The town of Vermont was politically a part of Blue Mounds until 1856 when its settlers perfected a local self-government. Among its first Norse settlers from 1849 and on we find Erik K. Sevre, Ole Brunsvold, Mikkil K. Blekkelien, Halvor Ruste, Arne Mikkelson, Ole Grotodden, Halvor Bakkene, B. Nees, Arne Vasfaret, Harold Vasfaret, Christian Vestrom, Gul Kantum, Jørgen Haugen, Halstein Nordby, Harald Brager, Peter Brager, Ole Brager, Hans Tomptene, Mikkil L. Tolebraaten, Ole Bakken, Ole Langedragslien, Arne Haugen, Ole Tollefson, Anders Espelien, Gulbran Ingemoen, Ole O. Thorsrud, Thord Mikkelsen, Anders Winden, Barsness, Amund Hillestad, Peter Moe, Einer Milleison, Hans Opsal, Iver Brennum, Knudt Hornet, Knudt Kjorstad, Jens Moen, Thomas K. Lee, Mrs. Thomas K. Lee (Syverud), Ole Syvrud, Gul Olson, Gilbert Halstein, Halstein G. Docken, Arne Steensrud, Anders Stensrud, Ole Flashaugen, Gulbran Docken, Aamund Hillestad, Anders S. Oberbo, Mr. Wilken, Store Lars, Ole Hagen, and P. C. Paulson.

CHAPTER III.

Pioneer Life 1846-54.

Having seen how the settlers scattered themselves thruout the various towns, it might not be amiss to try and lift the veil of the past and get a glimpse of some of the hardships that had to be gone thru in those earlier days.

What bothered the early settlers the least was their worldly possessions. The majority of them had a few clothes packed in a “drag-kiste,” or had them tied in a “skaut.” Very few had any
money left after the voyage, with which to buy their own yoke of oxen, to say nothing about buying land. Land at this time sold for a dollar and a quarter per acre but still it was too far out of reach of the poor immigrants. The first requisite of the pioneers was to get a hut or a “dug-out” to protect themselves from the elements of the weather; until this was ready they found shelter under extending cliffs and large trees. The later arrivals found shelter among these earlier pioneers until they were able to build a hut of their own. It is almost incredible how many people and families one of these ordinary 12x14 log-houses could accommodate, but it was “hjerte-rum” that counted in those days and good reason why.

An Old “Dug-Out”

An interesting anecdote is told of a large family that arrived in the early sixties. They temporarily overwintered in an evacuated “dug-out,” which was so low that the massive Viking had to go
outside to put on his coat, and when the older girls came home
for Christmas (having been out to work and acquired some
style), had to leave their wide hoop skirts outside as there was
not room for them in the little hut.

In the timbering of their abodes, the Norsemen’s agility in
swinging the axes and their strength in rolling up the heavy logs,
which the annual prairie fires had left, became a valuable asset.
The first dwellings were very primitive indeed, four walls made
of heavy logs which were again plastered with clay, a dirt floor,
a little door, a half sized window, and a hay roof. It was not
long, however, before improvements manifested themselves in
the floors which were now made from heavy timbers split in
two, the smooth side being placed up. The roofs were made
from somewhat the same material and ingeniously “locked”
together, as such a thing as nails was an unthot of luxury in
those days.

It was not an unusual thing for a neighbor to walk many miles
to another family to borrow some flour or salt. The food
supplies were almost invariably brot up from Koshkonong or
Milwaukee in the spring time of the year, and this supply would
have to last until the next trip would be made a year later. Thus,
if a family ever ran out of any of the necessary food supplies,
brotherly love would have to be practiced among the other
settlers, or the unfortunate family would have to make the best
of the situation.

Now we come to the essential adjunct of the family which has
stayed us these seventy years with ever increasing fidelity,
namely, the buying of a cow. If it happened to be the last part of
the summer the settler would swing the “arm strong mower”
and put up a winter supply of hay before leaving his wife and children to take care of themselves. Then he would tramp the country in search of work. Among some of the earlier and better situated settlers work could be had at any season, paying the enormous sum of fifty cents a day during harvesting and

1854

corn husking while in the winter six dollars a month was the average price paid for rail-splitting.

1914

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The early settlers had to rely chiefly on the lead ore mines of Wiota, Mineral Point, Crow Ranch, Miflin, and Blue Mounds for the sale of their labor. Some of the pioneers even rafted down the rivers to the south to cut wood thruout the winter months.

No homestead law was yet in force, all land was offered for sale by the government at $1.25 per acre; after being on the market for a certain length of time it was reduced to $1.00 and later to seventy-five cents per acre. It was often customary for the settlers to live on Uncle Sam’s generosity for a year or two before filing their claims and paying the government’s price. This method of disposing the land was however, destined to be short lived as it was not long before a different view formulated itself. As the land became settled its scarcity began to be realized and consequently its standard of value rose in direct proportion. This was also the time when that bug commonly known as the “land shark” or “speculant” and the money men from the East bought up the remaining tracts of land, and as the poor settlers accumulated enough money to buy an acre or two to add to the few they had, they were forced to pay them a large royalty together with a semiannual interest ranging all the way from 12 to 35 per cent.

In the spring the settlers had to busy themselves in preparing the few acres of land which they had cleared to plant their wheat and corn. Then next in order was to get this little piece of land fenced, either with a rail or sod fence, the latter being one half ditch and the other half sod, rock, or dirt piled up by the side of the ditch. The live stock had the “run of the range” as hay was always plentiful.
The breaking of the virgin soil was no easy task. It required ten oxen well broke and strong to turn the massive furrows of two feet or more, at the same time pulling out and turning all the second growth trees which the oxen could wade over, and circling about the Centenarians which had withstood the prairie fires for ages.

The virgin soil had only to be “tickled” before she responded most generously with a bountiful crop of golden grain. Harvesting at this time was of the crude and patience testing

Threshing Scene in 1850's

type. At sun rise the sturdy Norseman could be seen going to his field to reap the results of his labor. Picture to yourself the scene of our early forefathers as they swung with dexterity the massive hand-cradles and laid the yellow grain in swaths, later to be picked up and bound by their “better halves,” then shocked and carried into stacks. After this a still more difficult proposition presented itself to the immigrants, namely, the thrashing of the crops.
One of the early methods in vogue was to have the oxen tramp the kernels out. The frozen ground was made smooth and clean, the open sheaves were laid in a circle and two yokes of oxen were driven around and around until the kernels were out. Then the straw would be shaken and often the chaff would be fanned off with a hand-pan. This method of thrashing was a very laborious one to say nothing of its cleanliness.

One difficulty followed the other and the bothersome problem of getting the grain to the mill was not an exception to the general rule of affairs to the immigrant. The mills were up to thirty miles or more away, which was the distance the early pioneers had to travel with their loads of grain transported in a "kubbe-rulle" by a yoke of oxen. Often they had to travel greater distances in order to avoid rivers, creeks, and other impassable places. On arriving at the mill the driver would have to await his turn, which would often take days. The food for the driver and his yoke of oxen would always be supplied from his home as this tedious trip would often take a week. One of these early landmarks was the "Smit Mylla" (Moscow) where a "groseri" or country store was in operation for a long time. Pokerville, situated at the foot of the "Mounds" was also a lively and prosperous trading place decades of years—before "Straangji" (later called Mount Horeb) was ever thought of.

CHAPTER IV.
Early Religious Services and Schools.
1850-54.

Our early pioneers had not more than settled down and estab-