



## Door County

By George J. Knott

## Log Houses

THE tourist through Door County, if he is observing, will not fail to mark the location of many old log houses scattered along his route, and possibly he will wonder how old, and under what circumstances they were built. Many of them are in a state of delapidation that indicate a worn out lifetime, while others are still fairly well preserved or have undergone alterations, additions and repairs which show a moving spirit of progress and modern comforts as prosperity came to the early settler.

One reared in these days of steam heated flats and furnaces with enameled bathrooms and electric lights, can scarcely realize the primitive life and meagre comforts those early pioneers endured. Coming into a new country, the first necessities were shelter and food. Sturgeon Bay was a mere hamlet of a dozen or twenty log houses, a store or two, and a hotel which was also a saloon. Delving into the north or west forest the prospector selected his site and proceeded to establish a home for himself and family. Nowhere could this be done more quickly, cheaply and substantially than in Door County. The native forest trees, medium in circumference and tall, such as had waved and nodded in the summer breezes and braved the cold and sleet of winter for a century or more, afforded excellent material for houses, barns and fences. The new set-

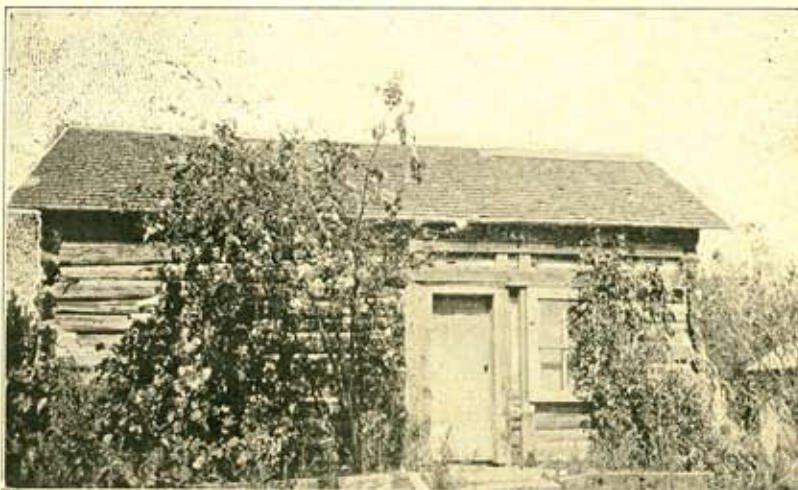
tlar, with his axe and maybe a saw, for other building tools were scarce, easily felled the sturdy trees and prepared them in proper shape for building. His neighbors, if he had any, generously helped him roll up the logs and in a day or two the main walls of a substantial house and barn were erected. With his axe, long thin shakes or flat strips used as a substitute for shingles, were split from the straight-grained cedar or pine, and the covering for the building was provided. The floors were made from timber in the same manner.

Doors were crudely made; in many cases windows there were none; but the home was made comfortable for winter by filling all the openings with moss and plaster made from clay mixed with twigs of live wood. A fireplace and chimney were added and partitions arranged,

although few of them had more than two or three rooms, and often only the one. If the family was large, beams were strung across under the rafters and a rough floor laid upon them made a second story, reached by a ladder from the floor below. Such was the building of early homes in Door County which for comfort were probably not equal, but for warmth were said to often excel more modern houses which cost thousands where the cabin cost dollars.

Door County was originally all timber, or nearly so, growing in solid formation to the shores on either side. The Moravians, who settled in Ephraim in 1853, were obliged to cut down the trees along the shore before they could land after a long trip by water from Green Bay. During the winter seasons a large portion of the inhabitants busied themselves in the woods fel-

ling the monumental pine which had borne aloft its unfading crown of green for a hundred years, and whose doleful strains of music from the winds in its branches was a familiar sound. The farmer-lumberman cut saw logs, cordwood, railroad ties, telegraph poles and fence posts for shipment by boat to Chicago and other points, until the lumber was practically gone and he could turn his attention to the more profitable farm. It required years to ac-



The Hugh Solway Home in Pioneer Days; First House Erected on Bay Shore Drive and Still Standing in Its Picturesque Surroundings



# DOOR COUNTY RESORTER



became easier after a long struggle, more modern houses were erected and the old cabin was left for shelter from the winter winds for stock, or was allowed to waste away and decay. The cheapness of lumber so near at hand, manufactured on the ground, and the many ledges of limestone in the county used for



comply with this but the splendid acreage of tilled soil increasing year by year testified to his indomitable courage and industry.

Nor were these rough structures as cheerless or desolate as the casual description may seem to indicate. As time rolled on the inventiveness and craftiness of the early pioneer conquered the problems and gradually lessened the overpowering and heart-breaking hardships. The crane with its pots and kettles hanging thereon over a blazing log fire was indicative of food in plenty, and the warmth from the fire was a cheerful change from the hardship of logging in the wintry outside. When schools were established it meant books and a craving for knowledge. Gradually the finer instincts of humanity grew and the cabin was correspondingly decorated with the finer emblems of comfort. Magazines furnished pictures for the walls and the ingenious pioneer devoted his spare time to the making of rustic furniture which, covered with the skin of the wild deer, wolves and other animals, made the cabin a comfortable if not exactly luxurious retreat for cold winter days and nights.

Log cabins continued to be built and were the sign of the solid citizen for many decades. Some of the early settlers, both from the Old World and the Eastern States, who settled in the county in those early days lived in cabins for years, but as progressiveness increased and money



These Old Homes Show the Primitive Life and Meagre Comforts the Pioneer Endured

foundations, so easily accessible, provided material for many homes of beauty and completeness.

In the earlier days the men were not alone in the exhausting, back-aching toil that was necessary to make a home in the woods. Women, too, did a man's work to help provide the necessaries of life. They secured a forty or eighty acre tract, and with little or no capital, set to work. They were full of hope and hard toil and bent to the task with determination to succeed—and they did. The older settlers would tell, with vivid recollection, of the hard winters when they were reduced for a diet to bread and potatoes and salt. Game was not always easy to obtain and if they lived near the

shores of the bay or lake they might fish if they had a boat. During the long winters they cleared the land of stones, of which there was an abundance, and cut cord wood. The pioneer carried his potatoes in his packet to the woods and when hungry would roast and eat them. In this way he worked on, frequently assisted and cheered by the wife. By spring-time they would have twenty to forty cords of wood cut and drawn on a handsled to the shore. This is but one instance of what first settlers were forced to endure in opening up a farm. But they were successful, and finally able to erect better homes, produce better crops, and be surrounded with the comforts of life, and became well-to-do farmers.

All honor to the log cabin settlers of Door County. The present generation scarcely comprehend the hardship under which they labored in getting the land ready for the plow. The soil was covered with heavy timber and rocks. Both had to be removed. To believe this labor was light or pleasant, to imagine the stones could be tossed around like golf balls or the timber handled like fish poles is mistaking the situation and undervaluing the work of the old settler in his years of unremitting toil to make a home in the wilderness. How they succeeded is evidenced by the broad green fields, the acres of fruits, and the pretty villages scattered throughout the peninsula. They builded better than they knew.

