

Chapter 3 - Communication and Transportation

Early Roads in the Theodore Area

The late Nineteenth Century

The transportation of goods and people in and out of Theodore was essential to the growth and development of the community. Without adequate transportation facilities a community, no matter how strong and vibrant it might have been at one time, has been known to simply disappear. The lack of transportation facilities to move people and goods from one place to another was, therefore, one of the first difficulties that the early settlers had to overcome.

Prior to the Dominion Land Survey and for a few years following it, settlers made do with the old trails that had served earlier generations. However, as more and more people arrived the need for properly built and maintained roads and bridges became more and more important. This need is illustrated by a 1896 report from the Yorkton correspondent to *The Leader* in Regina in which it was stated that the rivers and creeks were flooded and a great deal of damage had been done to property near the Whitesand River.¹ Many of the bridges had been washed away and communication with those living north of Theodore had been cut off.

In the summer of 1893 the Yorkton correspondent to *The Leader*, praised R. F. Insinger, the local Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for work done on the roads and bridges that year. The correspondent then stated that another road was required west of Yorkton, and expressed the hope that the road would be built either that year or the next.² By January 1894, it appeared that the road west of Yorkton would be built on the surveyed road allowance,³ and a few months later tenders were invited for the erection of several bridges in the Yorkton area,

including one over Clear Creek near Theodore.⁴ One of the more ambitious plans to meet the transportation needs of the people at Theodore was Richard Seeman's proposal to build a grade road to Yorkton discussed in Chapter 2.

The Early Twentieth Century

During the first fifteen years of the twentieth century there were relatively few comments in the Theodore news about road conditions in the Theodore area. However, with the arrival of the automobile during the First World War, the condition of the roads around Theodore became an important topic in the Theodore news column. The following news items illustrate the issue:

Now that roads are really drying for the first time. Cars are moving around more freely – travelers are puling out their old Fords, burning gas, breaking springs and otherwise doing their best to cheer the hearts of our garage proprietors.⁵

Now that the roads are drying up, it is possible to reach the lake, river, or other favourite resort, without the necessity of pulling down some farmer's fence, an being threatened with decapitation by said farmer.⁶

It is to be hoped that Mr. Garry or those responsible, will take some action towards linking up the splendid road to Beaverdale, with the fine road from Willowbrook to Yorkton, and provide us with means of reaching the city occasionally. At resent there are several miles of disgraceful road between Beaverdale and Willowbrook.⁷

In 1922 a young lad from Ontario became the first person to arrive in Theodore from an outside point by automobile, and stated that in his 2,200 mile journey the worst mud holes he had encountered on the entire trip were found in the Beaverdale District.⁸ Five years later another traveler, this time from North Battleford, claimed to have spent a solid week traveling the 264 miles from North Battleford to Theodore and that he had never in all his experience seen the roads in such bad shape.⁹

Poor road conditions in the Theodore area nearly cost the life of at least one of the village's residents in 1922.

A very serious accident occurred on Monday evening about nine o'clock, whereby Ralph Peterson, the ten-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs Chris Peterson very nearly lost his life, and lies at home today in a critical condition, but somewhat improved. After supper. Mr. Peterson decided to take the four youngsters from 3 to 10 years of age for a ride in their car, also a little neighbour girl and taking the north road past A. Fernie's farm, the car slipped over the side of the narrow grade crossing corner of Fernie's Lake and turned turtle in 3 feet of water, pinning little Ralph under the car side and under the water, the other four children though thrown clear, were in danger of drowning, but were quickly placed in safety by their father, who then turned his attention to Ralph, but was unable to lift car and pull the boy out. Crying for help, he was heard by Mrs. Fernie and some children, but unfortunately Mr. Fernie was absent berry picking on an adjoining farm, however he was soon on the scene and plunging into the water, helped the distracted father release the boy who spent nearly seven minutes below the surface and with the weight of the car squeezing the life out of his little body. First aid was administered by Mr. and Mrs. Fernie and a few friends before Dr Turner could be reached by phone and the effects of the water, soon overcome, but the lad is suffering from shock and severe bruises. However Dr. Turner hopes to pull him through.

It is hoped that immediate steps will be taken to make this grade safe for travel as under present conditions it is a veritable death trap for strangers driving north unaware of the narrow and very rough grade at foot of the hill and across the lake corner.¹⁰

A few weeks later, another traveler passing over the same dangerous grade at Fernie's Lake almost turned his car upside down in the water and it took him two hours to get his car back on solid ground.¹¹ John Hooge, who represented many of Theodore's farmers, at the RM of Insinger assured the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* that the RM Council would take immediate steps to make the grade safe.¹²

Poor road conditions had a negative effect on life in Theodore on a number of fronts. In 1925, for example, poor road conditions were blamed for less than fifty percent of the voters turning out at an election.¹³ In 1926 a salesman for one of the wholesalers in Yorkton, spent all day in Theodore because the roads were unfit for travel.¹⁴ Also in 1926 the roads around

Theodore were described as “just so many miles of mud hole,” responsible for an unusually slow period in the business life of the village.¹⁵

To suggest that the roads around Theodore were always in poor condition would, of course, be untrue as there are many reports in the Theodore news of good and even excellent road conditions. By the summer of 1922, for example, the mud holes had dried up and, the condition of the roads had generally improved. It could be reported that cars were running merrily on all the roads leading into town and that there are few impassible places.¹⁶ The effect good roads have on the local businesses was apparent. In 1925 it was reported that, commercial men were out in force after the roads became passable, and that about a dozen “knights of the grip” had called on local merchants soliciting business for their various firms.¹⁷

Since the improvement in roads, heavy quantities of grain have been coming in from outlying districts such as Gladwin, Jedburgh, Beaverdale, and Drobot. On Friday over four thousand bushels were delivered to local elevators, while Saturday’s deliveries were much heavier. A decided increase in business has resulted, and merchants generally feel more optimistic.¹⁸

The roads were not kept open for automobiles during the winters in the early twentieth century. In April, 1922, for example, it was reported that no cars were in operation yet, though a few driver had taken out licenses and were impatiently waiting for roads to dry up.¹⁹ By the end of the month, however, several cars had emerged from their winter storage.²⁰ A news report from 1923 stated that, Mr. Wallace Anderson of Beaverdale had the honour of being the first man to drive a car into Theodore that spring, and had also been the first car seen in operation on Theodore’s streets the previous year.²¹ Further proof that the roads were not kept open for winter travel by automobiles was a notice that, “Mr. C. DeForge was about to close his garage here for the winter months but would return in March to reopen his business on Henry Street.”²²

People in the Theodore district who were used to putting their automobiles, buggies, and wagons away for the winter in November or December experienced something quite different in late 1923. As the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* reported, that while winter had set in about December 1st, motor cars were still able to travel the roads as late as November 29th.²³ A thaw in late January and early February of 1924 ruined sleighing around Theodore but cars and buggies became the popular means of transportation that winter.²⁴ Never in the memory of the earliest resident of Theodore had cars been able to operate daily every month of the previous twelve.”²⁵

Bennett Buggies

During the Great Depression many people who owned automobiles but could not afford to run them removed the engine and windows and hitched the vehicle to a team of horses. In Canada they were called Bennet buggies because of Prime Minister Richard Bennet. In the United States they were called Hoover wagons.²⁶

In January, 1935 a slightly different version of the Bennet buggy appeared on Theodore's streets. A local farmer had mounted an old car body on a set of sleigh runners. Apparently the passengers enjoyed its comparative warmth protection, comfortable seats, and improved view.²⁷

Highway #14

In the late 1920s the need for significant improvements in the roads leading to Yorkton in the east and Saskatoon in the west became increasingly apparent, and several items in the Theodore news column addressed the issue.

A number of the younger and better looking members of our village motored to Sheho on Thursday night and enjoyed a fine dance. We believe the homeward drive was especially interesting. As soon as the Sheho-Theodore highway is complete" there is no doubt this will prove the most popular drive in the surrounding country for motorists, and then we hope to visit our western friends more often. We can't help liking those Sheho girls.²⁸

Your timely editorial on Saskatchewan's Roads in your issue of the third, Mr. Editor, entirely expresses the sentiments of our people here. All creeds and classes, who are daily paying into government coffers the necessary funds to carry out the promises of the government to gravel the roads and make them passable in all kinds of weather, are becoming weary of the long delay in commencing operations. If Premier Gardiner will go home and settle down to work, he will have less need to tour the province to assure us that we are a happy and contented people. What about commencing work on the Theodore-Insinger highway, Mr. Garry? This was promised prior to last election, and another one will be rolling around before you get the first sod turned.²⁹

One sore point regarding the new highway was the fact that in the spring of 1928 the residents of Theodore and district had been informed that the contract had been let for building the highway from Insinger to Theodore, but at the end of September that year nothing had been done.³⁰

Finally in the spring of 1929 saw some of the survey work being done on the six-mile stretch of road between Theodore and Insinger.³¹ By early June construction was well underway with thirteen different outfits working on the road and more expected.³² During the construction season, the Theodore correspondent kept his readers informed as to the progress on the road. The Government agreed to a request by the Village Council and built part of the highway along the north side of the railway tracks to the Christopher Street railway crossing near Peterson's garage, giving the village close contact with travelers passing through.³³

The portion of the highway between Theodore and Tuffnell in the west was completed by the end of October 1929, and the foreman in charge sold off the horses, wagons, tents and other supplies used during the summer.³⁴ It was generally understood that the government intended to build the Springside-Yorkton portion of the highway in 1930.³⁵

In January a delegation of twenty-five residents from Theodore and district met with government officials in Regina in an attempt to have Highway 14 designated as one of the Trans.-provincial highways. The Village Council financed another delegation of its own because it believed that such a designation would help bring business to the community.³⁶

By early May, 1930 tenders were called for the construction of Highway 14 south and east of Theodore to connect with the portion of the highway that was already completed into Springside.³⁷ As in 1929 regular and frequent reports of the progress being made appeared in the Theodore news column. Everything from the clearing the bush and scrub from the road allowance to grading and graveling was considered newsworthy. According to one report, the departure of one crew from the Theodore areas had the appearance of a circus train as it traveled in single file, and at every stop drew crowds of local sightseers from the stores and places of business, to examine the apparatus that makes it possible to gravel roads at the rate of a mile per day.²² Some of Theodore's residents who owned trucks were able to earn extra money by hauling gravel to the graveling crew.²³

The end of October, 1930 saw Theodore connected with distant points in the east west by an all weather highway, and residents were looking forward to receiving the benefits the new highway would bring.²⁴ Even before construction was completed the new highway was having an impact on the village. The following appeared in the Theodore news column in July, 1930:

Never before have so many strangers been seen daily in our little town. Travelers and tourists passing both east and west, are daily callers at the ice cream parlors and stores. 'there is no doubt that the completion of Route 14 will make this highway one of the most popular in the west, linking up with the Manitoba Provincial highway and connecting the cities of Winnipeg, Yorkton Saskatoon and Edmonton, not to mention Theodore, will make it a heavily traveled road, lined with hot dog stands, ice cream booths and gas filling stations.'²⁵

Other benefits of the new highway are described in the chapters dealing with Theodore's business community.

Notes:

1. "Yorkton," *The Leader*. Regina Assiniboia, North West Territories. 7 May, 1896
2. "Yorkton," *The Leader*. 20 July, 1893.
3. "Theodore," *The Leader*. 11 January, 1894.
4. "Theodore," *The Leader*. 31 May, 1894.
5. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 2 June, 1921.
6. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 July, 1921.
7. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 July, 1921.
8. "Theodore" *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 May, 1922.
9. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 31 May, 1927.
10. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 July, 1922.
11. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 August, 1922.
12. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 August, 1922.
13. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 November, 1925.
14. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 September, 1926.
15. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 September, 1926.
16. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 May, 1923.
17. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 May, 1925.
18. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 26 February, 1924.
19. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 April, 1922.
20. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 April, 1922.
21. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 May, 1923.
22. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 25 November, 1920.

23. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 December, 1923.
24. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 February, 1924.
25. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 21 March, 1924.
26. "Bennett buggy" *Wikipedia*. Retrieved 31 January from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bennett_buggy
27. "Sedan on Runners Latest Edition 'Bennett Buggy,'" *The Leader-Post*. 23 January, 1935.
28. Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 June, 1928.
29. Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 7 July, 1928.
30. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 September, 1928.
31. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 April, 1929.
32. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 7 June, 1929.
33. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 July, 1929.
34. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 October, 1929.
35. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 October, 1929.
36. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 January, 1930.
37. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 May, 1930.
22. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 22 August, 1930.
23. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 8 September, 1931.
24. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 October, 1930.
25. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 15 July, 1930.