



## House is a reminder of historic mills of Mianus

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Frederick A. Springer founded the Mianus Manufacturing Co. in 1899 on the site of the old metalwork rolling mills in North Mianus, property he had purchased at auction two years earlier, along with a small mill building, previously occupied by the Rippowam Woolen Manufacturing Co.

North Mianus was the first business center in Greenwich, with a saw and grist mill in use by 1688, according to The Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich.

The Mianus Co. manufactured horse blankets, carriage and auto robes, imitation furs and plushes, and used to make the ever-popular teddy bears. The imitation fur for women's coats resembled caracal, a lynx-like animal related to the African golden cat. The mill's output was sold throughout the United States and Canada. The official description, according to a 1920 map, was "Manufacturers of plushes and imitation fur fabrics, overcoatings and cloakings."

In 1899, at the age of 12, Anthony R. Belmont was working at the Mianus mill and three years later had become the mill's expert at fixing looms.

"I went to work there as tear-boy, 50 cents a day," Belmont said in an oral history for Greenwich Library. "And that was big money." The boy had to put the paint in "the box," for the printer to use his pattern block for fabrics.

When he became a weaver, he made \$1.25 daily, and later, as a loom-fixer, he earned \$36 weekly and, by 1916, \$48 a week. He had learned how to fix looms from a \$2 book he bought and a textile course for which he paid \$140 over time.

He left during a 1919 strike, worked at Yale & Towne lock company in Stamford and opened a small grocery store. When he retired in 1951, he owned both The Belmont Feed Co. and The Belmont Fuel and Mason Supply Co.

Mill owner Springer had attended the Lowell School of Practical Design at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston.

In 1914, more machinery was acquired by Springer from the receiver of the Derby Fur Fabric Co. in Derby, Conn., and the mill was enlarged to 150,000 square feet of floor space and 16 sets of machinery. The company became a multi-storied complex, employing large numbers of mill workers.

The mill went out of business in 1926, and 12 years later it burned to the ground. For many years, the Mianus water filtration plant has stood on the old mill site.

Mill owners often built inexpensive housing for their workers near the mill site, and a few were

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able to build their own homes. One of those houses, built in 1894 and renovated in 1998 has been listed for sale for \$849,000 by Jean Stafford Dana of Cleveland Duble & Arnold in Greenwich.

Almost 2,000 square feet, the clapboard-covered house on 0.11 acres has a rocking-chair front porch and a flagstone patio with a sitting wall and retractable awning in the rear.

The living room has a bay window, there's a formal dining room and an eat-in kitchen in white with gray-black granite and chopping-block countertops. A powder room with fluted pedestal sink and beadboard wainscoting, a mudroom and a separate laundry are also found on the first level, which has nine-foot ceilings.

Up a flight of stairs are two double bedrooms, a single bedroom and a bath of limestone with a tub surrounded by subway tile. The third floor has what could be a master bedroom and another limestone-swathed bath.

Where possible, original details have been preserved -- the old stairways and doors; the door frames; the nine-foot, first-floor ceilings; and the wide-board floors.

The first mill that harnessed the power of the Mianus River was John Haight's grist mill, which was erected in 1688 and sold for "10,000 pounds in New York money" in 1796, according to a history of the Mianus Mills by Allen H. Barton for The Historical Society.

An 18th-century saw mill stood along the river for years, and Swan's Paper Mill was built in 1815 by Walter Swan, who had emigrated from Scotland.

Greenwich Iron Works was founded in 1829 by English iron workers Walter and Robert Cox on what became Springer's property. Bankruptcy a decade later led to new owners creating a rolling mill, manufacturing railroad spikes and surviving until 1880. A wire mill for hoopskirt wire was built next door, which lasted from 1859 until 1868.

Henry Cox of Stamford married Walter Swan's daughter, Margaret, in 1835 and rebuilt the paper mill as a sawmill, where ax handles and carriage wheel spokes of hickory were made. Later, the mill made "shoddy," an inexpensive form of woolen yarn, and after the Civil War the mill was a saw, feed and cider mill.

Frank T. Palmer manufactured supplies for the new telephone and electrical industries, starting in 1881, and then started to make gasoline engines for boats on the Mianus. In 1901 Palmer built a new plant on the tidewater in Cos Cob.

Fred Springer was active in the Greenwich community, serving as chairman of the Board of Education for 11 years and on the board of the Bruce Museum. He served on the local Council of Defense during World War I and on the Republican Town Committee and the Bureau of Business Affairs. A justice of the peace, he was also a director of Greenwich Trust Co. An Elder at the First Presbyterian Church in Stamford, he was

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a member of the Acacia Lodge No. 85 of Greenwich and Ponus Lodge in Stamford

Earlier in his career, he had worked for the Sanford Mills in Sanford, Me., and had a designer's studio in Philadelphia.

Metal items, woolens were made at mills

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