

Daniel Hahn



Daniel Hahn—grandfather of Cedar Rapids' Mayor. Many claim he was Mount Vernon's first settler.

## Chapter 2

### A Chronicle Of Two Decades: 1840-1860

By the end of 1838 approximately fifty people, possibly ten families, had settled in and around the Mount Vernon area. In the absence of newspapers of that early day exact figures and dates of arrival are difficult to obtain.

#### 1840

Prairie grass grew rank and high over the wind-swept hilltop of what is now Mount Vernon. Tall elms, oaks, linden trees, perhaps a hundred years old grew on the west slope of the hill; and a less coverage of wild plum and crabapple trees sent forth delicious aroma in the spring. At the foot of the east end of the hill was a copious spring of water where travelers would stop to quench their thirst. A rough trail, widened by "stoneboats" which oxen pulled, ran steeply up the present schoolhouse hill and over to the west. Smoke from Daniel Hahn's cabin to the south floated lazily over the hilltop.

The Military Road from Iowa City to Dubuque had been surveyed, and a furrow ploughed by Lyman Dillon with five yoke of oxen marked the road over the winding hilltop.

Peter Roland had built a log cabin at the north edge of the hill near the present home of Roy Nelson. Reuben Ash purchased this site and set out a large apple orchard, using seedlings brought from the East. Mr. Ash never became reconciled to the advent of the railroad because he felt that it disturbed the serenity of the village. Elisha Williams settled in the timber area to the north, his land in later time being incorporated into the Witter farm. Dr. Amos Witter was a surgeon in the Civil War, and with his family took up land and became a permanent resident. A daughter, Mary, was a noted school teacher in the town.

Robert Smyth settled three miles west of Mount Vernon in 1840; his brothers, James and Jeremiah, came two years later. Robert had two sons and two daughters, William, John, Elizabeth, and Anna. The last named afterwards became Mrs. Samuel Holden. The Smyth families made the bulk of the membership of the Covenanter Presbyterians in the west of town. Robert was state representative and senator, and paymaster in the army during the Civil War. At his death it was said of him that he lived twenty years an Irishman, sixty years an American, and eighty years a Christian gentleman.

Allison Willits, a pioneer of great initiative, came in 1840, settling east of the Abbe farm, and later purchased much of the land