

Early Settlers: Daniel and Mary Faucet Van Brunt
By
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The family of Daniel and Mary Faucet Van Brunt, from upper NY State, homesteaded in the town in 1846. That's a year after the Foster's and Mays came to what is now Mayville. They had a son born in Williamstown. His name was Willard Van Brunt. Daniel was a wagon maker by trade.

Long story short, when iron was discovered south of Mayville, a blast furnace was built (a very small one), close to the river for cooling water. With a furnace producing a product, pig iron, what do you do with it on the frontier?

The iron had to be moved to the closest rail head which was Oconomowoc. How do you transport iron to market? Wagons. Big, heavy-duty, wooden wagons. But wooden wagons had iron parts. So the wagon maker left his homestead to build wagons in the new place called Mayville named after George Mays from Fort Atkinson. At first it was Maysville but soon became Mayville. Of course Williamstown was named for William Foster of the Foster and Mays that came to what is now Mayville in 1845. Think Foster Park in downtown Mayville! So, William for the township and Foster for the Park.

Why did they come to the Mayville location? Water power!! From the south end of what is now the city the Rock river falls 17 feet. Think about it! The upper dam was built for a grist mill and a saw mill. A dam was built of wood and a canal was dug around the dam for the water to flow. Two flumes of water fed the two businesses. Later a lower dam was built to feed more water to the blast furnaces at the end of Furnace Street.

There is a third dam in Kekoskee. That's where the paddle wheelers on Lake Horicon had to stop. There they unloaded goods and passengers. As it turned out, there is more fall at Mayville than at any location on the Rock River basin. That's why the Foster's and Mays came to the area and staked out land claims. By the way, where the Rock meets the Mississippi River was the location of Saukenauk, the main village of the Sauk and Fox Indians of Chief Blackhawk's fame.

With this background there is an interesting part for Williamstown. Daniel Van Brunt and brother George built the heavy duty wagons to haul pig iron to Oconomowoc. A trail (not much of a road) was cut through the wilderness to Oconomowoc. That is today's Hwy. 67. But originally the road (trail) cut off at Browns Corners and went south through Neda, Ironridge, Woodland, and then on south following Rt. 67 into Oconomowoc.

Daniel Van Brunt and his brother George (from Burnett) experimented with a way to sow seed faster and hide the seed from the huge flocks of passenger pigeons that ate the seed as fast as the farmer could sow it with hand seeders. They came up with a seeder that measured seed out and covered the seed with soil. Thus foiling the damned pigeons. They built the first 6 in Mayville and left for Horicon (they had no money nor big enough building) and a partner that kept them alive as they established the Van Brunt works in Horicon. Again a note, by the 1860s a railroad was being built through Mayville to Fond du Lac. The brothers had to come up with something

else as the need for big HD wagons would soon disappear. So off to another twist and turn in ones life.

Daniel also founded the Horicon State Bank. In 1901 he died. His son, Willard, took over the business and sold it to John Deere in 1911-12. Willard ran the business into the 1920s. He retired to California and died in 1936. His is a cremation burial and is buried in Graceland in Mayville with his mother and two infant brothers. The three, mom and two babies died of frontier fever between 1849 and 1852. Daniel never had another son although he buried two more wives. Life was hard, to say the least, in the 1800s.

The factory the family founded in Horicon became the John Deere Horicon works. Not bad for a family to homestead, build a life on the frontier and then build a business that is part of a world class multinational company known today as Deere & Company.