

Samuel Elliott White Planted Seeds For Greater Things

By **RON CHEPESIUK**
And **LOUISE PETTUS**

Samuel Elliott White (1837-1911) of Fort Mill District led an interesting and eventful life that moved from his agrarian beginnings through the tumult of the Civil War and Reconstruction, to establishing a small cotton mill operation and finally watching his son-in-law, Leroy Springs, lay the foundations of a textile empire.

White was born at the White Homestead (now on the National Register of Historic Places), the son of William Elliott White and Sarah Robinson (Wilson) White.

After mastering the elementary school subjects in Fort Mill, young White attended the Kings Mountain Military Academy in Yorkville. There he received excellent instruction from Col. Asbury Coward and Micah Jenkins.

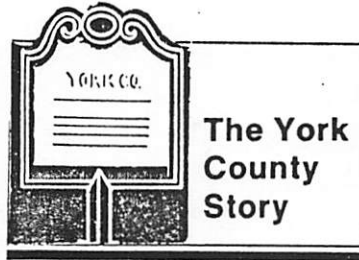
Dismissed from The Citadel during his senior year for leading a student rebellion, White was not ready to settle down to plantation life nor did he follow a military career. Instead, he took off for the West, spending at least two years in Texas and Mexico. He returned to South Carolina just before the state seceded from the Union in 1860.



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With three of his brothers, White organized a company and offered it for the state defense. The state was not quite ready for such volunteer companies.

Samuel Elliott White then enlisted in the 7th North Carolina regiment, in the same company where his brother Edward was a surgeon, and finished the war as captain. He was severely wounded in the Battle of New Bern but remained in service. After the war he served as a colonel of the York County Confederate Veterans, but he preferred his wartime title, and for the rest of his life he was called Capt. White.

On Nov. 21, 1866, Capt. White married Esther Phifer Allison of Concord, N.C. They had four children, but only Grace Allison survived to adulthood. Grace Allison White married Leroy Springs, whose family had deep roots in the Fort Mill district.

In 1886, a group of local Fort Mill men who liked to gather at the bandstand and, in the words of White's only grandchild, Elliot White Springs, "praise General Hampton, compare symptoms and entertain strangers," put their heads together and decided that Fort Mill needed a cotton mill.

It was a brave attempt to end the still-existing agricultural depression that dated back to the end of the Civil War. Elliott Springs liked to point out that not one of

the founders of the mill had any knowledge of cotton manufacturing or corporate finance.

A mass meeting was held, and the Fort Mill Manufacturing Co. was established with Samuel E. White as president, J.L. Watson vice president and J.M. Spratt as secretary-treasurer. White acted as the surveyor for laying of the first building and also was the cotton grader.

Later a second plant was added. Cotton mill operation was subject to severe ups and downs. In 1901, at one of the low points, Samuel Elliott White happily retired and handed over the reins of his Fort Mill businesses to his son-in-law, Leroy Springs.

White contributed more than mills to his home community. In the park are four statues for which he supplied much of the money — one is in honor of the faithful slaves, another in honor of Confederate women, and one to the Catawba Indians. The fourth statue honors the Confederate soldiers with the names of 169 soldiers from Fort Mill district.

Described as a man of "genial temperament and magnetic personality," White was also known as an extensive reader with a keen mind and a gift of expression. He died in Lancaster on March 4, 1911.

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