster, Chester and Fort Mill counted on the company staying open for business. He was not enthusiastic about working in the cotton mills, at one point telling one of his friends in the War that his real dream was to be a writer.ⁱⁱ None of that mattered during the Depression though, Elliott knew that the people of his community were counting on him.

The business was not in good shape. Springs' father, Leroy Springs, had badly damaged the confidence of New York bankers by telling them that his son had no idea about the operation of the mills, and also buried the corporation in debt.ⁱⁱⁱ Leroy had invested a lot of his company's profits in stocks or loans to other businesses. These didn't have much value in 1931, so Elliott Springs had to find other ways



A photograph from inside one of Springs Mills plants. The machinery in Elliott's mills was outdated, and needed to be replaced to continue to be productive in the 1930's.

to get money. Also, the five mills that he owned all had very old equipment that was breaking down or couldn't keep up with new models. The company, which had almost sold for \$10,000,000 in 1923 was valued at less than \$4,000,000 a decade later. Fortunately, Springs owned the Bank of Lancaster, which provided loans for the company.

Springs promised that from then on, he would only borrow from local businesses.^{iv}

Where many people saw obstacles, Elliott Springs found an opportunity. Textile production in the United States shrunk 15% between 1929 and 1933.^v Cotton mills all over the country were closing or at least cutting production. This meant

they had a lot of extra machines they weren't using, and like everyone at the time, they needed cash. Elliott started buying equipment from other mills that they weren't using at hugely discounted rates. Equipment valued at \$4,000 in 1950 was purchased for \$30, Springs bought \$1,000 looms for \$25 each plus freight, and in one case he got equipment from one closed New England mill for free because they didn't want to pay taxes on it.^{vi}



A postcard of Fort Mill from 1900.

Springs didn't just buy discounted equipment, he learned how to



Fort Mill in the 1920's. The downtown area of Fort Mill continued to grow as the mill operations provided larger numbers of jobs. Compare it with the photo above from 1900.

run it himself. According to Weldon Hunter, who worked for Springs Foundry, Elliott had the idea to take old frames and modify them for current cloth

demands.^{vii} Old frames were designed to make cloth that was 38 or 40 inches wide, but most people in the 1930's only wanted it 24 inches wide. Rather than throwing away the old equipment, Elliott Springs figured out a way to modify the old equipment to work. Springs also had a loom machine moved to the basement of his home and tinkered with it until



Franklin Roosevelt was famous for his "fireside chats" where he updated the American public on the programs he was creating.

he could take apart and put back together the entire machine.^{viii} It is said that he could hear a malfunctioning machine in his plants and fix it himself.^{ix}

In 1932, Franklin D.

Roosevelt was elected to be President of the United States of America, promising what he called a "New Deal" for all Americans. Roosevelt believed that in order to end the Depression, the government needed to have a much bigger role in society. Elliott was excited about the changes at first, because he thought the government was going to help people everywhere get benefits that he was giving to his employees. In a letter to the President, Springs bragged about giving raises to his employees, no longer employing anyone younger than 16, and hiring people with physical disabilities.^x Springs himself did not even get a paycheck from his company for several years, just to make sure he had money to pay his employees.

His enthusiasm for the New Deal ended quickly in 1934, when the government tried to force businesses to make less products. When less of something is made, normally the prices go up, and this was the President's plan to help companies stay in business. Elliott knew that making less at his plants meant less hours for his employees, so he refused to follow the guidelines given by the government.^{xi} He also came to believe that the government was damaging the reputation of mills in the South and clearly preferred policies that helped the Northern mills at the expense of Southern communities.



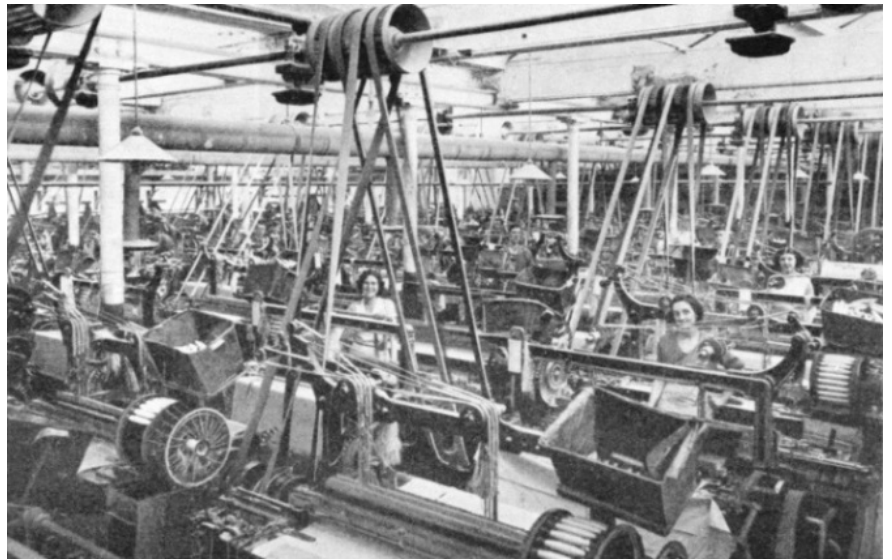
This political cartoon accused cotton mill owners of only hiring white workers. Most hours were cut to follow government rules, but Elliott Springs ignored the rules created by the government in order to keep all of his employees working as many hours as he could afford to pay them.

In an angry letter to a fake Democratic Senator, Joseph Gish, Springs responded to the Secretary of Labor's claim that workers in the South couldn't afford shoes. Springs pointed out that they normally took their shoes off at the door to be more comfortable, and the Secretary "does not realize that many of these women drive to work in their own cars."^{xii}

The government had created the Textile Code Institute to make sure that every company made the right amount of products, but Springs' companies did not make the reports.^{xiii} In one funny and rambling inventory request response, Springs reported that he had taken

over accounting because his bookkeeper had suffered "spots before his eyes, and has gone to a sanitarium for a rest."^{xiv}

Springs pretended that he couldn't count his machines because he had some frames in railway



Given the number of parts in cotton mill looms and spindles, and the fact that Springs kept his in business by buying old ones from other companies, inventory would have been very difficult.

cars, some in temporary storage, and a few that he believed had "floated down the river from Mount Holly in the flood of 1916."^{xv} He even claimed that one loom was in a high school classroom and that "two looms were in a truck collision, and later made into one."^{xvi} He concluded his letter by asking for understanding because he had "410,000 spindles practically running on roller skates" so there was just no way he could keep up with his inventory.^{xvii}

Springs may have played dumb to the government, but his business sense proved that he would not be "join[ing his] auditor in the

sanitarium.”^{xviii} By keeping his mills opened and running, Springs kept his employees working. He couldn’t sell a lot of the textiles he made because during the Depression, people didn’t have a lot of money. Springs took his extra goods and put them “everywhere he could stick a piece of cloth” just to keep the mill running at full capacity.^{xix}

The employees of the Springs-owned cotton mills had plenty of good reasons to appreciate Elliott’s efforts to keep their mills opened.



Unemployment in the Great Depression was a major problem, at one point rising above 20%. Elliott Springs managed to keep his mills operating at a very difficult time for people in the country to find work.

An elderly woman, who had previously worked in the mill and needed her job back because of the Depression, was refused employment because of her health. The manager believed that she couldn’t work hard because of her age and health problems.

She met Elliott in the street one day to beg him for her job back; he instructed her to meet him the next morning at the mill gate. The next day, Elliott and the woman walked into the mill together and Elliott overrode the managers decision.^{xx} The manager protested that the woman couldn’t do any of the jobs, so Springs had the desk chair removed from the manager’s office and instructed the women to sit in it until the

manager found work for her.^{xxi} Elliott was the hardest working employee at the mills, often being seen in the middle of the night during the third shift.^{xxii} He spent most of the time at his plants with his employees on the floor, rather than in his office.

Especially during the Great Depression, there were a lot of workers who believed their best chance to improve their working conditions were



Flying Squadron protests often had the potential for violence.

in unions. In a union, workers join together to put pressure on the owners to give better wages, benefits, and safer working conditions. Usually, they do this by going on strike, which meant refusing to work. Union members often used violence and threats to

get changes made for the workers. Especially in the states of North and South Carolina, where state laws protected workers who didn't want to unionize, this created conflict. Union supporters created a group called the "Flying Squadron" which brought in union fighters from hundreds of miles away to put pressure on non-union plants. The strikes were national news, reported on the front pages of newspapers like *The New York Times*. On September 6, 1934, the *Times* headline of the front page

claimed that there was a 110-mile-long front, where union workers attacked mills all across North and South Carolina.^{xxiii}

Unionized plants, like the cotton mill in Rock Hill, saw non-union plants like the ones belonging to Springs, as a threat, and wanted to force the Springs-owned mills to unionize. They sent representatives to try to convince Springs employees to unionize by persuasion or threats and



Springs didn't act alone against the Flying Squadron. Townspeople came out to support the mill as well.

force. One telegraph sent by Elliott Springs to the Cotton Textile Institute complained that they had forced three of his mills to be shut down.^{xxiv} There were multiple times when union representatives brought guns to try to scare

employees into supporting the unions. At one point, Springs paid two pilots to use company planes to circle above the roads leading to his plants, watching for union agitators.^{xxv}

According to one employee's memory, Springs vowed to allow his workers to make the choice themselves, but pledged to, "move his bed into the office and stand siege with them," should his workers want to resist unionization.^{xxvi} He promised to respect his worker's choice, but

also offered to join in with them if unionization was not what they wanted. Springs always encouraged the resistance to be peaceful, even when his workers offered to fight. In one case in September, 1934, Springs closed several plants in order to prevent union violence from occurring.^{xxvii} In all cases, Springs was careful to be sure that every employee was treated fairly, even those who wished to join in union actions against his company.^{xxviii} Non-compliance with certain rules kept his mills opened at full capacity, but he also knew which laws to follow carefully for the same reason. Elliott Springs inspired his workers to have more faith more in their boss, than in collective action against him, and none of the Springs Cotton Mills ever unionized.

Despite the Great Depression, The Springs Cotton Mills property value grew every year from 1933 to 1940 and the total amount paid in wages and salary also tripled.^{xxix} Many historians claim that World War II ended the Great Depression. Generally, the claim is that the increase in the need for war material caused the reopening of all of the plants and mills across the country, putting people back to work. The other popular claim is that

75 Young Women

From 15 to 35 Years of Age,
WANTED TO WORK IN THE
COTTON MILLS!
IN LOWELL AND CHICOPEE, MASS.

I am authorized by the Agents of said Mills to make the following proposition to persons suitable for their work, viz:—They will be paid \$1.00 per week, and board, for the first month. It is presumed they will then be able to go to work at job prices. They will be considered as engaged for one year, cases of sickness excepted. I will pay the expenses of those who have not the means to pay for themselves, and the girls will pay it to the Company by their first labor. All that remains in the employ of the Company eighteen months will have the amount of their expenses to the Mills refunded to them. They will be properly cared for in sickness. It is hoped that some will go except those whose circumstances will admit of their staying at least one year. None but active and healthy girls will be engaged for this work as it would not be advisable for either the girls or the Company.

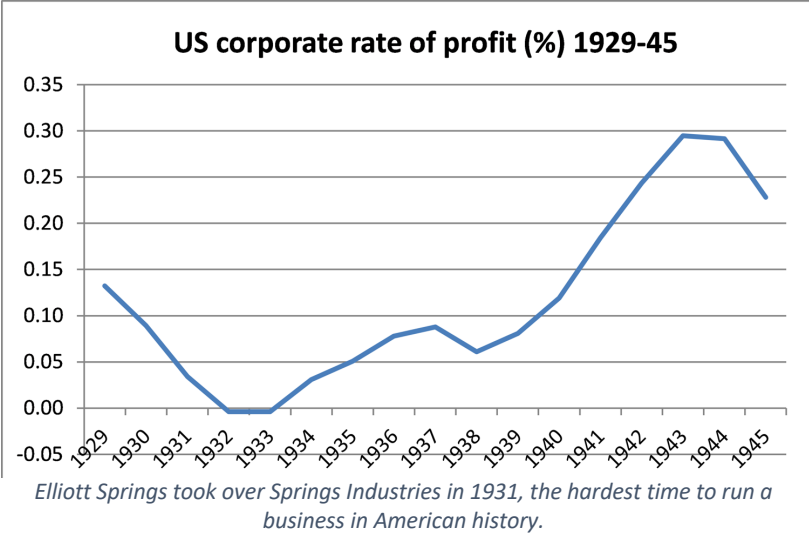
I shall be at the Howard Hotel, Burlington, on Monday, July 25th: at Farnham's, St. Albans, Tuesday forenoon, 26th, at Keyse's, Swanton, in the afternoon; at the Massachusetts' House, Rouses Point, on Wednesday, the 27th, to engage girls,—such as would like a place in the Mills would do well to improve the present opportunity, as new hands will not be wanted late in the season. I shall start with my Company, for the Mills, on Friday morning, the 29th inst., from Rouses Point, at 6 o'clock. Such as do not have an opportunity to see me at the above places, can take the cars and go with me the same as though I had engaged them.

I will be responsible for the safety of all baggage that is marked in care of I. M. BOYNTON, and delivered to my charge.

I. M. BOYNTON,
Agent for Procuring Help for the Mills.

Normally, young women were recruited to work in cotton mills (see above.). Elliott Springs made sure that his mills employed all kinds of people at a time when they needed the jobs and probably couldn't have gotten them anywhere else.

the New Deal policies of the Roosevelt Administration helped put people back to work. Neither of these interpretations is true for Fort Mill, Chester, or Lancaster, SC though. Elliott Springs didn't need the mills to be opened to survive the hard times of the Depression, but his employees did. It wasn't the New Deal or World War II that helped these communities recover from the worse economic times faced in America,



it was Elliott White Springs. Through personal sacrifice, commitment, bravery, and loyalty, Springs fought to keep his mills opened for his community. He earned the credit given to him by a White

Plant retiree, Glenn Walker, who simply said that Springs ran the mills “to give us three days a week. So we could live.”^{xxx}

Elliott Springs had saved the company and the community from ruin in the 1930's, but the challenges of the growing global economy after World War II would present a whole new set of challenges. Competition from companies all over the world brought new expectations for businesses. It would be a new battle to be fought by new generations as Springs Industries and its communities faced the transition to the global economy of the Modern Age.

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- ⁱ Elisha, Walter Y. "Standing on the Shoulders of Visionaries: The Story of Springs Industries, Inc." Speech. The Newcomen Society, Rock Hill, SC, 1993. 13-14.
- ⁱⁱ Springs, Elliott, *War Birds*, 102.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Pettus, Louise. "Elliott White Springs: Master of Mills and Many Other Things," in *The Legacy: Three Men and What They Built*, Speech. University of South Caroliniana Society, Columbia, SC. May 22, 1987. 25.
- ^{iv} Pettus, *The Legacy*, 26.
- ^v "Indexes of Manufacturing Production, by Industry Group: 1889 to 1954," in *Bicentennial Edition: Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, United States Department of Commerce, 668.
- ^{vi} Pettus, *The Springs Story*, 95.
- ^{vii} Hunter, Weldon, Springs Foundry, interviewed by Rebecca Parks, 1987. In Pettus, *The Springs Story*, 1987. 106.
- ^{viii} Pettus, *The Legacy*, 27.
- ^{ix} Ibid.
- ^x Springs, Elliott. "Letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt, July 28, 1933" in *The Springs Story*, 97.
- ^{xi} Springs, Elliott. "Letter to Joe Gish, April 14, 1938" in Springs, Elliott, *Clothes Make the Man*, J.J. Little and Ives: New York. 1948. 80-83.
- ^{xii} Springs, Elliott. "Letter to Senator Joseph Gish, May 26, 1933" in *Clothes Make the Man*, 63-64.
- ^{xiii} Springs, Elliott. "Letter to George A. Sloan, December 20, 1933", in *Clothes Make the Man*, 65-66.
- ^{xiv} Ibid, 65.
- ^{xv} Ibid.
- ^{xvi} Ibid. 66
- ^{xvii} Ibid.
- ^{xviii} Ibid.
- ^{xix} Ibid.
- ^{xx} Pettus, *The Legacy*, 27.
- ^{xxi} Ibid.
- ^{xxii} Pettus, *The Legacy*, 26.
- ^{xxiii} Shaplen, Joseph, Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES. "TROOPS CALLED OUT IN NORTH CAROLINA: GOVERNOR ACTS AFTER MOTOR SQUADS OF STRIKERS RAID MILLS ON 110-MILE FRONT. TROOPS CALLED OUT IN NORTH CAROLINA." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Sep 06, 1934. 1
- ^{xxiv} Springs, Elliott. "Telegraph to Cotton Textile Institute, September 5, 1934." In Pettus, *The Springs Story*, 1987. 94.
- ^{xxv} "FACE MARTIAL LAW IN SOUTH CAROLINA: STRIKERS ORDERED BY GOVERNOR BLACKWOOD TO DISPERSE BY NOON TODAY PROCLAMATION ISSUED TWENTY MILLS IN SISTER STATES REOPEN BEHIND BAYONETS--LULL IN PICKETING." *The Sun (1837-1994)*, Sep 08, 1934. 6.
- ^{xxvi} Pettus, *The Legacy*, 29.
- ^{xxvii} Shaplen, Joseph, Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES. "TROOPS CALLED OUT IN NORTH CAROLINA." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Sep 06, 1934. 3.
- ^{xxviii} Springs, Elliott. "Letter to Owen Simmons, Compliance Committee, The Cotton Textile Institute, January 15, 1934." In *Clothes Make the Man*. 66-70.
- ^{xxix} "Springs Growth," in *Our 75 Anniversary: The Story of the Springs Cotton Mills 1888-1963*, Springs Industries, Inc: Fort Mill, South Carolina, 1963. n.p.
- ^{xxx} Walker, Glenn, interviewed by Nancy Thomas, 1983. In Pettus, *The Springs Story*, 1987. 107



Elliott White Springs



Bill Close and Anne Springs Close Family

Into the Future

In September 1936, Elliott Springs' wife and children rode on the world-famous German dirigible, *The Hindenburg*.ⁱ They received a commemorative plate, made out of the metal of the airship for being the 1,000th passengers aboard. Elliott had made the flight earlier in the yearⁱⁱ and it was a status event for high society Americans. And yet, the day after Elliott Springs' trip was reported, signs were



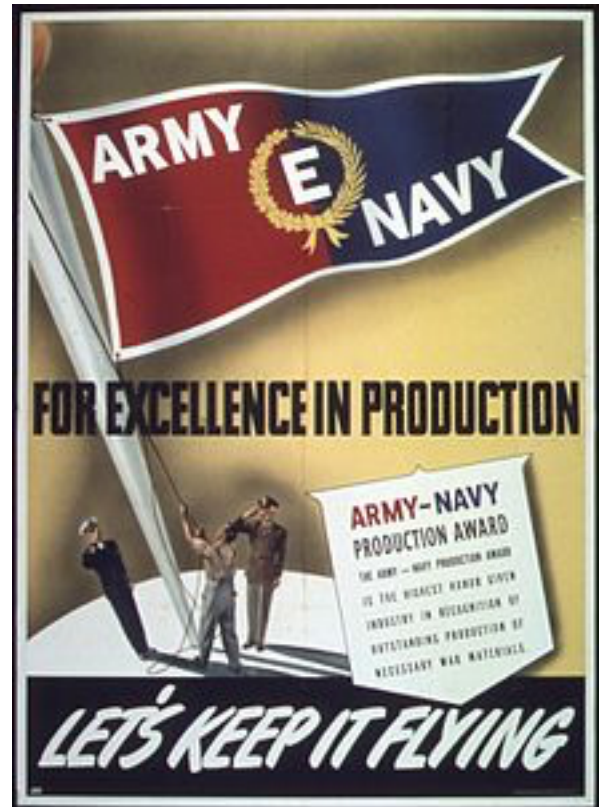
The Hindenburg airship flying over New York City..

already appearing in strained relationships between Germany and the rest of the European powers. British officials had accused the German airship of flying over places in England to spy, which the captain angrily

denied.ⁱⁱⁱ Several months later, *The Hindenburg* would catch fire and burn, crashing to the ground in spectacular fashion.

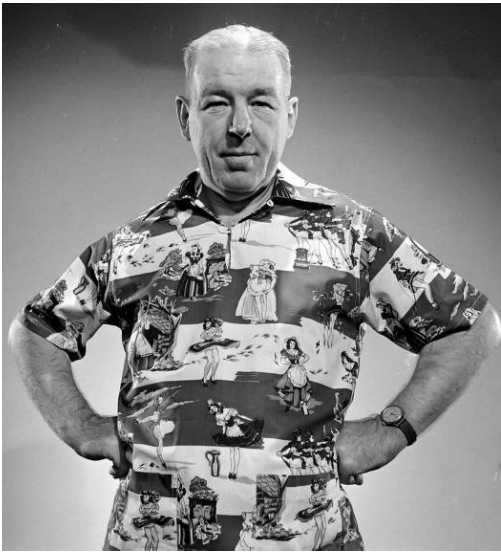
Only two years after that, Germany attacked Poland, plunging the world into another great war. The Springs family now had metallic symbols of America's German enemies from both Wars in their gameroom. They had a tailfin from a German WWI plane, and a plate commemorating a flight on a German airship flying the flag, not of Germany, but the Nazis. The Springs family, and soon the communities of Lancaster, Chester and Fort Mill, were becoming more connected to the world.

World War II did not end the Depression in Fort Mill, Elliott Springs had already taken care of that by keeping the mill opened and people with jobs. However, World War II did end the bad relationship that the company and government had with each other. The government needed Springs' looms to operate at full capacity in order to support the war effort, and he was happy to supply the need. The company was granted the Army/Navy "E" Award (for excellence) for its



Ironically, the same government that tried to slow textile production in the 1930's gave awards in the 1940's for production. Springs Industries won the award every year. Employees got a pin in recognition.

contribution to the war effort.^{iv} Springs personally returned to service for the Army for the War as well, helping direct the Charlotte Air Base.^v He retired as a Lt. Colonel after health issues prevented him from continuing.^{vi} Almost 1/4th of the workforce in the Springs plants served in the military.^{vii} Employees who stayed worked overtime, and many women took jobs to help ensure that the mills never missed a contract deadline, a record they continued for the entire war. More than any



Elliott Springs proudly displaying a shirt with his famous Springmaid Sheets advertisements.

other war in history, World War II demanded a total effort of American workers, manufacturers, and soldiers. The Springs Mills plants provided all three.

After the War was over, Elliott Springs continued to help the company adapt to the new economy. Springs' mills started to make finished textiles, most famously the Springmaid sheets. What made the sheets so famous was

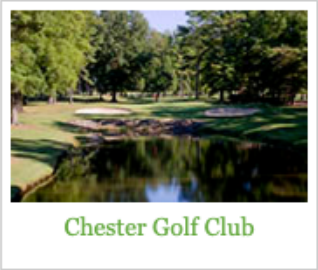
Springs' advertisement campaign. It was considered inappropriate by many people in society, to the point where some magazines refused to run his advertisements.^{viii} In another public gimmick, Springs sent out a Christmas card showing barefoot children and employees standing next to his looms, giving the appearance that Springs Industries still used child labor.^{ix} The "employees" were actually his family members. Elliott did all

he could to make sure that people always talked about and remembered his products.

Despite the controversies, Elliott Springs did many things to make his mills nice places to work. Employees were provided with a swimming pool at the mill that they could use if they wanted to.^x They also had access to a recreation park that was constructed for their use.^{xi} He developed beach and mountain properties that could be used by employees as vacation spots. His companies may have made him wealthy, but Springs never lost sight of the reality that the company served the community as much as the community served his company.

In the early 1960's, the company reached its peak. Elliott had continued to oversee the company as it expanded into new products and continued to post

large profits. When he died in 1959, his son-in-law, Bill Close, took over the business. When he took over the business, for a long time Bill stressed the importance of running the business as Elliott had.^{xii} Springs had trained Bill ever since his marriage to Anne Springs in 1946, and Bill had worked in many different parts of the company. Like his father-in-



These local golf courses were started by Leroy and Elliott Springs. They offered special rates to employees and low-wage earners who could never have afforded to play golf at a country club.

law, he had the ability to operate and repair most of the machines in the business he ran.^{xiii} Bill had the confidence of his father-in-law, but even more importantly, Elliott believed in the people of the company. In a speech for receiving the “Textile Man of the Year Award” in 1963, Bill Close quoted Springs as having said that people will predict Bill’s failure because of his age and inexperience. However, he finished by saying that



Elliott Springs was right to trust his son-in-law and his employees with the future of his company. It continued to operate and grow for several decades.

“the 12,000 people in this company are going to see to it that that doesn’t happen.”^{xiv}

In 1961, the company announced that it would build a 21-story high rise office building in Manhattan, just a few blocks from Times Square.^{xv} As the company continued to become more modern, so did its practices. Close began a human

resources department to make the hiring process at all of the plants more uniform.^{xvi} Close also added additional mills and warehouse facilities, growing the company to 22 plants and 19,700 employees.^{xvii} He also continued to expand benefits offered to the employees including medical services, improving the work environment, and building golf courses, tennis courts, and swimming pools for the community.^{xviii}

Springs Mills eventually started to close down certain operations that were unable to make a profit in 1978.^{xix} The mills had been shutting down for a week or two because there was not enough demand for their products for several years.^{xx} The mills had expanded to offer many new types of products, but some weren't able to compete with foreign competition. In the 1970's, China had begun to trade with the United States after nearly 25 years of refusing to do so. After WWII, China had become communist and cut off trading relationships with the United States and many of its allies. The reopening of Chinese trade meant that American manufacturing businesses had a hard time competing, since the cost to produce goods in China was so much lower. Springs Mills was one of those companies that had a hard time competing, so by the end of the 1970's, business was finally slowing down for good.



US President Richard Nixon shaking hands with Chinese dictator Mao Zedong. Nixon and Zedong restored a trade relationship with China, which could manufacture textiles much cheaper than US companies.

Despite the business becoming less a part of the modernizing Fort Mill, Chester and Lancaster communities, the family continued to engage the community through charity. Elliott Springs established the Springs Foundation in 1942 to benefit all people in the York, Lancaster,

and Chester counties of South Carolina. Continuing his father’s belief in education, the Springs Foundation helped finance the loans of 102 students in 1959.^{xxi} Although he had died in 1959, Elliott planned his estate to continue to contribute to the Foundation, and in the next 15 years, almost \$30 million were given to the charity by Elliott’s estate.^{xxii} In 1984, after three churches were burned in Lancaster that had mostly black members, the Springs Foundation helped restore them.^{xxiii} That same year, Anne Springs Close, Elliott’s only daughter, became



chairwoman of the Springs and Close Foundations. She continued to fulfill her father’s vision to put the money back into the

The Springs Close Foundation gives millions of dollars to local community programs.

community that came out of the cotton mill plants.^{xxiv} In 1989, the Anne Springs Close Greenway was constructed, setting aside 2,100 acres of land for outdoor recreational use in the heart of Fort Mill.^{xxv} As of 2017, the charities created by the family has given over \$100 million back to the community.^{xxvi}

On July 10, 2003, the newspapers announced that Springs Industries was going to close its Fort Mill and Lancaster plants.^{xxvii} The first Fort Mill plant had been closed in 1988, and eventually burned in York County’s largest fire. Walter Y. Elisha Park, which was donated to the

community to honor the chairman of the company who followed Bill Close, is the site of the former plant. The closure of the two plants ended over 100 years of operation in the towns. In many ways, the towns could never have existed, let alone thrived without the mills. Thousands of families lived, worked, and enjoyed recreational facilities provided by the mills. Even more importantly, thousands of children have pursued their dreams through education grants and loans provided by the Springs/Close family. The true legacy of the company, and the



Walter Y. Elisha Park, named for the man who ran the company after Bill Close. The Park was donated by the Close family and is the former site of one of the cotton mills in Fort Mill.

White/Springs/Close family lives on in the lives of the community members.

On March 27, 2019, Leroy Springs' remains were rediscovered after a search to find their exact location.^{xxviii} Springs' body had been buried on the property of his Lancaster

Mill. As Elliott led the company in a new phase of expansion, the burial site was covered by a clock tower. In future expansions, the clock tower was also moved and the site of the remains was lost.^{xxix} After its demolition in 2004, the plant site was eventually set to be redeveloped and some were afraid that Leroy Springs and his legacy would be lost forever. The Lancaster County Society for Historical Preservation eventually gained permission to locate and move his remains. The

Springs Global executive offices are now available for lease. The White Homestead is used only occasionally by family members as they visit the area. The family, like the town of Fort Mill, continues to move into a more globalized 21st century economy. Yet the rediscovery of Leroy Springs' remains is a powerful metaphor for the history of the community.



The White Homestead, just like the family and the community, has undergone significant changes since 1900.

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Chapter 1

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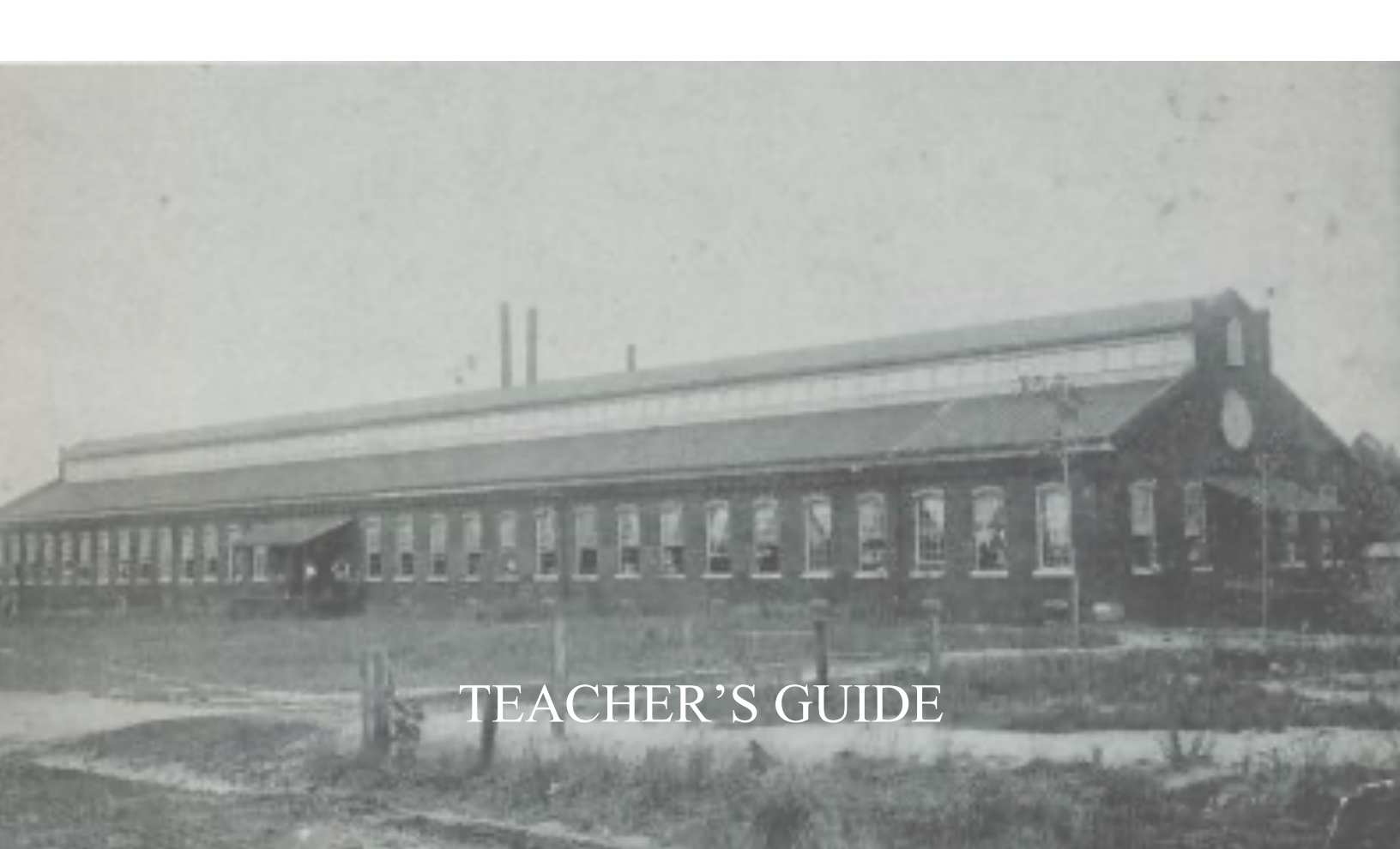
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TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide is not meant to be extensive, simply to provide a few ideas and questions that you can ask if you want to. I always encourage teachers to ask questions that relate specifically to the objectives of their teaching and units.

Please note that the primary goal of this project is to tell a story about a family's history, and the history of a community in a way that is positive. The people of Fort Mill, SC, just like people everywhere are deeply and personally flawed. They make mistakes, sometimes with the best of intentions and sometimes with less altruistic motives. Obviously, the man who confronted Leroy Springs in the streets of Charlotte would have had a totally different story to tell about the history of the town and the business. One history and one story in history doesn't always have to cancel out the other but adds additional threads to a very complex tapestry of stories. There are people even inside the Close/Springs family that believe that many of the actions of Samuel White were ignoble and connected to the Lost Cause perspective of the Civil War. This might be true. However it is also true that his mills gave an identity and purpose to people of all races and genders, and that Leroy, Elliott, and Bill Close all continued to expand these opportunities. Every historian (student) should have the opportunity to weigh these facts themselves, and to determine where this one particular narrative fits within the greater local and national narratives of the times in which they took place

Chapter 1

Reading Comprehension

1. What was the economic goal of Reconstruction?
2. How did the Civil War affect the financial situation of families like the Whites?
3. What did many Southerners build in the South to start to rebuild their economy?
4. How did the Progressive Era change the relationship between governments and businesses?
5. What is the “New South?”
6. When did child labor become illegal in the United States?
7. How did the expansion of the mills in the Fort Mill area benefit the community and the owners?
8. What did Leroy Springs do to ensure that the people within his community received an education?

Writing Prompts

1. How did the cotton mills contribute and create a community?
2. How did the actions of men like Springs and White shape their communities?

Discussion Questions

1. Is the monument to the “Faithful Slaves” a fitting memorial to the enslaved people of the South?
 - a. How should we remember enslaved people and slavery in American history?
 - b. What should be done about monuments like the “Faithful Slaves” monument?
 - c. If you could alter or add a sign to the monument, what information do you think it should give?
 - d. How can we remember the different viewpoints of enslaved people rather than stereotyping them?

2. Was child labor a bad thing for children in the South?

Make sure to discuss the fact that working in the Cotton Mills was the most realistic occupation for many Southerners, and starting younger got one ahead in learning the business and getting promotions.

3. How did education contribute to the continuing inequality of people of different races in the South?
4. Did the community or the factory owners benefit more from the development of the cotton mills?

Chapter 2

Reading Comprehension

9. What was the American position for most of World War I?
10. How did submarine warfare impact Springs and Grider's trip to Europe?
11. What made *Warbirds* different from other published journals about the fighting in World War I?
12. Why did pilots like Grider and Springs often battle feelings of "survivor's guilt?"
13. How did many American pilots feel about the German pilots?
14. What new inventions were used or experimented with during WWI?
15. How were Chinese laborers used in World War I?
16. What was "No Man's Land?"
17. According to Springs, what was the average amount of time that a pilot spent flying before he was killed?
18. How successful was Springs in the War?

Writing Prompts

3. How did technology redefine the war experience of all soldiers in WWI?
4. What kinds of experiences would have contributed to PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)? (Use at least 3 direct quotations from primary sources)

Discussion Questions

5. Do you think it was more important for Springs to be honest about his experiences in the war, or to highlight the heroic actions he accomplished?
6. How can one fight in a war but have no personal animosity toward the people he is fighting?
7. How has technology continued to define the ways that we fight wars?
8. Is it wrong for a pilot to feel a “thrill. . .waiting on human prey?”
9. Do you think that Elliott White Springs would describe himself as a hero?

Chapter 3

Reading Comprehension

19. How did people respond to the Spanish Flu Pandemic?
20. How did the Boll Weevil infestation impact the South Carolina economy?
21. Where were the main competitors for Southern cotton mills in the 1920's?
22. Why was Lena Jones-Springs nominated for Vice-President in 1924?
23. Why did Elliott give up writing?
24. Why was the period between 1922 and 1929 called the "Roaring 20's"?
25. How did Leroy's personality and decisions put his cotton mills at risk when the Great Depression started?

Writing Prompts

5. Compare and Contrast the Spanish Flu Pandemic and the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic?
6. How did the economic conditions of the early 1920's affect the cotton mill industry?
7. What skills or experiences does Elliott have that would help him successfully run the cotton mills in the 1930's and beyond?

Discussion Questions

10. Is it possible for both Leroy and Elliott to have been right about Elliott's future plans?
11. Should Lena have accepted a "token nomination" or declined it until people were serious about giving her a chance?

Chapter 4

Reading Comprehension

26. What challenges did Elliott Springs have to save the cotton mills when he took control in 1931?
27. How did Springs get loans for his cotton mills?
28. How did Elliott Springs use the Great Depression and cotton mill closings to his advantage?
29. What did Franklin D. Roosevelt promise the American people when he was elected in 1932?
30. What was Roosevelt's plan to help keep the cotton mills profitable during the Great Depression?
31. Why was the claim that women in the cotton mills were so poor that they couldn't wear shoes to work misleading?
32. Why do workers join a labor union?
33. How did the Flying Squadron put pressure on other cotton mills like those belonging to Springs?

Writing Prompts

8. How did the New Deal government attempt to control the economy to deal with the Great Depression?
9. What challenges needed to be overcome by cotton mill owners in the 1930's in order to stay in business?

Discussion Questions

12. Was it selfish for the workers in Springs' cotton mills to resist unionization?
13. Was it wrong for Springs to refuse to follow federal production quotas and laws?
14. Should the government be able to control how businesses are run during times of crisis?

Chapter 5

Reading Comprehension

34. What famous airship crashed and burned in 1937?
35. Why did the government need textiles from the cotton mills for the War effort?
36. How did cotton mill workers sacrifice in order to support the military in World War II?
37. How did the cotton mills change after World War II to stay competitive?
38. How did Springs promote his companies in ways that ensured people noticed his products?
39. How did Springs continue to improve the working conditions for his employees?
40. How did Bill Close modernize the cotton mills to be more efficient and competitive in the modern economy?
41. How has the White/Springs/Close family continued to contribute to the community despite having closed its cotton mills?

Writing Prompts

10. Compare and contrast the challenges of businesses after World War II to the challenges they faced before the War.
11. Describe the “life cycle” of the cotton mills in South Carolina.

Discussion Questions

15. Should the cotton mills be remembered as a success or failure?
16. How does knowing the history of your community change the way you view it?
17. What would be the best way to remember the White/Springs/Close families and their contributions to our community?