



## Century-old cabin reflects skill of pioneer carpenter

By KETA STEEBES

This started out to be a story about a cabin, a cabin that has haunted me since I first spied it, shrouded in snow, one bleak day last winter. After numerous false starts I find my story turning out to be a chronicle of people. The two are so intertwined I can't tell about one without including the other.

Forgive me, then, if I commit the unpardonable sin of newspaper writing and ramble a bit.

The cabin stands about 50 yards from the lapping waters of Green Bay on the exact spot it was built 118 years ago. It belongs to Ellis and Hilda Solway, descendants of a Norwegian immigrant bearing the alliterative name Solvi Solveson who later anglicized his surname to Solway.

Solvi's own cabin was located perhaps a half mile south of this cabin and if you know where to look and have sharp eyes you can spot its crumbling foundations. This cabin, the cabin in which Ellis and Hilda were born, is as sound as the day it was built.

The trouble is it wasn't built by a Solway!

Enter a Norwegian barrel maker named Neils Torstenson. He and a group of seven or eight Norwegian families (which included the Solvesons) sailed into the Bay of the Sturgeon in the late fall of 1852. The little band of would-be settlers found at least three other homes occupying a wild stretch of shoreline now known as Bay Shore drive.

Peter Sherwood, a fisherman who in 1836 built what is believed to be Sturgeon Bay's first residence, was one homeowner; David S. Greenwood, an ex-Hudson Bay trapper, was another and Oliver Perry Graham, also a fisherman, was the third. Graham and Greenwood erected their cabins in 1851 and Torstenson, obviously approving of their choice of location, built his in the nearby and fellow Moravian, soon soiled son.

Torstenson, unknowingly, was the wiser of the two. His two-room home, complete with loft and lean-to, was built just north of what is now Bay Shore cemetery while poor Solveson built his cabin just below the cemetery—on land owned by the Bradley-Crandall Lumber company.

Not content with erecting a homestead, the industrious Solway (as he shall be known from now on) built a cooper shop while Torstenson devoted his time to farming. The winter of 1852 was uneventful. Six-year-old Hugh Solway undoubtedly helped with the family chores while his father, in order to earn hard cash, went to work for the newly established Bradley Lumber company.

In 1853 Solway lost both his cooper shop and his wife, the former to fire, the latter to death. Although the first Mrs. Solway's name is unknown to this writer she does have the dubious distinction of being the first white woman to be buried in Sturgeon Bay.

Later that year another blow

fell. Solway failed to fulfill the requirements of what old courthouse records term the "pre-emption law." Although vaguely worded and more than a little ambiguous, this law demanded settlers do a certain amount of work developing their land and use it as a full time residence.

Solway had been using his cabin as a full time residence all right but had been so busy toiling for his employer, Bradley, he failed to make the necessary improvements on what he thought was his property.

The lumber company, owners of the entire stretch of shore property up to the cemetery, promptly stepped in and reclaimed Solway's home, land, and remains of his cooper shop.

Fortunately Neils Torstenson had by now regretted his choice of location. Farming on Bay Shore drive's sandy soil was a futile venture and the ambitious Norwegian up and left his snug little cabin for the more productive soil of the west side.

The housing situation being what it was, Solway immediately made arrangements to move into the vacant home. He had, in 1854, acquired a new wife—a widow named Bertha Falk, two daughters and two additional sons, John and Ole Falk. By marrying Bertha Solway added another first to his record. He not only was a key figure in the settlement's first burial but participated in the first wedding to be performed here.

Oliver Perry Graham, in the absence of a clergyman, united the couple (a common practice in the mid 1800's) and the entire family—his four kids, her four kids, and their three kids, all lived in Torstenson's former cabin.

Hugh Solway didn't stray far from home. Obviously a man who didn't believe in rushing pell-mell into marriage, Hugh waited until the year 1877 (when he was 32

years old) to take Ida Klinkenberg as his bride. The Hugh Solway family then occupied the cabin from 1877 until 1900 when Hugh built the large frame home now occupied by Ellis and Hilda.

The present Solway home is located a few steps from the log house.

Solvi had by then reclaimed his original homestead and a picture of the cabin and several members of the Solway family (taken in the 1860's) appeared in the June, 1927 issue of the Advocate.

All eight of Hugh and Ida Solway's children, plus one cousin, were born within its substantial walls. The children (in order of appearance) Dora, Severt, Hilda, Iola, Hercules, Ellis, Julius and Eli, were all born before the turn of the century, before their "new" house was built in 1900.

It isn't too difficult to imagine what life was like in Ida Solway's day. Her wooden hand wringer stands in its usual corner; an intricately carved, tapestry-covered rocking chair occupies a place of honor in the "front" room; a plainly-lettered, no nonsense 1890 calendar hangs over a commodious bureau—which stands alongside a neat stack of ponderously titled books. Bulky steamer trunks, crammed to overflowing, take the place of closets.

The lean-to kitchen has long been removed but the upstairs loft (where all eight children slept) is still reached by an almost perpendicular ladder and the wide planked floors, both up and down, are as straight and firm as dies.

It is a home almost unmarked by the ravages of 118 years; a home that has escaped the clutches of souvenir-hungry collectors; a home that has sheltered three generations, and a home that, if given the test, is still capable of providing shelter.