



## From the Pastor's Study

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### *"He being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4)*

Recently a photo-copied page from a book published in 1896 was sent to me by the great-granddaughter of Sheldon Ashley. The brief paragraphs on this page gave some fascinating details about the life of a man whose continuing legacy impacts all of us who are a part of Ashley Baptist Church.

Alanson Sheldon Ashley was born on October 30, 1806 in Richmond, New York. (Thomas Jefferson was president of the United States at that time.) In his late thirties, driven by the pioneer spirit that was prevalent in our nation at the time, Ashley came to Michigan. He purchased 640 acres in northeast Kent County, in what became the township called Oakfield. The area at that time was an unbroken wilderness covered with thick growing oak and hickory trees. He cleared and cultivated forty acres. He eventually gave this farm to his children. At the age of 75, Ashley moved on from Michigan to the Dakota Territory to pioneer this new land. He died the following year.

There are two things about Ashley that stand out. First, he was a man of strong constitution and indomitable will. He lived what Theodore Roosevelt would have called "the strenuous life." He was one of thousands of courageous pioneers who carved this great country out of an untamed wilderness. He helped settle the rough country of west Michigan with his rifle, axe, and plow. As an elderly man, he did not retire to a life of ease but ventured further west to attempt to repeat in the Dakota badlands what he accomplished in Michigan. As the old saying goes, "he died in the saddle."

Second, and certainly more significant, Ashley was a committed Christian. He was converted to Christ at 25 and united with the Baptist church in Richmond, New York. When he came to west Michigan, he was instrumental in organizing the First Baptist Church and Society of Oakfield. He served the church as a deacon. He donated the land and contributed generously to the construction

of the edifice that stood as the church's home until 2003. The record states, "Never seeming discouraged, he worked with untiring and fervent devotion for the Master's cause, and his great loving heart reached out to all his fellow beings, and he fain would have brought them all into the fold."

Sheldon Ashley was not a pastor or evangelist. He was a farmer by occupation, but he recognized, as all Christians should, that his true calling was to love the Lord Who saved him and serve him without reservation.

The record of Ashley's life concludes, "His oft repeated prayers, his timely words, his noble deeds are all written in the recording angel's book of life, and, although his lips are silent, he yet speaketh." Now, over a century since his death, each Lord's Day as the gospel is preached here at the church that was renamed in his honor, "he yet speaketh." May God use the memory and legacy of this simple, noble man of God, Alanson Sheldon Ashley, to challenge us to live our lives as he did: to the glory of God and the good of others.