



The Springs Founder's House

When John White returned to Fort Mill from the war in 1865, he found the community, though hardly touched by battle, had been significantly affected by the war. His younger brother Samuel, as a result of war wounds, had already been home for two years managing the family plantation and coping with challenges brought on by the war and its aftermath.

The White family and their neighbors, the Springs family, operated large farms. The men of both families had served in the war and now, as they returned to their homes and fields, began putting the past behind them and moving forward with their lives.

The absence of most of the men for nearly five years was reflected in the conditions they found upon their return. Barren fields needed replanting and buildings required repair.

John soon met and courted a young woman who, as their wedding plans were put together, joined him in the design and planning of a Victorian home to be built a mile from the White homestead. But before the home was completed in 1872, John's prospective bride called off the wedding plans, leaving John with a new home and no bride.

Before much time transpired, John married Addie Allison and moved into the house. As if plagued by bad luck, he subsequently became ill and died. John's younger brother, Samuel, and his wife, Esther—Addie's sister—moved into the home to comfort the young widow. Within a year or two, Addie married and went back to her hometown of Concord, North Carolina.

Samuel and Esther White continued to live in the home and it is believed that, in their dining room, the first meeting was held to form the Fort Mill Manufacturing Company, the first unit of what was to become Springs Industries. Leroy Springs, a prosperous young merchant whose family owned the contiguous farm, was present at that meeting. In the sitting room of the home, Leroy Springs courted and later married Samuel and Esther's only child, Grace Allison White. On their wedding day, Leroy was 31 years old and she was 19. Samuel and Esther continued to live in the home until Esther's death in 1903 and Samuel's poor health forced him to move to Lancaster to live with Leroy. Samuel White died in Lancaster in 1911.

In subsequent years, the home served as a residence for mill managers, was used by several prominent Fort Mill families and, by the early 60's, was renovated to serve as Guest Quarters for Springs visitors.

In the early 80s, efforts began to list the home in the National Register of Historic Places while an extensive restoration was planned. The project began in the summer of 1986 and was completed early in 1988. As part of the restoration, two cottages were added to accommodate additional guests. The Elliott White Springs house and the H. William Close house honor former company leaders. The four bedrooms in the two cottages are named for the towns where the original plants are located—Fort Mill, Lancaster, Kershaw, Chester.

The interior design of the Founder's House is an adaptation of the Victorian period, and while rooms in the house have the look of the 1800s, the flavor is toward simplicity, not the characteristic excesses of the Victorian period. Some furniture in the house is original; other pieces are purchased antiques or were brought from Springfield, ancestral home of the Springs family. The four bedrooms bear the names of those people prominent in the early development of Springs: Samuel Elliott White, Leroy Springs, Grace Allison White, and John M. Spratt.

Now more than 125 years old, this home stands as a symbol of perseverance and dedication of those who were instrumental in the founding of our company and their commitment to this community.

[ABOUT](#)[AUTHORS](#)[CATEGORIES](#)[TIME PERIODS](#)[REGIONS](#)[COUNTIES](#)[MEDIA](#)

Springs Industries

1887 –

 2 minutes to read

Springs Industries, a cotton textile company, was founded in 1887 by Samuel Elliott White of Fort Mill. Originally named Fort Mill Manufacturing Company, the company soon became a leading textile manufacturer in South Carolina. After White's death in 1911, ownership transferred to "Colonel" Leroy Springs. In 1922 Springs organized a company—Springs Mills, Inc.—to centralize control over his various holdings in Lancaster County. But his aggressive management style had drawbacks. Laborers threatened strikes over low wages, and the disgruntled cotton buyer Eldred Griffith shot Springs in Charlotte, North Carolina, over a questionable business deal. Though wounded in the head, Springs recovered, but he decided to manage his mills remotely from his office in New York City. On April 9, 1931, Leroy Springs died of respiratory failure during a visit to Charlotte.

Elliott White Springs, his son, inherited his father's six cotton mills, 7,500 looms, and 300,000 spindles, all valued at \$7.25 million. In his first months as mill president, Elliott Springs purchased used equipment from New England industries, and the recently renamed Springs Cotton Mills began to manufacture a variety of new fabrics—pillowcases, towels, dress goods, and spun rayon fabrics. But Elliott continued his father's administrative style, particularly his antipathy toward organized labor. Only under direct pressure from federal New Deal agencies did Elliott reluctantly increase wages and reduce the workweek from fifty-five to forty hours.

After World War II, Springs again expanded corporate holdings with an effective "Springmaid" advertising campaign and the construction of the \$15 million Grace Bleachery. At the time of Elliott Springs's death in 1959, Springs Industries included assets worth \$138.5 million, 17,800 looms, and 836,000 spindles. Management transferred to his son-in-law, H. W. Close.

The 1960s treated Springs well. In 1962 Springs built a twenty-one-story office building in midtown New York. The next year Close's mills began producing polyester-cotton fabrics. In 1969 Springs completed a ten-year, \$230 million expansion program, but national economic slowdowns and foreign competition hindered profits during the following decade. At the same time, turnover rates soared as a younger generation chose not to work in the mills or live in their parents' communities. New federal environmental regulations in the 1970s forced a \$1.8 million expansion of Grace Finishing Plant's waste-treatment facility, while a government recall in 1976 of Springs fabric treated with the carcinogenic chemical "Tris" cost the company millions of dollars in lost revenue and perhaps even more in bad publicity. W. Close died of heart failure in 1983. Under new management, the company was renamed Springs Industries and in 1985 acquired a major competitor, Lowenstein Corporation, for \$286 million. Additional acquisitions came a decade later, allowing the company to reorganize into three production groups: bed fashions, bath fashions, and diversified products. In 1998 Springs elected Crandall Close Bowles, daughter of H. W. Close, as company president. Net sales for Springs Industries in 2000 were \$2.3 billion.

Davis, Burke. *War Bird: The Life and Times of Elliott White Springs*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.

Pettus, Louise, and Martha Bishop. *The Springs Story: Our First Hundred Years*. Fort Mill, S.C.: Springs Industries, 1987.

Written by [Darren Grem](#)

Citation Information

The following information is provided for citations.

Title
Springs Industries
Coverage
1887 –
Author