FAMOUS "OLD MUSKEGO"

This settlement established by Norwegian immigrants has been called "Old Muskego" by the many historians who wrote about its importance to the Norwegian pioneers. But the events that made it famous really occurred in Norway Township, Racine County.

The settlement earned its distinction from the outstanding leadership of the men who lived there in the 1840's — men like Soren Bache, Johannes Johannesen, Even Heg, and Pastor C. L. Clausen. As a result of the initiative of these men, Muskego boasts many "firsts" in Norwegian-American history: 1. The Muskego settlement became the mother colony and helped Norwegian immigrants form other settlements on the frontier; 2. The first Norwegian Lutheran congregation was organized and the first Norwegian Lutheran church was built in the U.S.; 3. The first strictly Norwegian newspaper in America helped the immigrants become involved in the events and ideals of America; and 4. The democratic influence of the colony helped nurture the growth of Hans C. Heg, one of the first Norwegians to earn political and military fame in America.
THE MOTHER COLONY
The center of the new community seems to have been the Even Heg barn located near Waubeesee Lake. Heg, a wealthy inn-keeper from Drammen, Norway, purchased the farm of John Luraas and erected a barn in 1843. Here, hundreds of new immigrants could stop and receive hospitality, information, and assistance before continuing on to their destination. The barn served as a religious and social center too. Claus Clausen, who came to the community to teach school and remained at the request of the settlers to preach, organized his congregation in the Heg barn and held his Sunday School there until the first church was completed. During the cholera outbreaks of 1849, 1850, and 1852, the barn was converted into a fifty-bed hospital.

![Image of Even Heg's farm](image)

Even Heg’s farm, located on Loomis Road about one block north of Long Lake Road

Another gathering place was a post office and store. A large Indian mound had been excavated and boarded inside and this served the purpose. It was also used as a hotel. Johannes Johannesen was in charge. Johannesen was the author of the famous "Muskego Manifesto" of 1845. It was signed by 80 residents of the community and sent to Norway informing their relatives and friends in the homeland that in spite of sickness, hardship and suffering they
Barn on Heg farm, built with timbers from original Heg barn

were still glad they had come to the United States, and faced the future with confidence." Johannesen died during one of the later cholera outbreaks.

THE FIRST NEWSPAPER
James Denoon Reymert, an attorney, led an unusual and helpful life in the community. He was the editor of the first Norwegian newspaper in America called the "Nordlyset" or Northern Lights. Mr. Reymert was instrumental in getting a plank road built from Janesville to Milwaukee. To him belongs the credit of being the first Norwegian in America to be elected Assemblyman. He later became a federal judge.

Portion of first issue of Nordlyset, July, 1847
Reymert came to Muskego in the year 1842, at the age of 21. The first copy of Nordlyset was struck off in Mr. Heg's barn, dated July 29, 1847. Later issues were printed in a small building just south of the Waukesha County Line near Lake Denoon. The publishers were eager to make their readers well-informed American citizens. The first issues contained translations of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. Nordlyset took a strong stand against slavery and was a champion of temperance. Reymert sold Nordlyset in 1849, but it did not survive more than a year and a half after that.

The first Temperance Society of the Norwegians was organized in Muskego on January 31, 1848, at the home of Even Heg. Heg was elected president, and his son Hans C. Heg, at 18, secretary. Members pledged to abstain from liquor and to promote temperance generally.

One notable early event was the visit of the world renowned violinist, Ole Bull, 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."

James Denoon Reymert
HANS HEG

Hans C. Heg, son of Even Heg, came to America at age 11 and actively participated in the events that made the Muskego colony unique. By the time he was twenty-two, he had won the respect and admiration of the settlers and was considered a rising young politician. He believed in freedom, equality and brotherhood and affiliated himself with the Free Soil Party.

Heg became a member of the Norway Town Board in 1852 and served on the Racine County Board of Supervisors until 1857. He was appointed by the governor to serve as a warden at the state prison in Waupun in 1860.

In 1861, Governor Randall of Wisconsin appointed Heg as Colonel of the Fifteenth Wisconsin Volunteers. Heg recruited a Scandinavian regiment to help preserve the Union during the Civil War. 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 our country and of our homes." The final tally shows that 115 of 890 men enrolled in his regiment answered to the first name of "Ole."

The Fifteenth Wisconsin Volunteers were trained for a period of sixteen days before starting for the Southern battlefields. During the next two years as Heg fought and lived with his men, he gained their respect and devotion. In the battle of Chickamauga, Colonel Hans C. Heg was killed on September 20, 1863, becoming the highest ranking Wisconsin officer to lose his life in the Civil War. His grave is in the Norway Hill cemetery.
Colonel Heg's statue at east entrance to State Capital, Madison

It was to honor his memory that the Colonel Heg Memorial Park was established on a twelve-acre plot in Norway Township. It was dedicated as a county park in 1928. A museum there has many historic objects relating to the early Norwegian settlement as well as to Hans Heg. Other memorials to Heg include a statue designed by Paul Fjelde, a famous Norwegian-American sculptor, which stands at the east entrance to the Capitol building in Madison. Replicas of this statue stand at Heg Park and Lier, Norway, his birthplace. A cannon ball memorial marks the spot where Heg was wounded at Chickamauga.