

## **Chapter 2 - Theodore's First Settlers**

### **The People who Came to Theodore**

#### **The Scandinavians**

Prior to the establishment of the Seeman farm in 1892, the area around the village of Theodore had frequently been referred to as New Denmark or Little Denmark because of the number of Scandinavian settlers that had been attracted to it.<sup>1</sup> One of the very few references to New Denmark appears in 1890 when a Swedish language newspaper, *Den Skandinaviske Canadiensaren* drew attention to New Denmark by stating that it was located about 50 miles northwest of Saltcoats on the Manitoba and North Western Railway (M&NWR.)<sup>2</sup> A second reference is found in the Report of the Minister of Agriculture for the Dominion of Canada for the Calendar Year 1891 in which New Denmark was described as a young colony, situated in Township 28, Range 7, west of 2<sup>nd</sup> Meridian that had eighteen homesteaders, all of whom were Danish. The report states that the settlers had selected a beautiful piece of rich rolling country near the Beaver Hills that was composed of first class arable land, mixed with meadows and some timber and were engaged in mixed farming. The report concluded with the prediction that in a few years the Danish families, who were described as hardy and industrious would be able to give a good account of themselves.<sup>3</sup> By the fall of 1892, however, news items began appearing in *The Leader* under the heading, "Theodore," and the establishment of a post office on the Seeman farm at Theodore in 1893 confirmed the name.

While it is difficult to determine the names of all of Theodore's early Danish residents, six families can be counted among the first to settle in the area. Harold Frederickson, a resident of

Theodore, identified his ancestor Ole Frederickson, a school teacher who later returned to Denmark, and Peter Frederick Petersen, a stone mason as being among the first.<sup>4</sup> Both families emigrated from Denmark to Winnipeg in 1887, where they stayed until 1889 when they took up homesteads in the Theodore area.<sup>5</sup> Dorothy Profit, a former mayor of Theodore, adds the families of Soren Peter Sorensen, Clintman Peterson, and the Vickstroms to the list.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the family of Christian Jensen appears as a resident of Theodore in the records of Saskatchewan government's department of Vital Statistics.

One of the factors that influenced some people to leave Denmark in the nineteenth century was the political unrest of the period. In 1848 Denmark had fought and won a war against its much larger neighbour, Prussia. The war, however, did not settle the dispute between Denmark and Prussia, and in 1864 Denmark was engaged in a second war with Prussia. One result of the Second Danish-Prussian war was that the territories of Schleswig-Holstein which had been part of the Kingdom of Denmark were ceded to Prussia. The boarder change had a direct effect on the families living in the area. Chris Hansen, a former resident of Theodore, described how both his father and grandfather, Hans Hansen, who, although being born in the same house, were born in different countries because of the boundary change.<sup>7</sup> Myrtle Simpson, another Hansen descendent, recounts the experiences of her great grandfather Hans Hanson who had been born in Ketting, Schleswig-Holstein and lived through some of the fighting.

The story was told that Great Grandfather shot holes in the German flag when it was raised in the Village Square. They finally got fed up with their property being plowed up by the fighting and the children being terrified of the soldiers so they emigrated to the USA They settled in Storden Minnesota.<sup>8</sup>

The United States was the destination of choice for most of the Danes who left home following the second Danish-Prussian war. Many of them settled in Cottonwood County in Minnesota where life proved to be more difficult than expected. After a number of years in Minnesota some of them emigrated again. This time to Theodore.

### **Settlers From Central Europe**

When the Liberals under Sir Wilfrid Laurier defeated the Conservative in 1896 they introduced significant changes to Canada's immigration policies. One of these changes was the acceptance of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe. Among the various ethnicities included in this group were people who identified themselves as Austrians, Germans, Hungarians, Poles, Russian, Ruthenians, and Ukrainians. Even though many English speaking individuals and the English language press of the early twentieth century often referred to them as Galicians, very few were, in fact, from the small strip of land on Poland's southern border that had once been the Kingdom of Galicia. By the time of the first World War the word Galician had almost disappeared from common use because it was an inaccurate description of the people and because many of them often regarded the word as an offensive, racial slur. Its replacement, the word "Ruthenian," was also eventually replaced by the word "Ukrainian."

## Notes:

1. "History of United Grain Growers Local #833." Theodore Historical Society, *Theodore and District History*, Regina. Focus Publishing, 1987. p. 36
2. Bjork, Kenneth O., *Scandinavian Migration to the Canadian Prairie Provinces, 1893-1914* (Volume 26: Page 3) Retrieved 18 August 2014 from [http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume26/vol26\\_1.htm](http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nas/volume26/vol26_1.htm)
3. *Report of the Minister of Agriculture for the Dominion of Canada for the Calendar Year 1891*. Canada Department of Agriculture, Ottawa 1892. p. 190. Retrieved 15 September 2014 from: <http://books.google.com/books>
4. Frederickson, Harold, "Frederickson, Ole and Anna." *Theodore and District History*. p. 227.
5. Frederickson, Harold, "Frederickson, Ole and Anna." *Theodore and District History*. p. 227.
6. Profit, Dorothy, Village of Theodore History." *Theodore and District History*. p. 6.
7. Hansen, Chris. Personal Correspondence with the author.
8. Simpson, Myrtle (Hanson). "Hanson - Hans (Great Grandfather)," *Theodore and District History*.