

CAPT. JOHN WHITE HIDES SILVER COINS by Louise Pettus

William Elliott White, Fort Mill township planter, had five sons to serve in the Confederate army. Two were killed and the other three were wounded. One of the wounded heroes was Samuel Elliott White, who became the first president of Fort Mill Manufacturing Co., the cotton mill that was the forerunner of Springs Industries, Inc.

Another surviving son was Capt. John White. John White figured in an interesting episode in the spring of 1865 after the fall of Richmond, the Confederate capital.

John White had led a brigade of the 6th Regiment of S. C. Volunteers in Virginia and was one of those guarding the wagon train that followed Jefferson Davis and his cabinet officers to Charlotte, where Davis stopped on his flight south.

Not far behind the wagon train was a Union force known as Stoneman's Raiders. About the time that Davis was in Charlotte, Stoneman captured Salisbury, NC.

Officials of the bank of Charlotte held about \$40,000 in silver. Fearing Stoneman would next head for Charlotte, the bank prepared to hide the silver coins.

J. Harvey Wilson, one of the directors of the Bank of Charlotte, was given the duty of hiding the coins. Wilson enlisted the aid of his nephew, Capt. White. White was sick and exhausted but found a buggy and loaded the money during a cold rain. Wilson and White, fearing marauders, traveled at night down the old Nation Ford road.

About one mile from the White homestead, they stopped to bury the silver. Having no tools to dig a hole, White approached his father's home from the rear, looking for a shovel. Finding none and afraid he would be detected, he sneaked inside the house and got a fire shovel. It was about 2 a.m. when the men finished their work.

Afraid he might have left signs of his digging, White returned the next day by a circuitous route to the spot where he had placed the silver. After further obscuring the cache with twigs with and branches, White returned home by a different route.

White gave his uncle, who was anxious to return to Charlotte, a horse to ride. He was soon stopped by a group of men who claimed to be Confederates sent by a Gen. Ferguson to secure horses for his forces. They demanded Wilson's horse. But he insisted on personally seeing Ferguson. When one of them grabbed the reins, White threatened to shoot the man. White was warned that he was outnumbered and would surely die.

"Just then Robert Fullwood, a neighbor, came up to the scene steadying by a good walking stick his footsteps, tottering under the load of three score and 10 years." Fullwood also took hold of the bridle, telling the raider that White was his lifelong friend and he would rather die than let them take the horse.

This would most likely not have stopped the raiders, but it happened that another Confederate, Capt. John Mills, a friend of White's, rode up with a company of Alabama men. Mills told the would-be thieves that they had better disperse or he would have them arrested and hanged. They men sullenly departed, vowing vengeance.

A few minutes later, White saw the smoke from the burning railroad trestle over the Catawba River at Nation Ford.

Wilson and White returned to Charlotte "worn out and sick." The old homestead kitchen (a separate building as was typical of the time) was set afire by Union forces but was extinguished. However, the White gin house with 120 bales of cotton and 2,000 bushels of cotton seed was burned.

During their flight south from Charlotte, Jefferson Davis and his cabinet held their final meeting on the front lawn of the

homestead. Three months after the meeting the buried silver was retrieved and returned to the Bank of Charlotte.

John White died in 1877 shortly after building a large Victorian mansion in Fort Mill for his bride. Following White's death, his brother, Samuel White and his wife Esther moved into the mansion with John's widow, Addie. Addie was a sister of Esther.

The house, known as the Founder's House, is across the street from Springs' Executive Office Building and serves as a guest house for Springs Industries.

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