

Chapter 8 - Health Care and Education at Theodore

Theodore's Red Brick School

Construction

As Theodore grew and prospered during World War I, it became increasingly apparent that a new and larger school was needed. The third classroom that had been added in 1913 had relieved the overcrowding for only a short while. In the spring of 1918 a meeting was held in Theodore to consider the building of a new school. The prevailing sentiment expressed at that meeting was decidedly in favour of building a new school.¹ The meeting was reported in *The Yorkton Press* as follows:

We have the largest school attendance between Wynyard and Yorkton, I want to see a good building," was the opinion expressed by Wm. Wylie. "I am in favor of a good modern school as much as any one," declared Dr. W. E. J. Ekins. J. S. Brown emphasized the need of a school equipped with a gymnasium and designed to teach agriculture, manual training and the domestic arts. This is the modern idea in education and Theodore should take the initiative in getting a school of that type he declared. J. P. K. Jensen feared this was not the time to build a large school, but it was pointed out that there was more money in the country than ever before and Theodore could afford to build a school. It would benefit the country and town equally, and would increase the prosperity of the community as did the agricultural high schools of Denmark. It was pointed out that Denmark was on the verge of bankruptcy after the war with Germany. Through its agricultural schools the people were taught how to better themselves economically and improve their markets, with the result that today the per capita wealth of Denmark is greater than that of any other nation in the world, with possibly one exception. John Hooze expressed himself very much in favor of a good school. The sentiment against any improvement whatsoever, came from those who have no children to be directly benefitted by a new school or who cannot see the force of paying good money for modern efficient education. There was considerable sentiment in favor of consolidation. Under this system farm children in the neighboring districts would receive the benefit of a good graded and high school and be carried to school in vans. The trustees, Messrs. Austin, Peterson, and Spicer are anxious to do whatever is best for the district and on instructions from the rate payers will communicate with Premier Martin as to what the future school policy of the province may be and what would he advise the

district to do. A meeting will be held June 15th to receive the answer from Premier Martin.²

Over the summer it was rumoured that the Theodore school board intended to erect a new one-room school building.³ However, a visit by Inspector J. T. M. Anderson in September seems to have been instrumental in a major change in the plan for a one-room school building.⁴ During the winter of 1918-1919 it became more and more likely that either a new school building or a major renovation of the current building would take place the following summer and there was even suggested that an eight-room consolidated school could be build in Theodore.⁵ Eventually it was announced that plans for a new brick four-roomed school were being discussed, and that the provincial government had agreed to allow debentures to be issued if the local people approved of the proposition.⁶

Construction of the new school building began in the early summer of 1919, and a series of news items kept the residents of Theodore and district informed of the progress.

The splendid new \$20,000 red brick school house is beginning to show above the ground. The contractors will soon have the basement completed and walls of this fine structure will rapidly rise. When finished Theodore will have one of the finest schools in the province for a town of some 300 population; with four large classrooms and large double basement. The board of Trustees are to be congratulated for their action in insisting on the better accommodation for the large number of pupils presently crowded into the buildings that are entirely out of date. These numbers are rapidly increasing and it is expected that New Year will see about 200 in attendance. Mr. Wallace, school inspector of Yorkton, visited the schools here on Tuesday and was favourably impressed with the progress being made, also with principal Vale and his splendid staff of teachers.⁷ The new school house is taking on an imposing appearance. The brick work is now well advanced on second story, and there is every likelihood that the building will be ready for occupation by October 1st.⁸

When completed Theodore's new school was described as having four large rooms, teacher's rooms, cloak rooms, two large halls and a full size basement. The school was furnished with all the modern equipment of the 1920's and could accommodate between 180 and 200 pupils.⁹

In addition to the new building the school board purchased property adjoining the existing school ground to better accommodate that growing number of pupils attending the school.¹⁰ In 1920 the surface of the property was levelled, and in 1921 additional work was done on the school grounds enhancing its appearance.^{11 12}

The new school was soon filled to capacity, and before it was a year old, the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* wrote:

The fine brick school erected at a cost of \$20,000 last summer, is already taxed to the utmost to house the ever-increasing number of pupils who gather from all sides in the winter, to take advantage of the educational facilities of this thriving centre.¹³

In 1917 a third class room and teacher had been added to the school. This building, often referred to as the hut, had been left unused on the school grounds since the erection of the new school. By 1927, however, increasing enrollment forced the school board to reopen it and hire a fifth teacher.¹⁴ The hut remained in service until the mid 1950's when a new school building was constructed.

In 1923 the Village Council and School Board jointly purchased a large bell to be used as a fire and school bell.¹⁵ The bell was rung fifteen minutes before school was to start in the morning and after noon and again at the time classes were to commence in both the morning and afternoon. For a number of years the bell was also " rung every

night in summer at 9 o'clock, as a warning to parents that children under 16 years of age must be off the streets at that hour."¹⁶

Financial Issues 1921-1922

In spite of the post war recession that created significant financial concerns for some of the local School Boards in the Province, the Trustees at Theodore felt confident that the School's financial situation was in fine shape for the 1922-1923 school year, and chose not to reduce the salaries of the teachers at that time.¹⁷ The estimated financial requirements for operating the school for the 1922-1923 school year was reported to the Theodore's ratepayers in February 1922.

Total requirements for school expenditures for current year have been set by the board of trustees at \$9209.25. This sum is \$1,000 less than the sum asked for last year. The largest item on the list is, of course, teachers' salaries, for which \$5,000 is required. The second item of importance is debenture payment, \$1,765.75, and coal and care taking account for largest part of balance. Estimated government grants total \$1,500.00. Of the sum required a little more than two-fifths will be raised in the village and balance by the Municipality of Insinger. Estimated on last year's assessment.¹⁸

In the spring of the following year (1923) it was evident that the school had weathered the financial storm.

The Theodore School Board has sent its requisition for funds to cover operating expenses for 1923. Their requirements amount to nearly \$8,900.00 or about \$500.00 less than last year. Of this amount some \$1,500 will be made up of government grants and the balance will be raised by levy on Municipality of Insinger and Village of Theodore. Based on last year's assessment, in the village this will mean a levy of about 18 mills for school purposes alone.¹⁹

As everywhere else, school taxes were always a topic of discussion in Theodore, and the local school board made it a priority to keep expenses as low as possible, while at the same time offering a high quality educational program.

The practice of strict economy in regard to the management of the public school has made it possible for the board to cut down on current years estimate by some seven hundred dollars less than a year ago. This will be good news to taxpayers - though the reduction will not amount to very much individually as it is distributed between the rural and village ratepayers, but every little bit helps.²⁰

One example of their success appeared in the Theodore news column in March, 1927.

It is pleasing to note that a considerable reduction in school taxes may be effected this year in the Theodore School District which comprises the village of Theodore and a part of the R.M. of Insinger. The requisition for funds for 1927 sent by the board of trustees to the secretary shows a reduction on over one thousand dollars as compared with last year. This amount will be divided between the ratepayers of the village and R. Municipality.²¹

When higher tax were required the School Board and the Village Council also made it a point to explain the need to the people effected by the increase.

The school tax for village school will be higher this year owing chiefly to the fact that the board was forced last autumn to add a fifth teacher to the staff and keep up another room. The increase will amount to about 20 per cent, according to the requisition sheet in the hands of the tax collector.²²

At the annual meeting of the school board, held in January 1931 the affairs of the school district were reported to be in "first class order."²³ However, by the end of the year the great depression had wrecked such financial havoc in the Theodore area that the village and the surrounding municipalities were having difficulty meeting their obligations to the school board.²⁴ The dire financial situation and a possible solution appeared in the following news item from February 1932.

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.²⁵

The financial situation did not improve over the next six months and by August, 1932 there was a danger that the local school would not be able to operate because of a lack of funds.²⁶

The fact that the Theodore school did not close and did not lose any of its teaching positions during the depression seems to be largely due to the willingness on the part of the teachers to keep it open. As early as January 1931 the local teachers showed their willingness to make sacrifices and had voluntarily accepted a reduction in their salaries.²⁷ By the spring of 1939, however, the willingness of the teachers to continue to make sacrifices had come to an end. The staff of the local village school met the village council, the school board, and the reeve of the Rural Municipality of Insinger and gave notice that unless arrears of salary due the staff were paid, the members of the staff would be forced to resign. After a long time it was decided to call a general meeting of the ratepayers of the school district both in town and country and point out the need of paying up tax

arrears in order to keep the school operating. It is not known what the exact result of that meeting was other than the fact that the teachers did not resign.²⁸

Attendance and enrollment in the 1920's

Even though attendance at school was compulsory, and one could be fined for contravening the School Attendance Act, attendance was sometimes a problem. For example, a report in the Theodore news from November 1919 stated that the boys are dividing their attention between school and trapping muskrats.²⁹ Parents who allowed their children to skip school could be, and sometimes were fined, as happened to Mrs. C. Bates who in 1921 was fined \$10.00 and costs by Magistrate Austin.³⁰ News items from the 1920's show that exceptions to the attendance requirement could be allowed for some of the older pupils whose help was needed at home during the harvest.

Some of the boys have been out of school for threshing, but on account of the rainy spell they had to go back to school. Miss. Dora Frederickson was absent from school on Monday. She was kept busy at home.³¹
Doris Frederickson and Carmen Erstad have been absent from school for a few days. They are busy waiting on tables for the threshers. Oh never mind - they are over 14.³²

Many of the school age boys are absent from school, giving a hand at the threshing, thereby supplying a labour shortage.³³

Enrollment at the Theodore school remained relatively stable for many years due to the fact that there both the Westbrook School Division and the Lawrie School Division constructed new schools in 1927.^{34 35} Both schools were within only a few miles of Theodore.



Grade 11 - June 30, 1931

Back Row: Steve Ostapovitch, Lena Matkowski, John ?, Steve Minken, Ella Jensen, ??,
Steve Essar: Front Row: Katie Essar, Verna Chernapeski, Irma Jensen, Verna Paley,
Marion Anderson

Issues Related to Instruction

From a number of items in the Theodore news column it does not appear that Theodore had a separate room for its high school students prior to 1923 and that those taking subjects at the high school level were included in the senior room. This changed with the addition of the hut to the school property, and the following paragraph from 1924 sheds some light on the high school situation in Theodore.

Principal Westerman of the public school has for some time past been taking up high school work and at the present time there are fully 25 pupils enrolled who have passed the high school entrance exams. Owing to this the school board has been forced to take advantage of section 203 of the school act empowering the board to make a charge for tuition of all pupils who have passed the public school standard, and the board has set a rate of \$25.00 per year as the fee to be paid. With charge of \$6.00 for the term of 1924 expiring January 1st and the secretary treasurer has issued notices to all parents advising them that the charge of \$6.00 must be paid before October 29th, if pupils wish to continue to enjoy the advantage of a high school education at home. This is a step in the right direction. We learn with pleasure that the school grant has been largely increased.³⁶

A second important issue was the language of instruction in the school. During the late 1920's a number of prominent people in Saskatchewan began pushing for programs that would hasten the assimilation and integration of people from Central Europe into the English speaking population. Consequently in the spring of 1928, the Theodore School Board ruled that only the English language may be spoken during school hours, on the school grounds.³⁷ The rationale for this action was explained in the following letter from the board of trustees at Theodore to the editor of *The Yorkton Enterprise*:

To the Editor at The Enterprise-

In replying to Mr. C. A. Lightbody's letter in a recent issue at your paper, in which he takes exception to the prohibition of languages other than English in the Theodore Public School, we wish to say, there are eight different nationalities attending this School, and to foster assimilation, which Mr. Lightbody so rightly upholds we desire our pupils to speak one language; namely English. The Ukrainian children were the only group who persisted in the use of their own language in and about the school. Mr. Lightbody was probably not aware of the agitation in certain quarters among the Ukrainian people which not only made a division of their own people but also a wider breach between the English and Ukrainian peoples. These differences had been practically healed and Mr. Lightbody is merely opening up an old sore.

We know of five different classes of schools in Saskatchewan but this Classification does not include Ukrainian Schools as referred to by Mr. Lightbody. We would be pleased to know where these Ukrainian Schools exist. "Conditions in Ukrainian Schools found to be good." Has Mr. Lightbody visited that country and

is that where he made his rapid investigation? Since we have no Ukrainian Schools in this country such must be the case.

Mr. Lightbody has been away for nearly three years and returns and in two or three months makes a thorough investigation of conditions and applies a panacea for all our ills while men who have lived practically all their lives in close contact with these conditions have not come to so sure a conclusion.

The present and previous boards of this school have always worked with the best interests of the whole district at heart and the results of this school prove their wisdom.

We believe that the only method of making Canadian citizens of our foreign speaking populace is the teaching of English only in our Schools. The Public School, we maintain is not the proper place for fostering the language, customs and ideals of any other nation.

Thanking you, Mr. Editor for your valuable space.³⁸

The Theodore School Board felt that their action was vindicated when in the spring of 1929 Saskatchewan School Trustees at their convention in Regina passed a unanimous resolution, to the effect that only the English language was to be used in Saskatchewan Schools or on Saskatchewan School Grounds.³⁹ English remained the only language of instruction in all Saskatchewan schools until a 1968.⁴⁰

Mention has already been made of the fact that the teachers at Theodore strove to give Theodore's young people a high quality education. In addition to attending the usual Teachers' Conventions and Institutes, teachers at Theodore joined with teachers from neighbouring schools to form the Associated Teachers' Club. According to the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* the meetings of this organization gave the teachers the opportunity to exchange views on the profession and exchange helpful suggestion for teaching.⁴¹ Sometimes a member would present a paper and a discussion would follow and sometimes they would arrange for their respective school to participate in such events as the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation in 1927 and a

picnic held on the Whitesand River near Wolfe's bridge in 1928.^{42 43} In the fall of 1927 the teaching staff spent a day teaching the classes of the Sheho school, and a week later the Sheho staff visited Theodore and took charge of the local school.⁴⁴ The exchange was praised as a good idea in the Theodore news column as it gave the participants new ideas and furthered their efficiency as teachers.⁴⁵

School Sports and Recreation

The Theodore School Board recognized that a clean and safe play ground was an essential element of the school program and took several measures to ensure this. In June, 1923, for example, they hired Mr. D. Kerstuik to fence the School grounds.⁴⁶ In the fall of 1923:

The trustees of the school have erected four fine swings on the school grounds, and these are occupied fully during all play hours. Goal posts for football games have also been erected and a merry-go-round, teeter totter, and sand piles will be added later, all with a view to keeping the children within school grounds at recess time, many of them previously spent much of their dinner hour and recess time on the streets.⁴⁷

Further improvements in 1924 included levelling the ground and seeding grass.⁴⁸ It should also be noted that both teachers and pupils took responsibility for keeping the playground clean and would spend time raking and clearing up all rubbish in the yard.⁴⁹ In 1926 the school board further improved the appearance of the school site by planting a double row of maples on Main Street that reached the entire length of the grounds.⁵⁰

Parties, Programs, and Concerts

Then as now the school year was punctuated by parties held on such special occasions as Hallowe'en, Christmas, and Valentines. From the newspaper reports, it appears that the Hallowe'en and Valentines events were held in the school while the Christmas event was held in one of Theodore's public buildings.⁵¹ The 1922 Valentine's party was described as follows:

An enjoyable time was spent by pupils of the school on Tuesday afternoon, the event being the annual valentine concert and social. Dozens of home-made valentines were passed back and forth through the medium of the school mail service and many of them were truly works of art, showing skill and originality on the part of those responsible for them. After the concert, cake, cocoa and candy were passed around among the pupils who will look forward to the 14th of February coming round again, with a warm spot in their hearts.⁵²

From various reports appearing in the Theodore news column, it appears that the Theodore School Concert and Christmas Tree was an annual event that always took place in a public hall, and that it was open to the parents and the general public. In reporting on the 1921 school event, for example, it was stated that more than 60 pupils provided entertainment for more than 250 people from all over the Theodore District attended the School's Christmas event.⁵³

Unlike the Christmas Concerts held in the churches, one of which is described elsewhere, the school events appear to have been much more secular in nature with very little reference to the religious significance of Christmas. The following programme was presented in 1921: Chorus, "Oh! Canada.; Speeches: Robert Tracy and Dora Tracy; Song, "Dear Old Pal of Mine"; Japanese Umbrella; Folk Dance; Baby Girl; Dialogue, "The Discontented Sister"; The Golliwogs; Folk Dance; Red Riding Hood; Come boys and

girls; Forest scene; Ventriloquist; Cottage scene; Flag drill; Goodnight chorus; and Santa Clause chorus.⁵⁴

Sports

Although Theodore's adult Cricket team disappeared sometime in the second decade of the twentieth century, the game was still being played at school and there are several references to it in "The School Bulletin," a regular column in *The Theodore Tattler* in 1921. Skating, however, appears to have been one of the major recreational activities at the Theodore school during the winter months. In 1920 a piece of the school yard was flooded and maintained by Chris Peterson for the use of the school children.⁵⁵ In 1921 a much larger rink (60 x 100 feet) was built.⁵⁶ The rink was popular with both the children and the adults of the community and large crowds of people could be found there in the evenings. Adults were charged \$2.00 for the season and children skated for free.⁵⁷ In February, 1921 the school rink was the scene of an ice carnival.⁵⁸



Theodore' Third School - Courtesy Colleen Bilokreli

The white building on the left is the third classroom that was added to the old school in 1917. Note also, the horse in the lower right corner. Rural pupil often used horses to go to school before the days of school buses. The school stable was demolished in the early 1950s.

Every spring the school held a field day. The agenda for the field day for 17 June, 1919 appeared in the Theodore news column.

- 12:30 p.m.: Parade of school children.
- 1 p.m.: Baby show. Five cash prizes, for infants in arms.
- 1:30 p.m.: Races and school competitions. Large and varied list of events with cash prizes.
- 4 p.m.: Address by Premier Martin, Dr. Anderson and other prominent speakers.
- 4:30 p.m.: Free movies for the children.
- 5:30 p.m.: Big ball gam, Teachers vs. All Comers.⁵⁹

Another interesting recreational activities occurred in 1921. The female teachers of the district, accompanied by some of their pupils, spent several days attending a camp at Lumsden Beach Camp.⁶⁰

Notes:

1. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Press*. 11 June, 1918.
2. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Press*. 11 June, 1918.
3. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 August, 1918.
4. "School Fair at Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 September, 1918.
5. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 February, 1919.
6. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 April, 1919.
7. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 26 June, 1919.
8. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 31 July, 1919.
9. "The Theodore Public School" *The Theodore Tattler*. 24 December 1921.
10. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 7 August, 1919.
11. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 June, 1920.
12. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 July, 1921.
13. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 January, 1920.
14. "Theodore Consolidated School District No, 253 Sub, Unit 7," p. 45.
15. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 August, 1923.
16. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 August, 1923.
17. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 January, 1922.
18. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 February, 1922.
19. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 March, 1923.
20. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 24 March, 1925.
21. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 March, 1927.
22. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 25 March, 1928.

23. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 January, 1931.
24. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 15 December, 1931.
25. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 February, 1932.
26. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 30 August, 1932.
27. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 30 January, 1931.
28. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 6 April, 1939
29. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 6 November, 1919.
30. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 24 February, 1921.
31. "The School Bulletin" *The Theodore Tattler*. 17 September, 1921.
32. "The School Bulletin," *The Theodore Tattler*. 8 October 1921 p. 1
33. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 21 September, 1923.
34. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 September, 1927.
35. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 September, 1927.
36. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 October, 1924.
37. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 June, 1928.
38. -"Theodore Board Convinced English Should Be Only Language of Instruction," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 23 October, 1928.
39. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 March, 1929.
40. "Language policies of Canada's provinces and territories," *Wikipedia*. Retrieved 1 January, 2018 from <https://en.wikipedia.org>
41. Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 15 February, 1927.
42. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 17 May, 1927.
43. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 July, 1928.
44. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 September, 1927.
45. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 September, 1927.

46. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 June, 1923.
47. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 September, 1923.
48. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 2 May, 1924.
49. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 May, 1925.
50. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 May, 1926.
51. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 November, 1922.
52. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 February, 1922.
53. "School Concert and Xmas Tree Held Thursday, Dec. 23rd," *The Theodore Tattler*. 7 January, 1922.
54. "School Concert and Xmas Tree Held Thursday, Dec. 23rd," *The Theodore Tattler*. 7 January, 1922.
55. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 December, 1920.
56. "The Local News," *The Theodore Tattler*. 3 December 1921 p. 8.
57. *The Theodore Tattler*. 14 January, 1922. p. 1
58. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 24 February 1921.
59. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 June. 1919.
60. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 21 July, 1921.