The Grange in York County

■ Joint marketing allowed farmers to get better prices than individuals.

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Nearby history

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York County was primarily agricultural before the Civil War, and the war did not change that fact.

For several years following the war, seed was short. Landowners couldn't afford to replace worn-out tools and farm implements, and black people who had worked as slaves had not yet adjusted to a different labor system. However, in spite of all the problems, it took the area only about five years to recover. The cotton crop of 1870 was the largest since 1861.

In spite of federal occupation, life went on, and many large planters finding themselves barred from public office energetically threw themselves into the task of raising better crops.

A part of the stimulus came from the discovery of large deposits of phosphates that would, for the first time, provide an adequate source of fertilizer for depleted fields.

In 1871, a farmer's organization, the Patrons of Husbandry, popularly known as the Grange, came to South Carolina. The Grange furnished agricultural information, informed the farmer of his legal rights and encouraged the farmers to band together for mutual betterment. No S.C. county had a stronger Grange than York County.

Daniel Hill, a York County native who was editor of Southern Home in Charlotte, was one of the leaders who toured the county and spoke to the various Granges. In the summer of 1875, he wrote a series of articles about his experiences.

Hill and Col. Wyatt Aiden, master of the state Grange, met with some 50 Fort Mill Grange members. Also on hand were the Fort Mill Fire Co. — "in their new and handsome uniforms" — and a band that played for a four-hour dance following a "feast for 700." Hill noted that Fort Mill had a Grange Hall, as well as a Masonic hall, two churches, an academy and many stores. The principal streets were Trade, Booth and Secession.

Hill said that Col. John White took them to the showplace farms of his brother, Capt. Samuel White, who later founded Springs Industries Inc. Capt. White had 280 acres of cotton that averaged a bale to the acre. Hill also saw White's Steel Creek grist mill, saw mill and two cotton gins all with new and improved machinery.

Fort Mill township had 32 Grange farms, that is, farms that were operated on the most scientific principles of the day and who joined forces in marketing along the lines of a co-op. By joining, they could market cotton, corn, and wheat by the railroad car load and get better prices than individuals could. Hill said A.S. White's farm was the best cultivated, and Hugh Glestein's was the most self-sustaining.

A week later, Hill was at a Grange meeting at Smith's Turnout on the CC&A Railroad on the York County and Chester County border. There, he got about half Fort Mill's turnout of people and observed that the crops were not as good as Fort Mill's. He thought that Fort Mill's system of annual inspection made the difference. However, the food was just as good with barbecue done by W.C. Hicklin, "a one-armed veteran famed for his culinary arts."

The following week, Hill was at the Grange picnic at Tirzah on the CC&A Railroad, 8 miles from Rock Hill, after passing through "the ancient and honorable village of Ebenezer." At Tirzah, he found the best food anywhere and observed: "That section of York District has always been famed for the beauty of the ladies *not* famed for that quality of the ruder sex." Hill found that Tirzah had good crops and predicted that the Rev. Robert Lathan, pastor of the Tirzah Associate Reformed Church, would get some good fees in the fall. The last is a reference to the fact that farmers had little money to contribute to the church if the crops weren't good.

The Grange died out around 1880, when it was replaced by the more aggressive Farmer's Alliance and the accompanying Tillman movement, as the farmers turned to political action in an effort to solve their problems.

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