

## Chapter 3 - Communication and Transportation

### The Arrival of the Automobile

One of the most significant changes to occur in the lives of Theodore's residents during the early decades of the twentieth century was introduction of the automobile into their every-day lives. This change began slowly during World War I, gained pace as the war drew to a close, and continued well into the 1920's.

The first automobile to appear in Theodore was a McLaughlin Buick purchased by A. D. Eckhardt in the spring of 1911.<sup>1</sup> The arrival of Mr. Eckhardt's automobile was heralded in the Theodore news columns of both *The Yorkton Enterprise* and *The Yorkton Times*. Writing some years later the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* wrote, "We remember some thirteen years ago that he [Eckardt] purchased and operated the first motor car owned in Theodore, and many a ride we all enjoyed at his expense."<sup>2</sup> The correspondent also described his first ride in an automobile, "It is only a few years since your correspondent had the pleasure of his first ride in an automobile, and well he can remember with what feelings of trepidation he took his seat, and grasped the side of the car."<sup>3</sup>

Although there is no mention of it at the time, another very early motor car in the Theodore district was a one cylinder REO that was later purchased in dilapidated condition by C. B. Ungar in 1920.<sup>4</sup> After the arrivals of the first automobiles in the Theodore district it was only a matter of time before the first accident was reported and in the fall of 1913 when it was reported that while returning from town Mrs. R. Quinton's horses took fright at a passing automobile, and ran away, throwing her from the buggy and injuring her severely.<sup>5</sup>

By the summer of 1914 there were several automobiles in Theodore, and while they would remain something of a novelty for several more years, automobiles were gaining in popularity. By the fall of 1915 the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* made the comment that, “Motor cars are becoming more numerous than wheel barrows. As far as we are aware, there are only two [wheelbarrows] in the entire town and everybody wants them.”<sup>6</sup> Additionally, there were numerous reports of people using automobiles to travel to places such as Sheho, and Foam Lake in the west and Yorkton in the east. A report from the fall of 1916 stated that the twenty-two automobiles that were owned at Theodore could be taken as evidence of the prosperity the community was experiencing.<sup>7</sup>

After automobiles became more common in the Theodore area items would appear in the Theodore news columns describing the experiences of various drives. The first report of a traffic violation in Theodore occurred in 1917 when it was noted that A Feidler paid \$8.00 and costs for operating an automobile without a license.<sup>8</sup> Ordinary accidents such as a driver ending up in one of the many mud holes in the area were commonly reported in the news and is a somewhat amusing twist could be added to the story, so much the better. Such as when the comment was made about Bill Hanson’s tree trimming ability in 1918.<sup>9</sup> Also any slightly unusual event that had some concerning automobiles was considered news worth and seen in the two examples below.

One of our citizen who applied for a license for his 40 h.p. car had \$6.00 returned to him with the information enclosed that his car was only rated by the firm from whom it was purchased as 19 horse power, and therefore came in the Ford or \$12.00 license class. About 21 out of the 40 horses must have been sucking colts. This seems to be the case most cars after they have once been sold. The first mud hole shows just how much power is lacking.<sup>10</sup>

Mr. John Wilson of the Creekside district met with an uncommon accident while motoring to Theodore a few days ago. Sighting a cow on the road, he slowed down and almost

stopped as the cow refused to move upon his approach, and when within a yard of the animal she suddenly kicked out with both feet, striking the radiator and damaging it so badly he was forced to replace it with a new one.<sup>11</sup>

### **Business Changes Resulting from Automobiles**

Needless to say, the arrival of the automobile brought significant changes to business and social life in the Theodore district. One of the most obvious changes was the establishment of new businesses related directly to the automobile in addition to the dealerships and repair shops. In 1920, for example, Mrs. R Fiedler installed the third gasoline filling tank in the village near her hardware store.<sup>12</sup> John Young also opened his Vulcanizing (tire repair) business in 1920, and in 1921 H. V. Markham was advertising Sunoco motor oil.<sup>13</sup>

A second significant change in Theodore's business community was the introduction of delivery by motor trucks. One of the first merchants to adopt this change was Bert Edge, the local butcher, who in the spring of 1915 purchased the auto delivery formerly owned by Mr. Frank Collacott of Yorkton, and used an automobile to deliver meat to farmers in the district around Theodore.<sup>14</sup>

While there are only a few references to Theodore people engaged in the trucking and delivery industry before the 1930s, the completion of Highway 14 in 1931 and the general improvement in the roads in and around Theodore gave rise to several new business ventures in and around Theodore. Alvin Reese, the new proprietor of the Railway Avenue butcher shop, followed the lead set by Bert Edge and began delivering meat to Insinger and Sheho in 1931.<sup>15</sup> Also, the drought of 1931 created an opportunity for someone to bring a truck loaded of vegetable such as cucumbers, corn, celery, etc. to Theodore from Manitoba, and apparently did a

good business for a short time supplying those residents whose gardens had suffered from the lack of rain that summer.<sup>16</sup> Walter Frederickson found that he could buy up cordwood, haul it to Yorkton on his truck, and resell it there. The trip from Theodore to Yorkton which had once taken the better part of a day to complete could, in 1931, be made in about an hour and a half in February, on the new highway.<sup>17</sup>

The year 1931 also saw goods from the Yorkton wholesale houses being delivered to local merchants by truck by a Mr. Sevinski of Yorkton.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, this business venture proved to be unsuccessful, and was discontinued after only a few months.<sup>19</sup> However, there were still many trucks transporting such goods as gasoline, binder twine, soft drinks, butter, eggs and Seneca root to the larger centres such as Yorkton.<sup>20</sup>

It appears that by 1939 there were a number of trucks being used in and around Theodore. The 1939 crop was abundant and owners of grain trucks were reported to be working overtime bringing wheat to Theodore's four grain elevators.<sup>21</sup> According to an item in the Theodore news column, everything in the shape of a truck had been commandeered by the farmers for the purpose of hauling wheat to the elevators direct from thrashing machine in the field.<sup>22</sup>

Another significant change the automobile brought to Theodore's business community was that it opened up new shopping opportunities to the residents of the area. The building of highway #14 in 1930 made travel between Yorkton and Theodore much easier, and Theodore residents began to make more frequent shopping trips to Yorkton. In December, 1936 it was reported that the Theodore's merchants had experienced lower sales on all winter goods that fall, and that the Christmas trade in Theodore was not as brisk as in other years. The excellent condition of the highway and the mild weather that had kept the highway free of snow meant that

much of the business that had once gone to Theodore's had been attracted to Yorkton and other large centres.<sup>23</sup> Even large snow drifts could not deter motorists from traveling to Yorkton as indicated by the following news item from 1938:

Cars have been passing through to Yorkton for almost a week and this was made possible by a few public-spirited citizens who shoveled a snow bank that blocked the highway two miles south of town, digging a road through a bank 180 feet long, as well as a smaller drift nearer town. However, the highway at present is in anything but fair shape, and it will be some time before motoring will be general.<sup>24</sup>

The first bus service to operated between Foam Lake and Yorkton began in the spring of 1931 when N. Minken and Fred Koroll offered a bus service on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.<sup>25</sup> There is a reference to Peterson's Garage omnibus in 1936, but it may not have been competitive as there is no further information on it.<sup>26</sup> The competition, however, also seems to have had some major problems.

The Arrow Line bus seems to do the lions share of passenger traffic between Yorkton and Saskatoon, and appears to be a popular means of transportation, except for the fact that passengers are often required to wait around from half an hour to three or four hours for late arrivals. It would seem reasonable to suggest that the bus company should inaugurate a telephone system that would enable agents along their route to advise patron when the bus is running behind schedule and they could then choose some means of filling in the waiting period other than sitting on a hard bench in a hot sun, besides their stopping places awaiting what might or might not turn up soon.<sup>27</sup>

### **Changes in Recreation and Sports**

Good Spirit Lake or "Devil's Lake" as it was popularly called at the time had, for many years, been an important place for the aboriginal people and the early settlers to catch their supply of fish. However it was not until about 1915 that there were very many reports of people from Theodore spending a significant amount of time on Donald Gunn's property, known as Gunn's beach, for recreational purposes. One such report stated that, quite a number are going to Devils

Lake on Thursday to attend the sports day as a good day was assured by Mr. Gunn who would be giving good prizes for aquatic sports.”<sup>28</sup> In 1916 six cars motored to Devil’s Lake and reported that the roads were in good condition.<sup>29</sup> By 1917 “Devil’s Lake” had become a popular resort, drawing large crowds from the surrounding communities of Theodore, Springside and Buchanan.<sup>30</sup> In 1923 the Springside correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* stated that:

In the opinion of Your correspondent, there is no better place in Saskatchewan for that purpose than Devil’s Lake. The gradual, sloping beach with an abundance of beautiful white sand is an ideal spot for both young and old in which to bathe and it is absolutely safe for children. The road from Springside to the lake is now in fairly good condition with the exception of the last mile or so, and efforts should be made to have the Municipality improve that portion of it this year.<sup>31</sup>

In 1916 reports of people staying in cottages began to appear in the Theodore news. These cottages would have been located on property owned by Donald Gunn at the south end of the lake. Newspaper accounts indicate that some people such as the O. A. Thomas and P. C. Larson families of Theodore visiting the lake owned their own cottages.<sup>32 33</sup> According to Gunn’s granddaughter, Joyce Anaka, however, one cottage had been built for rental purposes and rented as early as 1916 and by 1923 the Gunn’s had four rental cottages and would eventually have nine cottages for rent.<sup>34</sup> People interested in renting a cottage were invited to contact Mr. John A. Gunn, Donald’s son, at Springside.<sup>35</sup>

Much of the lake’s popularity depended on the condition of the roads leading to it. When a new road was build in 1921 people began to take motor boats to the lake.<sup>36</sup> In 1927 John Gunn inherited the property from his father, Donald Gunn, and is credited with building roads into the lake, charging those who used the roads a fee for their upkeep. During the summer months the cottages and tents would be full of campers, making the resort a lively place.<sup>37</sup> Sunday afternoons

would sometimes as many as 150 motor cars would be parked around those favourite resort and the beach crowded with bathers.<sup>38</sup>

As part of a “make work project,” intended to ease the unemployment problem of the great depression the Saskatchewan government in 1931 built a number of provincial parks in the province.<sup>39</sup> On Labour Day 1931, a crowd of more than 3,000 people attended the official opening of Good Spirit Provincial Park. A civic holiday was declared by Theodore’s village council so that as many people from the village as possible could attend the opening.<sup>40</sup> Good Spirit Provincial Park and been a popular recreational destination for residents of the Theodore district ever since.

News releases issued prior to the opening promised the presence of six bands from various communities, a full sports program including a tug-of-war, softball games a host of juvenile sports and a horse shoe tournament, as well as a number of speeches by leading political figures.<sup>41</sup> The Hon. A. C. Stewart, the MLA for the Yorkton Constituency took advantage of the occasions to tell the assembled crowd of the wonderful thing the Conservative Anderson governments was doing to address the problems arising from the great depression.

In the summer of 1931 the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* first noted reported that like all other bodies of water in the area, Devil's Lake was much lower than it had been for several years.<sup>42</sup> The water level continued to fall as the decade progressed, and in 1939 the same correspondent wrote”

It was the belief last winter that the heavier than usual fall of snow would materially raise the level of lakes in this locality, but this has not been the case as most of our lakes, especially Devil's lake, show a further decline in the water level. Those who remember Devils lake of fifteen years ago are astonished at the drop that has taken place since that time. Many of us have fished in the creek that carried the lake waters to the east while the

waters of the lake itself lapped at the roots of trees growing on the shore line, and today the creek is dry, the body of it being several feet above the water line, while the lake has receded some three hundred yards from the old high-water mark. an evidence of the dry years through which we have passed.<sup>43</sup>

Prior to the ending of World War I the Theodore Hockey Team often played games against Sheho and Springside, and sometimes played games against such communities as far away as Saltcoats and Foam Lake. These communities were all located on the same railway line as Theodore. There were very few hockey games, if any, played between Theodore and the communities of Buchanan and Willowbrook and others not located on the railway line even though both Buchanan and Willowbrook were regular sports rivals during the summer.

The most likely reason for this situation was that taking the train to play and attend hockey games was almost always possible, whereas the condition of the roads between Theodore and communities such as Buchanan, Willowbrook, and others in the winter made travel extremely difficult and sometimes impossible. It was not until automobiles became more common, the roads improved, and kept open in the winter, that travel to these communities became common.

Two reports from early 1924 indicate how the automobile and improved roads changed Theodore's ability to participate in sporting events. Such travel would have been impossible, only a few years earlier.

**Notes:**

1. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 March, 1911.
2. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 January, 1923.
3. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 7 August 1919
4. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 May, 1921.
5. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 2 October, 1913.
6. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 August, 1915.
7. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 21 September, 1916.
8. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 August, 1917.
9. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 2 May, 1918.
10. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 May, 1921.
11. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 October, 1922.
12. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 June, 1920.
13. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 August, 1920.
14. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 May, 1915.
15. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 May, 1931.
16. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 August, 1931.
17. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 March, 1931.
18. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 March, 1931.
19. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 August, 1931.
20. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 August, 1931.
21. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 September, 1939.
22. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 21 September, 1939.
23. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 24 December. 1936.

24. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 31 March, 1938.
25. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 May, 1931.
26. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 April, 1936.
27. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 30 July, 1936.
28. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 July, 1915.
29. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 June, 1916.
30. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 26 July, 1917.
31. "Springside," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 May, 1923.
32. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 August, 1916.
33. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 August, 1916.
34. Anaka, Joyce. *Donald Gunn: Family History*. p. 75.
35. "Springside," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 May, 1923.
36. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 July, 1921.
37. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 July, 1931.
38. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 August, 1929.
39. "3,000 Attend Official Opening of Devil's Lake Reserve on Labor Day," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 September, 1930.
40. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 September, 1931.
41. "Six Bands Will Play At Devil's Lake Park Picnic on Labor Day," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 August, 1931.
42. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 June, 1931.
43. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 30 July, 1936.