

THE LIFE STORY OF COLONEL HANS CHRISTIAN HEG

Hans Christian Heg was born at Lier, near Drammen, Norway, on December 21, 1829. He was the oldest of the four children of an inn keeper, Even Hansen Heg and his wife, Siri Olsdatter Heg. Drammen is a small city in the southern part of Norway, a few miles from the capitol.

Hans Heg was eleven years old when his family arrived in Muskego, and he soon earned for himself the reputation of being a wide-awake and gifted boy. He took great pains to learn the English language thoroughly, and often accompanied parties of immigrants on their way to the settlements at Koshkonong, Rock and Jefferson prairies. Keenly observant, he developed a deep insight into American conditions. At twenty years of age, lured by the discovery of gold in the Sacramento Valley, he, with three companions, joined the army of "Forty-niners" and spent the next two years prospecting for gold in California. According to NORDLYSET, issue of March 26, 1849, the party consisted of Engebret and Halvor Rosvald, Magnus Hansen and H. C. Heg. T. C. Blegen, noted historian, says: "He was reasonably successful, but news came of his father's death in the fall of 1850—his mother had died in 1842—and it was clearly his duty to assume charge of the farm and the care of his younger brother and sisters. Accordingly, in 1851, he returned to Muskego.

Upon his return he took over the 320-acre farm which had belonged to his father. Shortly after, he married Gunhild Einong, daughter of a Norwegian immigrant of 1843. He was now twenty-two years of age, and had already won the respect and confidence, not only of the Norwegian settlers of the community, but of the native Americans of the vicinity as well. He was rapidly becoming looked upon as a rising young politician. Since "freedom, equality and



Col. Hans Christian Heg
Photo by Wis. State Historical Society.

brotherhood" were the very life of the simple pioneer society of Muskego, slavery was abhorrent to Hans Heg. He naturally became an ardent member of the Free Soil (later Republican) party."

In 1852 he became a member of the Norway Town Board, and also a Justice of the Peace. In 1855 he was chosen chairman of the Town Board of Norway. As chairman of the Town Board he automatically became a member of the Racine County Board of Supervisors.

In the old record books preserved at the Racine County Courthouse, Hans C. Heg's name occurs frequently and minutes of the meetings held during that time show that he took an active and intelligent part in the proceedings of the County Board, and served on many important committees. He was re-elected in 1856, and named as one of the Racine County Poor Farm Commissioners. "With the faithful and successful execution of the duties of these local offices he gained the confidence of an ever increasing number of citizens."

In 1859 he gave up farming and made his home in the Village of Waterford for about a year. In 1860 he was elected to the office of Commissioner of the state prison at Waupun. He appears to have been the second Norewegian elected to a state office in the United States. At Waupun he made a very creditable record and many improvements in the prison system came about under his direction. He believed that prisons should be not only for the purpose of punishing offenders, but should also "reclaim the wandering and save the lost."

In 1861 when President Lincoln called for volunteers for the great task of preserving the Union, Hans Heg began recruiting a Scandinavian regiment. Governor Randall of Wisconsin appointed him as Colonel of the Fifteenth Wisconsin Volunteers. Appealing to all young Norsemen he said "The government of our adopted country is in danger. It is our duty as brave and intelligent citizens to extend our hands in defense of the cause of our Country and of our homes." The success of his appeal may be judged by the fact that 115 of the 890 men enrolled in his regiment answered to the first name of "Ole"! His own brother, Ole Heg, was a quartermaster.

Col. Heg's brother-in-law, Dr. Stephen A. Himoe, of Lawrence, Kansas, was surgeon of the Fifteenth Wisconsin. Two of his assistants were Dr. George F. Newell, of Waterford, and Dr. Daniel Wooster, of Racine.

SURGEONS WHO SERVED IN COL. HANS HEG'S REGIMENT



Dr. Stephen O. Himoe
Lawrence, Kansas



Dr. George F. Newell
Waterford, Wis.



Dr. Daniel P. Wooster
Racine, Wis.

Photo of Dr. Himoe by courtesy of Annetta Himoe Booth; photo of Dr. Geo. Newel by courtesy of Miss Cora Newell; photo of Dr. Daniel P. Wooster by courtesy of Park Wooster.

Rev. Claus L. Clausen, first pastor of the first Norwegian Lutheran church in America, came back to Wisconsin to enroll under Col. Heg as chaplain in the famous Fifteenth Wisconsin, which played so valorous a part in the operations of the Union Forces for the next three years in Kentucky, Tennessee and northern Georgia. One third of this entire regiment perished during the war of wounds and disease. The "Fighting Fifteenth" as they were often called, remained at Camp Randall only sixteen days before starting for the southern battlefields. During the next two years Colonel Heg was constantly with his regiment and brigade. "In camp, on the march and in battle he shared their hardships, led them, and won their love and devotion." Letters written to his wife and children during this time and published in 1936 by the Norwegian Historical Association (Civil War Letters of Col. Hans C. Heg, by T. C. Blegen),

reveal the courage, ambition, kindness and depth of character of this truly great man.

In one of these letters to his wife he says, "You may be a widow, but you will never be the widow of a coward."

Twelve unpublished letters to his son Edmund have recently been deposited in the document files of the Wisconsin State Historical Society at Madison. These appealing letters reveal his strong affection and high hopes for his children. Several of them end with the promise, "I will be home for good in the fall." In another of these letters he mentions Dr. Daniel Wooster of Racine, saying, "Dr. Wooster of Racine has been commissioned as an assistant surgeon for this regiment. I am glad he is coming, for I know he is a very good man. I asked the Governor to appoint him." Dr. Wooster's Commission as Assistant Surgeon in the 15th Wisconsin Volunteers hangs in the Heg Memorial Museum, a gift from Dr. Wooster's son, Park Wooster, of Racine.

The Fiftieth Wisconsin Volunteers was one of the five infantry regiments from the Badger state which took part in the bloody battle of Chickamauga. The record of these regiments is one of gallant fighting against great odds, and of tremendous losses.

General Wm. S. Rosecrans had announced his intentions of promoting Col. Heg. to the rank of Brigadier General, and it was acting in this capacity that he led the third brigade, Davis' division, into battle. From noon until sundown of September 19, 1863, Colonel Heg was constantly exposed to the fearful fire of the enemy. At this hour, with his day's work almost done, he fell, pierced by a rifle ball. He passed the night in the hospital in great suffering, and his death occurred the following morning, Sept. 20, 1863. At Col. Heg's own request, Albert Skofstad accompanied his body when it was sent home for burial.

The whole state of Wisconsin mourned the loss of Colonel Hans Heg, but the keenest sorrow was felt in his home town of Waterford, where his body was brought. He was buried by the Masonic fraternity, of which he was a member.

FOUR GENERATIONS OF THE HEG FAMILY



This four-generation picture of the Heg family is included in this book through the courtesy of Matilda Fowler Van Doren, of Stamford, Conn. It was taken about 1910. Reading left to right, back row: Charles Newell Fowler, congressman from New Jersey; Hilda Heg Fowler, his wife, daughter of Col. Hans Christian Heg; Charles Newell Fowler, Jr., their son; Bottom row: (seated) Gunhild Einong Heg, wife of Col. Hans C. Heg; and his great-granddaughter, Matilda Fowler Van Doren.

Masonic ceremonies were conducted at the family residence, after which his body was removed to the old Congregational church on the west side of the village. This church is no longer standing, but the large iron key which opened its doors is now in the Heg Memorial Museum. Rev. Bar-tean delivered the funeral discourse, the text of which was chosen from 2nd Samuel, 1-27. Following the services at the church, the long funeral procession wound slowly to the cemetery on Norway Hill, where the mortal remains of the brave soldier were laid to rest beside his little daughter, Annetta, just twenty-three years after he had come to this community with its pioneer settlers.



HILDA HEG



GUNHILD EINONG HEG

Hilda Heg, daughter of Col. Heg died Feb. 20, 1932. The above photo, taken while attending Beloit College, was loaned through courtesy of Mrs. A. Van Doren, Stamford, Conn. Gunhild Einong Heg, wife of Colonel Hans C. Heg, is pictured above in a photo taken in November, 1890, loaned through the courtesy of E. Biddle Heg, University of Pennsylvania.

Colonel Heg's wife and three children survived him. Gunhild Einong Heg carefully carried out her husband's wishes concerning the education of their children, and moved from Waterford to Beloit in order that their children might attend college there. She passed away in 1922, at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Charles Newell Fowler, at Elizabeth, New Jersey.

His oldest son, James Edmund Heg, for a time editor of the Lake Geneva Herald, died in Waukegan, Ill., in 1914.



Pictured here is a copy of a Daguerreotype of Hilda and James Edmund Heg, aged ten and twelve years, respectively.

Hilda and James Edmund Heg were the oldest children of Col. Hans Heg. The daguerreotype was used through the courtesy of E. Biddle Heg, University of Pennsylvania.

His youngest son, Elmer Ellsworth Heg, became a physician in Seattle, Washington. He was listed in *Who's Who in America* (Vol. X, 1918-1919) and his death occurred in 1922, shortly before that of his mother, Gunhild Einong Heg.

His only daughter, Hilda Heg Fowler, who contributed so liberally to the founding of Heg Memorial Park, and who was present at the unveiling of the Colonel Heg Monument in 1928, died at Elizabeth, New Jersey, Feb. 20, 1932.

Colonel Heg's oldest brother, Ole Heg, died in Burlington, Wisconsin, in 1911.

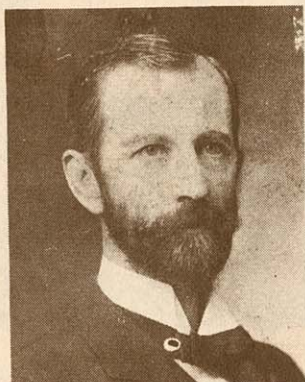
"The story of Colonel Hans C. Heg is the story of one who threw himself wholly into the currents of his adopted country. Without reserve he gave the best that he had to America. He knew the trials as well as the opportunities of pioneer life in the West. He learned to believe in and cherish our American institutions and ideals. He gave himself without qualification, to his country when its flag was in peril, and leading a brigade of the American army, he died fighting for that flag."

Colonel Hans C. Heg was a good citizen and a true patriot. It was to honor his memory that the Racine County

Heg Memorial Association was formed, and the statue which they erected at the entrance to the twelve-acre plot known as Colonel Heg Memorial Park will be forever maintained as a public memorial to that patriotism.

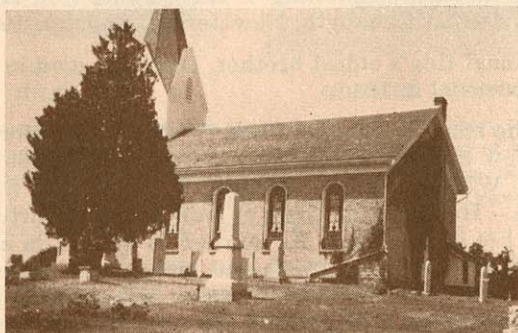


Elmer Ellsworth Heg



James Edmund Heg

Elmer Ellsworth Heg, physician, youngest son of Col. Hans C. Heg, was Maj. Brigade Surgeon, U. S. Volunteers, 1899, Spanish American War; also served for duration of World War as Major in U. S. Army Medical Corps. James Edmund Heg, son of Hans C. Heg and Gunhild E. Heg, father of Ernest Clark Heg and grandfather of Ernest Biddle Heg. Photo loaned through courtesy of E. Biddle Heg, University of Pennsylvania.



Norway Hill church yard, showing rear of Col. Hans Heg's tombstone, and also of graves of his father and mother, Even Hansen Heg and Siri Olsdatter Heg, beneath the shade of the cedar tree. Photo was loaned through the courtesy of Newton Brown.



Photo, courtesy of
Milwaukee Journal

“He has gone to the last long march,
To the land where nevermore
Shall the bugle sound reveille,
Or the dreadful cannon roar.
He who dies for country, dies not,
But liveth, evermore.”

Inscription on the tombstone of Col. Hans Christian Heg in the Norway
Hill Cemetery.

THE MONUMENT TO COL. HANS C. HEG

Standing upon the exact site of the old brick school-house is a bronze statue of the tall military figure of Colonel Hans Christian Heg.

As in life, Colonel Heg stood firmly for freedom and the American principles of education, the foundation of his statue very appropriately rests upon some of the bricks taken from the old school when it was replaced by a modern structure directly across the road, known as the Colonel Heg School.

The Racine County Heg Memorial Committee entered into a contract with Paul Fjelde, noted Norwegian sculptor, for an exact replica of the statue which stands at Madison, Wisconsin, and which was designed by Mr. Fjelde. There is an arresting youthful alertness about the figure, poised for action,

hat in hand. Mr. Fjelde said about his work, "The figure that I have created shows a much younger Colonel Heg than his photographs. After all he was a young man, only thirty-three when he died. I tried to regain the spirit of youth which must have been his before the cares of war had aged him beyond his years. I think I have succeeded." In order to help the worthy cause the sculptor supplied the statue for a very little above its actual cost. The nine-foot replica was cast in Oslo, Norway, and shipped to Muskego. B. H. Meyers of Racine erected the genuine light Barre Vermont granite base, which is eight feet tall.

To Mr. Lewis Rolfson, ninety-year-old veteran of Company C, fifteenth Wisconsin Volunteers, recruited by



Lewis Rolfson turning first spadeful of sod for the foundation of the monument to Colonel Heg at Heg Memorial Park. Photo by courtesy of Mathilda Christianson.

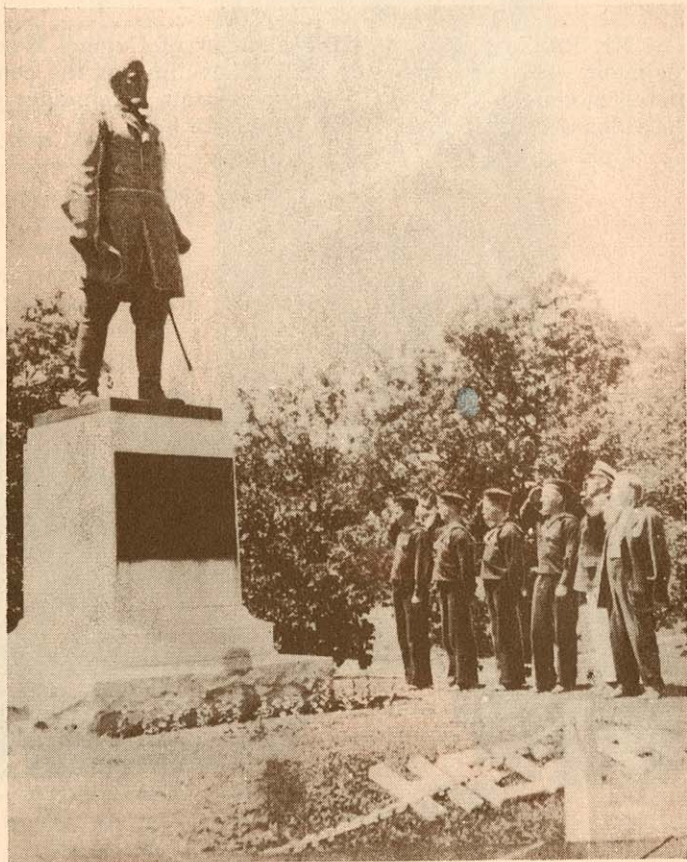
Col. Heg himself, fell the honor of turning the first spadeful of soil in preparation for the placing of the monument. Pupils of the Colonel Heg School participated in the ceremony. Thirty students, with their teacher, Miss Bertha Danielson, each helped dig out a spadeful of the dirt to prepare the site for the concrete foundation of the monument.

Mr. Rolfson, only surviving member of Colonel Heg's regiment, also performed the actual unveiling of the completed monument which will forever remain a reminder of the valor and patriotism of this Wisconsin hero.



Photo courtesy of Warner Studio, Burlington, Wis.

SCENE AT THE DEDICATION
CEREMONIES OF THE COLONEL HEG
MONUMENT — JULY 4, 1928



—Milwaukee Journal Staff Photo.

The crew of the Norwegian Training Ship Sorlandet with Lewis Rolfson, only surviving member of Colonel Heg's Regiment.