

## **Chapter 6 -Economic Realities of Life in Theodore**

### **Theodore Survives the Great Depression**

#### **Grain Prices**

In Canada the stock market crash of October 1929 brought an end to the prosperity of the 1920's. In Theodore, however, the effects of the great depression were not generally felt until some months later. The village council had closed the 1929 fiscal year with all debts paid, a balance in the local bank of more than \$400, and uncollected taxes amounting to \$1,164, which was only about \$200 more than that of the previous year.<sup>1</sup> In addition to being free of all debt, the village owned assets valued at \$10,000.<sup>2</sup> Evidence that some of Theodore residents did not immediately experience the effects of the stock market crash is the fact that a few of them such as Thomas Saunders, the local pharmacist, J. A. Joudrey, the bank manager, and Dr. O. A. Turner could afford to buy new cars in 1930.

Theodore's farmers, however, watched as grain prices continued to fall throughout the winter and in the spring of 1930 the prices farmers received for their grain and other produce was significantly lower than the prices offered in the fall of 1929. By March 1930 low levels of grain prices were having a direct impact on the amount of business that was being done in the village.<sup>3</sup> A small farm auction held at the end of June was additional proof to the general belief that money was scarce. A large grain separator sold for only \$300, a typewriter in good repair sold for \$3.35, and stove for \$1.00.<sup>4</sup> The reality of the depression was being felt in the village and on the farm and there were very few prospects of a significant change in the near future.<sup>5</sup>

In the fall of 1930 collectors for the implement companies, loan companies, and other creditors were having difficulty collecting the money that was due their companies. The Theodore Correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* predicted that their collections for 1930 would likely be small, and made a reference to the futility of trying to extract blood from a stone.<sup>6</sup>

In November 1930 it was reported in the Theodore News column that a local farmer who had sold several loads of oats at 15 cents per bushel, figured that he had disposed of 204 pounds of oats to purchase a 20-pound bag of oatmeal.<sup>7</sup> The opinion was expressed that with the recent three-cent drop in the price of wheat it was hard to distinguish the difference between farmer who produces forty bushels to the acre, and one who only threshed half as much because neither of them had received much for their summer's labour.<sup>8</sup>

The grain prices that had remained low during 1930 continued to be low well into the following year. In February 1931, a story in *The Yorkton Enterprise* stated that on the future's market for wheat the price for wheat to be delivered in May had closed at 60½ cents per bushel, a price that was eight cents above the seasons lowest price.<sup>9</sup> In spite of the low prices, the spring of 1931 saw a large amount of grain was delivered to the elevators in Theodore, by farmers who had been holding it all winter in hope of better prices. They apparently gave up hope of realizing better prices, and have decided to sell their grain for whatever they could get.<sup>10</sup>

Grain was not the only agricultural product to loose market value during the early years of the depression. At the end of January 1931, eggs were priced at 12½¢ cents per dozen in Theodore, and many were enjoying eating what has always proven to be a luxury in mid winter.<sup>11</sup> The egg producers, of course, were not enjoying the situation and would soon see egg prices fall as low as six to eight cents per dozen by mid May 1931.<sup>12</sup> In a similar manner, dairy producers

also suffered from low prices. One local farmer showed the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* a cream cheque for the amount of \$1.84. This was the proceeds of a large can of cream, which a year or so earlier would have netted him about \$6.00.<sup>13</sup>

### **Drought 1931**

One of the characteristics on the 1930's was the hot, dry, and windy weather conditions that prevailed across much of Saskatchewan. By the spring of 1931 many parts of Saskatchewan had managed to survive two years of drought.<sup>14</sup> When Chris Peterson and Rev. E C. Bewell returned from Regina, where they attended the Conference of the United Church, in early June 1931, they reported that Southern Saskatchewan was in bad shape as a result of the long extended drought.<sup>15</sup> Theodore had never experienced the kind of drought that was ravaging the southern part Saskatchewan, and the district had never failed to produce a crop of some kind, but a long spell of hot, dry weather in June just about ruined all hope of any crop in the Theodore district for 1931.<sup>16</sup> By mid June local gardens were the poorest they had been in many years and it was expected that there would be little in them in the fall.<sup>17</sup> In mid June the Theodore Correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* wrote, "Crops have never looked as near a total failure as at the present time, and gardens are still black, much of the seed sown lying dormant in the ground."<sup>18</sup>

By the end of June 1931, conditions in the Theodore district were looking very bleak.

Terrific heat on Friday and Saturday and no rain for the season of any account has just about ruined all hopes of any crop in this, district for 1931. Never in the pas 30 years have we experienced such long drought and not till this year has this district failed to produce a crop of some kind but the chances of much being harvested here this fall are scant indeed. None of the several showers that have fallen in Yorkton to the East, Foam Lake and Invermay to the west and, north, have touched the Theodore district, and in spite of the fact that our splendid soil has made a valiant effort to hold out, till rain refreshed the plants

that had a footing in the spring, the strain has proved too much, and the scant crop that barely covered the ground is now burning in the terrific heat of the past 2 or 3 days. The worst part of the situation is the lack of feed for winter and at present it would appear that stockmen will be forced to dispose of a large part of their herds or move them to more favored localities where feed is procurable. Gardens, too, are almost a failure, and this will prove a hardship for many who have lived chiefly from their gardens in the summer months. There will be desperately hard times far many In this district, but we have no doubt that the same old spirit optimism that has helped old timers through trying days in the past will carry us through the dark times ahead. So let us live in hope. <sup>19</sup>

When it did finally rain in mid July, the seed that had been planted two months previously finally germinated and although the crops would not be mature enough to thresh, it was thought that they would make excellent feed for the following winter.<sup>20</sup> Local gardens, too benefitted and it was predicted that there would be no lack of roots and vegetables for the winter.<sup>21</sup> Gardens that had been planted on higher ground were, of course, not as prolific as those planted on low lands. One of the best gardens in the general area grew in a slough that had once been flooded with four feet of water. It had been drained and cultivated, and dressed with fertilizer.<sup>22</sup> Other reports from the fall of 1931 indicate that the potatoes were both large and numerous, and the author of the Theodore news column in *The Yorkton Enterprise* seemed to enjoy telling his readers of the large potatoes that had been grown locally. One report stated that a single potato had weighed in at just under 2½ pounds and there was another report of a three-pound potato.<sup>23 24</sup> Groups of three potatoes were reported to weigh in at 6¼ and 7pounds.<sup>25 26</sup> There was also a profusion of marrows, pumpkins. citrons, squashes, tomatoes and all kinds of roots that there was not local market for them, and that pumpkins weighing as much as 15 to 20 pounds could not be sold at 10 cents each. <sup>27</sup>

As could be expected the 1931 harvest was generally very light with a large number of fields yielding only six or seven bushels per acre, although a few fields yielded as much as twenty

bushels to the acre.<sup>28</sup> In addition, heavy rains in September soaked the stooks and delayed thrashing for several days.<sup>29</sup> The September rains did, however, help assure that there would be sufficient moisture to get the next year's crop off to a good start.

The drought of 1931 was a disaster for many of the farmers in the Theodore area. Many crops were reported to be either too short or thin to cut with a binder, and a number of farmers simply gave up trying to harvest their grain. They just mowed their crops for winter feed for the livestock. It appears that even then there was a general shortage of feed, and many cattle were sent to market.<sup>30</sup> Some still faced the problem of obtaining sufficient feed to carry their stock over the coming winter and it was a major worry for many of Theodore's farmers in 1931. A few farmers allowed the wild oats to grow on summer fallow, until they could be cut for fodder. Others traveled as far as 15 miles from home in search of the odd bit of hay that could be cut and brought home. All the fence corners and small sloughs were cleaned out to provide feed.<sup>31</sup>

Even though the 1931 crop was one of the lightest that has ever been grown at Theodore, there were a few farmers who appear to have survived in relatively good shape. Some very good samples of wheat were delivered to the local elevators much of which was graded as Number 1 Northern, and some was good enough for Number 1 Hard.<sup>32</sup>

### **Relief in the Village**

By mid summer, 1931 it became clear that there were several cases of hardship in the village that would soon require some sort of relief.<sup>33</sup> The village council made enquiries with the provincial government regarding the establishment of a relief work program as a means of assistance.<sup>34</sup> The idea that people should do some kind of work for the assistance they received

was very popular in the 1930's, and in the summer of 1933 the village of Theodore introduced a program which allowed those who were in arrears for taxes, to work off their debt by grading and graveling the streets in the village. It was expected that a considerable amount of taxes owed to the village would be cleaned up, and some of the much needed improvements to the streets would be made.<sup>35</sup>

With the exception of a few calls for relief which were later repaid, Theodore was, in 1935, fortunate in that for the first five years of the depression, the village had only been called upon to provide relief for one family. This was in sharp contrast to many other towns and villages that suffered greatly from the burden of providing the relief required by the needy.<sup>36</sup>

Part of the reason for Theodore's situation was explained in a 1936 news item in which it was stated that many of Theodore's residents had diversified their income and were able to survive the Great Depression with less difficulty than others. Dr. O. A. Turner, for example, had a farm in the Invermay area and another near the village of Theodore that was stocked chiefly with good cows, and purebred chickens. Mayor Charles Bonney was interested in dairying, and kept a herd of pigs as well as noted for growing potatoes and other vegetables. Chris Peterson, another alderman and garage keeper, possessed some hogs, and purebred leghorn chickens. A. P. Swallow was in the purebred Jersey cattle business and A. E Gregory kept a general stock of horses, cattle, pigs chickens, and a large field of potatoes and roots. It is likely that about half of Theodore's residents were interested and directly involved in some kind of agricultural venture.<sup>37</sup>

By the summer of 1937 the situation at Theodore was beginning to change. The Overseer of the village has asked the correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* to advise those who had in the past received relief on occasions that due to the stringent money conditions that would likely

prevail during the coming winter, the village council would be in no position to help them, and that they were advised to make provisions for themselves before the cold weather sets in.<sup>38</sup>

The need for relief, however, continued to grow in Theodore. In early January 1936 there were nine families who were dependent on relief to a greater or lesser extent, and by early February the number had grown to thirteen.<sup>39 40</sup> At the beginning of April it was announced that although the Village Council had been authorized to continue the distribution of relief to the end of April, no further relief would be granted by either the village or the provincial government after that date.<sup>41</sup>

It does not appear that there was any significant improvement for the winter of 1939. In November 1938 the author of the Theodore news column estimated that about sixty percent of the populace in the district was in need, and in early January 1939 estimated that twenty percent of the village population was in need of relief.<sup>42 43</sup> In spite of the fact that the financial affairs of the village were found to be in very good shape in early January 1939, the village councillors were soon having troubles trying to provide for all those in need, as well as financing the school and village by the end of February when sixty-five people out of a total population of about 325 were receiving relief.<sup>44 45</sup>

### **Relief for Farmers**

The collapse of prices for agricultural products at the beginning of the great depression had a totally devastating effect on Saskatchewan's farmers. According to *The Canadian Encyclopedia* the price for wheat was the lowest price for wheat in recorded history and within two years farm income had plummeted by 90%. Two-thirds of the province's rural population were forced onto relief.<sup>46</sup>

Speaking at the opening of Good Spirit Provincial Park in the fall of 1931 the Hon. A. C. Stewart, MLA for Yorkton, outlined the situation in Saskatchewan. He stated that seventy-six rural municipalities had experienced complete crop failures in the past three years, another forty had gone two years without a crop, in the previous year 217 of the 303 rural municipalities in the province had failed to grow sufficient feed for their stock. He went on to state that at least 23,000 heads of families were unemployed in our cities, towns and villages.<sup>47</sup>

The government's response to the economic crises gripping Saskatchewan was a program of austerity. Stewart boasted of cutting the salaries of the MLA's and the civil service and of his plans to dismiss 45 civil servants from his department before the end of the year. He argued that the firing of so many civil servants was beneficial to the province because one civil servant receives a salary sufficient to keep five families on relief and that the average family on relief in the drought areas of the province had received only \$25.<sup>48</sup>

In early August 1931 it was reported in the Theodore news column that even though some farms in the Theodore district were showing fairly good crops, there had been a heavy demand made upon the Rural Municipal Councils for relief and that at each Council meeting there had been a large number of farmers and others claiming assistance.<sup>49</sup> In addition it appears that what little relief was available was also very difficult to obtain. Theodore's village council, for example, found that information as to how the various government relief schemes worked seemed to be unobtainable.<sup>50</sup> One can only imagine the sense of frustration J F. Baxter, Theodore's Relief Officer and the village council must have felt as the situation worsened.

Relief for needy farmers has occupied much of the time of the time of local Municipal bodies of late, as well as the village Council, to some extent, and judging by the way orders are sent out from Regina and then countermanded. It would seem that there is

considerable confusion in the mints of the Relief Commission, as to what plan to follow. The secretary of the village has undertaken two systems of relief and both of these have been cancelled. Just what plan will be decided on as final is still in doubt.<sup>51</sup>

For some people the idea of accepting relief was intolerable and there were those who would do almost anything to avoid doing so. There were also those who had no scruples about taking full advantage of the situation by offering extremely low wages and salaries as described below.

Many of the schools in this neighbourhood may find difficulty in paying their teachers during the coming term, owing to the fact that tax collections are so low that municipalities are having the greatest difficulty in financing the school boards. However to schools placed in this position we would remind them that there are many qualified teachers who would welcome the opportunity to teach in the schools and wait till the autumn for the bulk of their salary. We believe that there are several teachers in this village and surrounding district who would be glad of the chance of employment on terms like this, but there should be no attempt on the part of school boards to take advantage of the urgent need of many who are offering their services for almost anything they can get rather than apply for relief. It has come to our notice that attempts of this kind have been made and instances are related where qualified teachers of first and second class standing have been offered less than \$300 for the whole term. How anyone with a heart could have the nerve to ask a teacher qualified to teach a heavy school and pay her board out of that sum is more than many can understand. Let us hope that there are none of this class around Theodore.<sup>52</sup>

In the spring of 1932 a number of farmers in the Theodore and Insinger areas were able to take advantage of a relief program which provided them with free oats, and several carloads of oates were delivered to Theodore that year. On the day that car load of relief oates arrived at the Canadian Elevator in Theodore the grounds around the elevator were crowded with teams from early morning till late in the afternoon as about one hundred farmers came looking for free oats to feed their livestock. It was, according to J. S. Anderson, a scene reminiscent of the old days when oats poured into the elevators instead of pouring out.<sup>53</sup> By the end of May 1932 it was thought that every farmer in the district needed feed oats had been supplied with them. A similar

program was instituted in the fall of 1932 to give assistance to farmers who were unable to buy binder twine.<sup>54</sup> It appears that free seed oats were available to those who were unable to buy their own seed until at least the spring of 1939.<sup>55</sup>

At the end of 1932 a number of local farmers, who were still relatively well off, were able to take advantage of the government's farm relief scheme to provide winter employment for men on their farms. It was expected that in Theodore the local supply of unemployed men would soon be exhausted and that Yorkton and other large centres would be able to supply men willing to work for \$5.00 per month plus board.<sup>56</sup> By early December all the homeless, unemployed, single men who had applied for work on local farms had been placed and unfilled applications for men had been forwarded to Regina.<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps one reason why so many people in the Theodore area were able to survive the depression as well as they did, was because various clubs and organizations stepped in to fill the gap left by the general shortage of funds. In 1932, for example, the local lodge of the United Farmers of Canada engaged the town hall for a big dance and the Ukrainian ladies held a supper and concert, to aid in the relief of those in need.<sup>58</sup>

### **The Rural Municipality of Insinger**

By the end of June 1931 the farmers' need for relief was beginning to cause problems for the local rural municipalities. The R.M. of Insinger, in which the village of Theodore is located, was one in which the problem was particularly acute and the many applications for relief made to the Council made S. N. Sawchuk, the secretary-treasurer one of the busiest men between Yorkton and Foam Lake.<sup>59</sup>

Relief for needy farmers occupied much of the time of the time of local Municipal bodies, as well as that of the village Council, and it seems, a good part of that time was spent on trying to figure out what the rules regarding relief were. According to the Theodore news column, orders were sent out from Regina and then countermanded on a regular and frequent basis.<sup>60</sup>

It is very likely that the confusion created by the government in Regina was one of the chief reason that the R.M. of Insinger was in so much financial trouble that by October 1931 the situation could be described as hopeless.<sup>61</sup> The R.M. had a total indebtedness of \$78,000, much of it due to the fact that a great deal of relief had been given to local farmers. The amount of relief was far more than the Conservative government of J. T. M. Anderson thought should have been granted, and it accused the R.M. of Insinger of spending relief money in a reckless manner. The government then sent an inspector to investigate the whole financial structure of the municipality. As a result of the inspector's report the Reeve, Council and Municipal Clerk were discharged from office and John Smith of Theodore was sent in as official administrator. The government's action was not popular with the residents of the municipality and an attempt was made to have a new council elected. The government, however, rejected the new council and Smith remained as administrator.<sup>62</sup>

Smith immediately set out to rectify the financial position of the rural municipality. Because grain prices were still very low in 1932, it was necessary to find some way for farmers to pay their property taxes. One of the first things he did was to extend the deadline for thy payment of taxes without a penalty from the end of December 1931 to the end of January 1932. This gave many farmers an opportunity to settle their tax bill without adding to the already heavy burden.<sup>63</sup>

After a financial audit of the municipality's accounts and a reassessment of its spending priorities it was possible for Smith to implement a tax reduction of twenty-five percent for 1932 and offer a discount of eight percent to those who paid their taxes in full by the first of July. The discount was reduced by one percent each following month until December.<sup>64</sup>

For those who still lacked the cash with which to pay their taxes at the end of 1932 Smith entered into an agreement with the hospital in Yorkton in which the hospital would receive cordwood from the municipality and apply the value of the wood to the municipality's indebtedness to the hospital. The municipality would get the cordwood from farmers who were in arrears on their taxes and apply the value of the wood to their tax accounts. The wood had to be seasons and delivered in carload lots to Insinger, Sheho, or Theodore. Smith's accomplished three things. It allowed a number of people who might not have been able to pay their taxes to clear off their tax account and keep their land from being sold at a tax sale, it helped the RM clear off some of the debt it owed to the hospital for the treatment of patients from the RM, and it gave the hospital a secure supply of fuel for the winter.<sup>65</sup>

An audit of the municipality's books in January 1933 showed that under Smith's careful management and retrenchment, the municipality's finances were in better shape than had previously been the case. Expenditures were six thousand dollars less in 1932 than in 1931.<sup>66</sup>

The year 1932 had not been a good one for many farmers in western Canada and in the Theodore district hail had destroyed about forty per cent of the crop. In spite of all the setbacks the farmers in the RM of Insinger had managed to pay about 75 % of the tax levy. Smith was able to reduce the property taxes by about 15% for 1933, which when added to the 23% cut the previous year was expected to ease the tax burden faced by the ratepayers. In addition, Smith

extended the deadline for paying taxes without a penalty from the end of December to the end of March. The extension was to accommodate those farmers who had held onto their grain in the hope of higher prices.<sup>67</sup>

The newspaper does not say whether or not the RM would be willing to accept cordwood for the 1933 tax year. However, it did initiate a program similar to the one in Theodore which enabled residents to pay their property taxes by working on the roads in the R.M.<sup>68</sup>

By the end of 1933 the financial affairs of the Rural Municipality had improved to the point where the provincial government was willing to allow the ratepayers in the municipality to vote on whether or not they wanted to remain under the control of the present administrator, Mr. John Smith, or a council be elected at a later date.<sup>69</sup> When the vote was held in February 1934, the result was that 394 were in favor of the return of council and 223 in favor of continuing under an administrator.<sup>70</sup>

### **Land Seekers Arrive at Theodore**

By mid 1933 a few people from southern Saskatchewan who have suffered crop failures for five successive years in the south, began to trickle into the Theodore area in search of land on which they could locate. The splendid crops and gardens in the district combined with an abundance of timber for fuel and shelter, very strongly appealed to them. Two of these land seekers stated that Theodore's crops were the finest they had seen since leaving home, and that the gardens exceeded anything they had ever been able to produce in twenty-eight years residence in the south.<sup>71</sup>

By the middle of July 1934, the trickle of land seekers had grown considerably and large numbers of people from the dried-out, grasshopper-ridden country in southern Saskatchewan were arriving in the Theodore area each week, and most of them were impressed with the crops and fine pastures they found.<sup>72</sup> The dozens of land seekers who besieged our the real estate offices in Theodore during the summer of 1934 shared one regrettable feature. That was the fact that few, if any of them, had even the amount of a very small cash payment, so the number of actual sales was very few.<sup>73</sup> Only seven sales of farm land were reported in the Theodore news during the last half of 1934 and a similar number were reported in 1935.

Two of those land sales were apparently made to Messrs. Chisholm and Paulson, who, in mid July 1934, expressed the hope that they could locate in the Theodore area before winter.<sup>74</sup> According to a story in *The Leader-Post* they had suffered seven successive crop failures in the Swift Current area before trekking the 340 miles from their old home to Theodore. The journey took them fifteen days, and on their arrival they set up camp in the local sports ground. One Friday morning while they were searching for suitable land to buy, one of Theodore's residents noticed flames rising from one of the haystacks loaded with feed and equipment. Although the fire was extinguished a considerable amount of offered, clothing, supplies, furniture and equipment was destroyed or badly damaged.<sup>75</sup> At the end of September a brief note appeared in the Theodore news stating that they were taking up residence in the Theodore areas.<sup>76</sup>

Another land seeker who arrived in Theodore in 1937 absolutely broke had owned nine quarter-section of land valued t nearly \$40,000 in 1929 and had a \$34,000 bank account as well. During the past eight years between 1929 and his arrival in Theodore he had not harvested a bushel of grain, and spent his entire bank account in purchase of seed, paying taxes and providing

for his family's needs. He finally left all his earthly belongings except his stock equipment behind and stated that he would never return to his old home because the top four inches of his land has been blown away by constant dust storms.<sup>77</sup>

### **Transients**

One of the characteristics of the great depression was the disappearance of jobs in Canada, and the appearance of hoards of young men criss-crossing Canada in a fruitless search for work. Some of these young men made their first appearance in Theodore in the summer of 1930. While some were in genuine need, others, it appears were not and it appears that the first of these unemployed young men did not receive a hearty welcome in Theodore at that time.

It would appear that an organized gang of beggars have placed Theodore on their visiting list for the past month for it has witnessed the appearance of many in town, each provided with a card, setting forth physical disabilities in some shape or form, and begging for assistance to provide for wives and children. The last gentleman who made the rounds was successful in collecting a considerable sum of money from generously inclined citizens, and it was later learned that he in company with a companion, consumed some thirteen bottles of beer before leaving town. The same gentleman evidently had canvassed the town of Springside rather successfully the previous day, as his subscription list showed the names of several donors of cash. The public should guard against this class of imposters and make sure that the need is genuine before handing out donations to any strangers.<sup>78</sup>

Quite a number of unemployed are daily seen around town. These men are mostly new arrivals from Central Europe, and although some of them have been looking for work for several days, they refuse to accept thirty cents per hour for rough labor. It would appear that they have not yet reached the stage of hunger that prompted many of the old timers of some years ago to gladly accept jobs offering them one dollar per day or less. In fact, we have in our own little town men who are today independent who started life on arrival in Canada, twenty or twenty-five years ago, on a salary of ten dollars per month, and who worked hard and long hours to earn it. There is little sympathy wasted on the present day laborer who will not make the best of the circumstances.<sup>79</sup>

By the summer of 1932 the number of transients riding the freight trains had increased dramatically. In mid August the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* reported that:

On the local freight train passing this point one day last week, some two hundred free passengers were noted, filling up the empties and adorning the car tops. The past few days have seen a drop in that particular traffic, and it is hoped that many of these men have found employment in the harvest fields.<sup>80</sup>

Several reports from the late summer and fall of 1933 indicate that the number of transients passing through Theodore remained steady. In August a large number of transients were sleeping in box cars on the CPR siding, and in some cases were begging meals from Theodore residents.<sup>81</sup> Only a few of the transients could be absorbed into the harvest work at Theodore and most were forced to move on after spending a day or two in a vain search of work as there was very little demand for outside labor in the Theodore area.<sup>82</sup> The Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* wrote:

Apparently many of these lads are educated boys, and it does seem a pity that they should be forced into a life of this sort through no fault of their own.<sup>83</sup>

A number of young men left Theodore to look for work. One was Mike Woroniuk whose unpublished recollections can be found in the Theodore Museum. In it he writes:

In 1937 I made up my mind to go to Ontario where there were more jobs and better wages. This was on March 5, 1937. I only had \$1 .25. I wasn't going to ride a passenger train. I boarded a freight box and landed in Winnipeg. I almost froze. Not only that, but I got picked up by the C.P.R. police and spent ten days in jail for riding the rods at Zakolow. After I got out of the jail, the police took me back to the city and told me to get out or they will put me back in jail.

It was very cheap to live in those days. I stayed in Winnipeg three days in a rooming house. It cost 15 cents a night and I bought a loaf of bread for 5 cents and three big red apples for 5 cents. This kept me alive for three days. After three days in Winnipeg I didn't meet one person I knew. I got homesick and tired but I had a brother, George, who lived in Fort William (Thunder Bay) and decided to go there.

Mikes spend part of the summer of 1938 working in Northern Ontario and returned home in August when he could not find work. Because conditions at Theodore had not improved significantly, Mike again caught a freight train.

I had to walk to Springside to catch the freight. The through-freight didn't stop in Theodore because it didn't have water for the engines. I stayed in Nipigon until October doing odd jobs. Then I got a job at Red Rock working. They were building a track from the mainline to the paper mill. If you worked for the paper company they paid you 35 cents an hour. If you worked for the C.N. they paid you only 25 cents an hour. I worked there until November. Then I went to Toronto.

This was the night I was going to Toronto. I had to leave Nipigon in the middle of winter. When the freight stopped in Nipigon to take water for the engines I spotted a boxcar partly opened. I crawled into it I and found it was half filled with lump coal. I didn't know how far it was to Toronto or how long it would take to get there. When the engine gave a highball I knew I was on the run. It gave me a feeling of challenge and determination that I would be in Toronto in no time. It was about 10 o'clock in the evening and quite mild. I was all alone in this boxcar and sitting on lump coal was not very comfortable.

The train traveled for about one hundred and forty miles and stopped at a place called Hornepayne (a division point for changing the engine and the crew). I got out of the boxcar and walked up to a café. I had coffee with one of the crew. He told me that the train would stop there for at least two hours before moving on. This was about two in the morning. I was dirty, I knew, and tired and I couldn't warm up.

The proprietor knew that I was beating the rods and could see that I was sleepy. He asked me where I was going. I told him that I had come on the freight and was going to Toronto. He asked me if I would like to lay on a couch until the train starts moving again. What a kind man! He said that he would wake me up when the engineer blew his high ball. It wasn't very long before he came to the warehouse and woke me up.

I was on the go again wondering what morning would bring me. The train started to move I noticed that the boxcar I rode in was not on the train anymore. I didn't know what to do so I grabbed the ladder and climbed on the engine. Right there and then I noticed there was a big pile of coal (used for the engine) and very warm steam vapor was blowing all around me. This was Heaven. I didn't realize that the coal dust and steam vapor were making a Negro out of me. We traveled on to another division point where the train stopped for two or more hours. When the freight stopped the engine, we were about half a mile away from a town called Aurora. I got off the engine and didn't know what to do. I was afraid to walk up town (being afraid not getting picked up by the C.P. Police). It was not far from the highway. I thought maybe I should go to the highway and catch a ride.

It wasn't even ten minutes when a car came along and stopped. A man about 300 pounds opened the door and asked me where I was going. I told him I'm going to

Toronto. He said, "Jump in." He asked me many questions; whether I had ever been in Toronto before, where I came from and so on. There were about 50 miles yet to go.

He said to watch myself and not to get run over by a car. He let me off at Yonge and Queen Streets. I walked across Yonge Street onto Queen Street. I noticed there was a policeman standing on the corner. I asked him if he knew where Robinson Street was. He told me to go on Queen Street until I came to Bathurst Avenue, walk on Bathurst until I came to Robinson, go on Robinson until I got to the place I was looking for.

I knocked on the door and a man opened it. He shut the door in my face. He yelled to his friend inside there was a Negro at the door. I yelled back and said that my name was Mike. They opened the door again and said, "Where were you? You're all black.". When I was inside, I told them my story. I consider myself very lucky that I was black. The man who'd picked me up in his car was also black and thought that I was a Negro.

Mike found work in Toronto welling Watkins Products and remained there until 1942.<sup>84</sup>

He eventually returned to live in Theodore.

A few of Theodore's residents were fortunate enough to be in the fortunate position of being able to help some of the unemployed. In the fall of 1930 it was reported that Alex Fernie, whose farm was just north of Theodore, had a gang of men working to clear the balance of his land of brush and scrub in preparation to breaking it up next summer. Farmers, businessmen, and others who were in a financial position to have any kind of work done on their property were encouraged to have it done during the current period of high unemployment, as it would be welcomed by those in need as well as being advantageous to the employer.<sup>85</sup> In the same way when in 1932 another Theodore resident, J. C. McCrea, was able to paint and decorate his large pool and billiard hall, the Theodore Correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* reminded his readers that because labour was cheap, and the cost of paint and other supplies was down, those who were contemplating improvements to their property would find that the work could be done for much less than even a year previous.<sup>86</sup> A month later he wrote:

Traveling through the little towns and villages of this part of Saskatchewan, one is struck by the fact that in every place visited. About thee-fourths of the lumber dwellings and

other buildings are badly in need of paint and repairs, the absence of which greatly deteriorates from the appearance of the village, or town, and the thought has struck the writer that if each town and village had expended the amount of money in the form of paint, that has been given for direct relief, thereby providing labor for those out of employment, that much could be done to beautify the towns and at the same time render a service to those in need of work. It should be an easy matter to arrange with owners of property to pay these men a fair wage while engaged on this work and the owner, the laborer, and the town at large would all benefit greatly, at a cost to the Municipality that would not be much greater than under the present relief system, from which no one benefits except the recipient, who, in most cases would prefer to earn the money that is now given him. The hardware trade would also benefit by these transactions. The writer believes that it should be possible to provide considerable employment under this scheme even though only a small part of the outlay were guaranteed by the Municipality.<sup>87</sup>

### **Theodore's Customer Appreciation Day**

As a mark of appreciation of the patronage given them, Theodore's local merchants issued invitations to the general public to be their guests in the afternoon and evening of 14 December, 1935 in the town hall, when they would be treated to a free picture show. The cost of the entertainment, was borne by the merchants' organization. At the same time, special sales were held in the stores, enabling the public to secure needed supplies at reduced prices.<sup>88</sup>

More than 700 people took advantage of the merchant's invitation. It was reported that the big town hall could not accommodate the tremendous crowd that jammed every foot of available space from the stage to the entrance and that every nook and corner having its full quota of picture enthusiasts. It was said that when someone from the Creekside district was asked why he was not at the show, he explained that when he had opened the door to go in the place was so crowded that three men fell out and he was forced to pass up his invitation. To accommodate those who failed to see the two shows, the merchants agreed to present two more performances a week later and charge five cents for children and ten cents for adults to defray expenses.<sup>89</sup>

## **Signs of Recovery**

Even though 65 out of a total population of 325 were still receiving relief in February 1939, there had been several years in which some signs of recovery could be seen.<sup>90</sup> In the fall of 1936, for example, the financial position of a few people in the Theodore district had improved to the point where some of the old debts that had been owing for many years were being paid off. One creditor reported payment of two different accounts that had been marked off his books as uncollectible some years previously, while in another, the creditor received payment of an account that had been owing for fifteen years.<sup>91</sup> A second indication of improving condition was the fact that in the spring of 1937 every house or dwelling of any description located in the village was occupied and enquiries were being made by would be tenants for suitable quarters to lease.<sup>92</sup> The shortage of rental accommodation continued to the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>93</sup> Finally, the spring of 1937 saw a number of Theodor people buying new automobiles, an activity that had not been mentioned in the Theodore news for several years.

**Notes:**

1. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 17 January, 1930.
2. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 17 January, 1930.
3. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 March, 1930.
4. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 July, 1930.
5. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 March, 1930.
6. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 2 October, 1930.
7. -"Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 7 November, 1930.
8. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 November, 1930.
9. "May Wheat Passes 60¢ 8¢ Above Season's Low," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 February, 1931.
10. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 March, 1931.
11. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 30 January, 1931.
12. Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 15 May, 1931.
13. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 May, 1931.
14. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 May, 1931.
15. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 June, 1931.
16. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 30 June, 1931.
17. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 June, 1931.
18. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 26 June, 1931.
19. -"Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 30 June, 1931.
20. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 17 July, 1931.
21. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 21 July, 1931.
22. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 August, 1931.
23. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 October, 1931.

24. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 October, 1935.
25. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 October, 1933.
26. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 October, 1935.
27. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 7 September, 1933.
28. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 15 September, 1931.
29. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 September, 1931.
30. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 August, 1931.
31. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 July, 1931.
32. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 September, 1931.
33. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 August, 1931.
34. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 August, 1931.
35. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 June, 1933.
36. Anderson, J. S. "Theodore is Centre of Thriving Farming Area," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 July, 1935.
37. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 23 September, 1936.
38. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 August, 1937.
39. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 6 January, 1938.
40. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 February, 1938.
41. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 7 April, 1938.
42. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 17 November, 1938.
43. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 January, 1939.
44. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 January, 1939.
45. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 23 February, 1939.
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47. "3,000 Attend Official Opening of Devil's Lake Reserve on Labor Day," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 September, 1931.
48. "3,000 Attend Official Opening of Devil's Lake Reserve on Labor Day," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 September, 1931.
49. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 August, 1931.
50. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, " 9 October, 1931.
51. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, " 7 November, 1931.
52. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, " 9 February, 1932
53. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, " 8 April, 1932.
54. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 August, 1932.
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56. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 November, 1932.
57. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 December, 1932.
58. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. "Theodore," 15 April, 1932.
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60. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 7 November, 1931.
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62. "Insinger Municipality To Stay in Hands of Administrator For Year," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 November, 1931.
63. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 January, 1932.
64. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 May, 1932.
65. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 November, 1932.
66. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 February, 1933.
67. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 January, 1933.
68. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 June, 1933.

69. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 December, 1933.
70. "R. M. of Insinger Votes in Favor of Return to Council System Gov't." *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 February, 1934.
71. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27, July, 1933.
72. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 July, 1934.
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80. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 August, 1932.
81. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 24 August, 1933.
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90. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 23 February, 1939.
91. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 15 October, 1936.

92. "Theodore," The Yorkton Enterprise. 29 April, 1937.
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