THE OLD LOG CABIN

To most visitors at Heg Memorial Park the center of interest is the small log cabin, which was moved to the park from its original site on a nearby farm. Early records show it to have been erected in 1837 by Eliphalet Cram.

Little is known of any of the early owners of the cabin excepting their names, which occur on land transfers recorded at the Racine County Courthouse. Unfortunately the Norway-Muskegeo church records which would probably have furnished clues by which the descendants of these families might have been traced, were completely destroyed by the burning of the parsonage in April, 1916. The two towering cedars pictured have stood guard in the dooryard of this pioneer home for the better part of a century, but the story of the romance, adventure, heartaches and happiness of the first families who lived there is a closed book to us.

There is a tradition that arrangements were once completed to use the old log cabin as a parsonage for the first pastor of Norway Hill church, but that his young wife found the dark forbidding forests which surrounded it not at all to her liking, and insisted upon a less lonely location for her home.

In one of the old books of deeds at the Racine County courthouse is a record of the transfer of the farm on which the old log cabin stood, from Tollef Jensen and Martha, his wife, to Halvor Bendickson. This document was witnessed by Ole Heg, Notary Public, and by Martin Skofstad, and was dated December 6, 1866. The farm remained in posses-
sion of the Bendickson family until 1928, a period of sixty-two years.

Born April 2, 1826, in Stavenger, Norway, where as a lad he worked on the fishing fleets, Halvor Bendickson emigrated to America in 1858 with his young wife, Kari Bjordal, and settled in North Cape. Before many years had passed Kari Bjordal Bendickson was laid to rest in the North Cape cemetery. With two small sons, Bendick and Hans, Halvor Bendickson moved to the Norway settlement, where he married Anna Anderson, daughter of Ole and Ingebor Anderson. Anna Anderson was born in Norway, June 15, 1836. With her parents in 1840, she made the 13-week trip across the Atlantic as a member of the party of immigrants led by Even Hansen Heg. As a small child she helped, with the other children of the community, to carry shingles to the top of Indian Hill (now called Norway Hill) during the building of their first church. She attended Sunday school classes in the Even Heg barn, and later in the first church. She was a member of the first class confirmed by Rev. Stub in the old church. During her early teens, she was one of the survivors of the terrible visitations of cholera which caused Muskego to be known for a time as "The Region of Death."

In 1866, before Halvor Bendickson moved his family into the log cabin, he found it necessary to replace the two bottom logs which were even then badly rotted with age. He also added the top story, or "loft" and re-shingled the roof. This loft, reached by a crude stairway through a trap-door, was used as sleeping quarters for the children. As the years passed seven children were born in the Bendickson family. Two of these children died in the old log cabin. In 1884 the Bendicksons erected a larger home on the same farm, and the old cabin was occupied by Charles Colbo and family, and, following his death in 1888, by Hans Bendickson, whose son, Edward, was also born there.

After Halvor Bendickson's death in 1902, his widow returned to the little home to spend the remaining eighteen years of her life. After her death it was occupied for several years by a son, Oscar, and a daughter, Emma. Hanging on the wall of the old cabin, where his widow placed it soon after his death, is a large picture of Halvor Bendickson.
Both Mr. and Mrs. Bendickson are buried in the Norway Hill cemetery.

Surviving these Norwegian pioneers are seven children, Bendick Bendickson, of Wind Lake; Hans Bendickson, of Tichigan Lake; Julia Bendickson Colbo, of Honey Creek; Oscar Bendickson, of Waubeesee; Emma and Edward Bendickson, both of Milwaukee, and Anna Bendickson Stratton, of Burlington.

Thirteen grandchildren and seventeen great-grandchildren are also residents of Wisconsin.

The last owner of the old log cabin was Sivert Thompson, now an inmate of the Old People's home at Wittenberg, Wis.

In 1928, when the old cabin was about to be razed to make way for a modern dwelling, Julius Christianson, custodian of Heg Memorial Park, knowing it to be one of the oldest homes, if not the

Severt Johnson  Sam Lahr  W. Harold Pugh

Severt Johnson had charge of moving the old log cabin to the park. Sam Lahr, secretary, and Mr. Pugh, chairman of Racine County Park Commission were instrumental in securing this old home for preservation.
oldest, remaining in the vicinity, interested Mr. Harold Pugh, chairman, and Mr. Sam Lahr, secretary of the Racine County Park Commission, in preserving it for its historical value. Through their efforts the old house was purchased for the Park Commission, and Mr. Severt Johnson employed to remove it from its original site to Heg Memorial Park. The cabin was taken down carefully and the logs accurately numbered and set up again in its present location in the park. Mr. Christianson then refurnished it with articles typical of those used in the early Norwegian households in the community.

Stepping across the worn threshold, into the single small room of the cabin, one steps across a century of time into the heart of pioneer life in Racine county. Its simple, sturdy furnishings, many of them hand made by pioneers now at rest in Norway Hill cemetery, speak eloquently of the patience, thrift and versatility which enabled those early Norwegian settlers to withstand hardships and privation, and carve from the wilderness of Old Muskego the beginnings of the present prosperous community of fertile farms and convenient modern homes.

Interior view of the old log cabin. Photo by Warner.