

# FORT MILL TIMES

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## York County has peaches and grapes

### Fort Mill Times

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York County has always been "good country" for the growing of peaches and grapes. The first settlers reported the Indians served them stewed peaches, and old plats and deeds occasionally show an area marked "orchard."

The Catawba grape, found growing wild in this area, was of such high quality that migrating pioneers carried root stock with them and propagated the choice purple grape all across the eastern United States.

By the early 1800s many of the plantation owners had well-established orchards of a wide variety of fruit trees and grape vines. Before cold storage and canneries, the farmer either grew his own or did without. Over time, the growers discovered from experience which were the best varieties, the best types of soil, and how to make their orchards most productive.

By 1858, the Southern Pomological Society had been formed by leading growers. This society was an outgrowth of York District's Indian Land Society, an agricultural society, whose major officers were Andrew B. Springs, D. D. Moore, and S.S. Elam.

The Southern Pomological Society met in Charlotte on Nov. 4, 1858. The convention was chaired by Maj. A.B. Springs of Fort Mill District. Permanent officers elected were Dr. W. R. Wylie of Chester District, president; Richard Austin Springs, who lived on Springsteen plantation near Rock Hill, vice president; and A.B. Springs, a member of the executive committee.

The *Yorkville Enquirer* in 1858 wrote about A.B. Springs: "Major Springs is the most assiduous cultivator of fine fruit in the whole country and can boast of an orchard of the rarest and most delicious fruits. His selections of stock are from the nurseries of the South, and constitute much of the variety that produce through the entire fruit season."

The newspaper article concluded that Andrew Springs's fruit cultivation had two major benefits beyond the enjoyment of eating the fruit. His orchard was also an "agreeable pastime" and his neighbors gave him their "kind congratulations" for his generosity in sharing his fruits.

The *Yorkville Enquirer*, Aug. 18, 1859, reported that Capt. Simril of York had a "grapery more luxuriantly and practically beautiful than a dozen flower-gardens." The newspaper pronounced York District's climate as nearly perfect for the growing of the vine.

The *Enquirer* also noted that the district was a strong temperance area with a thriving "cold-water army." The paper suggested that "By way of encouragement, suppose our Temperance friends (who rule the ranche) incorporate into their pledge a special exemption to those who get drunk on wine of their own manufacture."

During the Civil War, Jonathan L. Sutton, who lived on Turkey Creek, regularly advertised his distillery. Under the headline, "GRAPES, GRAPES" Sutton instructed, "Gather all you can and bring them to me, and I will distill them for one third of the spirits....I will give \$1 per bushel for persimmons -- to 500 bushels to be delivered to the distillery." Sutton later stated that the persimmons ran 12 bushels to the barrel.

In the 1920s there was a revival of interest in peach growing. Prices paid by Northern markets were tempting. Elliott White Springs, grandson of Maj. Andrew Baxter Springs, after being fired from his cotton mill job by his father, decided to combine a writing career and farming. One of his efforts was directed at establishing commercial peach orchards.

By the 1950s Elliott Springs was selling 25 varieties of peaches and nectarines to New York markets and getting top prices. The Springs peach orchards are still flourishing.

Going out to the orchards and picking your own fresh fruit or stopping at a neighborhood peach stand is a York County tradition of long standing. May it continue.

- *Louise Pettus is a renowned local historian. "Fort Mill History" is sponsored each month by the Fort Mill Downtown Association. Check them out on the Web at [www.fortmilldowntown.com](http://www.fortmilldowntown.com).*

Fort Mill History

By Louise Pettus