Fort Mill Sesquicentennial?

This year,2002, 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 three years later, in 1873. At that rate 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 she wrote: "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 in place by June 1852.

Now, apply the same logic to Fort Mill. The first locomotive pulls into Fort Mill on July 4, 1852. Definitely, the sesquicentennial of the first railroad 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 September 20, 1833. Or, August 10, 1832 when Fort Hill Post Office opened and was recorded as a misspelling.

So, if Fort Mill accepts Rock Hill's logic, then she missed the boat and should have celebrated her sesquicentennial in 1983. On the other hand, if Fort Mill will remember to celebrate her bicentennial she can do it in 2033 and beat Rock Hill by 19 years. (However, there is a certain amount of risk in starting the planning now. By that time the two may have merged and—dreadful thought—be known as South Charlotte or some such cognomen.)

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 straight forward. Squire Roddey's survey was November 1851, obviously in anticipation 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 Hwy 160.

In January 1851, White erected a store building that he rented to Barkhardt, 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, or earlier, than Rock Hill.