

*Written by ...
for 125th Anniv.*

HISTORY OF SHELDON CHURCH OF BRETHREN

I would like to have you imagine yourself living around the 1880. This was not a highly populated area yet. Iowa had just become a state in 1846. The first major railroad across the state was built in 1867. Bridges across the Mississippi were completed in 1856. So transportation and travel had to be difficult. Families began to migrate from the east, bringing with them their livestock and farm machinery, looking for that fertile soil that was being offered .

The W.C. Kimmel and T. L. Kimmel families came from Illinois in 1884 and the Tobias Myers family arrived in 1888. Can you imagine the trek across Iowa these people had just to get here. Roads weren't that great. Then when they arrived here they had to build their homes and shelters for the animals and probably a school. They met to worship in a small schoolhouse across the road from this building or in Kimmels' barn, a buggy shed, side shed of a tenant house. With twelve members present, they requested and received permission to establish the Sheldon Church of the Brethren on November 3, 1888. exactly 125 years ago today.

Now I don't know about you, but I can't imagine meeting in some of those locations for a church service. It gets pretty cold around here in the winter. There were no furnaces or electric heaters to plug in. Not much in the way of electric lights either. Just a couple weeks ago, when we came to church the furnace thermostat had not been changed to come on when it got below 60 or so degrees and people thought they were going to freeze. Luckily Scott switched it so we had some heat, but can you imagine being in a barn or a buggy shed. Our forefathers must have been a very hearty and determined group of Brethren.

Tobias Myers was the first minister in charge and W.C. Kimmel was elected deacon at that first meeting. They met weekly. Their first communion was held in WC Kimmel's barn, which was built in 1888. The second communion was two years later, in the side shed of Kimmels tenant house. In 1891 or 92 they built a large buggy shed at T L. Kimmels in which they held revival meetings and communion.

In 1892 a regular Sunday School was organized with Tobias Myers as Superintendent. It grew rapidly and was considered one of the best in the northwest part of the state. Six years after it was organized, in the summer of 1894, the first church building was built at the cost of \$1,251.02. It was dedicated in August of that same summer. Fifty four persons of the church, as well as Sheldon businessmen, subscribed funds to build this building which is located at this present site. The corner lot was donated by W.C, Kimmel. Just think of what it took to even build such a structure in those days. There weren't any power saws or skil saws or power driven equipment at that time. It was pure manual labor.

In 1894 J.E. Rolston came from Virginia, taught school in the N.W. Iowa area and then came to Sheldon, where he taught in a rural school in Grant Township and

served as minister of the new church. In 1896 he was advanced to eldership and placed in charge of the congregation. He remained being an Elder or an Elder Emeritus for 53 years. In 1900, he married Ada Kimmel who was the daughter of W.C. Kimmel and Anna Kimmel.

Revival meetings were held as early as 1888 and continued frequently throughout the years. Russell and Jennie Glessner came from Waterloo in 1906 and served the church for more than 25 years, 23 as being clerk. A very active and growing Sunday School, bible study groups indicated that the church needed more space and in 1917 Sunday School rooms were added along with a full basement and tower room. Stucco embedded with rock crystals were used on the outside at a cost of \$6,500. The completed building was dedicated on December 25, 1917, debt free. The church was filled for this occasion in spite of bad roads and weather.

In 1941 the stucco was removed and replaced with white siding. In 1951, an oil burning furnace was installed and a Hammond Electric Organ was purchased in 1957. The furnace was replaced with a new L.P. gas furnace in 1986.

In 1947 Elder J.E. Rolston formulated a plan to buy the 80 acre farm across the road to the northeast of the church. It was to be operated by the men of the church and the income was to help support the church. The response from members and friends of the church bore evidence of the high esteem in which he was held and in a few weeks the farm was purchased at \$300 an acre. (\$24,000). The house on the farm was to become the church parsonage. This house was the little old schoolhouse that had been moved from across the road by the congregation years earlier. When it was moved another schoolhouse was built in its place. In the summer of 1978 an addition of approximately 12 x 26 feet was added to the south side of the house under the direction of Larry Rolston. This was done just prior to the arrival of the Hendricks family. The farm is managed by the trustees and to this day is operated by members of the congregation, Ross Cox and his son Jed.

The women of the church worked hard in the early days. They met once a month in their homes for worship, Bible study and to work. They made quilts and comforters for the needy. In September of 1924, they asked to be considered a regular branch of the church. The request was granted. (36 years after the church was founded) They gave freely of their time and energy in church related work. During the 1940's and 1950's The Ladies Aid as they were called, held bazaars, bake sales and church suppers. They bought pulpit chairs, papered and carpeted the church, various projects at the parsonage and assisted at the Community Crippled Children's Clinic. They also made hand-made rugs to sell. In more recent years, they assisted Bloodmobile, Meals On Wheels and contributed to the Storehouse of Sheldon. The Ladies Aid no longer meets, but the women are still very active in several of these community activities.

Even in the early years of the church Mission projects were a prominent issue.

The Sunday School and J.O. and Ellen Kimmel supported an Indian worker in the field for years. In 1911 the church raised \$100 for furniture for dormitory rooms in a newly opened seminary in India. It's said that Elder Rolston regularly preached sermons telling of the needs of the foreign fields and in 1918, after such a sermon, Russel Glessner said to him, "Now is the time to do something about this." and that same Sunday evening \$2,280 was pledged to start building the Anklesvar Church in India. Then they decided to assume the whole cost of the church, which they did, but it was not built until 1931 and at the cost of \$5,000. In 1953, at the close of school of missions concerning India, an Indian dinner was served with the help of Pastor Quincy and Kathren Holsopple who had served many years in India.

During the first half century the church relied mostly on the free ministry of J.E. Rolston and Charles Kimmel. The first full time salaried pastor was William Gahm who came in 1949. He served until 1952. Quincy Holsopple was pastor for the next eight years, until 1960. Earl Deardorf followed for an eight month interim.

In 1960 Russell Pepple became pastor and faithfully served the church and community until 1970. The church had a very active Youth Fellowship under the guidance of Dee and Russell. (And I think their daughters Leah and Millie are here today).

Calvin Teasdale pastored , along with the United Methodist church in Sheldon from 1971 to 1977. Francis and Jean Hendricks and their family were co-pastors from 1978 till 1984. Tim and Delis Waits were here for two years. Lots of great music was heard from those families I've been told.

In 1986 Leland and Jeannette Grove retired from a farm in southwest Iowa to become our pastor and remained until 1996. In 1988, The Church observed its 100 Anniversary, with many of the former pastors and their families returning and 184 people joining in the celebration. In 1990 Volney Rolston suggested planting potatoes in the set-aside land at the farm as a community project, with the potatoes given to the Storehouse of Sheldon. Local grocery stores donated the seed potatoes. They were planted and harvested by church members in 1990, (3000lbs.) 1991, (4,000 lbs.) 1992 (3400 lbs) and in 1993 I couldn't find an amount, but in March of 1994 Leland reported that he still had about 1300 lbs of potatoes in the church parsonage basement and so we will not do the potato project again. Leland himself cultivated those rows with an antique plow.(Picture in paper downstairs)

In 1990 Jeanette made new costumes for the Christmas Nativity scene.

In the fall of 1991, the Village Singers sang at the church for the first time and have joined us at least once every year for the following 22 years since.

In the summer of 1992 the kitchen was remodeled thanks to Lois VanMaanen and her family. In July of 1993 our church hosted a bicycle club from Cedar Rapids for RAGBRAI. Approximately 90 people were served a supper (Volney Rolston donated the sweet corn)and we also provided breakfast before they left in the morning. We also hosted the CROP Walk for 150 people that year. (Keith Rolston donated the apples)

The Groves loved to sing and so every Christmas season we went caroling, with hot cocoa and goodies at the parsonage afterward served by Clarence and Rhelma Evans.

In 1996 more renovations were completed on the church parsonage and John Elder and his family became our pastor after the Groves retired. Among a few of the projects during this time were: A Biker's Sunday (60 riders attended), new steps & sidewalk were completed at the church, Youth group from Pennsylvania stayed at the church over night on their way to the Youth Convention. (Many of these kids had never seen the sun set over a field or saw corn growing up close, or a moon rise over fields), Ladies Night Out were held during the Christmas season, Christ's Cupboard began, sent items to the USS Truman during the Iraq War, our new sign was built, new carpet laid in the church, new deck at the parsonage, participated in Cancer Relay for Life, new furnace and water heater were installed in 2005 and Pastor John answered a call to Garden City Kansas. (We've gone thru at least three furnaces, so I think the Brethren have decided they like to keep warm)

In 2008 , the Church celebrated 120 years, along with the Church of the Brethren's 300th anniversary and a meal was served to 140 friends and families of the church.

The pulpit was vacant from 2005 through 2008, but we were very fortunate to have a full list of men and women who filled that need. Some of them are here today: (Don Adkins, Pete Aberson, Dyan Sterk, Don Lenderink, Lucinda Douglas.)

In 2009, David Loveall was called to fill the position and continues to serve the church at this time.

During the past century our church leaders worked hard to get rural electric lines, telephone service and rural free mail delivery. In 1987, the black top road was put in to connect us to the county line road.

Changes occurred in the denomination to drop the requirement that an ordained elder must preside over the congregation. Since that time a Moderator serves the congregation of which there have been five (Rufus Rolston – Dick Kimmel – Warren Cox – Volney Rolston and now myself) I was told I cannot retire from this position and that there is only one way out of it.)

So, as you can see this little church has been a very busy one and still is, even though we are small in numbers, almost back to the original number when it was organized. In a council meeting report from Leland Grove in 1995, he stated " God has given the members of our congregation many talents. Valuable community service is given by the majority of our members in education, health services, senior citizens program, 4-H for youth, financial services, volunteer work, etc. The influence of our church in the community far exceeds the number of our members".

Memories abound from anyone who has been associated for any time at all with the little church out in the country. The Harvest Dinners, 4th of July Picnics, Christmas

Sunday School programs and yes even the funerals of long time members. Most of those memories include the words family. And that seems to be the center of what this church is all about.

I would like to close with this scripture from Ephesians: A church building is sometimes called God's house, In reality, Gods' household is not a building but a group of people. He lives in us and shows himself to a watching world through us. People can see that God is love and that Christ is Lord, as we live in harmony with each other and in accordance with what God says is his Word. We are citizens of God's Kingdom and members of his household.

Thank You

Presented: 11-3-2013

Linda Adams, Moderator