

Chapter 9 - Theodore Goes to War

Life on the Home Front 1914-1918

Labour Shortages

As the wars progressed and more and more young men joined the military, a severe labour shortage began to develop on the prairie farms, and the Theodore area was not exempt. There are several accounts in the Theodore News column of local boys coming home on leave to help with the farm work during both wars, and the return of any of Theodore's young men to help with the farm work during seeding or harvest was almost always noted in the Theodore news. Although soldiers from Central and Eastern Canada could also obtain leave to help with the farm work in the West, many Western farmers preferred to have their own sons do the work. As the Theodore correspondent noted, while the local farmers very much appreciated the exemption of these young men from military service, one expert farmer was worth two or three green ones, and the Theodore district was always short of expert farm help at reasonable wages."¹

Patriotic Meetings and Rallies

At the beginning of World War I there was already a strong feeling of patriotism throughout the country. As the war progressed this patriotic fervor was kept alive by a series of meetings and rallies which, in Theodore, were organized by the local Patriotic Society, and reported with enough detail to give the modern reader some idea of what went on. In addition to the music, no doubt of a patriotic nature, supplied by the choir and Theodore's newly formed

brass band under the leadership of James Twentyman, speeches by returned soldiers and various prominent speakers appear to have been popular.

The organizers of these events seems to have preferred speakers who could give first hand accounts of the war whenever possible. On 30 December, 1915, for example, a Private Bainbridge gave a brief account of life in the trenches to the cheers of the audience.² Even if a soldier did not speak, his mere appearance on the platform could inspire loud cheering as was the case when Privates Norberg, Reid, Beatty and Merriman, all from Theodore appeared on 8 February, 1916.³

By the fall of 1917 Canadians were hearing about the forced deportation of Armenians by Turkey, an ally of Germany. A lecture on Armenia by the Rev Lieutenant Saskissian, an Armenian, was well received in Theodore.⁴ According to the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise*, he portrayed very vividly the difference between being in Turkish bondage and British liberty.⁵

Other speakers were chosen from the ranks of prominent citizens, often from Yorkton, but known locally. For example, on one occasion in 1916 Dr. Patrick, a former MLA for Yorkton, spoke on the Value of British Institutions and Freedom.

He contrasted the ideals of Germany and those of the British. He based every argument on the recognized constitutional history of both countries. The audience gave him the most faltering hearing for two hours. As each point was scored the audience cheered enthusiastically. The doctor called spades, spades when dealing with slackers and denounced in scathing terms those who are halfhearted in the present struggle. He devoted part of the time to explaining the position of naturalized Canadians on enemy countries and also the expatriation treaty between Britain and the United States. He closed with an appeal to the district of Theodore to be British.⁶

On another occasion in 1916, The Reverend Canon Cornish of the Anglican Church in Yorkton spoke on the value of the British freedom was being fought for and what it has done for humanity. J. T. M. Anderson, school inspector, also from Yorkton, spoke at the meeting.

Mr. Anderson dealt briefly with some criticisms of the Patriotic Fund, and pointed out that our duty at this time is to give all we can in what way we can, and not be deterred because every little thing does not please us. He said that Canadians have need to develop a very broad spirit of patriotism in order to save Canada for that great future we believe to be hers.

He went on to show what must be done in our school in order to Canadianize and unify the peoples who have gathered in this country. He pleaded for a more sympathetic attitude on the part of English speaking people towards the non-English.

He maintained that the present war in Europe and this educational problem are for one and the same purpose. That is to bring the blessings of British freedoms to every man, woman and child in Canada.⁷

The speeches were, according to the news reports, well received by the audiences who cheered the speakers.

In addition to keeping up support for the war effort on the home front these meetings and rallies produced two other results. First, relatively large sums of money were collected for the Canadian Patriotic Fund, and second, young men were encouraged to enlist.⁸

Churches

The members of the clergy serving Theodore's churches also played a significant role in supporting the war. In 1915 the Rev. F. Chilton resigned his comfortable position as the Presbyterian Minister at Theodore to work in the British munitions factories.⁹ His departure prompted the local correspondent to the newspaper to state, "Mr. Chilton's action should put to shame some of the hot air soldiers whose patriotism is expounded nightly in wordy discussions on loyalty, etc., to their fellows, who have no better proof of their loyalty than the aforesaid hot

air.”¹⁰ There reports in of patriotic sermons being preached, at Theodore and one report that the Sunday school raised more than \$40.00 to aid the prisoners in Germany.¹¹

When the Creekside Sunday School held a picnic to raise money for the Red Cross Society in 1917 the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* encouraged a good attendance, “On account of the cause.”¹²

The Red Cross

The Canadian Red Cross, organized in 1896, took on a significant role during World War I. One of its major activities was the raising of money for more than 100 hospitals and charitable institutions caring for wounded soldiers. In Canada it also collected sweaters and socks for the soldiers in the trenches, as well as dressings, bandages, surgical coveralls and bed linen for the wounded.

The Canadian Red Cross also did a great deal to improve the conditions of prisoners of war. In addition to corresponding with them, it helped them keep in touch with home. The Red Cross worked to secure better treatment from the Germans, as well as providing a supply of nutritious food and by the end of 1915 more than \$21,000 had been spent by the Canadian Red Cross sending food parcels to prisoners through Switzerland.¹³

By the end of the war, 9,000,000 food parcels and 800,000 clothing parcels had been despatched by various organizations to British prisoners abroad.¹⁴ Canadian soldiers were considered to be part of the British army during World War I.

In the Theodore area several branches of the Red Cross Society were organized during the years 1914 to 1918 including a Junior Red Cross Club.

The young ladies of the town have organized a Junior Red Cross Club for the purpose of helping on the Red Cross work. The first meeting since organization was held at the home of Mr. Chas. Tracy. The Young ladies of the town have shown themselves ready to turn a helping hand to any good cause and their donating the money they had on hand to equip their "baseball club" to the purchase of yarn and cloth to make comforts for the men who are fighting for our cause.¹⁵

Reports of their activities appeared in the Theodore news on a regular basis, and if one of the Red Cross Societies wasn't raising money, some other organization was raising money for it. Activities supporting the work of the Red Cross included concerts, dances, picnics and sports days, teas, the sale of women's work, and whist drives. The amount of money raised by these activities ranged from just a few dollars to several hundred dollars. In April four-year-old horse, donated by H. J. Gregory, was auctioned off by the Theodore Red Cross Society and realized \$146.00.¹⁶ The following month, "a fine heifer donated by Misses Maggie and Annie Lawrie to the Theodore Red Cross Society realized the fine sum of one hundred and fifty dollars."¹⁷ The financial statement for Theodore's Red Cross day held on 1 July, 1918 is an example of how supportive the people of Theodore were to the War effort in general and the work of the Red Cross in particular.¹⁸

Receipts		Expenditures	
Admission tags	\$192.75	Prizes	34.30
Meals	\$197.35	Supplies for games	22.25
Stand fee and commission	54.60	Supplies for meals	23.30
Sales	56.50	Ladies' Aid	4.00
Sale of calf	65.00	Cornet Player	5.00
Doll and shooting gallery	37.10	Work, Lumber and hardware	44.85
Donations	26.00	Advertising, postage etc.	12.75
Junior Red Cross	51.00	Deposit Red Cross Account	529.86
Found	2.00		682.30
	682.30		

Parcels to the Front

In addition to the many fund raising events for the Red Cross, the Patriotic Fund and other worthy causes, several organizations in the Theodore districts also raised money and collected gifts to be sent to the soldiers at the front and in German prisons. In the spring of 1915 *The Yorkton Enterprise* published a brief description of conditions in the trenches in which Major Pawlett of the 16th Light Horse explained the urgent need for socks. “For three days at a time,” he wrote, “they [the soldiers] are on duty in mud and water and under these conditions the life of a pair of socks is limited.”¹⁹ He explained that because the men could not purchase socks for themselves and because the government supply was inadequate, they were dependant on their friends at home to send socks to them.²⁰

The people of Theodore responded to the needs of the soldiers with enthusiasm. The Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* was later able to write, “Sending parcels to the boys at the front is the order of the day.”²¹ Even at the end of October, 1918, less than two weeks before the armistice, Christmas boxes for the soldiers overseas were being packed in Theodore, and a call for further donations was being made because, “To fill a number of boxes requires considerable money and although a nice sum has already been subscribed the committee needs more.”²²

To simply say that the soldiers appreciated the parcels they received would be to grossly understate their feelings. For some soldiers who had been prisoners of war in Germany the Red Cross parcels were extremely important. According to Pte. Harold Brown, who, after returning to Canada, expressed his gratitude to the people of Yorkton and district for the supplies of food and

comforts sent to him while he was a prisoner of war in Germany and he believed that the parcels he received through the Red Cross had saved his life.²³

The claim that socks knitted in Theodore could save the life of a soldier in Belgium may sound strange to those unfamiliar with the condition known as trench foot. It was caused by the prolonged exposure of the feet to damp, unsanitary, and cold conditions of the trenches. If left untreated, trench foot could result in gangrene and amputation. Trench foot could be prevented by keeping the feet clean, warm, and dry. Fresh, clean, dry socks knit by women in Theodore were a very important contribution to the war effort.²⁴

In a somewhat tragic turn of events *The Yorkton Enterprise* also printed the following letter from Pte. J. E. Wright, formerly of Theodore, on 7 March, 1919 which it received some time after the death of the writer had been announced in the paper.

France, Dec. 28

To the ladies of the Caldervale Homemakers,

I beg to acknowledge receipt of parcels. All my near comrades wish to join me in tendering thanks and appreciation for your devoted service. I also wish to return compliments for a happy and prosperous year to all.

Pte. J. E. Wright²⁵

Theodore' Farmers and World War I

As indicated in Chapter 6, much of Theodore's first quarter century was a period of growth and prosperity. This was also true of Saskatchewan as a whole. Generally, people believed that there was no limit to Saskatchewan's prosperity because crops were good, the prices farmers received were high, and there was a continuous stream of new settlers to boost the economy.²⁶ There were, however, clouds forming on the economic horizon.

At Theodore, for example, much of the land available for homesteading had been settled by 1910 and fewer new settlers were arriving. Additionally, as the threat of war in Europe grew the number of settlers coming to Saskatchewan declined even further. A quick review of the book *Theodore and District History* shows that the number of families that came to Theodore in the five years before 1910 is considerably larger than the number that came between the years 1910 to 1914.

By 1912 the period of growth and prosperity that had ended in Saskatchewan as the province entered into a short, but sharp recession. The prices farmers received for their grain plummeted, real estate prices declined significantly, and in many places construction projects ground to a halt.²⁷ The Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* wrote, that local conditions as at dozens of other points were, to say the least, discouraging for the farmer."²⁸ According to Waiser the 1913 wheat crop sold for only 66 cents per bushel.²⁹

The brief recession ended with the beginning of hostilities in Europe in 1914, and by the end of 1915 the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* was able to say that the Farmers' elevator, under the management of H. S. Swallow, was doing big business, and that local farmers were well satisfied with both the grading and the prices."³⁰

In response to the demands created by World War I, Saskatchewan farmers in 1915 planted and harvested the best wheat crop in the province's short history.³¹ In many places wheat yielded between 40 and 60 bushels per acre.³² Theodore was not left out of the bonanza as three items from 1915 indicate.

Mr. Fred Minken threshed on his own farm 2,050 bushels of oats from 21 acres, and average of 98 bushels to the acre. Geo. Koshman reports an average of 41 bushels of wheat and 75 bushels of oats from his land under crop.³³

Grain is pouring in from all sides and elevators are working at full speed. Up to date about 200,000 bushels have been marketed and we expect Theodore will ship in the neighbourhood of one million bushels of this season's crop.³⁴

This years grain shipments greatly exceed last year's and great difficulty is being experienced in securing sufficient cars.³⁵

The year 1916 proved to be another good year for Theodore's farmers. In the fall of 1916 it was reported that Theodore farmers were very satisfied with their return and that two had earned \$30 per acre from their crops after expenses, and that the price for wheat had reached \$2.40 per bushel, almost 3¾ time the price of the 1913 crop.^{36 37}

Cattle prices at Theodore also improved during the war. In the spring of 1916 it was reported that James Merkley's Holsteins had sold well in Yorkton, with prices ranging up to \$77.00.³⁸ By the fall of that year prices at another sale of James Merkley's grade Holsteins averaged about sixty dollars per head.³⁹

An item in the Theodore news column indicated that other farm products had also risen in price during the war. “

Judging from the number of cars being sent out from Larson's Emporium these days the farmers are not planning to see hard time times in Saskatchewan. With present high prices for produce, the farmers are reveling in cash, but what of the consumer in cities and towns? With butter and eggs at 40¢ in the producing season we predict it will be impossible to reach the winter mark for the majority of consumers, unless the wage-earner's salary be increased according to increase of production.⁴⁰

With the increase in the prices paid for farm produce came and increase in the price of farmland as shown by the following news items from 1917 and 1918:

McConnell Bros. of Hamiota, have sold a quarter section of their big farm near town to John Bilokryi and son. The price paid was \$35.00 per acre. This is a splendid quarter section.⁴¹

Another real estate deal of some importance took place yesterday when Nels Frederickson purchased from McConnell Bros. their land east of the river for \$10,000. Real estate is booming here.⁴²

Notes:

1. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 7 February, 1918.
2. "Enthusiastic Patriotic Meeting at Theodore" *The Yorkton Enterprise* 6 January, 1916.
3. "Theodore Holds Patriotic Rally." *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 February 1916
4. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 September, 1917.
5. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 4 October 1917
6. "Enthusiastic Patriotic Meeting at Theodore" *The Yorkton Enterprise* 6 January, 1916.
7. "Theodore Holds Patriotic Rally." *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 February 1916
8. "Enthusiastic Patriotic Meeting at Theodore" *The Yorkton Enterprise* 6 January, 1916
9. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 August, 1915.
10. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 August, 1915.
11. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 21 September, 1916.
12. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 July, 1917.
13. "What the Canadian Red Cross is Doing for Prisoners of War," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 May, 1916.
14. "Red Cross Parcel," *Wikipedia*" Retrieved 14 September 2016 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Cross_parcel
15. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 February, 1917.
16. "Theodore," *Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 April, 1918.
17. "Theodore," *Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 May, 1918.
18. "Theodore," *Yorkton Enterprise*. 25 July, 1918.
19. "Description of Conditions in Belgium Trenches," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 15 April 1915.
20. "Description of Conditions in Belgium Trenches," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 15 April 1915.
21. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 30 November, 1916.

22. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 31 October, 1918.
23. "Thirteen Men Return Home From France" *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 May, 1919.
24. "Trench Foot," *Wikipedia*. Downloaded from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Trench_foot 14 November 2016.
25. "Late Pte Wright was South African Veteran," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. " 7 March, 1919.
26. "Saskatchewan Settlement Experience," *Provincial Archives*. Downloaded 16 November 2016 from <http://www.saskarchives.com/sasksettlement/display.php>
27. Saskatchewan | Great War greatwar.usask.ca/node/41
28. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 February, 1912.
29. Waiser, Bill, "The day Sask. kids waged war on gophers, Saskatoon Star Phoenix. 31 March, 2015.
30. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 December, 1915.
31. Champ, Joan. "The Impact of the First World War on Saskatchewan's Farm Families," *Western Development Museum*. 2002.
32. Champ, Joan. "The Impact of the First World War on Saskatchewan's Farm Families," *Western Development Museum*. 2002.
33. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 23 September 1915.
34. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 November 1915.
35. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 December, 1915.
36. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 26 October, 1916.
37. Waiser, Bill, "The day Sask. kids waged war on gophers, Saskatoon Star Phoenix. 31 March, 2015.
38. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 17 February, 1916.
39. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 30 November, 1916.
40. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 31 May, 1917.
41. "Theodore," *Yorkton Enterprise* 11 April 1918

42. "Theodore," *Yorkton Enterprise* 11 April 1918