# Has Fort Mill found a father?

■ William Elliott White is town's likely candidate.

**Nearby history**

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There is no tradition of a founding father of Fort Mill, but if the town should ever find itself in need of one, the best candidate for that title would be William Elliott White.

White was one of the supporters of the Charlotte, Columbia and Augusta Railroad (C.C.& A.), and it was on White's land that a depot was built in 1852. The depot stimulated a demand for business lots nearby, and White owned the land that is now called downtown Fort Mill.

The first business house actually preceded the depot. It was built by White in January 1851 and was first rented to Barnhardt, Coltharp and Co. For many years this building was known as "White's Old Store."

The second store was operated by a cousin, John D. White. Unfortunately for John White, he made a mistake in moving to Texas, where he was murdered by highwaymen some time before the Civil War.

Between the construction of the first two stores, there was a residence built by Owen Matthews. After John White's store, the fourth building was another residence. It was built by Dr. Benjamin Morris Cobb. He wasn't the first doctor in the area, but he was the first to live in the village.

Next was another store, this one called Morrow and Potts. In 1854 that store had the distinction of being the first building in town to burn down.

By the time the Civil War broke out, there were additional stores and residences. All the land was sold to the newcomers by William Elliott White.

The land for the village was only a small part of White's acreage. The Agricultural Census of 1850 showed that White owned 3,026 acres, of which 760 acres were in crops.

The origin of his land holdings stretched back to his grandfather, William Elliott. Elliott was one of the first settlers to lease land from the Catawba Indians along with Thomas "Kana-wah" Spratt, the Erwins, and Barnetts (Elliott married Mary Barnett, granddaughter of Thomas Spratt). That was in the mid-1760s, after the end of the French and Indian War.

William Elliott's daughter, Martha, married Capt. Joseph White and they had one child, William Elliott White, born in 1803. Capt. White died the next year. Martha Elliott White died in 1819 at age 44, leaving her minor son an estate valued at more than $23,000 which included 697 acres of land in two tracts leased from the Catawba Indians.

One of the plats showed the old Unity cemetery and the land so situated that it is undoubtedly the land on which eventually William Elliott White built the depot and the downtown Fort Mill buildings.

Before he was 21 years of age, young White also inherited one-third of the estate of his uncle, Samuel Elliott. On his uncle's leased land, White built a fine home in 1831, now a Fort Mill landmark known as the White Homestead.

At the White Homestead in the spring of 1865, William Elliott White hosted Jefferson Davis and the members of the Confederate cabinet on their flight from Richmond.

William Elliott White and his wife, Sarah Robinson Wilson, had nine children — five sons and four daughters. The best known of the children is Samuel Elliott White, who founded Fort Mill Manufacturing Company, the first mill of the Springs Industries Inc. textile empire.

White and his wife moved to Charlotte in 1857. Sarah White died there in 1864, and in 1866 William White was buried beside her in Elmwood Cemetery in downtown Charlotte.

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