

History of Sheldon, MN

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SHELDON TOWNSHIP

The township of Sheldon is one of the four interior townships of the county, and corresponds to a government township, except that its first six sections are in Houston, the township to the north. It is bounded on the east by Union, and a part of Mound Prairie; on the south by Caledonia, and on the west by Yucatan. Its southeast corner is but a mile or two from the exact center of the county. The northwestern part of the township is crossed by the South Fork of Root River. Starting in the upper part of section 34, Badger Creek flows in a northerly direction to join the South Fork in section 9, while Beaver Creek runs north in the western part of the township. These streams flow through valleys bordered by bluffs and ridges, while another valley on the extreme east adds to the variety of the landscape, its hills and dales being the most conspicuous features.

Beaver Creek has long been noted as a stream possessing excellent water power. It is formed from large springs, and has a western and southern branch which unite and form a single stream about a mile from the village of Sheldon. The stream varies in width from 20 to 25 feet, and has a depth of about 18 inches, with a fall of about two feet to the mile.

The honor of being the first settler in Sheldon undoubtedly belongs to a Norwegian named Gutorm Guttarsen, who arrived in June, 1853, from Rock County, Wis., and located 160 acres in sections 7 and 8. He, however, was not much ahead of two brothers, Michael and Andrew Michaelson, and a man named Andrew Jermonson, who arrived within a week or two, at most, of Mr. Guttarsen. These men were also Norwegians.

Michael Michaelson, then 25 years old, took a claim in section 21, and became a permanent resident. He helped in the construction of Brown's mill, the first erected in the township, and helped to build one of the early school houses. His brother, Andrew, settled in section 16, but in nine or ten years removed to Dakota. Andrew Jermonson died two years after his claim.

In the spring of 1854 Ole Targeson, another Norwegian, came to Sheldon with his family

from Dane County, Wisconsin, and taking a claim resided here until his death in 1881, at the age of 87 years, the homestead coming into the possession of his son.

The first man to take up land in the southeastern part of the township was John Brown, and his cabin was the first house in the village of Sheldon. He also built the first sawmill in the village. Mr. Brown, who was a Scotchman, remained here until about 1874, and then went to the Red River, where he was killed in a runaway accident in 1880. Soon after his arrival here came Benjamin Swan, in 1854. He started a farm just to the north, and married a daughter of Ole Targeson. In 1873 or 1874 he removed to Iowa.

In 1857 a Mr. Seeley built a grist mill near the sawmill, being assisted by John Phelps, who afterwards became the owner of the mill, and operated it for several years. Both mills were purchased by Joseph Schneider in 1868, and in 1875 they were replaced by another mill, with four run of stones and up-to-date machinery, which was operated for a number of years as a first-class mill.

About a year after Mr. Brown's arrival, a Mr. Cook came to the locality and built a house, which was subsequently enlarged and converted into a hotel, being operated by Martin Neubury.

The first store in the village was opened by Moses Woods, a miller, in 1856. It occupied a small slab building, which he erected, and was run for about a year when insufficient custom caused him to abandon it.

In 1857 John Paddock arrived from Illinois and started a better store with a good stock of merchandise. About the same time the postoffice was established, with Mr. Paddock as postmaster. The first religious service was also held at his house, and he was the first justice of the peace. After remaining in trade for about two years, he changed his occupation for that of a hotel keeper. He remained in town for about ten years, when he returned to Illinois. His daughter, Adeline, married Lewis Herring, about the fall of 1856. Another early store keeper was George Brenneman.

In 1856 John E. Homme, a Norwegian, took 120 acres in section 18, and at a later date bought 175 more. He was a carpenter by trade, and had previously resided in Dane County, Wisconsin. He developed a good farm here, on which he lived for many years. One of his sons, E. J. Homme, became a prominent Lutheran minister, the editor of a periodical, and founder of a Home for the Friendless.

In 1855, Henry Wilson, who had traveled all over the world, bought 160 acres in section 19. Subsequently he became a prominent citizen of the township, serving a number of times in local office.

The first settler on "the Ridge" in the eastern part of the town was Jerry Cunningham, an

Irishman, who had arrived in New York in 1851, and after working in different states, arrived in Houston County in 1854, the year of the first land sale. He bought 160 acres in section 13, where he subsequently built a log house in which he and his family lived for several years. It was afterwards replaced by one of more modern style and structure. In 1857 he married Ellen Haggerty, and they reared a family of children.

Another Irishman, named John Murphy, settled in Sheldon township at an early date, but in 1859 he went to Dakota. Among the pioneers or early settlers of the township who stayed, built homes and became more or less prominent, with the dates of their arrival, were: George Brenneman, 1857; Christof Evenson, 1857; G. Guttesen, 1853; John N. Ingham, 1856; Levi Olson, 1854; Moses Woods, 1856; J. B. Williams (came to Houston County in 1852, and opened the first dry goods store in Sheldon in May, 1857); Hans Hogensen, about 1868; Mikkell Eastonson, 1863; Leander G. Carpenter (came to the county in 1869); Hiram Knox, 1863; George W. Mills, 1876; Joseph Schneider, 1875; Edgar E. Webster, 1876; Jasper M. Know, 1877; and Frederick Pieper, who came to Houston County in 1866, and to Sheldon Township in 1881.

The town of Sheldon was organized May 11, 1858, at a meeting held in the village. The officers elected were: Supervisors, John Brown, chairman; Steiner Knudson and Henry Olson; town clerk, James Patton; assessor, Michael Ryan; collector, Lawrence Lynch; justices of the peace, Lyman B. Jefferson and Ch. Fetsan; constable, Bartholomew Henry; overseer of the poor, John Paddock.

The village of Sheldon derived its name from Julius C. Sheldon, previously a resident of Suffield, Connecticut, who anticipated a large and steady growth for the place, and with others, did much to promote its interests. For some years the prospects were quite encouraging; but the village met the fate that has befallen so many others of like promise, when the railroad left it six miles to one side, and its trade was diverted to other points. It is beautifully situated in the valley of Beaver Creek, on a broad bench of land running back from the creek, about a mile in width, and generally level. Though surrounded by bluffs, it is connected by various roads with the other towns, and is easily accessible when the roads have been rendered impassible by heavy snows or rains. The village, as laid out, had 16 blocks, with eight lots in each and cross alleys. Five streets ran north and south, and five east and west.