



# **A History Of The Sheldon Church Of The Brethren: 1888-1988**

# A HISTORY OF THE SHELDON CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN 1888-1988



***"Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below..."***

In 1870, three families broke prairie and settled northwest of Sheldon in the area which is now Grant Township, Sioux County, Iowa. The next year about 24 families homesteaded in this area.

In 1884, the families of W. C. Kimmel and T. L. Kimmel were lured by the fertile soil in Grant Township. They left their homes near Lanark, Illinois, and migrated with their livestock and farm machinery to the Sheldon, Iowa, area. In 1888, Tobias Myers and his family also left Illinois, and joined the Kimmels in this new land. The land they purchased was a parcel of Sunnyside "Trustee Farms" - land that belonged to stockholders of the St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad. General Bishop was general manager of the railroad and he was offering the 12,000 acres for sale.

The first church in Grant Township was built in Matlock. It was a Presbyterian Church. The second church in the township was established by the Kimmels and Myers in 1888. It was the beginning of the Sheldon Church of the Brethren. In September of 1888, the Gillette Grove congregation gave the families at Sheldon permission to organize a congregation. This organization took place November 3, 1888.

To quote Mrs. T. L. Kimmel, "The Church of the Brethren was organized in 1888, in our little old school house with about one dozen members present. Brother Tobias Myers was the minister in charge. Brother S. H. Miller of Waterloo and W. G. Cook of South Dakota, organized us into a working body. Brother W. C. Kimmel

was elected deacon at the same meeting. We had met weekly. Our first communion was held in the W C. Kimmel barn, built in 1888, after a series of meetings led by Dan Miller from Illinois. We had our second communion two years later in the W C. Kimmel tenant house, south of the grove, in the side shed of the home. At this meeting Brother W. M. Munderbaugh was elected deacon. In 1891, or 1892, we built a buggy shed at the T. L. Kimmels in which we had revival meetings and communion. At all of these meetings we had large crowds, the best of interest and a union of love that developed into a house of worship in 1894. Brother J. E. Rolston became our pastor and through ceaseless efforts we have grown in number and spirituality."

The charter members, of whom there is a reasonable record, included W C. and Anna Kimmel, T. L. and Emma Kimmel, Mr. and Mrs. Tobias Myers, Charley Myers, John Myers, and Daniel Hoover and family. Additional early church workers included the Slifers, McKinnies, Schumakers, and Munderbaugh's.

Sunday School was organized March 27, 1892. Regular meetings of the Sunday School, as well as the preaching service, were held in the school house and other available spaces until the summer of 1894, when the first church building was erected at a cost of \$1,251.02. It was dedicated in August, 1894. Fifty-four persons of the church, as well as Sheldon businessmen, suscribed funds to build this structure located at the present site, one mile west of Sheldon on Highway 18 and two miles north. The building was built on a corner of the W C. Kimmel farm and was donated by this gentleman as the "lot" for the church building.

Mr. Kimmel was a successful farmer and community leader. He served as a State Legislator from 1904 to 1910. W.C. and Anna Kimmel were known for their hospitality and neighborliness.

In 1894, J. E. Rolston came from Virginia and taught school in northwest Iowa. After a brief stay in another area, this distinguished gentleman came to Sheldon where he taught a rural school in Grant Township and served as minister of the new church. In 1900, J.E. Rolston married Ada Kimmel, daughter of W. C. and Anna Kimmel.

S. H. Miller from Waterloo was elder of the Sheldon church from 1888 to 1896. The elders of the district and the church congregation advanced J.E. to the eldership in 1896, and he was placed in charge of the congregation. He served this charge until 1951, when he became Elder Emeritus.

Elder Rolston married and buried many people during his more than 50 years in the ministry, whether they were members of the church or others in the community. Many times Florence and Bertha Kimmel sang for the funerals.

In 1908, Charles E. Kimmel, son of T. L. Kimmel, was elected to the ministry and helped Elder Rolston immeasurably in the work of the church. After some years in preparation at Mt. Morris College in Illinois and Bethany Seminary in Chicago, he continued as a farmer-preacher until 1941, when he was called to help in Civilian Public Service Camps and later in Brethren Service. P. B. Fitzwater, while teaching school in the community, was called to the ministry. He later became a well-known Bible teacher. Milton Kimmel and W. A. Brallier were also elected to the ministry. Russel H. Glessner and his wife Jennie came from Waterloo in 1906, and filled an important place in the life of the church and community throughout their lives. Russel Glessner served as clerk of the church for more than twenty-five years.

The Sunday School, organized shortly after the chartering of the church, had as one of its first superintendents, Obadiah Kimmel, who also was teacher and song leader. The Sunday School grew rapidly and at one time was considered one of the best in the northwest part of the state. A stimulating practice following the lesson period was that a "querist" would ask a Biblical question to be answered the following Sunday. An active library was maintained for many years. In 1917, when the new rooms were added to the church, the Sunday School was completely departmentalized.

A Christian Worker's Society was formed in 1907, and met on Sunday evenings with all ages attending. The

group was active in the District, attending rallies and entertaining them. Teacher Training classes were held. The minutes record the first class to graduate on October 8, 1918, included J. E. Rolston, Jennie Glessner, C. E. Kimmel and Milt Kimmel. Educational endeavors since then have included Bible study groups, schools of missions, world friendship, family life, Vacation Bible School, and Membership classes conducted by the pastor. Currently we have two "People of the Covenant" groups meeting regularly for Bible study, sharing and prayer.

Revival meetings were held as early as 1888, and continued frequently through the years. The first recorded evangelist was Dan Miller of Illinois. Other names remembered are Hughie Taylor, J. S. Zimmerman, C. S. Garber, L. H. Root and Oliver Austin. Frequent Bible Institutes were held and familiar leaders were J. G. Royer, I. M. Moore, C. Wiend, M. W. Emmert, W H. Uchty, and I. C. Snavely.

In 1916, C. S. Garber held a series of meetings and baptized sixteen persons. More space was needed in the church building. The congregation decided to remodel the existing building. This work was done in 1917. Adequate Sunday School rooms were added, as well as a full basement and tower room. Stucco embedded with rock crystals were used for the outside. The expanded building with a cost of \$6,500 was dedicated debt-free on December 25, 1917. Elder C. B. Smith of Morrill, Kansas, preached the dedicatory sermon. Worshipers filled the church for this happy 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. This was replaced in 1986, with a new L P gas furnace. A Hammond electric organ was purchased in 1957.

Through individual purchases, gifts and memorials, there have been other improvements in the church property and equipment, including a piano, a pulpit, curtains behind the pulpit, pulpit cloth, pulpit Bible, flower stands, wooden cross, pulpit light, ceiling lights, fan, music lights, platform carpet, candlesticks, vase, communion table, tables for the Sunday School classes and dining room, doors and restored pews.

Deacons that served the church during the early years included Russell and Jennie Glessner, Paul and Lizzie Evans and Jim and Laura Kimmel. Our older members today have happy memories of "Aunt Laura" working with the youth and in conducting Christmas Programs, "Aunt Lizzie" as a favorite Sunday School teacher for the little ones, and "Aunt Jennie" for her hospitality, kindness and concern for others.

Singing classes, music contests, and Christmas programs were entered into enthusiastically by all of those involved. Sadie Miller, Katherine Miller and Florence Heagley Kimmel were among the leaders. For many years Florence Kimmel served as chorister for regular church services and for Sunday evening "Hymn Sings".

The first daily Vacation Bible School was held in 1922, with Anna M. Hamer of Waterloo as director. Other leaders included Martha Martin, Edna Keltner, Elsie Finckh of Worthington, local pastors and leaders. Attendance by children of the church and community was excellent from the 1920's, through the 1960's.

In 1947, Elder J. E. Rolston formulated a plan whereby the church could buy the 80 acre farm across the road to the north and be operated cooperatively. The income would be used to support the local church program and the house would be used for a parsonage. The response from members and friends of the church bore evidence of the high esteem in which he was held. In a few weeks the farm was purchased. The members of the church appreciated the contribution of money and help from persons in the community and expressed that appreciation with a special dinner for those donors. The farm has produced well and continues to give solid financial support to the program of the church. In the summer of 1978, approximately 12' x 26' was added to the south side of the house. Under the able direction of Larry Rolston, many helped with the painting and varnishing. The entire house was rewired and insulated. It is a very comfortable home for the pastor and his family. The farm is managed by the trustees of the church. Should the church some day

cease to exist, the farm will be-come the property of the General Brotherhood Board of the Church of the Brethren.

"The women worked hard in the early days of the church," according to Helen Kimmel, one of our present day members. For several years the women met once a month in their homes for worship, Bible study and 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. Rebecca Heagley, Florence Kimmel's mother, became the first president. Other members of that first group included Emma (Mrs. T. L.) Kimmel, Anna (Mrs. W. C.) Kimmel, Ada (Mrs. J. E.) Rolston, Jennie (Mrs. R. H.) Glessner, and Lizzie (Ms. Paul) Evans. They and several other women gave freely of their time and energy in church related work. During the 1940's, and 1950's, the Ladies Aid held bazaars, bake sales and church suppers. They bought pulpit chairs, papered and carpeted the church, helped with various projects at the parsonage, and they assisted with the community Crippled Children's Clinic. For many years our ladies have had hand-made rugs for sale. In recent years the Ladies Aid has helped with the community Bloodmobile, delivered Meals-on-Wheels to the elderly, and contributed to the Storehouse of Sheldon which supplies food and clothing to the needy.

Missions have always been a prominent interest in the church. In January, 1895, the minute book stated that there should be "two more so-licitors appointed to aid in soliciting funds for missionary work." Solicitors were elected for many years. J. O. and Ellen Kim mel, and later the Sunday School, supported an Indian worker on the field for years. In 1911, the church raised \$100 for furniture for the dormitory rooms of the newly opened seminary in India. Elder Rolston regularly preached mission sermons telling of the needs of the foreign fields. In 1918, after such a sermon, Russel Glessner said to him, "Now it is time to do something about this." And the same Sunday evening \$2,280 was pledged to start building the Anklesvar Church in India. It was then decided to assume the whole cost of the church, which they did. Because of unfavorable exchange and other reasons, the church was not built until 1931, at a cost of \$5,000. In the spring of 1953, at the close of a 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. Curios and costumes added much interest. Friends in the community also enjoyed this occasion.

During the first half century the church relied mostly on the free mm-istry of J. E. Rolston (1894-1955) and Charles Kimmel (1908-1941). Student ministers in college or seminary were engaged to serve during the summers as follows:

1930 -	Stacy Shenton
1932 -	Grant McGuire
1934-35 -	Paul Wingerd
1939 -	Paul Miller
1940 -	Raymond Flory
1941 -	Lyle Kiotz
1942 -	Merlin Cassel
1944-45 -	Donald Decker

The first full time salaried pastor was William Gahm who came in 1949. He and Margaret and son Gary, were here until 1952, when Quincy and Kathren Holsopple came from Elgin, Illinois. Quincy pastored the church until his health broke in 1960. Earl and Lova Deardorf were then here for an eight month interim.

In 1960, Russell Pepple became pastor and faithfully served the church and community until his death in 1970. His wife Dee and two daughters, Leah and Millie, continued to live in the parsonage for several years. The church had a very active Youth Fellowship under the guidance of Russell and Dee.

Calvin Teasdale pastored our church along with the United Methodist Church in Sheldon from 1971 to 1977. Francis Junior and Jean Lichty Hendricks were called to be co-pastors in 1978. They with their children, Darren and Shelley, were here until 1984. Tim and Delia Waits came that same year. Tim was our pastor for two years, moving to Goshen, Indiana, to complete seminary training. Leland and Jeannette Grove came December 1, 1986, retiring from a farm in southeast Iowa. Leland is our current pastor. (**Editor's note:** Leland Grove retired after 50 years in the ministry and 10 years at the Sheldon Church of the Brethren, in June of 1996. He was succeeded by John and Michele Elder, who became our minister Nov. 1, 1996.)

Many have graciously filled the pulpit from a few to many Sundays. This includes Cliff Vander Burgh, Stan Vander Weide, Ray Weiss, Bill Albright, Harold Butz, Lyle Vander Werff, Dr. Scorza and Charles Focht.

During the past century our leaders have been actively involved in community work as well as church work. Early leaders worked hard to get rural electric lines, telephone service and rural free delivery mail. During the fall of 1987, a hard surfaced road connected our church to the Sioux-O'Brien County Line road. Leaders have also actively participated in the Sheldon Ministerial Ass'n, Peace Organizations, and service to the hospital, nursing homes and Village Northwest Unlimited. Our church has a good record of financial support for Northern Plains District, our Brotherhood, McPherson College, Bethany Theological Seminary, Camp Pine Lake, Heifer Project, CROP and Church World Service. Traditional celebrations include a picnic dinner on the 4th of July, a Harvest Dinner on the Sunday before Thanksgiving, and occasionally a soup and pie supper.

It was about a generation ago that the denomination dropped the requirement that an ordained elder preside over the congregation. Since that time lay persons serving as Moderator have included Rufus Rolston, Dick Kimmel, Warren Cox and Volney Rolston. Another change was the election of deacons to a term of years, rather than for a life-time. Since that time the deacons have included Clarence and Rhelma Evans, Dick and Clara Kimmel, Warren and Ada Ruth Cox, Jim and Darlene Houtsma, and Aian and Marcene Co~ Harriet Rolston served the church as organist for many years with Ada Ruth Cox as substitute. Meg Rolston was for many years a trustee and farm treasurer. Florence Kimmel, Helen Kimmel, and Billie Evans each served long terms as church clerk. Paul Rolston was a trustee of McPherson College and on several local and district committees.

The spirit of brotherhood and working together that was evident in the early years is still a trademark of the congregation after 100 years. A look at the bulletin board reveals a listing of whose "turn" it is to play the piano or organ for the worship service, to play the piano for the closing service of the Sunday School, to teach the adult Sunday School class, to mow the lawn, and to serve as custodian for the month.

As we enter the second century of the life of our church, we look to God to guide us in continuing service to our members, to our community, to our Brotherhood of the Church of the Brethren, and to our world.

Information from which this history was written include the following:

***History of the Northern Plains Church of the Brethren***, 1977.

***History of Grant Township*** compiled by members of the Brewster family.

Minutes of Council Meetings of the Sheldon Church of the Brethren as recorded by R. H. Glessner, Florence Kimmel, Helen Kimmel and Billie Evans.

# APPENDIX

Since future generations may wish to know more about the congregation at the time of this Centennial, we will include a listing of members, church officers, and those who "take a turn" in the various responsibilities.

## MEMBERS AS OF APRIL 15, 1988:

Adams, Frank and Linda of Ashton  
Behrens, Sue of Sheldon  
Bothmer, James and Leah of Aurora, CO  
Clemens, Toni Jean of Millard, NE  
Cox, Alan and Marcene of Boyden  
Cox, Ada Ruth of Ashton  
Cox, Ross and Sandi of Ashton  
Evans, Clarence and Rhelma of Sheldon  
Evans, George of Burnsville, MN  
Evans, Harold and Billie of Sheldon  
English, Arline of Sanborn  
English, W. K. of Austin, TX  
Faulkender, Maye of Spencer  
Gordon, Cora of Sheldon  
Grove, Leland and Jeannette of Sheldon  
Houtsma, James and Darlene of Sheldon  
Houtsma, James Dale of Bismark, ND  
Jans, Donna Rae of Hawarden  
Harder, Michelle of Iowa City  
Kimmel, Carla Louise of California  
Kimmel, Helen of Harris  
Kimmel, Kenyon of Sheldon  
Landhuis, Dorothy of Early  
Landhuis, Marlon of Columbia, MO  
Lofflin, James and Marilyn,  
Amy and Casey Eltemiller of Sheldon  
McNames, Jane of Caledonia, IL  
Meese, Barbara Ruth of Westborough, MA  
Pepple, Dee of Sheldon  
Pepple, Mildred Ruth of Shenandoah  
Peterson, Larry and Emily of Sioux Falls, SD  
Roflsmeier, Lynn, Molly and Liz of Sheldon  
Rolston, Doyle of Cresant Mills, CA  
Rolston, Jerry and Leona of Russellville, AR  
Rolston, Georgia of Wayzata, MN  
Rolston, Megrum and Margaret of Sheldon  
Rolston, Ray of Sheldon  
Rolston, Carma of Medford, OR  
Rolston, Harriet of Sheldon  
Rolston, Ursula of Harlingen, TX  
Rolston, Volney, Jo and Kevin of Sheldon  
Rolston, Nancy of Fairfield  
Vander Burgh, Cornelius and Eunice of Sheldon and McAllen, TX  
Vander Burgh, Paul of Cumming

## CHURCH OFFICERS - 1988

Moderator - Volney Rolston

Clerk - Billie Evans

Treasurer - Marcene Cox

Ministerial Committee - Alan Cox, Rhelma Evans, Jim Lofflin

Trustees - Ross Cox, Clarence Evans, Volney Rolston

Deacons - Jim and Darlene Houtsma, Clarence and Rhelma Evans

Finance Committee - Jim Houtsma, Harold Evans, Lynn Rolfsmeier

Parsonage Committee - Lynn Rolfsmeier, Jo Rolston, Rhelma Evans

Nominating Committee - Dee Pepple, Harriet Rolston, Jo Rolston

Auditors - Cornie VanderBurgh, Meg Rolston, Sandi Cox

Messenger Agent - Donna Brinkman

Church School Superintendent - Alan Cox

Assistant Superintendent - Marilyn Lofflin

Sunday School Secretary - Darlene Houtsma

Ushers - Alan Cox, Jim Houtsma, Ross Cox and Kevin Rolston

## PERSONS "TAKING TURNS" IN 1988

**Organist or pianist for Sunday Worship Service** - Donna Brinkman, Ada Ruth Cox, Marcene Cox, Amy Eitemiller, Jeannette Grove, Donna Rae Jans, Lynn Rolfsmeier, Harriet Rolston and Lois Van Maanen.

**Lawn Mowing** - Leland Grove, Harold Evans, Ross Cox, Clarence Evans, Meg Rolston, Jim Lofflin, Jim Houtsma, Alan Cox and Volney Roiston.

**Custodial Care** - Lynn Rolfsmeier, Volney Rolston, Clarence Evans, Jim Houtsma, Leland Grove, Harold Evans, Alan Cox, Dee Pepple, Meg Rolston, Harriet Rolston, Jim Lofflin and Ross Cox

**Pre-School Sunday School** - Rhelma Evans and Jeannette Grove.

**Youth Sunday School** - Marcene Cox assisted by Alan Cox and Donna Brinkman.

**Adult Sunday School** - Donna Brinkman, Ada Ruth Cox, Alan Cox, Leland Grove, Darlene Houtsma, Jim Lofflin and Marilyn Lofflin.

\*Not scheduled this year due to health, but who have shared responsibilities for many years are Billie Evans in teaching Sunday School and Cornie VanderBurgh in teaching, lawn mowing and custodial care.