Chapter 4 - Theodore's Agriculture Foundation

Changing Technology in Agriculture

Those who have made even a brief visit to any of Saskatchewan's Western Development Museums will have been impressed with the wide variety of farm implements and tools that are on display. These displays chronicle the changing technology in the various aspects of agriculture in the province. Harvesting technology in Saskatchewan, for example, begins with such ancient tools as scythes, sickles, and flails and progresses through to the modern combine. As in every other community in Saskatchewan, Theodore' farmers learned to adjust to these technological changes and use them to their advantage,

Breaking land with oxen near the Warend School District north of Theodore about1910 or 1911
Courtesy Theodore Museum, Theodore Saskatchewan.

From Oxen to Tractors

Grain farming in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a very labour intensive business. The fact that everything had to be done by hand was, no doubt, one of the

reasons why so many of the first settlers chose to begin their farming careers by raising cattle . With an established herd of cattle to sustain them, homesteaders could then focus on the more time consuming business of clearing and breaking the land in order to grow grain. Much of the clearing was done during the winter months when other work on the farm could not be done and when it was easiest to haul the logs off the land. In the spring and summer oxen were often used to break the land.

Plowing with a steam tractor Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan - Reference code R-A6985

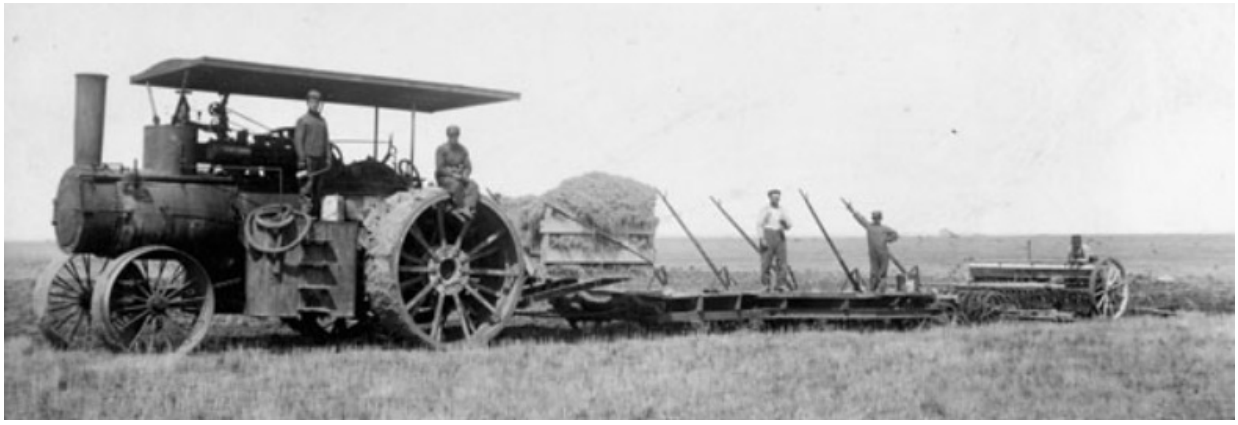
Gradually Theodore's farmers switched from ox power to horse power, but horses were expensive and not many of the early homesteaders could afford to buy them. However, as the farmers prospered, they not only purchased more and more horses, but also began using steam and gasoline tractors. The decision as to which type of tractor a farmer would buy may have depended on the fact that steam tractors could be fueled by wood which grew freely on the farm whereas gasoline had to be purchased, and cash was often very scarce.

Seeding June 1935 Archives Canada
Farmers in the Theodore district would have seeded their fields in the same way

One of the first reports of the change to steam and gasoline power occurred in 1910 when *The Manitoba Free Press* report on Theodore stated that there were three steam and two gasoline plowing outfits in the district, and that 10.000 acres would be broken that years.[1] By May 1911, however, the mechanization of Theodore's farms was well under way when C. P. Hanson & Sons, Nels Frederickson, and Andrew Hansen and Robert Lawrie, Jr. ordered large new threshing outfits, bringing the total of threshing outfits would be operating around Theodore the following fall to twenty-six.[2] [3]

Writing in 1949, J. S. Anderson remembered the early days of oxen and horses. In a piece entitled "Home of the Old Fashioned Ox." In it he describes the transition from ox power to tractor power.

> Over 40 years ago, when your correspondent first took up residence in Theodore, this place was known as the home of the old fashioned ox. Hundreds of ox teams could be counted on the farms of the surrounding country as the only means of power and locomotion. Only the best heeled farmers could drive horse teams. Later the ox entirely disappeared being replaced with horses that were bread from the best draft strains and Theodore then became known for its fine teams of draft horses and drivers, saddle horses, etc. Today the horse has become a rarity in this district, having been replaced by tractors that can be seen at work on almost all the farms in the district, while automobiles have laid aside the saddle horses and drivers. In conversation with our local harness dealer a few days ago he stated that harness may now be considered as a most dead stock for very little of it is being purchased by farmers or anyone else. Many who drove oxen at the time can now drive into town with their sons in the latest thing in cars. Such are the changes that have taken place in Saskatchewan in recent years.[4]



Seeding a field with a Rumely Tractor 1914 - Archives Canada

The transition to steam and gasoline power, especially as it related to harvesting and threshing the crops was regularly reported in the Theodore news column of *The Yorkton Enterprise*. While many farmers could afford to own their own binders, the larger pieces of machinery were very expensive and it was, therefore, not unusual for several farmers to join together to purchase steam or gas tractors and threshing machines. The purchase of a threshing outfit was always a newsworthy event, “Another gasoline threshing outfit was unloaded this week and is the property of Messrs. Adamson, Quinton, and Gregory. This makes eight outfits disposed

of this season by the enterprising firm of Merkley Bros & Co."[5] Owners of threshing machines could earn good money by threshing the crops of their neighbours.

Binder with horses on the Seeman farm - undated courtesy Bruce Frederickson collection

For the most part the reaping and stooking of the grain could usually be accomplished by a farmer and his family and there are a number of photographs of a single farmer on a binder pulled by a team of horses. On the large Seeman farm, however, crews of men were hired for this.

After the crops had been cut and stooked they were left in the field until they could be threshed. Threshing the crop required a large steam or gas tractor, a threshing machine or separator, and a large crew of men. Farmers who did not own their own threshing outfit would contract with someone who did, and who would provide the necessary crew of men to do the job. It was the responsibility of the contracting farmer and his wife to provide food and sleeping

accommodations for the threshing crews. There are numerous accounts of the huge meals and lunches that were prepared for the threshing crews who often spent the nights in empty granaries.

Stooking crew on the Seeman farm - courtesy Bruce Frederickson collection

It appears that there was some degree of friendly competition among the owners of threshing outfits as to who would be the first on the fields, and that too was newsworthy. Each fall the Theodore correspondent told his readers whose threshing outfit was the first to begin operations and on whose property the grain was being threshed. For example, "H. Gregory was the first to start threshing in this district [Beaverdale], with Fernie's outfit a good second."[6] Closer to Theodore John Hooge was often the first to begin threshing. Louise Marriman, John Hooge's daughter, described her father's threshing crew.

> Harvest was always a very busy time for mother and me. Dad had a big outfit, with seven stook teams, four or five field pitchers, and a spike pitcher, and an engineer fireman, straw man and water tank man all to keep the engine going. There were also grain haulers. If it rained the men all stayed at our place. We usually had thresher men for two months or more depending on the weather. Some of the men came from as far away as Sheho and Insinger year after year. They said my Dad was the only boss they knew who kept good hours, from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. with morning and afternoon lunches.[7]

Tractor pulling a binder operated by two men, stooks in foreground
Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan Reference code R-A15101a

The increasing use of gasoline and steam powered tractors during the early years of the twentieth century did not mean that horses would soon disappear from the farm. Horses remained an important and valuable part of farming in the Theodore area well into the middle of the twentieth century. Anything that touched on the well being of the horse population was duly noted in the Theodore News. The following are just three examples of news about horses.

> A government veterinary surgeon has been in town the past few days looking into cases of glanders among horses. As a result eight were shot on Wednesday. It is feared there may be many more found in investigation.[8]

> The famous black Percheron horse "Tureau," owned by the Theodore Percheron Syndicate for the past six years, and originally purchased at a price in the neighbourhood of $2,700 died of pneumonia last week. This was one of the finest horses ever imported into Saskatchewan.[9]

> Those who make a practice of leaving horses tied to a tree or post for hours at a time without feed or water should be taught a lesson in the law courts. On Sunday two teams spent the whole day tied to telephone poles without any attention of any kind. We would like to see such heartless owners of dumb beasts spend a few hours of like treatment themselves. This is becoming altogether too common in Theodore.[10]

Wagon Load of Sheaves at Theodore
Courtesy Colleen Bilokreli at Prairie Mapping, Theodore

Readers who have visited any of the museums dedicated to agriculture will have noticed the huge size of many of the early steam and gasoline powered farm tractors. What they may not have noticed were the smaller, and more compact Fordson tractors. These tractors made their first appearance in Theodore in 1918 and were judged to be well fitted to their work.[11]

Threshing Crew at Theodore
Courtesy Colleen Bilokreli at Prairie Mapping, Theodore

The Arrival of the Combined Reaper-Thresher Machine

Although the horse drawn binders, tractor powered threshing machines and the large crews of men needed for the harvest would remain part of the agricultural scene at Theodore for many years yet to come. The news of machines that combined the function of reaping and threshing is one operation was received with interest, and several farmers in the Theodore area were among the first in the province to purchase early versions of the new combines.

In the summer of 1926 *The Yorkton Enterprise* carried a report from the Dominion Experimental Station at Swift Current that indicated that the new combined reaper thresher could

harvest and thresh wheat at a much lower cost per acre than the binder and grain separator. A year later the first combine in the Theodore district was purchased by O. Adamson and Sons who farmed south of the village.[12] The new innovation in harvesting was watched with some interest by Adamson's neighbours, and in July 1928 the Burnard Brothers, of the Creekside district, purchased three Massey-Harris combines through A. P. Swallow, the local agent.[13]

Threshing crew on the Seeman farm - undated courtesy Bruce Frederickson collection

Bailing Machines

The first mention of bailing hay in the Theodore area occurred in January 1921 when it was noted that the first baled have ever brought to Theodore was delivered by Ed. McCort of the Crowtherview district in the Beaver Hills who, together with his partner had a large quantity of

fine wild hay which they were shipping to outside markets.[14] The next mention of hay bailing occurs in September 1934 when a large amount of hay and straw was prepared for shipment to southern Saskatchewan, and by early November many carloads of feed had been shipped south.[15] [16] After shipping several hundred tons of hay and straw out of Theodore, the hay bailing crew left for their home in Oxbow mid December.[17] [18]

Transporting Grain

One of the factors that kept cattle production higher than grain production in the 1890's was likely the fact that grain production was more labour intensive than cattle production. Cattle could be turned out on the open range in the spring, rounded up in the fall, and driven to market. Grain production involved first clearing and breaking the land, sowing the seed, cutting and threshing the crop, and finally hauling it to market.

Prior to the arrival of the first train in 1904, the closest point from which grain could be shipped was Yorkton. Farmers at Theodore who wished to sell their grain usually would have put it into bags and then haul it from their farms to Yorkton by horse-drawn wagons. As noted elsewhere, a team of horses could cover the distance between Theodore and Yorkton in a day while a team of oxen would have taken twice as long.[19]

According to Therese Lefebvre Prince, the heritage researcher for the City of Yorkton, archives the first elevator in Yorkton was not built until the end of the nineteenth century.[20] Therefore, as was the case in many other centres in the nineteenth century, the grain, whether it was hauled loose or in sacks, had to be shoveled or lifted manually into the railway car. After the wagon was unloaded, the farmers faced another day long trip back to the Theodore area.

Postcard Published by the Government of Canada Promoting Immigration and Homesteading Caption Reads: "Hauling Grain to the Elevator for Shipment in Western Canada. Each Bag contains About 1½ Bushels. Each Wagon Contains 75 to 100 Bushels."

Once the CPR had completed construction of the railway tracks, it was possible for farmers to ship grain directly from Theodore and the other small communities along the line. In many communities, including Theodore, the CPR built loading platforms next to the railway tracks to facilitate the handling of the grain. The loading platforms were timber structures with ramps at each end and the top of the platform was level with the floor of a boxcar.[21] It was much less work for a farmer to shovel his grain into the boxcar from a wagon on the loading ramp than from a wagon on the ground.

The loading platform built in Theodore was used for many years by those farmers who chose to ship their grain themselves, rather than use the elevators. In 1924 the largest amount of grain that had ever been loaded using the loading platform in Theodore in any season had been

shipped that crop year. However, many farmers claimed that they could have secured better grades and better prices by selling to the local elevators.[22]

The typical of the early box cars used in Canada in the early twentieth century was about 34 feet, 5 inches long, 8 feet, 4 inches wide and 7 feet, 1 inch high. It had a capacity of 30 tons or about 500 bushels of wheat.[23] For those farmers who chose to use the loading dock, it meant spending the better part of a day shoveling all the grain by hand

Over the years the CPR gradually increased the size of the boxcars used to haul grain. One of the more common was built by the Fowler Company who supplied 33,000 boxcars to the CPR. These cars had a capacity of 2,450 cubic feet and could carry about 40 ton. All boxcars used for shipping grain had to be "coopered" at the elevator. That meant that planks were fastened across the door openings to keep the weight of the grain from breaking them open. The planks did not go all the way to the top of the door so the elevator grain pipe could be inserted into the car.[24]

When one understands the amount of work involved in getting a crop of grain to market in the 1890's it is easy to see why relatively little grain was produced at Theodore at that time. All that changed, however, when the railway arrived in 1903 and the elevators were built. It was not long before grain production at Theodore eclipsed the production of live stock as the main agricultural product. The report on Theodore published in *The Manitoba Free Press* in 1910 and republished in *The Yorkton Enterprise* also goes on to state that:

> Grains of all kinds can be grown with success, there being marketed for last season 98,749 bushels of wheat and 153,710 bushels of other kinds of grain. Taking them at a fair average these yields produced at the rate of 16 to 26 bushels to the acre for wheat and 60 bushels for oats. Three grain elevators, having a combined total capacity of 120,000 bushels, handle the bulk of these large yields.[25]

The Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* would sometimes mention what appear to be unusually high yields. For example, in 1906 he reported that, "Mr. Ed Haacke of Beaverdale reports a yield of 53 bushels of wheat per acre from a field of summer fallow. Mr. P Duff of the same place threshed 46 bushels per acre from a field of new land."[26] Such high yields appear to have been the exception rather than the rule. In 1911 a crop inspector from *The Winnipeg Free Press* visited the Theodore area and reported as follow:

> This afternoon I have driven thirty miles going northeast and also south of the town. Crops in this district are variable. I have seen fine wheat and oat fields, indications of good farming, while other show less careful methods with consequent poor results. On the whole the outlook is good. Across the Whitesand river to the northeast wheat is earlier and much of it will be cut in a week's time; nearer town and to the south it will take ten days at least to mature. The earlier oats will be cut next week, but there are many fields that will not be ready before September 1. There is no damage from frost or rust. I traveled through a district supposed to have been visited by hail on Sunday last, but saw no evidence of damage. Some heavy oats are down, but the percentage is small. Flax sown on breaking looks good. The barley grown is consumed locally. Estimated averages for the district are: Wheat, 23 bushels; oats, 45 to 50; barley, 20; flax, 12 to 14. Shipments in 1910 were; wheat, 113,000 bushels; oats 312,000. With present prospects and considering the extra land under cultivation this will be increased to a total of 500,000 bushels this year.[27]

In some communities one-story warehouses were constructed next to the rail road for the storage of bulk grain until boxcars became available. Generally, these warehouses were gable-roofed, wood-frame structures with a capacity of anywhere from 1,000 to 15,000 bushels.[28] Because these warehouses did not have elevating equipment, grain was loaded and moved in or out by hand, using shovels, thereby making handling the grain a slow, cumbersome, and labour-intensive process. While it is known that such a warehouse existed at Yorkton,[29] there is no evidence of one at Theodore. As in many other places the nineteenth century grain handling facilities at Yorkton proved to be inefficient and inadequate in handling the increasing amounts of

grain arriving for market. By the summer of 1902 Yorkton could boast of having two elevators with a third being built in 1904 and another in 1905.[30]

Elevators at Theodore

The introduction of the grain elevators at the end of the nineteenth century cut down the amount of labour previously required to ship grain. Grain no longer had to be bagged on the farm, but rather simply loaded into wagons, and at the elevator it no longer had to be shoveled by hand as the wagons could easily be dumped.

After the grain was dumped through the grate into pit, it entered the bottom of the leg and was lifted to the distributor at the top of the building. Here it was distributed to various bins for storage. When it came time to ship the grain, it was again lifted to the top of the building where it distributed to the car spout and then to the waiting railway car.

The Use of Chemicals on the Farm

It appears the very little chemical fertilizer was used in the Theodore area until the summer of 1934 when the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* wrote:

> The wisdom of using mineral phosphate fertilizers in growing of field crops, has been well proven in this district this year. Several of our best farmers have sown fields of wheat as a trial, and in each case, there is a great difference in the fertilized, and unfertilized crops. Your correspondent had the privilege of viewing a ten-acre field of fertilized wheat on the farm of Mr. John Hooge this week, and found that the fertilized wheat is fully a week in advance of unfertilized wheat sown on the same day, and right beside the trial plot and the difference in yield will probably run to ten bushels per acre. The fertilized wheat is much farther advanced, with less danger of being affected by rust, better filled and the stand is heavier in every way, plants being stooled out much better than the wheat beside this plot. But probably the greatest advantage noted was the comparative freedom from weeds in the trial plot, particularly does this refer to lambs quarter, which has grown so abundantly

> in summer fallow fields this year. The rapid growth of the fertilized wheat, has had the effect of choking out weeds that have got the better of much of the unfertilized grain growing beside it, and will prove a great factor in cleaning up dirty land, if for this reason alone, the use of this fertilizer would seem to be justified. The cost to the farmer equals something like 1.00 per acre, while this will probably be returned seven or eight fold when the grain is threshed. Mr. Chris Peterson, who handles this product reports that orders for large amounts are already coming in for next spring delivery. Those farmers who have tried it out this year, will sow much greater areas in this way next year.[31]

Until 2,4-D, one of the cheapest and most common weed killers, was developed by Dow Chemicals in the 1940's, farmers at Theodore had no chemical weapons with which to fight the various weed that infested their lands.[32] Farmers, therefore had to resort to mechanical means of fighting weeds

One of the worst of the weeds was Perennial Sow Thistle, which commonly had a root system of eight to ten feet, but occasionally would reach thirty feet. The root stalks grew about four inches from the surface of the ground and every few inches a new plant would be formed. Eventually all other plant life would be choked out. Farmers who wished to keep the plant from spreading on their lands had to remember that if even a small piece of its root was accidentally dragged to another part of the field, a new plant would be produced. The two most recommended ways of dealing with the weed were pulling it up by hand, or just pulling off the blossoms, putting them in a sack, and burning them, sack and all.[33]

At a meeting held in Theodore in January 1924, a government representative stressed the danger presented by Perennial Sow Thistle. He referred to the Snipe lake district, where the weed, first discovered in 1914, now covered twenty-five acres, and to the Quill Lake district where fifteen acres of solid perennial sow thistle had been found. Theodore farmers were urged to take action against the weed by cultivating the patch of weed well, loosening up the dirt, and then

covering it with tar paper, and leaving the tar paper in place for the season. The other method was to get the ground well worked and saturate it with cheap oil, summer-fallowing the land keeping the groung black, and never allowing it to show any green leaves.[34]

An item from the Theodore news column stated that steps to address the weed problem were being taken by farmers and the village to eliminated the weed.[35] Unfortunately, some farmers between Orcadia and Yorkton did not take the warning seriously. By 1931 large fields of sow thistle were reported to be flourishing along the highway, and many fields appeared to contain little else sow thistle in full bloom.[36]

Lunch in the Field on John Hooge's Farm
Courtesy Lorna Russell

Notes:

1. "Theodore Sask" *The Manitoba Free Press* Reprinted by *The Yorkton Enterprise* 8 September, 1910

2. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Times.*11 May, 1911.

3. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Times.*18 May, 1911.

4. "Home of the Old Fashioned Ox," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 12 May, 1949.

5. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 22 February 1905

6. "Beaverdale," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 30 Sept. 1910.

7. Merriman, Louise, "Hooge, John and Louise (Jensen)", *Theodore and District History*, Theodore Historical Society, Theodore, Saskatchewan Canada 1987. pp

8. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 27 June, 1912.

9. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 19 June, 1913.

10. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.*, 19 June, 1913.

11. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 2 May, 1918.

12. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 30 August, 1927.

13. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 3 July, 1928.

14. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 20 January, 1921.

15. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 20 September, 1934.

16. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 8 November, 1934.

17. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 29 November, 1934.

18. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 13 December, 1934.

19. Burns, Terry, "How fast could they travel?" Retrieved 17 January 2015 from http://www.terryburns.net/How_fast_could_they_travel.htm

20. Prince, Therese Lefebvre, Heritage Researcher, City of Yorkton Archives, Personal email to the author. 15 January 2015

21. *Saskatchewan Grain Elevators: A Brief History of the Grain Handling Industry.* Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation, Retrieved 16 January 2015 from http://www.pcs.gov.sk.ca/GrainElevatorStudy

22. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 8 February, 1924.

23. "9238 CPR Boxcar 41844," *Old Time Trains.* Downloaded 21 March 2017 from: http://www.trainweb.org/oldtimetrains/photos/cpr_rolling/two.htm

24. "CPR Boxcar," *Manitoba Agricultural Museum.* Downloaded 21 March 2017 from http://ag-museum.mb.ca/artifacts/vehicles/cpr-boxcar/

25. "Theodore, Saskatchewan," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 8 September, 1910

26. "Theodore," *The Leader.* 24 October,1906

27. "Theodore," *The Leader.* 24 August, 1911.

28. "Theodore," *The Leader.* 24 August, 1911.

29. Prince, Therese Lefebvre, Heritage Researcher, City of Yorkton Archives, Personal email to the author. 15 January, 2015.

30. Prince, Therese Lefebvre, Heritage Researcher, City of Yorkton Archives, Personal email to the author. 15 January, 2015.

31. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 2 August, 1934.

32." 2,4-D: The Most Dangerous Pesticide You've Never Heard Of," *Natural Resources Defence Council.* Retrieved 10 December from https://www.nrdc.org/stories

33. Lamson, H. L. "The Sow Thistle, Menace,"*The Yorkton Enterprise.* 22 February, 1924.

34. "Sow Thistle Menace Stressed at Meeting Theodore Farmers," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 4 January, 1924.

35. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 5 August, 1924.

36. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 1 September, 1931.