

## Minnesota Ancestor: Albert (Bert) Millard Sheldon

Bert Sheldon was born on his family's farm near Owatonna, Minnesota on May 15, 1867. After graduating from high school in 1886, he promptly went to work as a bookkeeper and savings clerk at the First National Bank of Stillwater, Minnesota. Two years later he was sent to open a new bank, Prince Sheldon & Co. Private Bank, in the lumber and paper mill town of Cloquet, Minnesota. At first, he had to send important documents to be signed by his father because he was not yet 21. It was his practice to ride into Duluth to pick up the cash needed at the mill to meet the payroll. One day, when he was riding toward Cloquet with the cash, two men with guns stepped out from behind a bush to demand the cash. Bert dug his heels into the horse's sides and jumped past the startled robbers unscathed. He continued on to reach Cloquet with the cash intact.



Figure 1 : Lumber camp near Cloquet 1887, similar to when Bert would have lived there. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

In 1896, Bert left Cloquet to become vice president and manager of the Imperial Elevator Company in Minneapolis. In 1915 he returned to banking where he and his brother Frank formed the Sheldon Brothers Company, an investment and banking firm. While still living in Cloquet, he married his high school classmate Wilhemine Heegaard. They had one son before her early death in 1919. He then courted and married Fay Wenk, a young widow whose husband had died of the Spanish Influenza only months after their marriage.



Figure 2: Fay Wenk, Oberlin College, 1913

Fay had graduated from Oberlin College and taught math in Iowa, Idaho, and Alaska before moving with her new husband to Minneapolis shortly before his death. She met Bert while working at Plymouth Church, where he chaired the board. They courted on the Lake Street streetcar between Minneapolis and St. Paul.



Figure 3: Minneapolis Trolley c 1910. Courtesy MNHS

In 1927, Bert shifted careers again, this time to sell insurance for Marsh & McLennan Insurance. A pioneer in the marketing of group insurance programs, he continued in this business well into his 80s. According to family lore, Bert asked to be paid by commission rather than salary, which was not the usual arrangement at the time. He did much better on commission than he would have if he'd been salaried.



Figure 4: Bert Sheldon, courtesy Carleton College Archives

His civic activities were numerous. He served as a director and President of the Minneapolis Civic and Commerce Association, and also of the Minneapolis YMCA, president of the Pillsbury Settlement House and a trustee of Carleton College for many years. Bert and Fay were loyal members of Plymouth Church in Minneapolis and founding members of the Encampment Forest Association. Bert died

in 1960 and Fay died in 1970.



Figure 5: Bert lived at 1808 Knox Ave S. for many years, beginning in 1909.

Bert and Fay are the grandparents of current Minnesota Dame Ames Sheldon, author of *Eleanor's Wars* and winner of the IBPA Benjamin Franklin Gold Award for Best New Voice: Fiction. Ames' colonial ancestor was Thomas Daggett (1658-1726) of Massachusetts, son of Captain Thomas Daggett, who served in a variety of capacities under Governor Mayhew of Massachusetts and was chosen by the militia in Edgerton, MA to be their Captain in 1691.

#### **Resources:**

Images of Cloquet Lumber Camp 1887 and Minneapolis Trolley 1910 used with permission of Minnesota Historical Society (Collections Online)

Marquis, Albert Nelson, *The Book of Minnesotans: A Biographical Dictionary of Leading Living Men of the State of Minnesota*, Chicago, 1907, p. 461

Minneapolis Directory Company, Minneapolis (Minnesota) City Directory accessed April 2019 on Ancestry.com [Provo, Utah] 1905, 1907 1911, 1914, 1916, 1941, 1959

Photo of Fay Wenk from Oberlin College Yearbook, 1913

Photo of Bert Sheldon courtesy of Carleton College Archives

"Sheldon Brothers Organize Banking and Investment Company," *Commercial West*, Minneapolis: January 1, 1916, p. 10

U. S. Census Bureau (1920, 1930, 1940 *Federal Population Schedule*, Minneapolis, Hennepin, Minnesota) database online accessed April 24, 2019 on Ancestry.com [Provo, Utah]