

Chapter 6 -Economic Realities of Life in Theodore

The Years 1902 - 1914

In Saskatchewan the first decade of the 20th century was characterized by a tremendous optimism. All across the province the population exploded as new settlers took up homesteads. Many people felt there was unlimited potential as both crops and prices were generally good.¹

At Theodore conditions mirrored those in the rest of the province. By the end of the year 1902 the location for the new village of Theodore had been chosen by the CPR and the tracks had been laid as far as Theodore. Even the CPR station had been built. By the end of the following year the land on which the village was to be situated had been surveyed and the first map of the village had been produced. The first buildings had been erected, and, like the rest of the province, a decade of rapid growth had begun. The earliest description of the new village was provided by the Beaverdale correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise*, who in December 1903 wrote:

A visit to Theodore town discloses now quite a thriving little village where a few years ago the wilderness held sway. Among other buildings and enterprises we might mention are the hardware store of A. C. Tracey; the general store of W. Magrath; Allan Tracey's store and boardinghouse; Northern Elevator Co's. lumber yard under the management of A. Eckhardt; March Bros. large elevator; Winchcomb and Yemen's blacksmith shop; a fine railway station; and several other buildings.²

Every indication of Theodore's growth in the years prior to World War I was reported in the Theodore news column of *The Yorkton Enterprise*. In the spring of 1905, for example, it was reported that property in the village was being bought up rapidly, that many buildings were being erected, and that the village was expected to boom.³ A very similar report was made in the spring of 1906 stating that, "Theodore has commenced to boom and in a year's time we may look for vast changes in our little village. Town lots are advancing in price and are being bought up on

every hand.”⁴ A third report in the spring of 1907 stated that lumber was scarce due to the great demand for it,⁵ and that the price of lots in the village selling well at good prices.⁶

Each spring the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* reported the names of those who either were building or intended to build that summer. The list of proposed buildings for 1906 and 1907 will give the reader some idea as to how rapidly Theodore grew at that time. The 1906 list of new building projects included houses for P. Yemen, P. Mickelson, L. Wylie, A. W. Wylie, J. Hansen, and A. D. Eckhardt.⁷ The report also mentions that the foundation of the Great West Trading Co. Elevator had been laid and that the carpenters would be commencing work shortly.⁸ In 1907 the list of people who were either building or who had expressed an intention to build new houses in Theodore was somewhat longer and included: William Wylie, the Rev. A. R. Maunders, G. Chandrey, J. S. Anderson, M. Malone, and Mr. Irwin.⁹ Also, the number of new buildings that were erected for various businesses in 1907 was longer than in previous years. The list of new business construction includes: a large general store for A. D. Eckhardt, a new store for A. W. Wylie & Co., an implement warehouse for A. D. Tracey, a harness and shoe repair shop for F. Reese, a hardware store for J. Hope and Sons, a livery stable for H. McInnes, a billiard hall for J. Hansen, another billiard hall, and a restaurant for Pinder and Golding.¹⁰ Several other structures including the new Methodist Church and a third Elevator were also built in 1907, and hope was expressed about the possibility of a grist mill and a new post office building, which according to the correspondent, was badly needed.¹¹

The reports of growth and success by the various local correspondents to newspapers during the early twentieth century all had a strong element of boosterism. As noted in Chapter 3, every correspondent in every community attempted to present his community in the best possible

light, and even reports and articles that appear to have been written by people who had no vested interest in the community's growth may in fact be nothing more than a paid advertisement. While it is very possible that the following article, first published by *The Manitoba Free Press* in the summer of 1910, and reprinted by *The Yorkton Enterprise* was sponsored by Theodore's business and civic leaders, it does describe the boom that Theodore experienced in its early years.

In relation to its size, Theodore possesses quite a variety of commercial houses and professions, all of which appear to be deriving a profitable business among their various patrons. The representative lines of business embrace four general, two hardware, one drug, and a millinery store; three implement warehouses, a lumber yard, two livery barns, a butcher, baker and confectioner, hotel, two boarding houses, two blacksmiths two barbers and two pool rooms, a post office, two painters, a stone mason, four building contractors, a wood working shop, a feed store and chopping mills, three real estate agencies, a lawyer, doctor, and branch of the Union Bank of Canada.

A further indication of the steady growth of the town is revealed in the number of buildings erected during the last two years. Statistics reveal the fact that nearly \$6,000 was expended on new buildings alone for the previous year, while the present season so far exceeds that amount by approximately \$2,000. Town lots are purchasable at prices ranging from \$60 to \$600.

Trade is well sustained and the sales of the farming machinery business has shown a favourable increase during the recent months. Some \$15,000 worth of farming implements of all kinds was the extent of last year's output. Up to date the 1910 sales have already exceeded this amount by \$8,000.

There are still business openings for men possessing the twin attributes of enterprise and some capital in the following lines: Harness maker, and laundry. A skating rink, flour mill and another grain elevator are also needed.

Theodore's educational facilities are provided by its present school erected four years ago at a cost of \$1,600. There is present daily average attendance of forty-two pupils whose training is well served by a staff of two qualified teachers. Three churches at present minister to the religious needs of the community, the Methodist, Presbyterian, and the Church of England. The football and tennis clubs also supply the means for the physical and recreative needs of the sporting fraternity. There is also a good entertainment hall with seating accommodation for 200 people.

Although one of the older and smaller towns in the West, Theodore is showing a steady, if somewhat slower growth in comparison with others further West, but with its fine tributary farming country to support it, it appears to possess those favourable possibilities, coupled with the energy and business acumen of its merchants, to a still further and well sustained development.¹²

In August 1911 it was reported that building operations were greatly hindered by a lack of carpenters, and a later report stated that building was going on as fast as carpenters can be secured.^{13 14} This lack of skilled workmen appears to be about the only thing that slowed the building boom in Theodore.

Another aspect of the early boom years in Theodore was the marked increase in the value of real estate. One example of how property increased in values appeared in a 1910 item in the Theodore news column in which it was noted that J. S. Anderson had received an offer of \$1,000 for his corner lot on Railway and Henry Avenues.¹⁵ According to the report, the property had been valued at \$150 only three years previously.¹⁶

Farm land also showed a dramatic increase in value. In 1910 an item in the Theodore news column of *The Yorkton Enterprise* noted that almost all the land once available for homesteading in the Theodore area had been taken up for some time, but that good quality land could still be purchased privately.¹⁷ It is interesting to note that raw prairie land that could have been purchased from the railways or private owners in the 1890's for only three dollars per acre was now available at the "reasonable" price of ten dollars per acre, and that improved land was now selling at prices ranging from twenty dollars to twenty-seven dollars per acre.¹⁸

By 1912 the economic boom of the twentieth century's first decade had ended and a worldwide recession had begun. In Saskatchewan the prices farmers received for their grain fell sharply and remained low, but because the tariff that protected Canadian manufacturers remained in place, the prices farmers had to pay for farm machinery and other essentials did not change to any significant extent. Farmers were, therefore, faced with a situation in which much of what they produced was sold on an open market and much of what they bought was on a protected market.

In addition the real estate market together with the construction industry collapsed, and many of the old transportation problems still continued and the two new but uncompleted transcontinental railways, the Canadian Northern Railway and the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway were particularly hard hit, By the summer of 1914 some parts of Saskatchewan had experienced through three consecutive years of drought, and many farmers who only had a quarter-section of land were facing hard times.^{19 20 21}

Like every other community in Saskatchewan, Theodore felt the effects of the recession. Writing in 1921 J. S. Anderson, Theodore's correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* recalled some of his own experiences.

The boom days of 1912, when town lots in every little burg were selling at prices that could not be realized in large centres today. It was at that time that your correspondent and a friend took a "flyer," investing \$4,000 for lots assessed to day at \$350.00. Needless to say we have not been stung on farm land during the past year or so.²²

Theodore, it seems, managed to escape some of the worst conditions of the recession. As mentioned previously, the land was ideally suited to mixed farming which enabled local farmers to diversify their production. Also, the abundance of natural resources in the area enabled local farmers to turn non-agricultural activities such as logging, trapping, and digging Seneca root into a source of revenue. An item in the Theodore new column from 1913 stated:

Theodore, as always, is enjoying a good trade in spite of hard times and tight money. We doubt if there is another town along the line that produces as much in the shape of Seneca root, furs, hides, butter and eggs, cordwood, etc., something the settler on the bare prairie knows nothing of. We may be thankful we live where we do and don't have to depend entirely of grain crops, sometimes so disappointing. However this district can and does grow crops second to none.²³

Notes:

1. "Saskatchewan Settlement Experience," Provincial Archives Downloaded from <http://www.saskarchives.com/sasksettlement/display>. 10 February, 2017.
2. "Beaverdale," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 31 December, 1903.
3. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 15 March, 1905.
4. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 21 March, 1906.
5. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 14 March, 1907.
6. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 11 March, 1907.
7. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 22 August, 1906.
8. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 22 August, 1906.
9. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 21 March 1907.
10. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 21 March 1907.
11. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 21 March, 1906.
12. *The Manitoba Free Press*. Reprinted in *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 8 September, 1910.
13. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Times*. 24 August, 1911.
14. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Times*. 26 October, 1911.
15. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 23 June, 1910.
16. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 23 June, 1910.
17. From the Manitoba Free Press Reprinted by *The Yorkton Enterprise* 8 Sept 1910
18. From the Manitoba Free Press Reprinted by *The Yorkton Enterprise* 8 Sept 1910
19. Murphy, Rae, and Bain, Colin M. *The Essentials of Canadian History Canada since 1867: The Post-Confederation Nation*. Research & Education Association, Piscataway, New Jersey. p. 22.
20. Saskatchewan | Great War greatwar.usask.ca/node/41

21. Champ, Joan. "The Impact of the First World War on Saskatchewan's Farm Families," *Western Development Museum*. 2002.
22. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 January, 1921.
23. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 26 June, 1913.