Residents of the Past

The year was 1831, when Eldred Hale and his brother, traveled through what now is the town of Mt. Vernon, on their way from Wiota to Fort Winnebago (now Portage), with a load of goods to make a final payment to the Winnebago natives for their lands. The route through the Mt. Vernon area was a mere footpath at the time. The first pioneer family to settle in the Mt. Vernon area was the George Patchin family who traveled here in 1846 by wagon from Ohio. Their cabin was built near the Big Spring because wood and water were necessary for existence, and here they were both plentiful. On December 22, 1846, their son, David Patchin, was born. It was in 1847 that Joel Britts came to Primrose and acquired 200 acres of land including the present site of Mt. Vernon. In 1849, George Britts built a water powered saw mill. The Britts family had originated in the state of Virginia, and named their new home in Wisconsin after Mt. Vernon, Virginia. George Britts platted the village of Mt. Vernon in the years 1850 and 1851, and built a home. It was built on the farm now owned by William & Cindi Haack. In 1852, Dr. P. Byam obtained possession of the village site and much of the adjoining land. Because of dishonest marketing and deceptive land sale practices, the Byam family was thrown out of town in 1859. In 1858, the original grist mill was built by Edward Britts and Charles Smith. The grist mill was a valuable addition to the town as it brought farmers from long distances into town to have their grains milled. They would then make purchases at the stores and business in Mt. Vernon, and would stay overnight in the hotel.

In 1852 there were only 12 families in Mt. Vernon. By 1880 there were over 100 inhabitants. Many businesses were operated by the early village residents. Hall C. Chandler built the first general store in 1848. John Jones Sr. kept the first hotel and later operated the grist mill. His hotel stood where Harland Erfurth's garage now stands. The hotel served pioneer teamsters hauling load oar with ox teams from the mines of southwestern Wisconsin to Milwaukee. Mr. C. W. Karn operated the grist mill after Jones, and Karn then made several improvements to the mill. In 1852, Mr. Charles C. Allen built and operated the Hotel De Allen, with a saloon and a stable on the west side of the river. Before the Civil War, William W. Minor had a boot and leather goods shop where he did his own tanning.

Below: The Mt. Vernon Creamery located on the corner of Washington and 2nd Streets circa 1890. Later converted to the Dance Hall. -Courtesy of The Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society, Inc.
1852

MOUNT VERNON
WITH BYAM'S ADDITION DANE COUNTY, WIS.
RECORDED OCT 9, 1852.
SCALE 1'-400 LINKS
E. MILLER C.E.

STATE OF WISCONSIN
DANE COUNTY

ON THIS FOURTH DAY OF OCTOBER IN THE YEAR EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY TWO,
BEFORE THE UNDERSIGNED, A NOTARY PUBLIC IN AND FOR SAID STATE, PERSONALLY APPEARED PHILANDER BYAM,
WHOSE LATER SIGNATURE APPEARS ABOVE WRITTEN TO ME WELL KNOWN TO BE THE PERSON WHO EXECUTED THE
FORGOING PLAT AND ACKNOWLEDGED SO MUCH THEREOF AS IS NOT ENGRAVED IN A PLAT AS IS DULY RECORDED IN PLAT
BOOK NO. 10, LAID OUT BY GEORGE BRITTS AND SO MUCH THEREOF AS IS KNOWN AS LEONARD LEWIS'S ADDITION TO THE
TOWN OF MOUNT VERNON GIVEN UNDER MY HAND AND OFFICIAL SEAL THIS FOURTH DAY OF OCTOBER EIGHTEEN HUNDRED
AND FIFTY TWO.

Reproduction of Copy of Original Plat
Furnished by Dane County Title Company

James L. Powell
Notary Public, Wisconsin

-Courtesy of the Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society, Inc.

MT. VERNON 1846-1996
and there was also an Erick Erickson who made shoes. John Dick had a shoe shop in 1867. It stood where Libby Sherwood now lives. Mr. William W. Abbot ran a blacksmith shop from 1852 until the 1880’s. It stood on the spot where H.C. Erfurth later had a slaughter house. In 1868, Andrew Peterson owned a blacksmith shop with Pete Peterson operating it some years later. Moses Way operated a restaurant, and he ran a barber shop, and in 1895 he sold his shops to Jason Black. Clark Lewis and John Korner were carpenters, and P. E. Call had a harness shop and made saddles. M. F. Van Norman was a live stock buyer, and George Wade was a butcher. William J. Donald was the first doctor in town in 1863, and Issac G. Brader kept a general store and served as postmaster in 1872.

The early plat of the village of Mt. Vernon that was drawn up by George Britts in 1851, and expanded upon later by Dr. P. Byam, once boasted of thirty or more town blocks, with streets bearing the names of such revolutionary heroes as, Franklin, Washington and Jackson, among others. The main road, running north to south through the town, now highway 92, was appropriately named Washington Street. The main business street, running east and west was known as Main street. The public square was bounded by Washington, Jackson, Penn, and Green Streets. The town was originally to have had two public squares, according to the plat map. It was in 1880, that construction of the railroad west of Madison was begun. The railway ended up taking a path through Verona, Riley, Klevenville and Mt. Horeb, bypassing Mt. Vernon. This affected the future growth of Mt. Vernon as some merchants moved to where the railroad was more accessible. Today, only one public square actually exists, the Forest of Fame Park. Many of the 30 town blocks originally platted were never built. The Mt. Vernon plat, as printed in an 1873 plat book, also listed the following people as businessmen: William H. Brunneil, blacksmith and machinist; John McGregor, blacksmith and farrier; Patrick Carr, dry goods and groceries, boots, shoes and crockery; Andrew Peterson, blacksmith and machinist; Michael Johnson and John Eggum, farmers and stock growers, and A. O. Lee, cabinet maker.

In 1877, Onon B. Dahle moved to Mt. Vernon from Daleyville and took over the Brader store

Below: Gathering of the Ladies Aid of the Baptist Church circa 1890’s
-Courtesy of Bernice Moore.
and Postmaster position. He had previously built a store in Daleville after finding his fortune in gold in California. In 1887, his son, Herman, went to Mt. Horeb and started the Dahle Brothers store there. Herman later became a congressman serving the 2nd district. In 1878, F. A. Fix opened a saloon and hotel. A. D. Coleman also came to Mt. Vernon in 1878. He was a carriage and wagon manufacturer, repairer and painter until 1884. Harry Watt was a cheesemaker and Stephan W. Ellis came to town as a general merchant in 1879. John Barness opened a furniture store and made coffins in 1884. The clerk at the school was E. C. Pierce for many years, and later, Luther D. Robbins looked after the school finances, as well as building cabinets and coffins on the side. Stephen Foye & sons, Carl Neihus and Carl Erfurth did mason work, and Carl Bieri was a cheesemaker who also made Swiss cow bells. Ray Morris operated a store for a time, and a Litheuser also ran a general store. Otto Sundquist was a carpenter, and Frank Coward had a shoe shop. In 1886, there was a James Haines who dealt in lumber, coal and machinery. Gust Huebbe had a harness making shop, and Jim Smith had a store on the site of the building now occupied by the Stapelmann family. Warren Chandler was a stock buyer, and Tom Everill printed a newspaper called the Mt. Vernon Enterprise in 1891. Otto Hacker opened a barber shop on the corner where Sparky's Bar now stands, and there was C. J. Weltzin who ran a general store and pulled teeth part time. In 1893, the creamery was sold to Frank Moore, Jr. for $2,500.00. The newspaper reported that he would charge 1 1/2 cents for making cheese and 3 3/4 cents for butter, and 2 cents per 100 pounds milk rent.

In the early 1900's, Emil Koch operated an implement business at the sight of the present J & W Bar, and August and Herbert Koch operated a department and grocery store at the site of the apartment house that is next to the bar. Across Main Street from the Koch brothers stores, Will and Burt Chandler had a large general store. The Sinako brothers later operated this store, at which time it burnt down. George and Herman Lee sold machinery at the site of Harland Erfurth's garage. The telephone company was started in 1901 by the Moore brothers, William and Frank. John C. Gunderson operated a general store from 1918 to 1923. George Orr built the grist mill as it now stands. Fred and Ferdinand Koch operated the mill for many years, selling it to Herbert Hankel in 1946. Waldo Disch took over the mill in 1953.

In 1946, when Mt. Vernon celebrated its 100th anniversary, some of the prominent businessmen were, Andrew Nelson, who kept the store, Herbert Hankel, who operated the mill, and Miner Marty, who was a blacksmith. The two garage owners were Rodney Kollath and Alfred Eggimann. H. C. Erfurth was an auctioneer, and one tavern was run by Eli Kobbervig and the other by Louise Eggimann. And, of course, there were many local farmers. It was their patronage for the previous 100 years that had kept all of these Mt. Vernon shopkeepers in business.
Mount Vernon - by Dr. W. J. Donald, 1877

The following description of Mt. Vernon was written by Dr. W. J. Donald and included in the book titled, "History of Madison, Dane County and Surroundings," published by WM. J. Park & Co. in 1877. Dr. Donald wrote:

"This village, of about one hundred inhabitants, is situated on the middle branch of the Sugar river, nineteen miles southwest of Madison. The location is a pleasant one, the greater part being on the East bank of the river, while on the west side, some high rocks and hills add to the picturesqueness of the scenery. On one of these rocks grew an old pine tree that was an ancient landmark to the early settlers, and a noted object of interest to visitors because of its marked distinction from all surroundings. It was blown down by a wind-storm on the evening of January 1, 1876.

The surrounding country, though rolling, is productive, and well adapted to the raising of stock and dairy purposes, and inhabited by a thrifty class of farmers, mostly of German and Norwegian origin.

The health of the place is excellent, with a remarkable exemption from epidemics, particularly scarlet fever, and cases ofague are rare.

Two religious societies are here represented, Baptist and Methodist. The Baptists have a good church edifice. The Methodists hold service in the school-house, a good stone building.

The never failing Sugar river affords two excellent water powers, with only one, as yet, improved. Its distance from Madison and other villages makes it a good point for business of all kinds; not one, in truth, can be said to be overdone. Those in business here have been, in most every instance, successful, and have continued residents of the place for many years. Mr. John Jones, proprietor of the flouring mill, learned his business here, and afterward became partner, and again eight years ago, proprietor, while he now rents the mill to C. W. Karn. Mr. I. G. Brader, Sr., who keeps an excellent general store, has been in business, with a little exception, for the past eighteen years, and has held the office of postmaster continuously since 1856. Mr. C. C. Allen furnishes a good hotel, and lately erected new buildings for the better accommodation of the traveling public.

Dr. William J. Donald, after a year's respite from business, is at his post again, as in the past eleven years. Mr. W. W. Abbott, blacksmith, and C. J. Lewis, builder and carpenter, have been residents of the place for the past twenty-five years, and in active business. Among others doing business and generally prospering may be mentioned: Foye and Rea, masons; W. W. Miner, boots and shoes; M. F. Van Norman, live stock buyer; Andrew Peterson, blacksmith; Erick Erickson, shoemaker; P. E. Call, saddler; F. A. Fix, hotel and saloon; George Wade, butcher; C. H. Lewis, carpenter; A. C. Brader, clerk; I. G. and A. C. Brader were in the mercantile business until two years ago. I. G. Brader, Jr., removed to Iowa, but has recently returned, and built himself a residence, and expects to resume business soon."

---

Right:
View looking west up Main Street (now Davis St.) toward the Mill Dam with the Mill Hill in the distance.
-Courtesy of the Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society, Inc.
THE PATCHIN FAMILY

The first immigrant pioneer settlers in the Mt. Vernon area were the Patchin family. George Patchin and his wife, Sophronia Nash Patchin, traveled from Ohio in the spring of 1846 to the Mt. Vernon area. They made the trip by lumber wagon before settling close by the “Big Spring” in Mt. Vernon. They built a cabin and later exchanged the property for that of Philaner Nash’s in Primrose township, which later became the Josiah La Follette property.

In the “Story of Primrose Township”, written in 1895 by Albert Barton, George Patchin’s son writes an eloquent account of life in the area. W.W. Patchin writes,

“One pleasant feature of pioneer life was the fraternal disposition of the settlers. This was shown especially in the matter of cabin building. Cabin buildings were usually most jolly seasons. The settlers welcomed the new arrival by helping him build his cabin and were glad of an opportunity to get together and help each other. In building, four good men, skilled with axes, stood on the growing building, rising log by log, one at each corner, to flatten and fit each his end of the log. During and after the raising there was generally, considerable fun in one way or another, and afterward a lunch if circumstances were at all favorable.”

At one cabin raising on a warm day Patchin recalled that so many of the men suffered from fever that they could hardly lift the logs. But as dinner was brought to the men, the cook was heard to remark, “Boys there’s no problem with your lifting now.” One day was all that was required to raise a cabin. Over the years the neighbors continued to rely on one another. Harvesting crops, threshing and barn raising, brought neighbors together and made the hardest of jobs a lot easier.

THE BYAM EPISODE

The Byam family of Mt. Vernon will stand out in village history for the colorful shenanigans that they brought to the area. Dr. Philander Byam and his two brothers sold patent rights for butter churns, and buggy springs. Many of the local farmers of the area were taken into their bogus scheme and lost money in the dealings. The Byams also owned land in the area. They went to Brockland, New York and sold village lots at vastly inflated prices by showing pictures that misrepresented the properties. Pictures of Mt. Vernon with a steamboat in a large river were shown to prospective buyers. One eastern family, the Tilton’s, bought property in the village for $1,200, sight unseen. On the night of October 24, 1859, local townspeople sick of the antics of the Byams, took the law into their own hands and drove the unsavory Byams from the area. A band of nearly seventy people, led by R.B. Chandler, rallied and marched to Mt. Vernon determined to oust the brothers. They marched to the home of Dr. Byam, just south of the mill, and called out for Dr. Byam, who sent his wife out instructing...
her to tell the mob he wasn’t home. The mob however, knowing that the Doctor was in, began to tear down the house using axes and crowbars. Finally the doctor made his presence known by yelling out, “If it weren’t for the infant in the cradle here, a half dozen of you would by lying dead out there.” Mr. Chandler yelled back, “Mr. Byam will you please come down and go with us over to the mill, we’re going to hold a meeting there.” After pledging that no harm would befall him, Byam was persuaded to go with the group. At the mill a trial was held and it was decided that Dr. Byam and his brothers would have to leave. Col. Kelly of Mt. Vernon declared, “Now Mr. Byam, and that means every Byam in Mt. Vernon, there is one of two things you can do, either leave Mt. Vernon, every soul of you, inside of 24 hours, or stay and be hanged.” A brother who lived in a cabin by the “Big Rock” received tar and feathering that night. The next morning the Byams hired teams and wisely moved to Madison. One of the brothers did return to the area for a load of hay, but on the top of the Mill Hill he was apprehended and the wagon and hay was set on fire, causing quite a spectacle. In 1860, the Byams decided to sue the townspeople involved in the incidence and filed a suit for $10,000 dollars. The case ended in acquittal for the defendants, but the townspeople did have to pay the court costs of $78.26.

Below: Dredging the Mill Pond with horses and wheel scrapers when the Koch brothers operated the mill in 1919. Courtesy of Herbert Hankel.

**Mary Adiliner’s Bible**

By William “Pete” Way

It seems history can go back a long way. Where do I start? How about Grandma Mitchell’s bible? My mother gave it to me for safe keeping several years ago, and I treasure it deeply. It holds the 23rd Psalm that Grandma recited to us often and taught to us children as we were growing up. She’s been gone for 25 years now and was 100 years old when she passed away. Mt. Vernon was just 25 years old when she was born. Grandma kept part of our family history in her bible, and in it I found the birth dates of her parents and other family members who were all born in the early 1800s and who all played a role in the history of Mt. Vernon.

Her father, Eldred S. Hale, was born on April 13, 1816. In a book titled, “The Story of Primrose Township”, published in 1895, my Great-grandfather, Eldred, told the story of how he first came to Mt. Vernon and what life was like then. He was said to be the first immigrant settler to have visited Mt. Vernon in 1831. Here is what he wrote in 1895:

“My father was drawn to the lead regions of northern Illinois and was killed by the Indians there in the Blackhawk War of 1832. I served in Fort Wiota as a guard of the women and children during that war. The year before this (1831), I made a wagon trip with my brother, “Wash”, from Wiota to Fort Winnebago (now the city of Portage). We went
over the present road leading from Mt. Vernon to Postville which was then only an Indian trail and carried with us a load of goods for the Indians and our last payment for their lands. We camped out wherever night overtook us, propping up our wagon pole with a stick and throwing a canvas over it for a tent. We came back around Lake Mendota at Madison, the region being then, of course, a wilderness. Madison had then contained only one building, a small double log cabin occupied by a Frenchman and his wife.

I brought the first span of horses to Primrose, I believe. We had no roads in those days, of course, but we got along anyway, all we needed was an ax to cut our way thorough the woods and a spade for cutting down the embankments of the streams and crossing. Wood and water determined cabin locations. Destructive prairie fires would sweep over the country. Game, especially of the smaller kind, was exceedingly plentiful, so much so that I have seen small knolls covered with rabbits and other game during the progress of a prairie fire. Roving bands of Indians were quite numerous at first, but they gave us little trouble.

The Indians all knew us as Hale brothers and were afraid of us as they knew we hated them for killing our father. Once in the early days, my brother, Wash, saw an Indian chasing a deer over the hill past my cabin here. He took down his rifle and went out to meet him, but the Indian was afraid and fled back westwards. “Wash” followed him until he reached their camp on the Barton farm. He walked right into camp with his rifle on his shoulder and told the Indians they must get out. They feared us and in a day or two, were gone.”

The stories kept in my Grandmother’s Bible also tell that Eldred Hale’s wife and my Great-grandmother, Mary Jones Hale, was born on May 11, 1832, and died 90 years later on March 20, 1922. Her family also played an important role in the history of Mt. Vernon. She was born in Wales and came to America in 1843. Her father, John Jones, operated the first hotel in Mt. Vernon, serving pioneer teamsters hauling lead ore with ox teams from the mines of southwestern Wisconsin to Milwaukee. She and Eldred were among the first settlers in the town of Primrose. When she died in 1922, an era died with her.

My Great-grandparents lived in very exciting, yet difficult times. The Winnebago, who had occupied the land for hundreds of years, had agreed to sell the first part of their land in 1829. They soon found out that this meant they would have to leave. Fear and distrust separated the Winnebago from the settlers and intensified the kind of hatred my Great-grandfather felt toward them for having lost his father in the Blackhawk Wars. The settlers did not comprehend the hardships that the native people faced having to leave their ancestral homes forever. Unfortunately, my Grandmother’s Bible does not record the births

Below: An early Arbor Day celebration in Mt. Vernon, circa 1910. The Baptist Church and the grist mill are in the background.
-Courtesy of the Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society, Inc.
and deaths of the Native American families who lived on the branch of the Sugar River at the site of Mt. Vernon before my Great-grandfather arrived. But, it is important that we today, do remember the very first inhabitants of the Mt. Vernon area and perceive the hardships that they were forced into by the immigrant settlement of the area.

**Mt. Vernon Civil War Connection**

On April 24th, 1861, James H. Smith enlisted in the Union Army. He had been serving as Mt. Vernon's Post Master. On May 24th of the same year, three others from the Mt. Vernon area signed up to serve in the Union cause. William Minor, a tanner, curer and shoemaker in the village, Henry A. Smith, and William E. Moon would join James Smith and go on to fight with the 2nd Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry. They all held the distinction of being chosen to serve in an elite section of the regiment called the “Randall Guards,” which would be similar to the Green Berets of our time. All but William E. Moon returned from the war, no small feat in a regiment that lost nearly one fifth of its enrollment in battle or to disease.

William Minor was 41 years of age when he enlisted. He left a wife and three children when he entered the service to go to the far away battlefields of Bull Run, Gainesville, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. After the battle of Gettysburg, Minor was one of only 69 able body men left from the regiment to fight. He went on to fight in the battle of the “Wilderness,” a battle in which every officer in the regiment was either killed or incapacitated. Minor himself lost a leg in the battle, and mustered out while resting in a hospital in September of 1864.

Henry Smith also left a wife and two sons behind to go to war, and James Smith, who was a Sergeant Major, was the only one of the four to rise above the rank of private. William Moon, a schoolteacher in Primrose, was the only casualty of the four, he died in the battle at Gainesville. He, like so many others, had enlisted for three years, or the duration of the war. Most thought the war would be short lived, but, the war dragged on for what must have seemed an eternity. What was short lived however, were the lives of many thousands of men thrown into battle.

Although not part of the elite Randall Guards, many other Mt. Vernon area men enlist-