

12-01-00

# Quietly, Fort Mill passes 150 years

This year, Rock Hill has celebrated its sesquicentennial (150 years) anniversary. We have often said that the coming of the CC&A railroad in 1852 created the towns of Rock Hill and Fort Mill. Then isn't this also Fort Mill's sesquicentennial? Or when will, or should have, Fort Mill celebrate (d) its beginnings?

If you think that the date on the incorporation charter would be the correct "birthday" of the town, then let's take a look at those dates. Rock Hill was incorporated in 1870 and Fort Mill in 1873. At that rate, if we use the charter date, Rock Hill jumped the gun and should have waited until 2020 to celebrate a sesquicentennial.

And what does Douglas Summers Brown write in her centennial history, "A City Without Cobwebs, A History of Rock Hill, South Carolina"? On page 80: "On April 17, 1852, Rock Hill was officially recognized and named by the establishment of a United States Post Office, which date has been accepted as the birthday of our city."

So, some time prior to 1952, the Rock Hill Centennial Association chose the Rock Hill Post Office opening date as the date for Rock Hill's birth. Of course, the railroad's coming accounts for the post office, and not vice versa. But for Rock Hill, these two events did pretty much coincide. The tracks of the CC&A (Charlotte, Columbia & Augusta) railroad were in place by June 1852.

Now, apply the same logic to Fort Mill. The first locomotive pulled into Fort Mill on July 4, 1852. The sesquicentennial of the first railroad to pass through this area has happened and Fort Mill ignored it.

But remember that Rock Hill used the post office as its birthday. So when did Fort Mill get a post office by that name? According to U. S. Post Office history the date was Sept. 20, 1833. Or Aug. 10, 1832, when Fort Hill Post Office

### NEARBY HISTORY

Louise Pettus



opened and was recorded as a misspelling. So if Fort Mill accepts Rock Hill's logic, then it should have celebrated its sesquicentennial in 1983.

If we drop the idea of post office name or arrival of a train, then we might ask, "When was there the appearance of a town?" That is, houses and stores on lots that are close together?

David Roddey surveyed Rock Hill and laid off lots on designated streets, so that is pretty straightforward. Roddey's survey was in November 1851, obviously in an-

participation of the coming of the railroad.

Fort Mill apparently had no initial survey. Most of the land of current Fort Mill was leased from the Catawba Indians before leases were recorded or agents appointed (as was true of Rock Hill). Fort Mill's Main Street was close to being a dividing line between the leases of William Elliott and Thomas "Kanawha" Spratt.

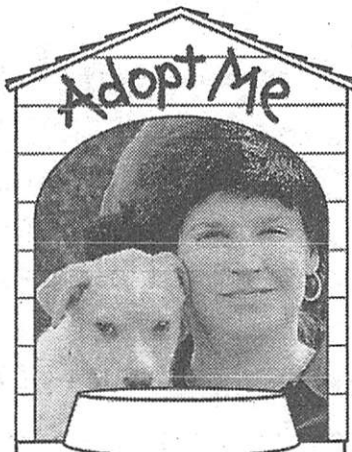
William Elliott White, who built the White Homestead, had inherited land that adjoined Spratt land. White had built the Fort Mill depot on his land and on the "Road to Camden," now S.C. 160.

In January 1851, White erected a store building that he rented to Barnhardt, Coltharp & Co., later called White's Old Store, which housed the Fort Mill post office at

a later date. The second building was the residence of Owen Matthews, built in 1852. The next recorded building was a business operated by John D. White in 1854. So Fort Mill had the beginnings of a town as early as, or earlier than, Rock Hill.

It occurs to us that if Fort Mill will remember to celebrate her bicentennial (carrying the name of Fort Mill for 200 years) she can do it in 2033 and beat Rock Hill by 19 years. But, we'll not advise Fort Mill to start planning its bicentennial now. By that time Fort Mill and Rock Hill may have merged and, dreadful thought, be known as South Charlotte or some such cognomen.

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



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