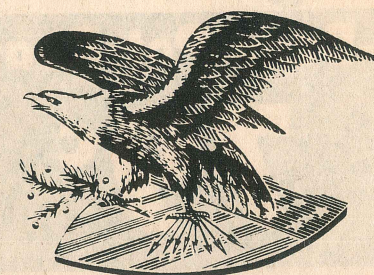


# BICENTENNIAL

## 1776-1976



*"Rememberances of Days Gone By"*

## Sheldahl: A Town Founded by Norwegians

The tiny central Iowa community of Sheldahl celebrated its 100th birthday last year, and the 1976 celebration will also be a monumental one in the life of the community, as it will host the upcoming Bicentennial celebration. Plans are already in the making and it promises to be one of the greatest celebrations ever in the 101 years that Sheldahl and Slater have hosted Fourth of July celebrations.

The town dates back to 1874, but one must look farther back to the year 1854 when a group of Norwegian immigrants arrived in America from Etna, Norway. The original founders of the town settled in Lisbon, Ill. when first arriving in our country. At this time they met a traveling Bible salesman who related about land farther west selling for \$1.25 an acre. So the group held a meeting and selected three men, Eric Sheldahl, Osmund Sheldahl and Ole Apland, to venture to the area of what is now central Iowa to check into the matter. They arrived in the area in the month of September, and in the summer in 1855, returned with twenty families. The trip took 15 days and the pioneers traveled Highway 6 or the old California Trail as it was known in those days. The group came by covered wagon, and interestingly enough, it was against their religious beliefs to travel on Sundays. They would put their wagons in a circle and hold religious services inside. The Norwegians planned on settling in Omaha but the beauty and richness of the Iowa soil attracted them to this area so they settled and constructed the Palestine Lutheran Church in Sheldahl, a structure built by Osmund Sheldahl. He also assumed the role of pastor until his death in 1900. The church was erected in the northern part of town on May 2, 1883 and is still standing today. Mr. Sheldahl donated 20 acres of land to the town and the town deed was signed by Abraham Lincoln.

The town possesses the unique aspect of being situated in three counties, Boone, Story, and Polk and four townships, Palestine in Story county, Garden in Boone county and Lincoln and Union, both in Polk County.



Sheldahl  
Norwegian Lutheran Church  
Founded 1883  
by Pastor Osmund Sheldahl

It is situated 18 miles north of Des Moines on a branchline of the Chicago and Northwestern railroads. Sheldahl was surveyed and laid out by Jefferson S. Polk, a railroad builder from Des Moines. Anticipation of a narrow gauge railroad line being built to connect the cities of Ames and Des Moines helped to bring about the platting and eventual settling of the community which served as a junction for the railroad. The railroad was built by Polk and Hubbell, a Des Moines firm in August of 1874.

The town was regarded as an area eventually to become a prosperous agricultural center. The fertile land was tilled by sturdy pioneers who migrated from

the Scandanavian, Benelux and German countries. The community was also destined to become a prosperous area because of the neighboring towns such as Cambridge and Swede Point wouldn't be able to threaten its supremacy due to the fact that no railroads passed through the community at this time. The only regarded rivals were Ames and Polk City.

The years between 1874-79 were prosperous ones for the Sheldahl community, but things began to change in '79 when a dispute with the railroad arose. Polk City officials were talking to the railroad company to see what possibilities there were in receiving access to the present railroad services. Sheldahl businessmen, in the meanwhile, sought to halt the impending discussions. Alledged discrimination charges were leveled at the Sheldahl townspeople resulting in trouble with railroad officials.

Railroad officials considered Sheldahl to be a midway point on the proposed trips to Chicago and Omaha, but when the surveys were completed in 1880, the crossing point of the Chicago-Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroads was 80 rods north of the town.

Jenks then proposed the idea of moving the town to the new area for he owned land around the railroad which he had already divided into city blocks for expansion purposes. Many people then began to consider the move, for businessmen knew that to remain in Sheldahl might mean extinction.

Town meetings were held and many businessmen decided to move their establishments to the new location. Oley Nelson's general store, the grain elevator, built in 1885 as well as several other buildings were transported to the new location. By the end of 1888, an estimated 53 buildings had left Sheldahl in favor of Sheldahl Crossing, now known as Slater.

Incorporation of the town of Sheldahl came in January of 1882 with a majority vote of 35-10 favoring the passage. The first town election was held in 1886 with C. B. Owen elected town mayor. Population of the town at this time number 235.

### Firsts In the Town

As mentioned, the first election occurred in 1886, with the following men holding town offices: S. W. Shepherd, recorder; E. F. Miller, treasurer; L. G. Johnson, assessor; Swert Houge and Gust Reinuer, councilmen.

The following men were the first respective businessmen in the town:

General Store — Oley Nelson

Hotel — G. Milligan (The hotel had no floors or partitions.)

Bob Hopkins erected the first house in the town.

The first successful town paper, the Iowa Cyclone, was opened on August 23, 1882, and was published by Willie D. McTavish. The paper had three columns to the page. The Sheldahl Thrift preceeded that, being in publication as far back as 1878.

The first livery barn was built by J. N. Scott.

The town's first fire occurred on December 25, 1886, and completely destroyed S. W. Snyder's flour mill. Damage estimate was at \$4,000.

The first graduating class from Sheldahl came on May 22, 1918 with Georgia Peterson and Carl Liechty comprising the class. The first school board was comprised of Henry Peterson, president; John Harmon, Olliver, Charles Sargent and O. R. Peterson, board members.

Rev. John Linn was the initial pastor of the Swedish Methodist Church, one of four eventual churches in the town. The Methodist church was organized in 1868, but the building was not constructed until 1875. The structure was rebuilt in 1915 when a basement was added. This church remains the only active house of worship in the community today.

The Sheldahl consolidated school was established in 1916 and is presently used as an attendance center in the North Polk Community School District.

Sheldahl has not rapidly progressed as a town as was first thought due to the following reasons: 1) the moving of part of the town to Sheldahl Crossing and 2) fires plaguing the town throughout the years. The first destructive fire happened in 1886, destroying the flour mill and on January 28, 1926, fire consumed Trumbell's garage. Four business establishments were destroyed by fire in 1928. Lost in the fire were the Sheldahl Savings Bank and Town Hall, the Gaines Building which housed the Sheldahl Thrift newspaper and the post office and the Britt Viland Building.

The town population is today around 279 and the Sheldahl branch of the Tri-County Co-op erected in 1954 is the community's largest business.