OLD MUSKEGO

An early history of Waukesha County states that the region about Lake Muskego was one of the principal camping places of the Pottawatomie Indians. In fact, the first settlers found a large village of them established on its shores. In the Indian language the word "muskego" is used to mean swamp, marsh, cranberry, and fish. Since these aborigines depended almost entirely upon wild game for food, the abundance of wild rice, fish and waterfowl made this locality especially attractive to them and reminders of their occupation still may be found in the Indian Mounds which they constructed.

In the year of 1839, a party of about forty immigrants from Tinn, Telemarken, Norway, led by John Nelson Luraas, landed at Milwaukee on their way to the Norwegian settlements in La Salle County, Illinois. Milwaukee merchants persuaded them to make Wisconsin their future home instead. Guides were furnished them for explorations in search of a suitable place to settle. The summer of 1839 had been exceptionally dry and the swampy lands about Lake Muskego, covered with lush green grasses, looked like fertile prairies to the eager homesseekers. Here they stopped and founded the second Norwegian settlement in the state of Wisconsin. From the early records in the Waukesha County courthouse we learn that they made arrangements for about 640 acres of land in Sections 29 and 32 on Sept. 1, 1839. To their bitter disappointment spring rains flooded many of their homes and created unhealthful conditions which made it necessary for them to move to higher land. Most of them eventually moved farther south and the Muskego settlement spread out into Norway, Waterford, Raymond and Yorkville Townships of Racine County.

Soren Bache and his partner, Johannes Johanssen, who had come to Illinois early in 1839, visited the Muskego region, later that same fall. Young Bache, whose father was a well to do lumber dealer in Norway, was so impressed with its beauty and natural resources that he built a cabin in the dense forest near Norway Hill, and they purchased a large tract of land from the government, later re-selling it at a reasonable figure to other immigrants who wished to
Otte Skilling Species.


1. Sigurd - født i 1827.
2. Ole - født i 1829.
3. Andersen - født i 1833.
4. Peder - født i 1837.

I alt 4 barn.

Familiens navn er Mønsholm.

Familieleder: Lars Mønsholm.

Firma: Mønsholm.

Ved: Mønsholm.

Emigration Permit for Mønsholm family to America in 1840. Photo by courtesy of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

Page 14
clear land for farming. Bache and Johannsen sent wonderful stories of the opportunities to be found here back to their friends in the homeland. Influenced by these reports, Even Hansen Heg, an inn-keeper near Drammen, sold his property and with his wife, Siri Olsdatter Heg, and his four children, Hans Christian, Ole, Andrea, and Sophie, aged eleven, nine, five and three years, respectively, started the long journey to distant Wisconsin. In the same group were about thirty persons from Drammen and the same number from Voss. The sailing vessel on which they embarked from Drammen on May 17, 1840, was called the "Emilia". The captain's name was Thomas Anckersen. He had made one voyage to America the year before. The ship stopped at Gothenborg, Sweden, where two weeks was spent in taking on a cargo of iron. The stormy trip across the Atlantic to New York took another eleven weeks. The entire group came to look to Even Hansen Heg as their leader because of his fine character and great resourcefulness.

---


A most interesting and thrilling episode of this voyage has been related to us by Mrs. Ada Cleven Bjorn Henderson of Stoughton. Among the passengers was Tosten Kleven, her grandfather, then a lad only sixteen years of age. When
the sailing vessel was a few hours out of New York harbor he was stricken with the black plague, given up for dead, and preparations were made for his burial at sea. The Even Heg family intervened and were given permission to bury their young friend on land. They took him to the establishment of a New York undertaker. Here he awakened from the coma which had been mistaken for death, and though it was some time before he fully recovered his health, he lived to become seventy-four years of age, and is now buried at the West Koskonong cemetery near Stoughton, Wis. At the age of nineteen he helped with the building of the first Norwegian church.

In 1843 Tosten Kleven's parents, Astrid and Egil Kleven, and his brothers and sisters followed him to America. Astrid and Egil Kleven rest in the Norway Hill cemetery. Tosten Kleven and his brother, Gullick, married sisters, Asse and Ingebor Qualset. Kleven became changed to Cleven. Gullick used his first name as a surname. His son, Simon Gullick was a resident of the Norway-Muskego community until his death Oct. 16, 1936. Miss Ida Howe, one of the descendents of this family who lives in Racine, Wisconsin, possesses the original passport used by the Qualset sisters when they came from Norway in 1843. Teachers, physicians, dentists and lawyers are among the descendents of the Kleven family living in Wisconsin.

Among the other members of Heg's party, many of whose descendents still reside in the community about Heg Park, were Ole Hoganson, Ole Anderson, Holge Thompson, Johannes Skofstad, Sivert Ingebratson and Ole K. Trovat- ten whose famous "America Letters" later influenced many of his countrymen to come to the United States.
From New York they followed the usual route to the West, going by river and canal to Buffalo, and thence by steamer on the Great Lakes to Milwaukee. The Voss group went directly to Chicago. The objective of those from Telemarken was Muskego, now less than an hour’s ride from Milwaukee by automobile, but in 1840 a long day’s journey over a strange, hard trail. In his diary Soren Bache describes his joy at hearing the voice of his old friend Even Heg outside his cabin. Soon after his arrival Even Heg purchased the farm of John Nelson Luraas, a settler who had come in 1839 and wished to move farther west. This farm is now owned by Henry Schubel, and is situated about a mile and a quarter from Heg Memorial Park on Highway 36. The Heg farm became the mecca of hundreds of Norwegian immigrants in search of homes in Wisconsin and farther west. In 1843 Even Heg erected a large new barn which was often thronged with parties of new-comers who found here their first rest and welcome among their own nationality after their long, weary journey across the sea. Not only was the Heg farm a haven for new arrivals, but it also served as a social and religious center of the community. Lay services were conducted here on Sundays. The famous Norwegian evangelist, Elling Eielsen, preached here when he was in the vicinity. Claus Clausen, who came to the community to teach school and remained to preach, at the request of the settlers, organized his congregation in the Heg barn, and held his Sunday school classes there until the first church was completed. It was once the scene of a large double wedding. During the cholera epidemic which desolated the colonies in the forties, it served as an emergency hospital. Its huge hewn oak timbers now form part of the framework of the modern farm building standing on the site of the old historic barn.

Another favorite gathering place of the early settlers was a small store and trading post which Soren Bache and Johannes Johannsen had constructed by excavating a portion of an Indian mound on the shores of Lake Waubee see. The mound has become completely obliterated by time, and even its exact site is not known today, but in Billed Magazine (published in Madison in 1868) Svein Nilssen wrote “here the two men plied their trade undisturbed by the fact that dead men’s bones sometimes peeped between the cracks in their walls.”
It is not generally known that the first Temperance Society of the Norwegians was organized at Muskego, on January 31, 1848, at the home of Even Heg. Even Heg was elected president, and his son Hans C. Heg, then a youth of 18, secretary. Bjorn Hattestead was vice-president. Members pledged to abstain from liquor and to promote temperance generally.

It was Johannes Johannsen who was the author of the famous "Muskego Manifesto" of 1845, signed by 80 residents of the community and sent to Norway informing their friends and relatives in the homeland that in spite of sickness, hardship and suffering they were still glad they had come to the United States, and "faced the future with confidence." However, during the same year Johannsen himself, was one of the cholera victims. In 1847 a tragic accident caused Soren Bache to leave the community. Returning from a hunting trip, he had stopped to call at the Storlie cabin. As he walked through the door the trigger of his gun caught on the door-latch, and a bullet pierced the heart of the young mother who sat rocking her baby across the room. Stricken with grief, Bache gave all of his property into the charge of James D. Reymert and returned to Norway where he spent the remainder of his lifetime.

However, pleasant and enjoyable happenings were also a part of early days in Old Muskego. One of the most notable of these events was the visit of the world renowned violinist, Ole Buil, in 1851. He arrived with a party of friends from Milwaukee, only to find that fire had just destroyed the home of his friend, James Reymert, where he had expected to be entertained. The settlers gathered beside the smoking ruins and he gave his concert as scheduled, playing for them "The Carnival of Venice". So, in spite of hardships and disasters the Norway-Muskego community continued to grow and prosper, and the passing of the century finds it with swamps drained and forests cleared, one of the garden spots of Wisconsin.
Ole Heg was a pioneer printer and store-keeper. His photo by courtesy of Miss Cora Newell. Andrea Heg Himoe was a pioneer Wisconsin school teacher. Her photo by courtesy of Mrs. Anetta Himoe Booth. Sophie Heg Halsted was Col. Heg's youngest sister.

Halvor Nelson Lohner supervised the building of the old church. His photo by courtesy of Mrs. Gust Olson. Mr. Peter Jacobson was the first deacon in the old church and the first postmaster in the Town of Norway. Their photos by courtesy of Miss Henrietta Jacobson. Jacob Anderson, came to Muskego in 1842 at the age of 4 years. Was a member of first class confirmed in the old church. Photo by courtesy of his daughter, Mrs. Julia Schnetz.
Mr. and Mrs. Ole Hoganson    Astrid Kleven    Egil Kleven

Mr. and Mrs. Ole Hoganson came to Muskego with the Heg party in 1840. Their photo by courtesy of Martin Hoganson. Astrid Kleven, 1800-1867, and Egil Kleven, 1795-1877, were parents of Tosten Kleven. They came to Muskego in 1843 and are buried in Norway Hill cemetery. Photos by courtesy of Miss Ida Howe, Racine, Wisconsin.

Ole and Ingebor Anderson    Mr. and Mrs. Knud Aslakson Svaalestuen

Ole and Ingebor Anderson came to Muskego with the Heg party in 1840. Their photo through courtesy of Oscar Bendickson. Mrs. Knud Aslakson Svaalestuen (Margaret Dale) came to LaSalle County, Ill., with her parents in 1837, a few years later moving to Muskego. Her husband was an immigrant leader who came to America in 1839. Their photos furnished by the courtesy of Miss Henrietta Jacobson.