

Summer In Fort Mill, 1911

Weather Was Dry, Dust Was Terrible,
And The Road Needed Paving



An old picture from the Ruth Meacham collection shows unidentified Fort Mill citizens around the town pump in front of the

Fort Mill Times. A 1914 fire that destroyed half of downtown led to the town's first waterworks.

FORT MILL — The 1910 census showed Fort Mill to be a small town with a population of 1,616. Fort Mill Manufacturing Co., with two plants, was the major employer. The company had been founded by Capt. S.E. White in the spring of 1887.



Nearby
History

**Louise
Pettus**

The town was incorporated in 1873 but there had been a railroad depot and a scattering of houses and stores since 1852.

In the summer of 1911 so little was happening in Fort Mill that the proprietor of the Fort Mill Times, B.W. Bradford, was pleading with subscribers to send him any news items by appealing to their sense of local pride.

Bradford got some response from "S," who titled his weekly contribution, "Newsy Notes from Gold Hill."

Actually, not much was happening in Gold Hill, either. Week after week, "S" reported such things as the farmers laying by their cotton, the beginning of the cotton picking

season, fodder pulling, that the ladies missionary society had met at Philadelphia Methodist Church, or that the church was planning a "protracted meeting," meaning that they were having a weeklong revival.

One of editor Bradford's projects that summer was pushing the idea of paving Main Street. If it rained, there were mud holes to bog the farm wagons up to the axles. If the weather was dry, the dust was terrible.

The summer of 1911 was so dry that at one point below India Hook dam the Catawba River only measured 10 feet across. Mud was 10 to 15 feet deep along a 10- to 15-mile stretch of the river. The editor blamed Duke Power Co. for keeping back too much water upstream.

When the paper did have something to report, it was done in fine detail. There were few automobiles in Fort Mill. But if there was an accident, the reader found out every detail including the name of the doctor who treated the victim, whether it was the left or right headlamp that was damaged, how many feet the car slid into the ditch, how much insurance the driver had, and other information.

The local militia unit, of which Fort Mill was tremendously proud, all received typhoid shots.

Besides the militia, Fort Mill still had a few Confederate veterans around. One of the veterans, Joseph Parks, celebrated his 87th birthday, and the editor wrote a birthday story that detailed Parks' Confederate service along with the service record of Parks' deceased son, Ledbetter. Joseph Parks had had four wives and 24 children — which made him noteworthy, even if he had not been a revered veteran.

In August, Marshall's Red Shirt Cavalry was reorganized. The Red Shirts dated back to 1876 when they backed Wade Hampton's successful bid for South Carolina governor.

Now, like the Confederate veterans, the Red Shirts had reorganized statewide and were planning a fall convention in Columbia. In fact, many, if not most, of Marshall's Red Shirt Cavalry were Confederate veterans.

All Democrats (all male because women couldn't yet vote) who voted in the 1876, 1878 and 1880 election were invited to join and to go on the planned excursion to Columbia. The

Red Shirt Cavalry held an election and reelected every original officer still living. The 1911 officers: J.W. Marshall, Capt.; S.H. Epps Sr., 1st Lt.; B.M. Faris, 2nd Lt.; W.H. Crook, 1st Sgt.; J.L. Kimbrell, 2nd Sgt.

One of the bits of news that summer: "Tom Hall, young son of Mr. and Mrs. W. Lee Hall, has a sore foot from stepping on a sharp cane that was cut off just above the ground."

Seven years later young Tom Hall would be Sgt. Tom Hall, winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor, one of five earned by South Carolinians in World War I and one of two earned by Fort Mill men. The other medal winner was James Dozier. Dozier survived and later became a general. Tom Hall was killed in action. Tom Hall Street, Fort Mill's longest, is named for him.

•
Louise Pettus is a retired history professor at Winthrop College. Her column appears on Sundays.