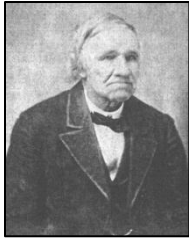


Abraham Van Vorhes: 1793 – 1879



Abraham Van Vorhes served 3 terms as Washington County Surveyor. He began his first term in 1853, at age 60. When he completed his last term, from 1862 to 1873, he was 80 years old.

Van Vorhes was Register of the U.S. Land Office in Stillwater from 1849 to 1853. He was appointed by Alexander Ramsey to serve as Minnesota Territorial Auditor in 1852. Later, he was elected and served a one year term at the Minnesota Territorial House of Representatives in 1856. And of course, he was an accomplished land surveyor.

Nonetheless, Van Vorhes' most interesting accomplishment is uncovering **mastodon tusks** near the base of the hill on Myrtle Street in Stillwater. The year was 1856. He found the tusks in a horizontal stratum of sand about 37 feet below the surface.



Following is a letter from Van Vorhes to an unknown researcher:

Stillwater, April 26, 1877

Dear Sir:

Yours of the 16th came duly to hand, and found me almost helpless with a rheumatic attack, which explains my seeming neglect to answer your inquiry.

*The **mastodon tusks** were found about eight or ten feet above the base of the hill: the hill at this point rises at an angle of about 45°. After excavating in the base of the hill on the grade of Myrtle Street about 37 feet, the tusks were found, consequently 37 feet below the surface. At this point the hill was about 90 feet high.*

The crockery I found some thirty feet farther into the hill and some six or eight feet higher in the strata. This hill is a continuous tongue of land lying between the Florence mill stream and a spring run. The two streams run parallel and some 350 feet apart. The hill is so steep on the Florence mill side as to be inaccessible except by clinging to roots and brush growing on it. The material at the base is sand and small gravel. Where the tusks were found the strata were pure sand ten or twelve feet thick, exhibiting clearly the direction of the current in an eastward inclination one or two degrees. On the top of the hill were heavy boulders of the drift period. I deeply regret that indisposition and the weight of the eighty-four years have rendered me incapable of composing a satisfactory communication.

Yours, with much esteem.

*A. Van Vorhes **

* The Geological and Natural History of Minnesota - the Sixth Annual Report for the year 1877, p. 62, from the Annual Report of the Board of Regents, University of Minnesota, Vols. 1876-1878, Johnson, Smith & Harrison, Minneapolis, 1878.