

Stod, The Ghost Town Of Trondhjem Township

Draw a line northeast from Rothsay, southeast from Barnesville, southwest from Pelican Rapids and northwest from Erhard. Where those lines intersect you will find ... nothing.

Well, almost nothing. Very close to where those four lines converge you will still find the 150-year old South Immanuel Church.

What you will not find is the town of Stod that was once a part of Trondhjem Township. That community still exists only in stories handed down over several decades and generations and in a very few old memories told by grandparents. Even fewer photographs exist. The ghost town of Stod reflects a time that will soon be no more, even in ancient memories.

But a local historian from Pelican Rapids is keeping some of these old memories alive. The following is a recounting of some of those old memories compiled by Paul Gubrud of Pelican Rapids. Paul is a local hobbyist of all things obscure, memories and records that can be compiled by visits to old cemeteries and searches of old church records.

The following is a reprint of a story Paul wrote for the Pelican Rapids Press.

By Paul Gubrud

Few would know that a ghost town once existed between Pelican Rapids and Rothsay. It had a promising start beginning with a church, general store, and a cooperative creamery, but it never went further than that. Lacking a railroad and major roads, the community dried up before it was able to gather much steam.

The little hamlet was called Stod, named after the Norwegian hometown of most of the area's immigrants, Stod, Norway. The name Stod (pronounced "Stood") means "to stand still" in Norwegian,



PAUL GUBRUD

and the name was prophetic. Today's only landmark left of its existence is the South Immanuel Lutheran Church at the crossroads of county roads 21 and 28 in Trondhjem Township northeast of Rothsay.

Most of what we know about Stod is from word-of-mouth stories handed down over the past generations, but in 1989 the Fergus Falls Journal interviewed Selmer Nordgaard, who grew up in Stod. He had an excellent memory, and much of this article is based on his recollections. Selmer passed away in 1997 at the age of 96 and is buried in the South Immanuel cemetery.

The Stod Church

The community's anchor was the church, first organized in about 1871 as the East North Immanuel Lutheran Church in Norwegian Grove Township, and the congregation grew rapidly. Because of internal conflict over church doctrine, as well as distance, the church was divided. On May 4, 1872, it was decided to build a South Immanuel Church, but it wasn't until May 19, 1875, that the church was ready for the first service.

The first plan was for a log

church, but plans were later changed in favor of a frame building at a total cost of \$400. The first building soon became overcrowded, and plans for a new building were proposed in 1883. Each church member was asked to supply three loads of stone and to help transport the lumber. The cornerstone for the new church was laid on June 9, 1886.

There is no record of when the first service was held in the unfinished church, but the first congregational meeting of the South Immanuel Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church was held on October 21, 1886. Until 1918, all services were held in the Norwegian language.

The Stod Creamery

Stod was a beehive of activity and optimism in the 1880s. The local farmers formed the Trondhjem Cooperative Creamery and built a creamery in 1885 to sell their cream and eggs. A general store was also started at about the same time.

The creamery consisted of an office, an ice house, a six-horsepower single-cylinder steam engine for power, two small wooden churns, and two vats for making butter. Cream was churned into butter and packed in six-gallon wooden tubs. The creamery's butter had no brand name and was hauled to the railroad depot in Rothsay to be shipped to regional markets.

Ice for the ice house was cut from Midboe Lake, three-quarters of a mile southeast of the creamery, and sliced with ice saws into 18-inch square blocks. The blocks were then loaded on sleds and packed in sawdust in the ice house. The ice would last until late summer and was used to keep the cream cold and to cool the store.

Area farmers could bring their cream and eggs to the creamery and then do their shopping at the store, or hired drivers could pick up the cream



The Stod Store as it appeared a few years before closing in 1913. The owners had living quarters upstairs, which included living and dining rooms, a kitchen, and two bedrooms. When one of the last owners, Christ Mindrum, became too old to climb stairs, he added two bedrooms on the east side of the store. (Photo courtesy of the Otter Tail County Historical Society.)

from area farmers and haul them to the creamery by horse and wagon. Patrons would often order groceries, and the driver would deliver them on the return trip.

Competition from the larger town of Rothsay soon took its toll. The Rothsay Creamery started in 1907, and the Stod Creamery closed three years later, in 1910. The lumber from the building was purchased by a local farmer, who dismantled the structure and took the lumber home.

The Stod Store

At about the same time as the creamery was built, John Torgerson started the Stod store and post office in the west wing of Stasius Nordgaard's home near the church and creamery. Torgerson and Nordgaard, as well as most of the people in the region, immigrated to the United States from Stod, Norway. Many of them spoke different dialects of Norwegian, and as Selmer Nordgaard declared, "some couldn't understand each other across the fence."

Soon Torgerson wanted a larger building, so he built a store across the road from the creamery. The building was twenty-two feet wide and forty feet long, with walls twelve feet high. A grove of boxelder trees surrounded the store, which was built right up to the road. Hitching posts stood outside the store for farmers to hitch their horses on, and some even hitched their horses to the porch posts.

When the mail arrived by train in Rothsay or Pelican Rapids, it was picked up by the Star Mail Route and delivered to the Stod store and other

rural post offices between Pelican Rapids and Rothsay. In 1888, the Stod store became the first and only rural post office in Trondhjem Township. Local folks could buy stamps, pick up their mail, visit, and buy groceries and other necessities. The Decorah Posten and the Fergus Falls Ugeblad, both Norwegian newspapers, were delivered weekly and were popular as most people couldn't read English. The post office at the Stod store closed in 1906 when residents began receiving rural free delivery from Pelican Rapids.

Like any general store, the store sold all the necessary items for survival on the prairie. Cloth, wool yarn, ribbon, thread, and Putnam fadeless dye were sold in the southwest corner of the store.

In the northwest corner, grocery items were sold, such as prunes, raisins, apricots, sugar and coffee in bulk, soda crackers, vinegar in barrels, Mothers Oats, cookies, a breakfast cereal called O-Cee, and lutefisk. Lutefisk was dried codfish prepared by soaking in water and lye. It was packaged and sold in sacks and looked like tree bark.

There were numerous hardware items as well as harness supplies, buggy whips, horse blankets, and kerosene. Other items were tobacco, shoes, leather mittens, work clothes, school supplies, books, Bibles, and dishes of clear and red-tinted glass embossed with Stod, Minnesota. The dishes are rare today and are highly sought after by antique collectors.

When farmers brought in butter, eggs, and other items to sell, the store owner gave aluminum trading

chips in exchange that could be used only at the store. In 1902, the telephone arrived in Trondhjem, and the switchboard was located at the north end of the store. Patrons could call Rothsay or Pelican Rapids.

The trade area for the store was halfway between Rothsay and Pelican Rapids. The store stayed open from early morning until late evening. The store was not open for regular business on Sundays, but young folks would gather, buy candy and sodas, and socialize in the afternoon. Travelers and hunters would stop and buy a snack of soda crackers, sardines, and pop. Christmas was the busiest time of the year, just like it is today, with people buying groceries and gifts.

The store had several owners over the years. The last owners of the store were John Nordgaard (Selmer Nordgaard's father) and Christian Mindrum. When Mindrum died in 1912, John Nordgaard sold as much of the store inventory as he could before holding a public auction.

After the store closed in 1913, it was used for ladies' bazaars. During World War I, the Red Cross was headquartered there. Women used it to meet and knit sweaters and mittens for the soldiers. In 1919, John Nordgaard dismantled it and used the lumber to build his barn.

The only vestige of Stod that can be seen today is the South Immanuel Church, which recently celebrated its 150th anniversary. The store and creamery disappeared decades ago, and the ground it stood on is now occupied by corn and soybeans.



Few photographs of Stod exist, and none show the entire community. Selmer Nordgaard, the son of the last owner of the Stod store, painted this panoramic view of the church, store, and creamery from his memories of what Stod looked like before 1910, when the creamery closed. (Photo courtesy of the Otter Tail County Historical Society.)

Major Cleanups Across The Region Underway

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of those "Alberta Clippers" blow through Wednesday and Thursday before Christmas and we got another two to six inches of snow depending upon where you were. That wintery blast did change a lot of travel plans and meeting schedules.

It would have been nice to report that the weather improved for Christmas. It did not. Christmas Eve found folks

walking into church in sub-zero temperatures. Just for giggles, the frigid temperatures produced even more light, fluffy snow. That fluff could and did blow around in the cold northwest winds.

The New Year's weekend warmed up a bit so people felt good about going out to ring in the New Year. Being naughty or nice didn't really matter. Everyone continued to get more snow in their stocking anyway.



Frosty kept melting and freezing so many times that he is almost unrecognizable.



This guy made it through Thanksgiving and Christmas. Hopefully him and his family, who call Highway 9 just past the school home, will stay out of danger and make it till spring.



Almost everyday last week all the trees gave this tremendous display of Hoar frost. It definitely looked like a Winter Wonderland.

REGIONAL REPORT

Rothsay, Minn.

January 2023
Edition

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