

Fort Mill appearance at the time of settlement

The following was written by A. S. White, Feb. 18, 1910, for his daughter, Miss Zoe White.)

The general appearance of this country in this neighborhood during the time of the American Revolution was very different from what it is at this time. From old family records and tradition, and from a very interesting journal of his campaigns in S. C., left by Lord Cornwallis, we can form a tolerably correct notion of how it appeared to those living then.

Within the corporation limits of Fort Mill was an unbroken forest without a cabin or cleared patch of ground. It was pretty much the same in the balance of the township which then went by the name of The Fork, that is the part of York District included between the Catawba River and Sugar Creek. The northeast corner was blackjack and then called prairie from its level, grassy and treeless appearance.

Soon after the country began to be settled a mill was established on Steel Creek where the old Providence road crossed that creek about one and a half miles from the town. A mill being the place where people mostly congregated there was a small store and a post office which went by the name of Webb's Mill. After the mill change the P. O., was moved to the forks of the Saluda and Camden roads opposite the cotton mill of the Fort Mill Manufacturing Co., to the then store of William E. White. They sent on to the P. O. Department (the name) of Fort Hill, for the old fort on the hill where the Spratt residence is, but as there was another Fort Hill postoffice in the state the authorities divided the name and made it Fort Mill, now (1910) grown into a town of near 2000 people.

After the first settlers came in, others would stop and remain. William Elliott, a friend of Thomas Spratt, settled on the east of the spring (Spratt's Spring), and the Erwins, Garrisons, Farises. From an old survey book, compiled by Hugh White, there seem to have been about as many white people living around in the country as there are this time during the last decade of the 18th century.

Cornwallis speaks enthusiastically of the beauty and charm of the upper country after leaving the pinewoods about Camden. He says the whole country looks like an English park, the splendid oak woods are large trees with no underbrush but greensward as far as the eye can reach. (The Indians kept the woods burnt off every spring so as to give chase for hunting). But we call the blackjacks he described as level green prairies with buffalo and deer pasturing over them, and abundance of wild turkey racing through the open woods.

The Catawba tribe of Indians numbered probably about six thousand when Thomas Spratt settled among them. They had two towns within a mile of Fort Mill, one of either side of the road near Warren White's house (Warren White was a negro in 1857 operated a "Freedman" blacksmith shop, his place was on the road from Fort Mill to the Nation Ford, just west of where Fred Nims lives), and one in the old river bottom near the Slab House, besides other towns in different parts of the Indian Land, but soon after the whites came in the smallpox got among them in and reduced their numbers to about one thousand. The land from Warren's house to the river was an Indian field where they cultivated their patches of corn. That work was done altogether by the women. Uncle George once told me about watching of group of women planting corn. They had long handle diggers and dug the holes for seed all around where they stood without any regard to rows of distance between the hills. They must have reaped scanty crops at harvest time.

(Signed) A. S. White