

Chapter 5 - Theodore's Businesses Community

The Hospitality Industry at Theodore

Boarding Houses

The first accommodations for travelers appears to have been the boarding houses operated by such early settlers as Allan Tracey and Sarah Wylie. Indications are that Tracy's boarding house opened before 1903 and served travelers heading west from Yorkton and that Mrs. Wylie's opened her boarding house in Theodore about 1905.^{1 2} Generally, meals at Wylie's place cost between 25 cents and 50 cents, and like at Alan Tracy's place, nobody was turned away.³

According to Joyce Edmonds Essar, "The Allan Tracey family lived just west of Theodore, and their home had been a "stopping place" for travelers coming through on the trail from Winnipeg."⁴ This was likely the first boarding house in Theodore and is mentioned in the list of existing business in 1903.⁵ There is no other mention of a boarding house in the Theodore news until after the Leland Hotel fire in 1915 when a boarding house, a large, three story, log and plaster building, was opened by Mr. and Mrs. Mike Larson on Henry Street directly north of the station.^{6 7} It appears that the boarding house was located on the corner of Henry Street and Yorkton avenue.⁸ The Larsons operated the boarding house until 1919 when they sold it to Mr. C. B. Ungar.⁹ During the four years in which the Larson's operated their boarding house they established a reputation for providing the best of accommodation, meals at all hours.¹⁰ After selling the boarding house the Larsons moved to their farm.¹¹

Shortly after Mr. Ungar purchased the boarding house, it was gutted by fire and although it did not burn to the ground, it was damaged to such an extent that it was of no further use as a

boarding house.¹² Mr Ungar, however, was able to continue the boarding house business in an adjoining dwelling.¹³

In 1920 Mr. Ungar discontinued the boarding house business, and it was taken over by Mrs. Westergaard who owned a large house of Main street.¹⁴ Mrs. Westergaard operated her boarding house for only a few months before deciding to move to Kandahar.¹⁵ C. B. Ungar then re-opened his boarding house on the corner of Henry Street and Yorkton Avenue.¹⁶

In 1921 another boarding house was opened in Theodore by the widow of the late William Peterson who rented Lawrence Larson's residence for the purpose.¹⁷ The boarding house was located on Main street across the road from the newly opened Post Office and the drug store, and offered "good accommodation and reasonable rates."¹⁸ The year 1921 also saw the opening of Miss Annie Bates boarding house in a dwelling rented from P. C. Larson, also located on Main Street. As the local correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* commented, "The village is certainly well equipped with boarding houses, cafes, and lodging houses."¹⁹

The boarding house experience was not always a pleasant one for the boarders as two Chinese men discovered when they attempted to move out of a boarding house owned by Wasyl Statcky.

Mr. Wasyl Statcky appeared before Justices Eckardt and Austin last week charged with threatening bodily harm and received a sentence of two months in jail. This was the sequel to a dispute with his Chinese tenants of his boarding house, whom he interfered with as they sought to vacate his premises, refusing them the right to remove a range. However, after a couple of days deliberation and much persuasion on the part of our legal advisor and J.P. [Justice of the Peace] the range was finally released. The tenants opening up on Railway avenue in the Reese block under the name of the Excellent Café.²⁰

The Leland Hotel

By 1907 C. M. Abbot had built the Leland Hotel, which was considered by the local residents to be one of the best in the Mackenzie district.²¹ The hotel was built on the site of Mr. McDougall's store which had to be torn down before construction on the hotel could begin.²² The hotel was located on the corner of Railway Avenue and Henry Street, just one a block away from the CPR station, which made it very convenient for travelers. It was sold to James Large of Yorkton, in 1909 for the sum of \$10,300.²³

The Leland Hotel had a bar, and when its license came up for renewal in 1911 there was a considerable amount of excitement was stirred up in the village.²⁴ It appears that some of the customers could get rowdy on occasion. A Bilokreli family story states that when several fellows

started a commotion in the hotel bar, John Bilokreli simply picked them up and threw them out.²⁵

There were also several items in the Theodore News describing drunken behavior on Theodore's streets. It was not, therefore, a foregone conclusion that the license would be granted. Many people in Theodore were opposed to the idea of a licensed bar in the hotel.

Friday last at a special meeting of the town council called to consider other matters, Mr. J. Large owner of the hotel asked the councilors to sign a prepared statement that they believed a majority of the people of the town are in favour of a licensed bar. This two councillors did while a third refused on the grounds that this present council was not elected as in favour of or as opposed to a bar and that a majority of the householders had already signed a petition against the bar. If the town overseer is so sure that a big majority of the people are in favour of license let him resign and test the question.²⁶

The question of whether or not the hotel would be able to renew its bar license dragged on well into the summer irritating many and satisfying none.²⁷



In 1913 the Leland Hotel was sold to Claude Markham for a purchase price reported to be in the neighbourhood of \$21,000.²⁸ The Leland Hotel burned down in 1915.²⁹ An account of the fire was carried by *The Yorkton Enterprise*.

The Leland hotel at Theodore was destroyed and surrounding buildings damaged in a disastrous fire which broke out in the hotel basement early Sunday morning, being cause by an overheated furnace pipe. The fire caught in the wall between the metal covering and when discovered at breakfast time, it had too much of a start to be put out. It spread to the hotel shed and S. Green's livery office, which were also totally destroyed. The fire caught on Green's livery stables, the hotel laundry and stable but was checked. The post office and L. Kelson's general store were threatened and the contents were removed.

The hotel was purchased by the present proprietor, Claude Markham about two years ago, for over \$20,000 and was insured for about \$5000 on stock and fixtures and \$5,000 on the building. \$6,000 insurance had been cancelled a few days ago.

The guests saved most of their personal property. The Yorkton fire brigade as notified and eight members with all the equipment they could carry, left for the scene in the Great West Express, but were too late to give any assistance.³⁰

Rental Accommodation

While the Leland Hotel adequately served the needs of traveling public, there was also a need for accommodation for people who were not just passing through town. The following items indicate that Theodore regularly faced a housing shortage in the early years of the twentieth century:

1916 - There is strong need of three or four decent tenant houses in Theodore."³¹

1919 - Demand for dwellings is becoming active, now that winter is approaching.³²

1921 - There is a house shortage here again, everything larger than a piano case apparently has occupants.³³

1923 - There is a good demand for houses to rent at the present time.³⁴

1926 - The new manager of the Royal Bank was unable to move his family to Theodore because there was no place for them to live.³⁵

One of the very few times that Theodore had a surplus of rental accommodation occurred in the early years of the great depression when the following item appeared in the Theodore news:

There are five or six vacant houses in Theodore at the present time awaiting renters; this is the largest number we have ever seen idle in the past twenty years, and just one more evidence of the severe financial conditions under which we are labouring, and daily hoping for an improvement that seems slow in coming.³⁶

Because of the shortage of rental accommodation, some young men would rent a house together. Such was the case in 1915 when George Layng, Hugh Walker, and T. F. Learmouth rented a house from Mrs. Frederickson.³⁷ It does not appear that the rental situation improved much over the years because in 1921 it was rumored that a number of young bachelors were talking of renting a house and hiring a housekeeper. They figured that they could pay all the costs and get their board at a lower price than they are paying now at the boarding houses.³⁸

Theodore's Second Hotel

It appears that the site of the Leland Hotel remained vacant for a number of years following the fire in 1915. Occasionally rumors would arise concerning the site such as the one in February, 1918 which indicated that the property had been sold to Mr. A. Sant, who would erect a large store on it.³⁹ Nothing, however came of these rumors, and in spite of an ever increasing

demand for accommodation by the traveling public for suitable accommodation in Theodore the village remained without a hotel until the summer of 1920.⁴⁰

In early December, 1919, John Smith, a local businessman, purchased the old Leland Hotel site on Railway Avenue, and it was announced that he would build an up-to-date hotel in the following spring.⁴¹ In early June, 1920, Smith began excavating the cellars on the hotel site and had started the foundation work of his new hotel.⁴² By mid July, 1920 the stonework was completed and the foundation was ready for the new building.⁴³

Rather than construct a new building for his hotel, Smith chose instead to convert an existing structure, the old Theodore school which had been replaced by a new school building a year earlier. The old two-story school building was moved from the school yard to the site of the old Leland Hotel by the Jackson moving company of Saskatoon over a period of four days. Once settled on its new foundation, the old building was remodeled and rebuilt according to the needs of its new purpose.⁴⁴

In October, 1920 it was reported that the new hotel would soon be ready for occupation and would fill a long felt want in the village.⁴⁵ By mid November, 1920, Smith found a buyer for his hotel in the person of Mrs. S. Westergaard.⁴⁶ Mrs Westergaard had moved to Theodore in early 1920, and had operated a boarding house on Theodore's Main Street for a few months before discontinuing the business and had returned to her home in Kandahar, Saskatchewan.^{47 48 49} She was apparently well known to business travelers who had stopped at Theodore, and it was expected that she would do well in her new venture.⁵⁰ The expectation of success was quickly fulfilled and a later report stated that, "The Theodore hotel is rapidly making a name for itself, as

a home away from home. Nearly every night this popular hostelry is filled to capacity with travelers here to spend the night.⁵¹

The grand opening of the new hotel in Theodore was expected to draw a large crowd of friends and acquaintances. The event was reported as follows:

A very interesting affair took place in this thriving town last evening, when Mrs. Westergaard formally opened up the new hotel which she has just purchased and fitted up in the most modern style. Invitations were sent to friends and out of town and to parties living as far away as Winnipeg, Man. A surprising number of these were present for the occasion. Altogether there were over three hundred guests who took part in the grand opening.

A short but interesting program started the proceedings. Miss M. Hanson of this town performed on the piano in her usual mastery style as did Mr. C. Wilkie of CPR fame. Miss Reese one of the talented vocal artists of this town was unfortunately unable to perform owing to a slight cold. Mr. Conn of the Imperial Oil Company rendered a cornet solo which was beyond praise. All these artists were repeatedly encored.

Following the musical part of the program the whole assembly, old and young, took part in some games. The guessing contest proved a very amusing diversion. Mr. O. A. Thomas and Mr. C. Wilkie chose sides and battled for chief honors for half an hour. Mr. Thomas, however, being a more seasoned veteran came out victorious. The game of musical chairs proved a great laugh producer. The only difficulty experienced was in preventing the participants from carrying the chairs around the room with them. Needless to say the two who outlived all the others were young ladies. Trust the female of the species to find a place to talk, stand or sit where they want, when they want.

After the games were over everybody played cards for about an hour. "Noses," seemed to be the favorite game, although the older and more staid people played whist of bridge. The honors in the Nose game, beyond a shadow of a doubt, went to miss Clara Larson, and Mr. C. Wilkie. They are the Nose players par excellence, of this district.

The dancing commenced at 11 o'clock. The music for this part of the entertainment was furnished by Miss M. Hanson, Mr. C. Wilkie, and Mr. H. Keletsky on the piano and Mr. A. Bates on the violin.

At 12 o'clock luncheon was served and this was where the hostess, Mrs. Westergaard made her presence most agreeably felt. The luncheon consisted of coffee and the most delicious sandwiches and cakes and other appetizing morsels; all the result of the hostesses' very useful culinary ability. After luncheonette the dancing was resumed, by all the young people and quite a few of the old. Many preferred to play cards or look on. These seemed to enjoy themselves no less than the dancers.

At one o'clock the guests left; all of them feeling that they had attended the affair of the season in these parts.

Mrs Westergaard is fortunate in having a house particularly well situated and suited for commercial travelers. As proprietor of such an establishment she is second to none.⁵²

A second social event occurred at the hotel on Christmas Eve, 1920 when Mr. and Mrs. S. Westergaard entertained a number of Theodore's single male residents to what was described as "a good old-fashioned Christmas dinner." Miss Myrtle Frederickson was hired to help serve the meal which consisted of roast goose with all the trimmings, and ended with Christmas cake, plum pudding, coffee, chocolates and fruit. After dinner Mr. Westergaard passed around cigars.⁵³ Other social events at the hotel soon followed, and it was reported that:

The Theodore hotel is rapidly making a name for itself, as a home away from home. Nearly every night this popular hostelry is filled to capacity with travelers here to spend the night.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, the year 1921 does not appear to have been good to the Westergaard family. In addition to the recession that plagued all of Canada, the Westergaards experienced personal difficulties. In early May Mr. Westergaard, a butcher by trade was found stabbed in the chest in the basement of the hotel. *The Yorkton Enterprise* reported the event as follow:

On Monday evening shortly after eight o'clock, Sam Westergaard, an hotel keeper at Theodore was found in the basement of the hotel, (the basement being used as a butcher shop,) with a wound below his heart.

Westergaard was taken to his room and medical aid was summoned immediately. On the following night he was removed to Yorkton Hospital where he is progressing as well as can be expected.

Mr. Westergaard is a married man but has no family. About a year ago Mrs. Westergaard moved to Theodore and started a boarding house. Mr Westergaard, who has been in the butcher business further west for some time joined her in Theodore about six months ago when they purchased the Theodore Hotel.⁵⁵

No other details of this event have been found. Later that year Mrs. Westergaard took ill and was confined to her bed for several days.⁵⁶ On 7 March, 1922 the Westergaards sold the hotel

back to John Smith, who later on the same day, sold it to Mr. Grover Darrach.⁵⁷ The Westergaards apparently moved to Saltcoats.⁵⁸

Mr Darrach had the good fortune to purchase the hotel just as the recession was ending and business was picking up. Two reports from 1922 describe it as a successful business.

Judging by the number of commercial men who have called at this point lately there must be a great improvement in business due for the near future. Every day from four to eight travelers have been accommodated by the local hotel which is rapidly making a name for itself as one of the best places to eat and sleep along the line.⁵⁹

The Theodore hotel enjoys an ever increasing trade from travelers, who know how to appreciate good meals and accommodations, of late this popular house has been taxed to full capacity to handle the trade.⁶⁰

As with the previous owners, the new hotel continued to be the venue for some of the smaller social events in Theodore.

Mr. and Mrs Grover Darrach, of the hotel, were host and hostess to a delightful party held in the hotel last Monday night which was attended by a number of friends who each and all spent an enjoyable evening.^{61 62}

A pleasant little dance was held in the hotel dining room on Tuesday night when a number of the young folks enjoyed a few hours fun.⁶³

In October, 1922 it was reported that some alterations and an addition had been made to the property which added to its appearance and convenience. This in turn made it an even more popular place for travelers to stay and it was often filled to capacity.⁶⁴ Under the management of the Darrachs the hotel continued to be a venue for parties until the spring of 1925 when Mrs Darrach suddenly died after a short illness.^{65 66} A year later Mr. Darrach left Theodore and moved to Saskatoon where he was expected to enter the lumber business.

Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Larson, of Buchanan assumed management of the Theodore and operated it until the summer of 1936.^{67 68} In November, 1928, it was reported that Theodore's

hotel was been unable to handle all the commercial trade, and that on some occasions when the hotel and all spare rooms in town were filled the odd traveler was forced to continue his or her journey on to the next community east or west of Theodore.⁶⁹ For the most part, however, there was little remarkable or exciting at the hotel while it was managed by the Larson's. The one exception occurred when Mr. and Mrs. Emslie of Saltcoats arrived in Theodore to take up residence. On the day of their arrival a little daughter was born to them in the hotel.⁷⁰

John Smith, who still owned the hotel operated it for several weeks in the summer of 1936 while he renovating it and in September leased it to Mr. and Mrs. J. Palfiener, of Regina.^{71 72} After only a few months operating the hotel, the Paifeiners gave up their lease and returned to Regina.⁷³ In February 1837 the hotel was taken over by Mr. and Mrs. P. Hunter, formerly of Saskatoon, who arrived in Theodore with their son and two daughters.⁷⁴

Cafés and Restaurants

The first mention of a café or a restaurant in Theodore appears in the list of new construction planned for 1907 that was published in the Theodore news column.⁷⁵ There are no other references to a restaurant until 1920 when a Chinese restaurant was listed among the business operating in Theodore.⁷⁶ These gentlemen opened their Excellent Café in the building that had formerly been occupied by Cohen and Daien, merchants who stayed in Theodore or only a short time. At that time the owners of the Chinese restaurant that was already operating in Theodore under the name The New York Café decided that there was too much competition and moved away.^{77 78} In December, 1921 Charles Wing and Charles Tong the owners of the Excellent

Café, sold it to the Yee brothers.⁷⁹ There is, unfortunately, very little mention of the Chinese Café in Theodore other than the occasional report on the change of ownership.

Notes:

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4. Essar, Joyce Edmonds. "Austin, Mr. and Mrs. Manley" *Theodore and District History*. p. 152
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6. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Times*. 25 March 1915.
7. Stroshein, Nora. "Merkley, Walter, Alice and family" *Theodore and District History*. p. 367.
8. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 6 May, 1920.
9. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 September, 1919.
10. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 April, 1915.
11. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 September, 1919
12. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 September, 1919.
13. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 September, 1919.
14. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 February, 1920.
15. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 6 May, 1920.
16. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 6 May, 1920.
17. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 17 February 1921.
18. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 June, 1922.
19. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 May, 1921.
20. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 21 April, 1921.
21. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 19 April, 1907.

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31. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 30 November, 1916.
32. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 October, 1919.
33. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 December, 1921.
34. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 May, 1923.
35. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 April, 1927.
36. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 17 April, 1931.
37. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 25 March 1915.
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39. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 28 February 1918.
40. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 September, 1920.
41. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 December, 1919.
42. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 June, 1920.
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49. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 February, 1920.
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