1970-1282 letter from Allen Osmundson.

https://library.rice.edu/collections/WRC/finding-aids/manuscripts/0003 box 2 folders 2, 3 and 4.

<http://genealogytrails.com/ndak/griggs/mardell.html> has the history of Mardell.

  
  
**Griggs County** **ND   
The History and Story of Mardell**

**STORY OF MARDELL**

**By**

**Ole Serumgard**

**Mardell brings back many old memories to my mind that have been buried for years. Mr. Ellsbury went to Everest, Washington, and I believe died there; his partner, I think, was a Tower City banker by name of Sherman. The townsite agent was Mr. Lee, but I know nothing of him for years. I have lost track of all the pioneers except John Wamberg, of Hope, North Dakota.**

**The townsite map made Mardell a wonderful railroad center, in fact, a veritable hub, the proposed lines forming the spokes of the wheel, the outside rim of which to our vivid imaginations was the ends of the world. I remember there was one line from Valley City, one from Tower City, the Hope branch of the Great Northern, one west from Mayville and Portland, and extensions to the other side of the map often passing through Mardell, but this only a part of the proposed roads that would converge at the future metropolis.**

**I came over there from Mayville. Had to get out of that town by walking on the railroad bridge south of town, as the Goose river was over its banks. I struck the Sheyenne river at Lee postoffice, and ferried over the mile-wide stream in a wagon box. I walked down the west side of the river till I got to Lybeck postoffice, about two and one-half miles north of Mardell, and had to repeat the ferrying process. This was in April, 1882. When I got to Mardell there was already there enclosed, but nearly completed, a large two-story hotel, owned by the townsite company and run by Mr. Robinson. The lumber for all the buildings had been hauled from either Tower City or Valley City. There was also on the ground and running a general store, including a drug store owned by S. J. Axdahl and J. J. Wamberg, and a hardware store owned by Julius Stevens and Anton Enger. A Dane, Andrew Johnson, and I put up a small office building, where we engaged in the proof and loan business, also locating settlers and doing a general land business. The townsite company had an agent, Mr. Lee, who tried to sell lots. Butler and Upton, I think, lived there that summer, while they opened up a big farm southeast of town.**

**Griggs county was not yet organized, and I got signers for a petition for the appointment of three county commissioners who would locate the county seat at Mardell. I had no horses and could not have crossed the river anyway to see the settlers living on both sides of the river, so I walked and covered the ground pretty well. Governor Ordway was governor of the territory and had to pass on the petition.**

**The town of Hope had been located in Traill county just across the line from Griggs county territory. It was owned by Small and Steele of the Minneapolis Big Boston Clothing store, and when they found there was a county seat to be had they moved the town across the line into Griggs county. Hope had the railroad, but hardly any settlers near it. The settlement and the bulk of the population was on the Sheyenne river through what was then the center of Griggs countv, and justice to the settlers would have given our set of commissioners their appointment, but Governor Ordway made a trip of investigation. He promptly refused our petition and appointed another set of commissioners.**

**The county seat was located at Hope and our stock fell. We tried to work up a vote for a removal of the county seat to Mardell that fall, but before the date of the election, R. C. Cooper and his brother started to build the Sanborn, Cooperstown & Turtle Mountain railroad north from Sanborn. The town of Cooperstown was located, and became an aspirant for the county seat. It would be sure of a railroad the next year, and the friends of Mardell gave up the fight. We all began to realize that the greatness of Mardell was all on paper and in the fertile brain of Ellsbury, and we all began to prepare to remove to Cooperstown, which we did in the spring of 1883.**

**In the meantime one more citizen had been added to the population of Mardell in the person of Frank L. Axtell. We formed a partnership in the land and loan business. He was lost in a snowstorm, badly frozen, and had to have the toes of both feet amputated. The following spring he was accidentally shot bv Daniel Anderson. Stevens and Enger moved to Cooperstown, and so did I. Wamberg moved to Hope, where he still lives. Samuel Axdahl went out of business and went to farming. The townsite agent, Lee, had departed long before the final desertion. The Robinson family still lived in the hotel during the summer of 1883.**

**I taught the first school in Griggs county, I think, in a little log; house on the farm of Pioneer Nelson, a mile north of Mardell. It was the Mardell school, and the Robinson children among others were my pupils, but there was no quarters in the little village, so the board secured this little old log house. This was during the winter of 1882 and 1883.**

**(Source: Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, Vol. II, 1908)**

**Submitted By: Cathy Danielson**

**HISTORY OF MARDELL**

**BY**

**Henry A. Bemis**

**In a wide portion of the valley of the Sheyenne river in what is now Washburn township, Griggs county, occupying all of the west half of the southwest quarter of section thirteen, about seven miles northeast from Cooperstown, is where the abandoned town of Mardell was platted. Its situation was beautiful, its drainage excellent. A little brook called Coal creek, which ran only in the spring, flowed from the east and cut into the townsite on the south, and excellent water could be had at slight labor and cost. Had it not been for certain adverse circumstances, Mardell might have been today another Valley City or Jamestown.**

**Mr. Richard P. Sherman and his brother (who had a large interest in the townsite company which they afterwards sold to Geo. H. Ellsbury at a loss) had the foundations laid for the prospective city by Samuel H. Reynolds, surveyor. The plat made by him was filed at Cooperstown July 30, 1882, and at Valley City. On this plat the streets were run east and west and, commencing at the north, were named as follows: Robinson, Lee, Sherman, Kindred, Ellsbury, College, Portland and Mill. Beginning on the west, the avenues Sheyenne, Cooper, Park and Capital run north and south.**

**The advantages of this townsite, both real and imaginary, were widely advertised by means of a boom map issued and scattered broadcast by Mr. Ellsbury, in which Mardell was shown as a great railway center. Inhabitants then came, and business enterprises were pushed forward.**

**H. H. Wassem put up the first stone building, which is still standing. John Wamberg and Samuel Axdahl followed with a dry goods store, in which was a drug department. Julius Stevens and Anton Enger put in a hardware store, and Mr. Samuel O. Homme a blacksmith shop. Meat was furnished by Benjamin Upton and Dubois Newell; machinery by Andrew Johnson; land business was entered into by Ole Serumgard and Frank Axtell. A town lot was purchased by the Nelson school district and a school house erected.1Ole Serumgard was the first teacher, not only of Mardell, but also of Griggs county. No saloons were allowed in the place. A hotel named the Palace was erected by the townsite company, and Captain Martin Robinson was chosen manager. Here accommodations were provided for home seekers going north and west for Dr. Virgo, whose office was under its roof, and for others who were not otherwise provided for. A mail route ran from Tower City to Lee. It passed through Mardell, which had been established as a post- office April 3, 1882, with Theodore F. Kerr as the postmaster. Mr. Robinson was deputy postmaster, for Dr. Kerr lived in Cooperstown and practiced there.**

**On Sundays Mr. Robinson conducted an informal Sunday school. Rev. Lundeby and Rev. James H. Baldwin held services there occasionally.2**

**Mr. E. C*.*Butler and William Henderson were able to get plenty of work as carpenters on the new buildings.3**

**Evidently the founders of this typical pioneer town of North Dakota looked for great things to come. This was strengthened by the settler's expectation of the coming of the railroad. Plenty of logs could have been cut nearby for the building of houses. Some few log barns were built, but homes and places of business made of logs would not comport with the ambition of this town. Therefore, lumber was hauled from Tower City or Valley City for the first buildings erected. In hauling this lumber the drive was broken by stopping over night at Ellsbury, a place about ten miles southwest of Hope. It thus took four days to make the trip. As the Palace hotel contained twenty-four rooms and some of the other buildings were quite large, the time, money and labor expended were no small items.**

**Mardell and Cooperstown were rivals in trying to get a railroad. A branch from Sanborn came to Cooperstown in the summer of 1883. There was a general understanding that the Great Northern railroad would extend the line out from Hope.4 Their expectations were never fulfilled, however, and when the inhabitants began to see that their hopes for a town would never be fulfilled, they began making their preparations for leaving. When this suspicion was confirmed, the buildings were torn down and taken away. Their owners one by one followed, and in 1885 the town lots were sold for taxes. For a time the postoffice was kept by S. H. Nelson, of Steele county, and later by Carl Carlson. It was discontinued on December 30, 1899. The school house was moved entirely off the townsite, and is now used as a granary by H. A. Sundin. The large, well kept hotel was cut down into a farm house, and now a grain field occupies most of the townsite of Mardell.**

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**Notes:**

**1H. H. Wassem and John Wamberg engaged in business in Hope after the abandonment of Mardell; Julius Stevens and Anton Enger went to Cooperstown; S. O. Homme, E. C. Butler, B. A. Upton and Dubois Newell farmed in the vicinity. Mr. Stevens, Mr. Upton and Mr. Newell are now dead. Samuel Axdahl afterward became superintendent of schools in Steele County, and now lives in Aneta.**

**2Rev. Lundebv was in the vicinity of Mardell as early as 1881. He worked in a neighboring Norwegian settlement for several years. He died in 1897. For a biography of James H. Baldwin, see Appendix, p. 241.**

**3Mr. Henderson farmed several years and then sold out and returned to his old home in Michigan.**

**4The following is a quotation from a letter by Richard P. Shennan, of Tower City: "Mr. Elsbury told us Mr. Hill had promised to put his railroad through Mardell. Then Mr. E. and my brother, and perhaps one or two others interested, had a personal interview with Mr. Hill, who told them that if they would go to the expense of a survey through and out of Mardell by a regular railroad expert and bring his work to him he would put his road through Mardell if the surveyor's or engineer's notes showed it feasible. After doing this survey work at considerable expense the notes and figures were submitted to Mr. Hill bv Mr. Ellsbury, my brother being present at the interview. Mr. Hill examined the notes carefully and said to Mr. E. and my brother, "This is O. K. You need not fear to go ahead with your outlay and advertising. I will put my road through Mardell."**

**(Source: Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota, Vol. II, 1908)**

**Submitted By: Cathy Danielson**

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