

## Chapter 7 - Cultural, Religious, and Sporting Groups

### Earliest Church Activities in the Theodore Area

During the 1890's and early twentieth century, there was a great deal of church activity on the Canadian Prairies as each denomination sought to establish its presence in the many new communities. Earliest reports indicate that services and special events such as Christmas concerts were held in the homes of the settlers. In 1900, for example, the ladies of the district organized what at that time was called a "Christmas Tree" at the home of Mr. Pinder.<sup>1</sup> The report of the event indicated that there was entertainment for the children, presents for everyone, and as usual, a lunch provided by the ladies who brought baskets full of food.<sup>2</sup> It was reported in the Theodore news column, that many families in the district enjoyed themselves until early morning.<sup>3</sup>

The first church in the Village of Theodore was built by the Presbyterians in 1902 and was located on Main Street across from what was later to become the school yard.<sup>4</sup> Various items in the Theodore news Column of *The Yorkton Enterprise* indicate that this building, was only used as a church from 1902 until 1907 when the congregation moved into the second story of the new school building.<sup>5</sup> The church building was later used as a community hall, an extra class room for the school, and finally as a private residence.

Shortly after the establishment of Theodore the three protestant denomination active in the district, the Lutherans, the Methodists, and the Presbyterians, considered erecting one building to serve all three congregation.<sup>6</sup> A mortgage was apparently arranged through the Methodist church, and construction was begun in 1907. The original plans for the building included a finished basement for Sunday school and entertainment purposes, and a steeple.<sup>7</sup> The church was build by

the local people who provided free labour and materials. In 1925 when the mortgage on the building was finally paid off, Mrs. A. D. Tracy gave a brief account of the construction of the church. The many large stones which went into the basement, for example, were both given and hauled free of charge. Mr. Clement a former resident of Beaverdale, gave many days of free labour as a stone-mason, as did many farmers and businessmen of Theodore, on the main body of the church. The beautiful windows and a great deal of the lumber was supplied at actual cost, but in spite of this the cost of the church was around \$3,400. Before construction was completed both the Lutherans and the Presbyterians withdrew from the plan, leaving the local Methodists in possession of the building and with the responsibility of repaying the mortgage.

One interesting note is that in spite of the facts that the earliest settlers in the district were Scandinavian, and the community was originally called New Denmark, there is almost no mention of any activity by the Lutheran church in the newspaper columns of the times. There are only two brief items in the Theodore news columns acknowledging a Lutherans presence in Theodore. The first announced the fact that services had been conducted in the Danish language in 1905, and the second announced that a large and attentive audience of Danish and Swedish settlers had attended a service in 1907.<sup>8 9</sup> One reason for this may be that most of the services in the Lutheran Church were not conducted in English. Danish and Swedish, being the two Scandinavian languages most commonly spoken in the area.

The Scandinavian Lutheran Church was organized in 1912, and in 1915 they erected their church building. Bruce Frederickson, a grandson of one of the founding members states that the building was very similar to one of the Lutheran Churches in Westbrook, Minnesota, where many members of the church had lived prior to arriving in Theodore.



Elim Lutheran Church

At some point the Presbyterians, who, withdrew from the plan to build a union church in Theodore, sold their original building and held their services in the hall over Eckhardt's store.<sup>10</sup> On Sunday, 12 June, 1910 the Presbyterians formally opened a new church building in Theodore and the Presbyterian Ladies Aid sponsored a banquet and concert in Eckhardt's hall in honour of the occasion on the following Monday.<sup>11</sup> This second Presbyterian church was used until 1914, when the Presbyterians joined with the Methodists to form a new Union Church in Theodore.

Like the Lutherans, there is little information regarding the Anglicans in Theodore. The earliest mention of Anglican services in the Theodore news columns describes the harvest and

thanksgiving services held in October 1907.<sup>12</sup> The second mention of Anglican activity occurs more than a year later and describes the Thanksgiving service held in the waiting room of the CPR. station.<sup>13</sup> Other than announcements stating the dates and times for services or announce a social event such as a Whist Drive, there simply is no news about the Anglican church.

In 1909 the Diocese of Qu'Appelle organized its railway mission which allowed Anglican priests to travel from town to town to minister to the immigrants settling in Saskatchewan.<sup>14</sup> The Anglican church in Theodore was just one of the more than forty small churches organized under the Railway mission.<sup>15</sup> By 1912 the railway mission covered more than 1,000 miles of railway.<sup>16</sup>

In September 1911 the foundation for an Anglican church in Theodore was laid and the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* announced that the builders, Hanson and Son were making good headway.<sup>17</sup> The church was formally opened on 10 December 1911 when the Rural Dean, Rev. C. C. Cornish, Yorkton, conducted a services of Matins and the celebration of Holy Communion, the first service in the new Anglican Church actually took place on Sunday, November 26, 1911 at 7:30 p.m. and took the form of a service of praise and thanksgiving.

The harvest thanksgiving at the above church was held last Sunday night. It was the first service at the church and a very fitting one as a first. The church had been most tastefully decorated by a band of willing workers. The altar looked rich with farm and garden produce - tokens of God's munificence in this wonderful west. The service was fully choral and the congregation joined in a way which did the human heart good and which made the angels in heaven to rejoice. The church was packed to overflowing, and the offertory was very substantial indeed. Theodore is a city of churches and it is proud of its new child.<sup>18</sup>

## **The Saskatchewan Methodist Church and the Ukrainian Settlers**

Saskatchewan was fortunate in that there were many who saw the Ukrainian population not as some kind of a threat, but rather as people in need of help, and took concrete steps to meet and need.. The following paragraph appears in the minutes of the Saskatchewan Conference of the Methodist Church for the year 1915:

This Conference heartily endorses the proposal to establish a social centre At Insinger, according to the policy outlined by the representatives of the Saskatchewan Conference at the General Board of Missions in 1914 and endowed by that body, and Request the General Board of Missions to make a grant of \$5,000 to provide a site and plant for the same.<sup>19</sup>

In 1916, Peter Yemen, the principal of the Theodore school, resigned his position to take on the duties of the director of the Methodist Social Centre at Insinger. Yemen's first report the Methodist Conference appears below.

### **Report from the Insinger Social Centre,**

Insinger is situated thirty-five miles west of Yorkton, on the CPR, in the heart of one of the largest non-English speaking colonies in Saskatchewan. The people are nearly all Bukowinians and Orthodox Greek Church in religion. A circle drawn around Insinger, with a 15-miles diameter, would include only half a dozen English speaking families, and a similar condition exists from Canora, on the CNR, to Good Eve, on the GTP. The townships near Insinger are thickly settled, running as high as one hundred and twenty-five families to a township, and until the Social Centre was erected there was a sealed district, the people living to themselves, living away from any Canadianizing influences.

The site chosen is half a mile from Insinger, on the most public four corners in the district. Five acres have been secured on each of the three corners, one of these is set aside for farm demonstration, one for recreation, and one for the buildings.

On this ground has been erected a very nice hall of the cottage type, 24' by 40', a stable and a suitable dwelling. An effort has been made to make these buildings models, that may be copied in farm house and school buildings in the neighborhood. Mr. Peter Yemen, of Theodore, has been placed in charge.

A number of types of work have been carried on. During the winter months the surrounding schools are closed, and the little the children learn in the summer months is almost forgotten, A school was opened and about fifty pupils, ranging in age from five to twenty-five years, have taken advantage of it. In this school a great opportunity for

religious and moral teaching incidentally presents itself, especially in literature and history. A special effort is made to give a working knowledge of English; agriculture, civics and hygiene are emphasized. Owing to lack of English in the community special methods have to be employed. The institution has been equipped with a good lantern and pathoscope, these have created a great interest and fill a great need. They bring to the people the dress, customs, manners and standards of the English speaking world. Night school has been opened and a number of adults have entered its classes. The pathoscope and lantern have been used once a week in winter and educational and religious pictures are shown- and explained by the manager and others. Since a close relation exists between the economic and social conditions, an effort has been made to improve farming methods, by showing better cultivation of the soil, selection of seed, treatment of weeds, and live stock improvement.

Quite an interest has been aroused in live stock, and we expect to place a car-load in the district this year.

Some work has been done to help the women and girls in sewing, cooking, and care of infants, the latter being very much needed as the death rate is unduly high. During the year many of the homes within a radius of five miles have been visited and many have used the Social Centre. Two concerts were given wholly by the pupils of the school in English. The attendance at these was very good, and a collection of \$27.00 was taken for Armenian relief. Only one pupil had ever taken part in a concert before, and they were very well pleased with themselves,

A number of social evenings have been given and spent in playing games; this sort of entertainment is also quite new to them. Last year the district was not organized for school fairs, by the public school, so the Social Centre organized one. About one hundred and twenty children and fifty adults attended. The usual school-work and garden produce were exhibited, and the fair was quite successful. As a result a much larger fair will be held this year in connection with the Central Fair at Yorkton.

One of the best types of work attempted is the help given to the public schools in visits with the picture machine and assistance to boards in securing the right type of teachers. If we could get well-trained or specially-trained consecrated teachers, the non-English problem would be solved in a very short time. The Social Centre has helped to place several such teachers, and special mention should be made of Miss Halfpenny of the National Training School of Toronto, who did excellent work at Wasilief last year.

The teachers of these schools are gathered together at the Social Centre on week-ends and talk over their school problems, and for a little change from the lonely shacks or tents in which many of them live during the week, often miles from any congenial society.

Although there has been much organized opposition from, the Orthodox Greek Church and Uniate Church, who do not wish to see any change in the ideas of the people take place, as they realize that they must keep them in the dark to hold them, a great deal has been done to help them on the upgrade to better Canadian citizenship.

Last year, immediately around the Social Centre; forty men, and most of them poor men, bought Victory Bonds just to show us where they stood, while five or six miles away it was almost impossible to sell any. Red Cross teas, which have ben started at the village, are well patronized, the last raising over \$40.00 cash. A school inspector, who is a leading authority on the

foreign problem, says that more progress has already been made than he expected in five years.

Your humble servant,  
(Signed) P. YEMEN.<sup>20</sup>



Insinger Community House  
Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan  
Reference code R-A3494



Peter Yemen

Peter Yemen died in 1918, a victim of the Spanish flu epidemic. His obituary, written by J. T. M. Anderson, superintendent of Schools in Yorkton and later Premier of Saskatchewan, speaks in glowing terms of his work among the Ukrainian settlers.

## **P. Yemen Gives Life Ministering To Foreign-Born**

Glowing Tribute to Character and Work of One Who Laid His Life on the Altar of True Citizenship.

During the past four years we have read hundreds of tales of the heroism and bravery of our Canadian sons and daughters on the shell torn battlefields of Europe. The stories of their noble deeds have heightened our national pride. Note that we were surprised by these manifestation of the heroic. We expected it. The ideals cherished by our Anglo-Saxon race could not give birth to cowardice or weakness. That they were lofty is evidenced by our glorious triumph over forces that bear the stamp of degradation.

And the majority of those Canadians who have remained at home have been guided and actuated by these same lofty motives. Thousands during the terrible plague that has swept our land, have buckled on their armor and faced death in fighting the scourge. Hundreds have fallen in the struggle and no less heroic have been their deaths than were the sacrifices of those whose remains rest beneath the poppy clad fields across the sea.

It is not indicative of the loftiness of our British ideals, and our sincerity of purpose, when we see our brave Canadian men and women freely offering their services to combat this terrible disease in the “foreign” settlements of Saskatchewan. While our heroic soldiers are in mortal combat with similar “foreign” settlements in distant Europe? The stories of self-sacrifice and heroism recently enacted by young men and women of Saskatchewan in the non-English settlements, will perhaps never be fully told. They have gone about their work quietly and with no ostentation. They have entered filthy, unventilated homes and cleaned them up; they have tended unkempt children and fed helpless infants; they have cooked for the sick and closed the eyes of the dead; they have carried everywhere sympathy, assistance, cheer and life itself. When people of their own nationality cowed by superstitious fear, have held aloof, our Canadian teachers and others have hurried forward and how many lives they have saved can never be told.

One of these Good Samaritans was Peter Yemen of Insinger, Saskatchewan, – one of the noblest specimens of Canadian manhood – physically, morally, and spiritually - the writer has ever met. During the epidemic he labored unceasingly tending the sick, carrying around medicine, comfort, and cheer – regardless of his own health – only seeking to aid others. He looked after over one hundred cases among the Ruthenians of Insinger Municipality and dozens of lives were undoubtedly saved through his ceaseless efforts. But at last the dread disease seized him and on Monday last he passed peacefully to his reward. Yes, Peter Yemen is dead – but he will live in memories fond and dear, among the Ruthenian settlers of Saskatchewan.

They realize that they have lost a faithful friend and advisor and the number who attended the funeral on Wednesday afternoon told only too plainly that he had not laboured in vain among these people. One poor old man in broken English begged that he be permitted to take one last look at “de good man,” and when his request could not be granted, he broke down and sobbed bitterly. Another Ruthenian tearfully remarked, “last

time me see him he help me sig well to get water for my sick family;” another paid the following glowing tribute; “I have wandered around for twenty years among Galicians, English, Americans and others. There may be as good men as Mr. Yemen, but I have never met them.: Still another said, “Pete say to me -Never lie – a lie never get a person anywhere. A truthful man always wins out.” A poor old grief-stricken father told how when his six-year-old child heard of the death of this friend of all children , he could not be consoled.

This man has attached himself deeply to the hearts of these people and through him they have obtained a clear sight of what is highest and noblest in our Canadian life. This is the task for our Saskatchewan teachers – than which no nobler exists.

Mr. Yemen had labored for over ten years carrying the gospel of Canadian citizenship to these new Canadians as Principal of Theodore village school. Two or three years ago he was chosen as the best man available to take charge of the Community Centre established by the Methodists church Insinger. During this period he has lived in close touch with the Ruthenians settled there. With Right on his side he has unflinchingly faced all handicaps: He has taught the children and advised the parents in matters of all kinds; has helped them in their threshing operations, and advised them in business transactions; he has attended their weddings and been present at their funeral services. At all times his thoughts were busy planning the assistance. Even at the hour of death some of his last words were, “the foreign problem can be solved.” How true W It can be solved but it must be solved largely by the use of methods adopted by this Canadian herp, Peter Yemen.

Mr. Yemen was born I Ontario over forty years ago. He was a staunch Presbyterian and in politics a Liberal. He is survived by a wife and three children aged four, six and eleven. His father, one brother and one sister also reside in the west.

“Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life” – in the interest of a united Canadian Citizenship. – J.T.M.A.<sup>21</sup>

**Notes:**

1. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 December, 1900 .
2. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 December, 1900 .
3. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 December, 1900 .
4. "Theodore News" *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 May, 1955.
5. "Theodore News" *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 Mach, 1907.
6. Dryden, Edith Austen, "History of the Theodore United Church, *Theodore and District History*. p. 74.
7. "Burning of the Church Mortgage and Missionary Enthusiasm in Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 March, 1925.
8. "Theodore, *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 March, 1905.
9. "Theodore, *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 29 August, 1907.
10. "Theodore News" *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 May, 1955.
11. "Theodore Presbyterian Church Opens," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 June, 1910.
12. "Theodore, *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 17 October, 1907.
13. "Theodore, *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 November, 1908.
14. Hyrniuk, Margaret, and Korvenmaker, Frank. *Legacy of Worship: Sacred Places in Rural Saskatchewan*. Coteau Books Regina. 2014. p. 18
15. Hyrniuk, Margaret, and Korvenmaker, Frank. *Legacy of Worship: Sacred Places in Rural Saskatchewan*. Coteau Books Regina. 2014. p. 18
16. "Theodore, *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 August, 1912.
17. "Theodore, *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 7 September, 1911.
18. "Theodore, *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 30 November, 1911.
19. Minutes of the Saskatchewan Conference of the Methodist Church 1915 p.48
20. Minutes of Saskatchewan Methodist Conference 1918 pp 34-35

21. Anderson, J. T. M. "P. Yemen Gives Life Ministering To Foreign-Born," *The Yorkton Enterprise*." 2 December. 1918.