

Chapter 8 - Health Care and Education at Theodore

The First School in the Village

Construction

As mentioned in Chapter 6, Theodore's first school building was located east of the present village. It served the community for about ten years and by 1903 the need for a new building had become evident. There were, at that time about twenty-four families with some thirty-five children of school age living on the farms near Theodore and approximately another eleven children living in the village. A meeting of the ratepayers held at Theodore in February, 1904 approved the borrowing of \$1,500 at 8% interest repayable in ten equal annual instalments for the construction of a new School building. It was later determined that an additional funds would be needed and another \$300 was borrowed. In accordance with advice received from the Department of Education a piece of land "bounded by Main St. in the west, Henry St. in the east, and Yorkton Ave. in the south," was purchased for school use. Tenders for the construction of the building were called in the summer of 1904 and the contractors chosen were the Logan and Black Construction Company and Hukins, both of Yorkton. The final cost of the new school was as follows; land \$200.00, the building \$1,625.00, desks, library facilities, etc. \$110.00. ¹

It appears the school was first heated by wood burning stoves on each floor which were upgraded to coal-burning heater in 1916."²

The new building was ready for occupancy in 1905.³ While the first floor was put to use immediately, the second floor remained unoccupied until 1909. At that time P. F. Peterson was given the contract to plaster the upper storey so that it could be used as a classroom.⁴ On 25 May,

1909 the Theodore school opened with two teachers, Mr. Peter Yemen, who had been employed as the teacher since the school was built and Miss Eileen Walmsley, of Yorkton.⁵ Mr. Yemen now served as teacher and principal.⁶



The First School at Theodore - Courtesy Colleen Bilokreli Prairie Mapping at Theodore

Attendance and Enrolment

Except for a brief period in 1896 when it was difficult to maintain an average attendance of six students due to the number of families leaving the area,⁷ enrollment and attendance at the Theodore school grew steadily from the original eight students in early 1890's to the fifteen or sixteen who attended the one-room log structure⁸ to an enrollment of forty-nine⁹ with an average

daily attendance of forty-two students by 1910.¹⁰ By the end of the 1913 school year there were more than one hundred students attending Theodore's two-room school and it was necessary to open a third classroom.¹¹

The third class room was opened in the Presbyterian Church located across Main Street from the school in 1913.¹² The use of the church building was made possible by the fact that the Presbyterians have been working closely with the Methodists for several years and were in the process of forming a union church at Theodore. When school opened in August 1915 nearly one hundred pupils were attending it, and the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* reminded parents that much better progress was made when students attended classes regularly, it was in the parents' interest to see that their children attend regularly and punctually.¹³ It wasn't long, therefore, before a fourth classroom was needed and in 1917 a small separate building, was erected on the school property.¹⁴ In spite of these attempts to remedy the situation, overcrowding remained a problem at the Theodore school until a new twenty-thousand dollar brick and tile school was erected in 1919.¹⁵

Theodore Emphasised Quality in Education

The people of Theodore have always prided themselves on the quality of education offered by the local school. This pride can be traced back to Theodore's first teacher, Mr. McCullough, who in 1895 received the praises of the correspondent to both *The Leader*¹⁶ and *The Winnipeg Tribune*.¹⁷ Inspector Hewgill visited Theodore's school in June 1897 and reported that everything was satisfactory.¹⁸

There are perhaps two reasons why the Theodore school earned a reputation for academic excellence. The first was the interest taken by the residents of Theodore in school affairs. The second was that Theodore frequently hired highly qualified teachers.

One example of the high level of interest taken in school affairs occurred at the annual meeting of the ratepayers in 1896. According to the correspondent to *The Leader*, “the trustees had to endure a somewhat severe roasting from some of the ratepayers upon their management of the district for the past year.”¹⁹ Two decades later a community meeting in the village was reported as follows:

The Better Schools Day was observed at Theodore with a small attendance, due partly to the preparation that was being made for the celebration on the following day. Though the attendance was small the interest was keen. The chair was occupied by Rev. Mr. Shannan, Mr. Yemen gave an address on the relative merits of the consolidated school and the rural superintendent, Mr. McLennan, of Yorkton, gave an address on the aims of our educational system. A free discussion followed, participated in by trustees, teachers, and citizens, after which a resolution was passed commending the consolidated school and the system of rural superintendents.²⁰

Advertisement for teachers for the Theodore school from the early twentieth century often stated that a first or second class teaching certificate was required. At that time few people had a high school education and those who did were in high demand as teachers for the rapidly growing school districts. A third class teacher’s certificate was the equivalent of a grade nine education, a second class certificate indicated a grade ten education and a first class certificate, and a first class certificate indicated a grade eleven education.²¹ As more and more people earned degrees from the university advertisements for teaching positions at Theodore sometimes specified that a bachelor’s degree was required.

The Theodore School Board was prepared to offer salary increases to good teachers. Miss E. P. McGill, for example, began teaching at Theodore in 1915, and on receiving a raise in 1916, and was praised for being an efficient teacher whose increase in salary was deserved.²² In the same way, Miss. Mary Kirkland who was described as “one of the best primary teachers in the province.,” was offered an increase of salary to induce her to remain in Theodore.²³ One problem that Theodore often faced was that after attracting a highly qualified teacher another school district that could afford to pay a higher salary would lure him or her away after a few years.

A third possible reason for the general academic success of Theodore’s students may be that the achievements of students and teachers alike were reported to the general public in the Theodore news column. Student’s names and the grades they achieved were often printed in the local news column, and teachers were recognized for any extra work they did for their students. For example, Mrs. A. C. Tracy, was recognized for giving her grade VIII class extra tuition each evening in the spring of 1917.²⁴

The emphasis on providing a high quality education at Theodore attracted students from neighbouring school districts. One district is reported to have lost so many students to the Theodore school that it was in danger of losing its provincial grant in 1911.²⁵ An item in the Theodore news on 15 February, 1917 stated that, “The senior room of the public school is being crowded by non-residents,” and an almost identical item appeared on 30 January, 1919.²⁶ The overcrowding produced by the influx of non-resident students together with the natural growth of the population in the Theodore School District was a contributing factor in the decision to build a new school at Theodore.



The Second School at Theodore
The building on the left is the third classroom that was opened in 1917.

Examinations

Examination for students between Grades I and VIII were held at Christmas, Easter and at the end of the school year in late June. The name of each student and the grade he or she had received on the latest examination was published in the Theodore news column. Additionally every June the local senior department at the school was closed down to make room for those candidates who were writing their senior Provincial examinations. In June 1917, for example, twenty-two candidates presented themselves at Theodore to write off their Grade VIII and teachers' examinations.²⁷ When the results of the examinations were reported, the names of seven people were listed as having completed the requirements of Grade VIII, six names qualified for a third class teaching certificate, and two others passed the second class examinations.

At that time teachers in Saskatchewan were classified according to their level of their education. Third-class teachers had achieved Standard VI, roughly equal to completing Grade 9, second-class teachers were those who had achieved Standard VII, or about a Grade 10 standing, and first-class teachers had achieved Standard VIII, or Grade 11.”²⁸

Use of School building

Unlike other neighbouring communities where dances were frequently held in the school building, it does not appear that such was the case in Theodore. The school building was, however, frequently used as a place of worship for several churches until they could erect their own buildings. The second story of the school, for example, was “fitted up as a hall” and was used by the Presbyterians as a place of worship in 1907.²⁹ The Anglicans used the building in 1908,³⁰ and there was at least one Lutheran service conducted in the Danish language in 1905.³¹

The school building also served as a venue for a variety of concerts sponsored by different community organizations. For example, in 1905 one of the churches used the school building for a concert to raise money for its organ fund,³² and a month later the Theodore Sunday school put on a concert and raised \$15.50.³³

Hot Lunches

One interesting and unique feature of life in the Theodore school was the introduction of a hot lunch programme during World War I. At their December meeting in 1915 the Theodore Homemakers’ Club appointed a committee to meet the school board regarding serving a hot dish each day to country pupils.”³⁴ Nothing appears to have come from the Homemakers’ initiative.

However, when inspector J. T. M. Anderson visited the school the following February, he was entertained at noon by the rural students who had prepared hot lunch.³⁵ Inspector Anderson said this was his first experience of the kind and that it greatly pleased him.³⁶ The story behind this episode was carried in *The Yorkton Enterprise*. Unfortunately the author is unidentified.

The rural children attending the Theodore village school have solved the warm lunch problem, and for this they deserve special commendation. Every noon hour a warm meal is served in which all rural pupils take part. One of the pupils has written a short essay on "The Best Hour of the Day." It is very interesting and reads as follows:

We country pupils of the Theodore senior room each day serve a hot dinner at school. During the early winter months we brought cold lunch generally consisting of some sandwiches, a piece of cake or pie or sometimes a little fruit and we drank a glass of cold water. This really became very tiresome and made us feel like not eating any lunch at all. The girls discussed the subject quite often but we went no further.

The first week of January the weather was very cold and we decided to make a cup of tea for each country person. This made the lunch hour seem a little more present and I am sure it was appreciated by the boys as well as the girls.

A few of the boys could not be induced to drink any tea. We thought they were shy. However a few days later one of the boys brought some eggs and half a pound of butter with the request that some of "the larger girls make scrambled eggs for dinner. Since then the boy has been persuaded to have dinner with us. The other boys have also joined us since we accepted their contributions.

The day we had scrambled eggs was really the beginning of a hot dinner. At noon or after four we decide what each person shall bring for dinner the following day. We take turns about making the meals and we all help wash dishes and putting dinner away. We've had soup, potatoes, meat, fruit, tarts or pies and various other dishes of food for different dinners. Today we entertained our teacher, Mr. Yemen and Inspector Anderson at dinner. We have found hot dinners a success and are sure all other schools would find it so.³⁷

School Fairs

During the First World War and for some years afterwards school fairs were a popular in Saskatchewan. Theodore's first school fair took place in 1918 and by 1920 had become an annual event. Considerable time and energy was required to hold a school fair, Theodore's first school fair was announced in December, 1917, but not held until the following Autumn.³⁸ Attendance at

the Theodore School Fair was open to all schools in the immediate area, and schools taking part were asked to contribute the expenses necessary to the carrying out of the program.³⁹

In August, 1918, it was revealed that the program for the School Fair would consist of exhibits of drawings, paintings, busy-work, vegetable, grains and flowers.⁴⁰ These were to be collected by the teachers in each school and brought to Theodore for judging.⁴¹ In addition to the exhibits there was to be a Junior Sports Day consisting of races of all kinds, games and amusements with prizes being offered to the winners.⁴² In the evening there would be a concert consisting of elocution, story telling, music, and a spelling match held in the band hall.⁴³ The winners in all the contests would be eligible to compete at a final school fair to be held at Yorkton.⁴⁴ After a final planning further details of the day's events were published in the Theodore news Column.

The kiddies of the district will have the time of their lives at the school fair. They will exhibit grains, vegetables, flowers, cooking, canning, sewing, basketry, art work of every description. As a reward for their good work they will be treated to a free moving picture show by Mr. A Wicks, the movie man. At the grand program there will be competitions in solo and chorus singing, elocution, story-telling and spelling.

The program will start promptly at 1 p.m., after the visitors have had a basket lunch. The schools will form under the direction of their teachers and march around town. Each school is to be designated by pennants, flags and colours. Upon returning to the school grounds, exhibition drills will be held. Premier Martin and Inspector Anderson will speak. Following the addresses there will be races and games. The free moving picture show and the grand concert will be big features of the day for the kiddies. Every boy and girl should be present with his parents.⁴⁵

Follow-up stories in *The Yorkton Enterprise* reveal that the pupils of Poplar Leaf school won the largest number of prizes with a total of 55 prizes, 25 of which were firsts, and that Caldervale school won a total of 35 prizes, giving them second place.⁴⁶ When the winners from Theodore went to Yorkton, Poplar Leaf school received 99 point obtained from 18 prizes.⁴⁷

A 1931 reference to the annual school fair indicates that the school fairs begun during the Great War became annual events and continued to be held until well into the 1930's.⁴⁸ Exhibits of grains, vegetables, and school work were prepared by the pupils from both the Theodore school and the surrounding school districts.



Teachers and children 1914

The adults in the above picture are Mr. Peter Yemen, Principal, and Miss Edith Austin, teacher. Pupils that have been identified include: Gladys Tracy, Mable Hanson, Olive Innes, Minnie Hanson, Mabel Adamson, Norman Innes, Phyllis Gregory, Emma Streeton, Rosie Spencer, Charlie Spencer, Bill Austin, Jake Bokofsky, Lottie Streeton Dora Bokofsky Pearl Ungar, Gertrude Yemen, Jennie Fiddler, and Mona Ungar. Pupils who may in the picture but who have not been identified include: Bill Ungar, Vivian Ungar, Obert Reese, Tom Gregory,

Gopher Day

On May 1, 1917, the pupils from Theodore's school joined tens of thousands of other pupils from 980 schools throughout the province of Saskatchewan to compete in Saskatchewan's first official Gopher Day. Gophers, officially known as Richardson's ground squirrels, were and still are among the most common crop destroying pests in Saskatchewan. During World War I it was estimated that gophers were destroying a quarter of a million acres of crop each year. These crops that were essential to Canada's war effort. Additionally, gopher holes injured cattle and wrecked farm equipment. Armed with poison, snares, traps, and guns, school children across Saskatchewan were sent into the fields by their teachers to wage war on gophers. By the end of the day Saskatchewan children had exterminated more than half a million gophers.⁴⁹

Notes:

1. Theodore Historical Society, "Theodore Consolidated School District No. 253 sub. Unit No. 7." *Theodore and District History* p. 43.
2. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 9 November, 1916.
3. Theodore Historical Society, "Theodore Consolidated School District No. 253 sub. Unit No. 7." *Theodore and District History* p. 43.
129. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 15 April, 1909.
130. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 May, 1909.
131. Theodore Historical Society, p. 43.
132. "Theodore," *The Leader*. 11 February, 1897. P. 5
133. Theodore Historical Society, "Theodore Consolidated School District No. 253 sub. Unit No. 7." *Theodore and District History* p. 43.
134. Theodore Historical Society, "Theodore Consolidated School District No. 253 sub. Unit No. 7." *Theodore and District History* p. 43.
135. 1910 *Manitoba Free Press*
136. Theodore Historical Society, "Theodore Consolidated School District No. 253 sub. Unit No. 7." *Theodore and District History* p. 44.
12. Theodore Historical Society, "Theodore Consolidated School District No. 253 sub. Unit No. 7." *Theodore and District History* p. 44.
13. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 August, 1915.
14. Theodore Historical Society, "Theodore Consolidated School District No. 253 sub. Unit No. 7." *Theodore and District History* p. 44.
140. Anderson, J. S., "Theodore is Centre of Thriving Farming Area," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 July, 1935.
141. "Theodore," *The Leader*. 7 November, 1895. p. 1
142. "Theodore," *The Winnipeg Tribune*. 7 November, 1895. p. 6
143. "Theodore," *The Leader*. 10 June, 1897.

144. "Theodore," *The Leader*. 30 January, 1896. p.5
20. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 6 July, 1916.
21. "The Drastic Shortage of Teachers in Saskatchewan's History" retrieved 24 February 2018 from: <http://sites.rootsweb.com/~cansk/school/DrasticShortageOfTeachers.html>
22. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 9 November, 1916.
23. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 20 December 1917.
24. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 29 March, 1917.
149. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 May, 1911.
26. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*." 15 February, 1917.
27. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 July, 1917.
28. Horsman, Ken. "Education in Saskatchewan Before Confederation," *The Encyclopaedia of Saskatchewan*. Downloaded from <http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/education.html> 15 March 2017
29. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 14 March 1907.
30. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 30 Aug 1908
31. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 8 March 1905
32. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 25 January 1905
33. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 22 February 1905
34. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 23 December, 1915
35. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 February 1916
36. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 February 1916
37. "Serving Meals to School Children in Comfort," *The Yorkton Enterprise*." 17 February, 1916.
38. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 December, 1917.
39. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 May, 1918.
40. "School Fair at Theodore " *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 29 August, 1918.

41. "School Fair at Theodore " *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 29 August, 1918.
42. "School Fair at Theodore " *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 29 August, 1918.
43. "School Fair at Theodore " *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 29 August, 1918.
44. "School Fair at Theodore " *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 29 August, 1918.
45. "Theodore to Hear Premier Martin Sept. 24." *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 12 September, 1918.
46. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 3 October, 1918.
47. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 17 October, 1918.
48. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 April, 1931.
49. Waiser, Bill. "The Day Sask. Kids Waged War on Gophers," *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. March 31, 2015.