

Chapter 9 - Theodore Goes to War

Life on the Home Front 1939-1945

Theodore and the Phoney War 1939 - 1940

World War II began at dawn on September 1, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland. Great Britain and France declared war on Germany on September 3, and on September 10 King George VI announced that Canada had declared war on Germany. Following the collapse of Poland there was a period of inactivity from October 1939 to April 1940 which became known as the "Phony War." During this period recruiting was stepped up in Canada, and there was some increase in employment opportunities as Canadian industries began gearing up to meet the demands for war-related items. In Theodore, however, it was if nothing had happened and there was no mention of the war in the Theodore news column at all in 1939. This was a sharp contrast to the early days of World War I when war fever seized the country, the province and the village.

It wasn't until mid to late January 1940 that the war in Europe received much attention in Theodore. On one occasion near the end of January the Rev. Father Shalla, of Yorkton, addressed a large crowd in the village hall, and speaking from first hand knowledge, told audience how conditions in Poland had changed since the war began.¹ Then in early February the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) held a well attended bridge and whist drive to raise money for the purchase of materials they would be converted into war requirements by Canada's soldiers.²

Also, in February 1940, it was announced in the Theodore news that the Theodore branch of the Canadian Legion held a drive for funds.³ Although the war is not specifically mentioned in the news report, it seems very likely that the funds raised would become part of the \$500,000 that

the legion hoped to raise to finance their war services program.⁴ The drive ended with a Noodle and whist drive followed by a dance on 23 February 1940 which cost those attending thirty-five cents.⁵

War-time Depopulation

The end of the phoney war in the spring of 1940 had an immediate effect on the problem of unemployment and underemployment in Theodore. Beginning in June and continuing until the end of the year the Theodore new column contained numerous accounts of those who left the community to find work in other parts of Canada. The Theodore correspondent wrote:

All of the young men who left this part for eastern and western Canada some time ago have secured employment in Ontario, or the far west. It looks like our boys are in demand. There are many former residents of this village now employed in the eastern Cities, and we believe that Theodore is represent in every Province in the Dominion by those who at one time or another resident here.⁶

By November 1940, the exodus from Theodore had reached the unusual point where:

Many of the lads who made up the Theodore senior hockey team last year, are now scattered in various parts of the Dominion, and it is unlikely that Theodore will be represented on the ice this year by a junior team alone.⁷

War-time Depopulation was not unique to Theodore. many small communities in western Canada suffered serious depopulation. Writing in December, 1941, J. S. Anderson Theodore's correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* wrote:

In noting the loss of population that has happened to most of the western towns and villages, as indicated by the last census, your correspondent has discovered that in the past two years some 50 persons who were resident in Theodore at that time are now in other parts of Canada, or in Britain. Of course in many instances these losses have been replaced by new-comers, but the population of the village is about 50 less than two years ago. Most of the young people who were in any way qualified for government service either in the ranks or in offices, have left for eastern or western points, and Theodore is now

represented in practically all of the larger towns and cities in the Dominion, as well as in the Air Force, or military camps in Canada or Britain. With the movement continuing, there will soon be few of the old faces seen in our midst.⁸

By mid summer of the following year Theodore's depopulation had become a significant concern to those residents who owned rental property. J. S. Anderson, himself a landlord offered the following solution in the Theodore news column:

Owing to the loss of residents, caused by migrations to the east or enlistments, there are now 7 or 8 vacant houses in this village, any of which could be rented for \$5.00 to \$12.00 per month. In view of the overcrowded conditions and high rentals that prevail in larger centers, such as Yorkton, it is difficult to understand why wives of enlisted soldiers, and others in a position to do so, do not take advantage of cheap rentals in the smaller surrounding villages. They would find much more comfort, cheaper fuel, and cheaper living conditions all-round. But they all seem to want to crowd into the larger towns, even though the costs may be double, Why?⁹

In just one week in October 1942 the Theodore news column identified three families that had scheduled auctions sales in preparation to leave the area.¹⁰

In mid August, 1940 it was announced that D. W. Smith, and R. W. Mercer, had been appointed Deputy Registrars for the Village of Theodore, for the National Registration which was to take place between August 19 and August 21.¹¹ Everyone in Canada who had reached the age of 16 years on or before 21 August 1940 was required to register, or suffer the penalty for failing to do so. In Theodore the entire population over 16 years of age was registered with the help of a large staff of willing volunteers.¹²

In mid September 1940 the Canadian government appointed R. W. Mercer and J. S. Anderson as registrars of all guns and rifles and at times their offices took on the appearance of an armoury.¹³ After one week of registering firearms, the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* wrote:

Judging by the number of guns and rifles that have been presented here for registration, this district is well prepared to stand off invaders. Many fearful and wonderful weapons have been produced, representing the era covered by the past fifty years or more. Over 300 weapons of different varieties have been registered to date, and registration will continue til Sept 30.¹⁴

Not everyone was happy with the registration of firearms and one individual complained that he would soon have to carry a grip to contain all the certificates and licences that were required.¹⁵

One of the events that marked the end of the “Phoney War” in Theodore, and drove home the reality of the war its residents was Theodore’s Pioneer Day. The Pioneer Day was a unique fund raising event that was pulled together in less than three weeks and was held in Theodore on 2 August 1940.

Pioneer Days

Canada had officially been at war with Germany for almost ten months when the local Community Club called an organization gathering for Monday, July 8 to arrange the event to raise funds for War Services. The meeting was attended by representatives from the following schools: Theodore, Creekside, Westbrook, Caldervale, Lysenko, Poplar Leaf, White Sand, Chernowitz, Good Luck, War End, Beaverdale and Clear Creek, as well as representatives from the following local organizations: Village Council, Legion, Masonic Lodge, Community Club, IODE, Ukrainian Ladies' Aid, Theodore, Ukrainian Ladies' Aid Westbrook, Theodore Homemaker, Beaverdale Homemakers and the United Church Ladies' Aid. Mr. John Harasymiuk presented an outline of a pioneer day that he had seen successfully carried out in another community, it was decided to hold on a Pioneer Day at Theodore, on August 2.¹⁶

Under the chairmanship of Mr. Harasymiuk plans were drawn up for the day. There was to be a pioneer parade to show the advancements in farming over the years, a number of speakers, representative of the First Nations people, a monster dance.¹⁷ As the special day grew closer more activities such as a ball game between Willowbrook and Yorkton, softball, and children's sports scheduled throughout the day were included, and the speeches were slated to start at 4:00 pm.¹⁸

It was reported that 2,200 people paid admission to the Pioneer Celebration at Theodore and the entire proceeds of the day were devoted to war charities as follows: Red Cross Society, \$200.00, YMCA, \$100.00, Salvation Army, \$100.00.^{19 20}

The parade got underway at two o'clock and was led by the Yorkton Civic Service Club band followed by two members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Then came a team of oxen followed by a Ukrainian float depicting some of the arts and costumes of the early Ukrainian settlers. Then a team of mules with a prairie schooner depicting the arrival of the early settlers. Boy Scouts from Foam Lake, Sheho, and Theodore were next in line, followed by children from the ten schools in the district Floats by the Red Cross IODE, a steam engine, and an ancient thresher were next found in the parade, followed by the oldest cars in the district, after which came the 1940 models. An old tractor of very early vintage was followed by a 1940 model tractor and finally a comedy float.

When the parade reached the sports grounds at 2:30 a program of softball, running races and other events began.²¹ Many enjoyed the pow-wow that members of the First Nations held.²²

Rationing

During the Second World War, food became a weapon of war, and in 1941 the National Film Board of Canada produced the documentary film, ““Food - Weapon of Conquest” as part of a series of short films “ *Canada Carries On.*” This wartime newsreel showed how Nazi-Germany used food shortages in occupied countries to control concurred population and force farmers to hand over their produce to Germany, leaving their own populations hungry. The film then goes on

to show how Britain was unable to feed itself and the necessity of importing food from North America.²³ Canada's response to the Milk For Britain campaign has already been noted, but food aid was not limited to milk.

By the end of the war, it was estimated that Canadian exports accounted for 57 per cent of British wheat and flour consumption – down from its 1941 peak of 77 per cent – as well as 39 per cent of bacon, 15 per cent of eggs, 24 per cent of cheese, and 11 per cent of evaporated milk consumed in Britain. Much of this was achieved through major state intervention on Canadian farms.²⁴

In response to the need help feed its wartime allies as well as its own military personnel the Canadian government instituted a number of food policies. Among those policies was the rationing of certain food items. Rationing in Canada began in January 1942 with sugar which was quickly followed by coffee, tea and butter. In 1943 meat was added to the list of rationed foods. The following items from the Theodore news column sum up Theodore's early response to food rationing.

The public generally are regarding the rationing system in sugar, allowances of which have now been reduced to half a pound per person per week. It seems possible to get along on that limited amount, at least in a way, but there are poor prospects of much canned fruit for next winter. At present moment hundreds of pounds of excellent rhubarb is going to waste for want of sugar to cook it, and it would seem good business to make some arrangements to save this highly healthful food if it is at all possible.²⁵

Tea and coffee rationing is having an ill effect on the ladies' afternoon tea parties, and as a result will be fewer parties. This is to be regretted, for in the Past these gatherings have proven to be of great assistance to governments and public bodies who have been hatched under the influence of a cheering cup.²⁶

Our patriotic housewives have accepted the rationing of tea, coffee and sugar with the best of grace substituting Postum for tea and coffee, honey and syrup for sugar, but the rationing of butter provides a problem that is more difficult of solution, especially so in the absence of bacon fat and beef gravy shortage. Some of the old-timers are trying to recall just what they used in place of butter in the 1880's when the butter rationing was a daily rule enforced by the absence of any butter. Will it be a case of rabbit diets again?²⁷

One of the unintended side effects of rationing in Canada was the positive impact it had on local merchants. The general shortage of gasoline and tires served to keep many people who had formerly done much of their business in Yorkton at home. Additionally, some people paid off old debts with money that they are unable to spend otherwise.²⁸

It was reported that people who had been in the habit of doing much of their shopping in the large city department stores, and who hoped that they could obtain merchandise that was not available locally because of rationing, soon discovered that this was not to be the case because even the large stores in the cities were unable to supply sufficient quantities to supply the demand.²⁹ One person, for example, ordered eighteen items from a city store, but received only six of them and a refund for the rest. Another person who had ordered pins and had instructed the store to substitute in case of lack of the article, received a half dozen pairs of shoe laces.³⁰

Although rationing was introduced in Canada in January, 1942, it wasn't until the following summer that the ration book were finally issued. It appears that for a number of months in 1942 the honour system was used with regard to sugar rationing in Theodore.³¹ Every family member in every household was issued a ration book which was mailed out on August 31, 1942. Each book contained coupons for tea, coffee, and sugar, along with spares in the event that other products would be rationed.

In February 1943, when the second ration book was distributed it was necessary for each person to apply at the local council chamber and none would be sent out through the mail.³² People were also instructed to bring their old ration book with them with the card on the inside filled in, because without that card they would not receive a new ration book.³³ On this occasion the work of distributing the books was handled by Mrs. Irwin McCrae, Mrs. A. Mickelson and

Secretary-Treasurer J. S. Anderson, who all volunteered their time.³⁴ A similar procedure was used when it was time to issue subsequent ration books.

New born babies were also issued their own ration book. Their parents were advised that the baby's ration book could be obtained by filling a cards and mailing it to the local ration board at Saskatoon. The cards were available from the village secretary.³⁵

The one rationed item that seemed to receive the most attention in the Theodore news column was sugar. In 1942 it was noted that there were "hundreds of pounds of excellent rhubarb is going to waste for want of sugar to cook it."³⁶ In spite of the fact that the second ration book issued in 1943 did contain an application form for additional sugar to be used in canning and preserving, The shortage of sugar for canning was raised twice in 1943.³⁷

What to do with the rhubarb crop is a question that will remain unanswered till such time as sugar rations are greatly increased. Tons of rhubarb are going to waste in all districts, and as that is about the only fruit that many farmers have to enjoy at this season, it is a pity that it cannot be utilized.³⁸

With apricots at \$3.75 per case, peaches the same, and pears at \$7.50 per box - and sugar unobtainable to preserve them — we will have to confine ourselves to what can be produced at home till more favourable times, and that does not mean that we will go hungry ether.³⁹

The application for additional sugar for canning had to be sent to local boards before 15 April.⁴⁰ It is, therefore, possible that some people in Theodore had simply missed the application deadline.

Another Labour Shortage

The labour situation during World War II was somewhat different in that both men and women people began to leave Theodore for war related work as early as 1939. By the fall of 1940

so many young men had left Theodore to find work in other parts of Canada that the village could not field a senior hockey team and that Theodore was be represented on the ice by the junior team alone.⁴¹ The exodus from Theodore can be tracked by the numerous reports of auction sale in the local news column which often stated that the sellers had found work elsewhere.

The decline in Theodore's population can also be tracked by the number of ration books issued in the village. In March 1943 the village office issued 1,474 ration books to local residents, in September of the same year 1,400 ration books were issues, and in April 1944 only 1,350 ration books were issued.^{42 43 44}

Even thee Canadian Pacific Railway had trouble keeping employees. Between the first of January and May ii, 1944 Theodore at four different agents at the railway station, and the local reporter did not expect the situation to change in the coming year.⁴⁵

Housing shortage

By early winter 1942 a shortage of suitable housing had developed in Yorkton and it was reported that seven applications had been made to rent one small house within a few days. Many people began to look for rent accommodation in the adjacent villages where comfortable quarters could be leased, at much lower rentals than were being charged in Yorkton. Theodore, at that time had about half a dozen empty dwellings that could be secured and the distance to Yorkton was not a major problem as long as the roads remained good.⁴⁶

The Community Club in World War II

While the country as a whole experienced a great deal of upheaval during the war years, there was also a great need for some semblance of the old normality of former years. The Theodore Community Club was able, in some ways, to contribute to that sense of normality by continuing to offer familiar programs and events. The weekly movies shown every Saturday evening in the town hall, for example, were continued throughout the war years with only a few minor changes. In 1942 the club purchased a new "Onan" engine and generator to light the town hall and operate the movie projector.⁴⁷ The other change was to offer the shows throughout the winter months.^{48 49} Prior to 1943 the shows had been discontinued when cold weather set in.⁵⁰

The annual sports day held on the first of July also gave a sense of normality to the people of Theodore. In the spring of 1940 there was some question as to whether or not the July first celebration should be continued, but at a meeting in May it was unanimously agreed to continue this celebration because it had become an institution to which people look forward. Consequently, committees were appointed and arrangements made to have a better day than ever before. More than \$500 was offered as prizes for the various events, and an estimated 1,900 people from surrounding communities and districts paid admission to the grounds.^{51 52 53} Theodore's annual sports day continued through the war years.

The third event that continued throughout the war was the New Year's Dance in the town Hall. In 1942 Bingo and other games were added to the evening's programs.⁵⁴ Like the sports day, the New Year's Eve dance, had become a much anticipated institution.

While continuing to offer familiar events, the Community Club also offered a variety of activities to aid the war effort. In the spring of 1942, for example, the Community Club sponsored

three events on the evening of 17 March at the homes of Mrs. C. Bell, Mrs. O. Turner, and Mrs T. Sanders. Card games such as whist and bridge in which the prizes were in the form of War Savings Stamps were played by the attendees, and the hostess provided a lunch.⁵⁵ The Community Club also undertook to canvass the village and district for the War Service Board in 1941 and was able to surpass the suggested quota by a considerable amount.^{56 57}

At the 1944 annual meeting of the Theodore Community Club the treasurer's statement showed that year was closed with approximately \$800 on hand, as well as several hundred dollars invested in victory bonds, savings certificates. The Red Cross convener reported that the society had exceeded its objective in raising cash, and that a large quantity of knitted goods, quilts, etc., had been sent overseas. It was at this meeting that Mr. G. S. Brown brought, up the matter of a small hospital for town and district, a project that would be undertaken after the war.⁵⁸

Notes:

1. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 February, 1940.
2. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 February, 1940.
3. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 February, 1940.
4. Foster, Brigadier W, W, "Address of the Dominion President," *Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service league*. Montreal, Quebec 27 May 1940. Retrieved 8 March 2019 from: <https://wartimecanada.ca/sites/default/files/documents/CanadianLegion>
5. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 February, 1940.
6. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 September, 1940.
7. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 21 November, 1940.
8. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 December, 1941.
9. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 August, 1942.
10. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 October, 1942.
11. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 15 August, 1940.
12. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 August, 1940.
13. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 September, 1940.
14. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 September, 1940.
15. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 September, 1940.
16. Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 July, 1940.
17. Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 July, 1940.
18. "3,000 Expected To Attend Pioneer Day Friday At Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 August, 1940.
19. "2,200 People Attend Pioneer Celebration At Theodore on Friday," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 August, 1940.
20. "Financial Report Theodore Pioneer Day," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 August, 1940.

21. 2,200 People Attend Pioneer Celebration At Theodore on Friday," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 August, 1940.
22. "Theodore Honors Its Pioneers, 2,200 Attending Big Celebration," *Star Phoenix*. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 7 August, 1940. p. 7.
23. "Food, Weapon of Conquest," *National Film Board of Canada*. Retrieved 28 December, 2019 from: https://www.nfb.ca/film/food_weapon_of_conquest/
24. "Food on the Home Front during the Second World War," *War Time Canada*. Retrieved 28 December 1919. From: <https://wartimecanada.ca/essay/eating/food-home-front-during-second-world-war>
25. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 June, 1942.
26. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 August, 1942.
27. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 24 December, 1942.
28. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 24 December, 1942.
29. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 24 December, 1942.
30. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 January, 1943.
31. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. " 4 June 1942.
32. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 February, 1943.
33. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 February, 1943.
34. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 March, 1943.
35. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 May, 1943.
36. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. " 4 June 1942.
37. "Rationing" *The World War II Home Front In Summerside Prince Edward Island*. Retrieved 29 December from <http://www.wyattheritage.com/homefront/main.asp%3Flevel1=government&level2=materials&level3=food&level4=rationing.html>
38. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. " 8 July, 1943.
39. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. " 19 August, 1943.

40. "Rationing" *The World War II Home Front In Summerside Prince Edward Island*. Retrieved 29 December from <http://www.wyatttheheritage.com/homefront/main.asp%3Flevel1=government&level2=materials&level3=food&level4=rationing.html>
41. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 21 November, 1940.
42. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 March, 1943.
43. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 2 September, 1943.
44. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 6 April, 1944.
45. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 May, 1944.
46. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 February. 1942.
47. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 July, 1942.
48. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 7 January, 1943.
49. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 February, 1943.
50. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 March, 1943.
51. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 16 May, 1940.
52. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 June, 1940.
53. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 July, 1940.
54. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 24 December, 1942.
55. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 March, 1941.
56. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 March, 1941.
57. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 April, 1941.
58. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 February, 1944.