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Towns' growth followed rails

■ Clover named for plants that grew where train spilled water.

Other than their courthouse towns, York, Lancaster and Chester counties had no population centers before the arrival of the railroad.

In 1851, the coming of the CC&A (Charlotte, Columbia and Augusta) Railroad created the towns of Rock Hill and Fort Mill. From that point, we can discern a pattern of town-building that has lasted until this century.

With the railroad came a depot. For the Piedmont farmer, that ended long wagon trips carrying goods (chiefly cotton, but including grains) to sea-ports. Within the year storehouses were built, and the first "town houses" followed. Streets with lots large enough to have a barn or stables in the back were laid out. Ten to 20 years later, the town would incorporate with a mayor and city council, a small police force and a volunteer fire department.

Gradually, other businesses would be established. A cotton gin in town along with a cotton warehouse was likely. Once enough farmers were in place, a variety of small businesses followed, including a lumber company, a

blacksmith shop, a hardware store and a drug store. The first business to employ more than 100 people was invariably a cotton mill.

Take the town of Clover. Before the Civil War, the area was known as Bethel, named for the Bethel Presbyterian Church, which drew a congregation from an area up to 10 miles in all directions.

In 1872, the Kings Mountain Railroad, which had a depot in Yorkville, merged with a N.C. railroad called the Carolina Narrow Gauge. In 1874, tracks were laid through what is now the town of Clover by a man who brought horses and mules from Kentucky to do the work. He called the place Bowling Green, named for his Kentucky home.

The first train arrived two years after the track was laid. There was no regular schedule for the train, which went as far as Gastonia. Without a way to turn the train around, it came back to Clover in reverse. There were three railroad cars. One carried white passengers. One was for black passengers. The third car was for baggage. The people called the train the "Short Bob," named for the engineer, Bob Smyre.

A 5,000-gallon water tank furnished the steam locomotive. The story goes that when the locomotive tanked up, the water frequently spilled onto the ground. At that spot grew a lush crop of clover. The train crew ignored the Bowling Green name and called the village

Clover Patch for the spot in which they killed time by hunting for four-leaf clovers.

Every town has a notable personality. Clover's was "Blind Sam" Campbell who pumped the water into the tank for 15 years. When Campbell was in the Confederate Army, he was shot through the head. The bullet passed just back of the eyes, destroying his sight, but leaving him otherwise healthy. He was a skilled whittler and excellent conversationalist.

Clover got a one-room post office with a pot-bellied stove in 1884. The second postmaster, Josiah I. Gwinn, endeared himself to children by adding a showcase filled with candy, cookies and crackers. Three years later, the town was chartered.

Clover's first cotton mill was built in 1890, three years later than Fort Mill, but financed in much the same fashion. A local citizen, Capt. Beatty Smith, headed a subscription drive. Captain Smith rode a horse from farm to farm selling enough stock to finally set up the Clover Spinning Mill with 3,000 spindles. The cotton mill had come to the cotton fields. In 1899, a mill village was added to accommodate workers making their transition from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy.

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Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Saturdays.



Nearby history

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