

Chapter 5 - Theodore's Businesses Community

Individual Retailers in Theodore

Bokofsky Brothers

Although the story about the flour mill at Theodore, states that the Bokofsky brothers, Moses and Sam, arrived in Theodore and opened a store on Railway Avenue in 1910.¹ Reports in the Theodore news column clearly state that they were living in Theodore in the summer of 1908, and that they enlarged their store in the summer of 1909, and again in 1910 when they bought G. Yeman's lot and blacksmith shop.^{2 3} In addition to their retail store in Theodore the Bokofsky Brothers had at least four other retail stores, one of which was located Wynyard, another in Leslie, a third was in Springside, and the fourth was in Yorkton.

In 1918 the Bokofsky brothers held a large stock reduction sale and announced their intention to "tear down the old store building and erect a larger, up-to-date building."⁴ It seems, however, that Moses Bokofsky got out of the retail business in Theodore for a short period, as in 1920, it was reported that, "Mr. M. Bokofsky is re-entering the general store business at this point. Mr. Bokofsky has rebuilt the interior of his store and is now restocking it with general merchandise."^{5 6}

In 1921 Sam Bokofsky who had left Theodore and was living in Leslie opened a store in St. Norbert, Manitoba.⁷ Later that year he was charged with the theft of the proceeds of a car of flour which, it is alleged, had been destroyed by fire and committed to stand trial at Wynyard.⁸ The outcome of the trial has not been found, It is likely that Sam Bokofsky died sometime in the mid 1920s as the following news item appeared in April 1928:

Mr. D. Dashefsky, one of our popular merchants, gave his many friends a pleasant surprise as he stepped off the west bound train last Thursday morning with his bride, who was formerly Mrs. Sam Bokofsky, a former resident of our town of some years ago. Both Mr. and Mrs. Dashefsky are receiving the hearty congratulations and best wishes of their host of friends.⁹

In the late fall of 1926 it was reported that Moses Bokofsky had purchased a store in Theodore from Messrs. Flick and Laing of Yorkton.¹⁰ Since there is no mention of Flick and Laing ever operating a store in Theodore it is assumed that the purchase was just for the building in which their store was located.¹¹

Moses Bokofsky became quite ill in the late 1920's and began disposing of his assets. In November, 1928 he had J. E. Jacobson, of Minneapolis, conduct a sale for the store which was identified as M. Bokofsky and Son, and in the following January he sold his farm to John Le Sann.^{12 13} It seems that Jacob Bokofsky ran the store from 1928 until the spring of 1930 when he closed it and sold the building to Messrs. Roy and Sam, the owners of the Excellent Café, who renovated it and moved their business into it.^{14 15}

The Bokofsky brothers had several other business interests in Theodore. There are several references in the Theodore news columns to their farming operation, and numerous references to their cattle buying business. Finally, in 1916 they built and owned Theodore's flour mill.

To say that the Bokofsky brother had a bit of bad luck with thing burning down, might be something of an understatement. Their stores in Leslie, Springside and Wynyard all burned down as did a large frame barn on Moses Bokofsky's farm, and there was a fire in Sam Bokofsky's wood shed. Coal thieves were blamed for the fire in the wood shed, and other than the total destruction of shed no serious damage was done.¹⁶ The fire that destroyed the barn and killed two calves was attributed to spontaneous combustion caused by damp hay stored in the loft.¹⁷

The first fire to destroy one of the Bokofsky's stores occurred in January 1910. Bokofsky and Erickson, business partners, were operating a general store in a rented building owned by the Bjarnson brothers, but were building their own store across the street. The carpenters building the new store needed to warm up some roofing tar, but rather than build a fire outside, they put six cans of roofing compound on the stove in the store. The cans of tar exploded and set fire to the store causing \$4,000 damage to the building and \$10,000 to the contents. The insurance carried was \$1,000 on the building and \$4,000 on the contents. The burning store set fire to the local hotel, located about a block away, several times but was saved by the local firefighters.¹⁸

In December 1920 a fire of mysterious origin broke out in Bokofsky's store in Springside. On this occasion Springside's drug store was also destroyed. The Bank of Montreal and the post office were threatened, but escaped serious damage.¹⁹

Frank Krushen, who had operated a fruit and candy store in Theodore in 1916 and had married Moses Bokofsky's daughter in 1917 was the manager of the Bokofsky store in Springside.^{20 21} Krushen was arrested by the RCMP and charged with arson.²² The preliminary hearing was held in Springside, and the presiding justices, who after listening to the evidence for the better part of a day, dismissed the charges against Joseph Silverman, a clerk who had been charged as Krushen's accomplice, but sent Krushen up for trial.²³ When the case was tried in the Court of King's Bench in Yorkton the judge, after listening to the witnesses for the prosecution, withdrew the case from the jury, and released the prisoner.²⁴

The third disastrous store fire broke out in a garage next to the Bokofsky store in Leslie in February 1921, and again the cause was unknown. The harness maker who used part of the garage for his shop, suffered a complete loss of machine tools and work on hand, and so on. Of

the five cars in the garage only three were insured, and while the garage was insured, the Bokofsky store and contents were not because the fire in Springside had not been adjusted. The loss to the Bokofsky brothers was estimated at \$27,000.²⁵

Alexander Fiedler's Many Business Ventures

Alexander Fiedler and family arrived in Theodore in the spring of 1913, and he opened a general store in Baxter's pool hall.²⁶ No other news about Mr. Fiedler or his business appears until the fall of 1915 when he held a dance in what was described as his new store.²⁷ He sold this business to Mr. A. Sant of Winnipeg the following spring of 1916.²⁸

In the spring of 1916, after selling his business to A. Sant, Mr. Fiedler, who also sold Fire Insurance and coal built a second hardware store in Theodore.^{29 30 31} The Fiedlers sold this store to Thomas Drobot in the spring of 1918 with the understanding that Mr. Drobot would purchase the stock and take over the business at a later date.^{32 33} In the spring of 1919 Mr. Drobot bought Fiedler's stock of merchandise.³⁴ Then after operating the hardware business for only a few months Thomas Drobot disposed of it and the property to an outside buyer saying that business life is no treat to which a tired farmer should retire.^{35 36}

Having disposed of his first two stores to A. Sant and T. Drobot, Fiedler's third business venture in Theodore was to purchase property on Railway Avenue, on which he built a third store which unlike many of the stores in the village had a basement.³⁷ It was said that, "Mr. Fiedler has great faith in Theodore, as is proven by his third entry into business life."³⁸ A large shipment of hardware arrived in time for the store to open on October 15, 1919 and it was expected that

another large shipment of general merchandise would arrive shortly.³⁹ By the spring of 1920 the Fiedler's store had earned the reputation of being one of the best stores in Theodore.⁴⁰

Once again, however, Mr. Fiedler operated the business for only a few months. In the spring of 1920 he sold the building, on which his wife took out a long term lease and continued to operate the business under her name.⁴¹ In the summer of 1920 Mrs. Fiedler installed the third gasoline filling tank in the village at the store.⁴² Hard time hit Theodore in 1920 as the post war recession set in and in December of that year Mrs. Fiedler had to dispose of some of her stock by holding auction sales each afternoon at the store.⁴³

The Fiedlers were fairly successful with this store until 1922, when they decided to open a branch of the business in Springside. Part of the Theodore store was torn down and the lumber transported to Springside, where a new building was to be erected.⁴⁴ The Fiedlers Springside store was opened in September 1922 and it was reported that business was very good.^{45 46} The arrangement at the time was that Mrs. Fiedler would manage the Springside branch while Mr. Fiedler managed the Theodore store.⁴⁷

Either business was not as brisk as the Fiedlers reported it to be, or they had simply overextended themselves because by December 1922 the Fiedlers were in financial difficulty and had to make an assignment for the benefit of their creditors in Winnipeg.⁴⁸ In March 1923 it was reported that Mrs. Fiedler had spent several days in Theodore disposing of her household furniture and effects, and had left for Yorkton.⁴⁹ In February, 1924 it was announced that Fiedler's large store on Railway avenue would be sold by Public Auction to satisfy a mortgage."⁵⁰ In May 1924, Louis Kelson, who had lost his store and stock in a recent fire, rented the building and continued his grocery business.⁵¹

Benjamin Barsky and Jacob Pishker

In the spring of 1922 Thomas Drobot returned to Theodore from Winnipeg where he had been living since selling his first store and reopened a store that had been owned and operated for a short time by Messrs. Lerman and Chernick.⁵² He immediately brought in a large shipment of goods to refill his shelves, repainted the building, and hired Mr. D. W. Smith as clerk.^{53 54 55} In the spring of 1923 it was announced that Messrs. Benjamin Barsky and Jacob Pishker had purchased the general store business of Thomas Drobot.⁵⁶

Barsky and Pishker began by leasing the building from Mr. Drobot, and when they bought it in 1926, they immediately began making improvements to it.^{57 58} The Theodore store was just one of the four stores they owned, the others being in Rein, Vonda, and Winnipeg.^{59 60 61}

The Theodore store was first managed by Barsky, but in 1926, Pishker moved his family to Theodore and Barsky moved to Winnipeg.^{62 63} After selling the Winnipeg store, Barsky moved back to Theodore and the Pishker family moved to Rein for a short time.^{64 65}

In the fall of 1929, the partnership of Barsky and Pishker came to an end, and a large sale that drew a large number of customers from many miles away was held in November.⁶⁶ In early 1930, Barsky left Theodore and took up permanent residence in Winnipeg.⁶⁷ Pishker purchased the store and moved his family back to Theodore.⁶⁸ Pishker operated the store in Theodore for only a few months before taking his own life in June 1930.

Jacob Pishker Well Known Theodore Man Committed Suicide

Found Shot Through The Head in Basement of His Store this Morning.

Jacob Pishker, 40 year-old Theodore Merchant, committed suicide shortly before eight o'clock this morning. Worry over his business is believed to have caused him to execute this deed. Funeral arrangements as yet are not complete.

Pishker is well known throughout the Yorkton district having conducted businesses at both Theodore and Rhein and Yorkton found him a frequent visitor.

Mr. Pishker spent the evening at his home and retired about mid night. He arose early in the morning and went down to his store shortly before six o'clock where he was checking accounts. About 8 o'clock his clerks missed him and then heard groans coming from the basement. Upon entering the cellar they found their employer shot through the head with a 22 rifle bullet and breathing his last.

A note was left behind but as yet The Enterprise was unable to learn what its text contained. He is survived by a wife and two children.⁶⁹

Mr. Pishker's brother who had been managing the Pishker and Barsky store in Vonda came to Theodore in August, shortly after his brother's death. While he was in the village, his store in Vonda burned down and he decided to move to Theodore.^{70 71} It is not known exactly how long Mr. Pishker managed the store in Theodore, but news reports from the 1930s always refer to the proprietor as Mrs. Pishker.

Jacob Pishker's widow, Minnie, continued to operate the store in Theodore until the end of November, 1939 at which time she moved back to Winnipeg.

After many years in the general store business in Theodore. Mrs. M. Pishker has sold her general stock of merchandise to Mr. Peter Grywinski. late of Humboldt, Sask., and will shortly remove to Winnipeg where she will reside in future. During her long residence in Theodore, Mrs. Pishker won for herself the esteem and respect of scores of friends, each of whom will regret the departure of one who has been an excellent citizen in every way. We are all sorry to see her go, but trust the change will prove to her entire advantage.⁷²

Mrs. Mercer's Millinery and Ladies Wear

While most of the businesses in Theodore were owned and operated by men, the village was home to at least one successful businesswoman. Mrs. Georgina Mercer, wife of William Mercer, owned and operated a ladies' wear shop and millinery in Theodore from 1908 until her death in 1924. It appears that Mrs. Mercer was an astute business woman and not only kept the latest styles for her customers, but traveled to Winnipeg where she attended the millinery displays

and shows.^{73 74} Apart from a few advertisements such as the one that mentioned a shipment of dolls, toys and games suitable for Christmas presents in 1916, little is known of the day-to-day operations of the millinery store.⁷⁵



Mrs. Mercer's Millinery and Ladies Wear Courtesy Dwight Mercer

Mrs. Mercer does not appear to have had any serious competition as there are only brief reference to other attempts to sell millinery in Theodore. In 1915 Miss Lottie Winberg, of Yorkton, arrived in Theodore with the intention of opening a millinery shop in the block.⁷⁶ However, nothing more is said about her. Then in 1924 Mrs. Ellis Johnson and Miss M. Hansen of Foam Lake spent part of a week in Theodore taking orders for ladies wear.⁷⁷ In 1926 Mrs. M. Bokofsky opened a millinery and ladies goods store in the Telephone Exchange block and is reported to have done nice work, however, again nothing more is said about her in the Theodore news.⁷⁸ Finally, Miss Boyd, a milliner from Yorkton visited Theodore on several occasions

between 1927 and 1929.^{79 80} After Mrs. Mercer's death in 1924, her husband continued to operate her store until the spring of 1926, when he cleared out his stock by auction.⁸¹

It does not appear that there was ever another successful millinery store in Theodore. In the spring of 1929 a Miss Boyd of Yorkton operated a part-time millinery business in Theodore which he operated until the following October.^{82 83}



This 1912 advertisement appeared in *The Yorkton Enterprise*

Notes:

1. Eriksson, Mrs. Harold, "Theodore's oldest landmark, grist mill being destroyed," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 December, 1963. p.10
2. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 July, 1909.
3. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 23 June, 1910,
4. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 16 May, 1918.
5. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 October, 1908.
6. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 August, 1920.
7. "Douglas Resigns Office at Leslie," *Saskatoon Daily Star*. 1 April, 1921.
8. "On Theft Charge," *Saskatoon Daily Star*. 20 December, 1921.
9. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 April, 1928.
10. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 November, 1926.
11. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 December, 1926.
12. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 November, 1928.
13. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 January, 1929.
14. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 April, 1930.
15. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 April, 1930.
16. *The Yorkton Enterprise* 4 January, 1917.
17. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 November, 1925.
18. "Destructive Fire At Wynyard, Sask," *The Leader-Post*. Regina, Saskatchewan. 12 January, 1910.
19. "Springside Scene of Big Fire Last Night," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 2 December, 1920.
20. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 April, 1916.
21. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 25 January, 1917.

22. "Springside Scene of Big Fire Last Night," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 2 December, 1920.
23. "Krushen Sent Up On Arson Charges," *The Leader-Post*. 14 December, 1920.
24. "Criminal Cases at Yorkton Are Completed.," *The Leader-Post*. 11 February, 1921.
25. "Leslie Hard Hit By Fire: Garage and Store Burned" *Saskatoon Daily Star*. 19 February, 1921.

26. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 April, 1913.
27. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 23 September, 1915.
28. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 June, 1916.
29. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 November, 1916.
30. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 October, 1917.
31. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 August, 1916.
32. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 August, 1916.
33. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 May, 1918.
34. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 13 March. 1919.
35. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 13 March, 1919.
36. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 31 July, 1919.
37. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 September, 1919.
38. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 September, 1919.
39. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 October, 1919.
40. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 March 1920.
41. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 March 1920.
42. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 June, 1920.
43. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 December, 1920.
44. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 24 August, 1922.

45. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 September, 1922.
46. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 September, 1922.
47. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 October, 1922.
48. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*., 8 December, 1922.
49. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 March, 1923.
50. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 26 February, 1924.
51. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 23 May, 1924.
52. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 April, 1922.
53. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 April, 1922.
54. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 May, 1922.
55. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 October, 1922.
56. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 March, 1923.
57. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 July, 1926.
58. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 24 August, 1926.
59. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 24 August, 1926.
60. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 15 August, 1930.
61. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 May, 1927.
62. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 November, 1926.
63. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 May, 1927.
64. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 May, 1927.
65. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 21 October, 1927.
66. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 November, 1929.
67. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 January, 1930.
68. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 January, 1930.

69. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 June, 1930.
70. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 15 August, 1930.
71. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 December, 1930.
72. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 November, 1939.
73. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 March, 1915.
74. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 September, 1917.
75. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 30 November, 1916.
76. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 March, 1915. p. 7.
77. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 September, 1924.
78. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 July, 1926.
79. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 October, 1927.
80. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 April, 1929.
81. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 23 March, 1925.
82. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 April, 1929.
83. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 2 October, 19