

Chapter 3 - Communication and Transportation

Establishing the Post Office

Communication between the people living in the community that was growing up around the Seeman farm in the early 1890's was an absolute necessity, and one of the first demands of the early settlers was for a post office. Prior to establishment of the Seeman ranch in 1892 mail addressed to the residents of New Denmark had simply been dropped off at Ole Frederickson's farm by the contractor who delivered the mail to Sheho Lake.¹

The efforts to have an official post office established in the Theodore district are first mentioned in the summer of 1892 when the Theodore correspondent to The Leader wrote, "We have been asking for a postoffice for over six months. From 50 to 60 persons would receive mail, but so far no post office. Could not N. F. Davin, Esq. help us by touching up the Postmaster-General? Sheho mail drives right by the route."² (Nicholas Flood Davin was the Conservative Member of Parliament for the Federal Electoral District of Yorkton.) The efforts of the local settlers to secure postal service finally paid off as the Theodore correspondent to The Leader noted, "Post office at last! After a year and a half of waiting the Government granted the settler's petition. Three months was [an] abundance of time to fix up that bit of business, as Sheho mail was running weekly through the settlement."³

It appears that the location of the post office remained on the Seeman farm for several years. Richard Seeman, the owner of the farm, was appointed as Theodore's first postmaster.⁴ He resigned his position within a year and was replaced by G. J. Mitchell, the farm manager. Wesley W. Watts who succeeded Mitchell as farm manager also succeeded him as postmaster as well. It

is interesting to note that years later, Seeman, who never was a British subject used the fact that he had been Theodore's first post master to acquire a British passport.

In 1898 A. C. Tracey was appointed post master, and it is likely that the post office was moved to his store which was, at that time, a log building located just east of the present town site. The post office would have moved again when Mr. Tracey built his new store on Main Street. It is interesting to note that on 10 October, 1911 the Liberal government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier was defeated and replaced by the Conservative government of Sir Robert Borden. A. C. Tracey, who had been appointed by the Laurier government was dismissed from his position on the grounds of political partisanship in 1912 and replaced by Louis Kelson, another Theodore merchant.

Getting the Mail to and from Theodore

Prior to the arrival of the railway, mail sent to and from remote communities such as Theodore and Sheho was transported by individuals under contract to the government. They used their own horses and wagons and would make the trip between these communities and Yorkton once or twice a week. After the arrival of the railway the mail was transported in special mail cars, sometimes referred to as Railway Post Offices. Here mail was sorted by trained post office employees as the train progressed from community to community.

OCT 15 1892
CANADA

Post Office Inspector's Office,

Winnipeg, Man.

No. 457. 12th. October 1892.

Sir,

I have the honour to make the following report upon the accompanying application for the establishment of a new Post Office in the Electoral Division of Eastern Assiniboia, referred to me ~~for enquiry~~ on the 27th. June last for enquiry and report, and in connection therewith, to submit the following particulars, viz.:—

- Proposed site: Section I, Township 23, Range 7 west of 2nd Meridian, Eastern Assiniboia.
- Proposed Name: 'THEODORE'.
- Proposed Postmaster: Alexander Mc.Millan
- Neighbouring Post Offices:

NAMES.	DISTANCE AND DIRECTION.
WHITE SAND	9 miles east
EBENEZER	18 miles E.S.E.
YORKTON	24 miles S.E.

- Number of families to be accommodated by proposed office: about forty.
- Character of population: Majority Polish and Danish immigrants with some English and Canadian Farmers.

(OVER.)

The Honourable
The Postmaster General,
Ottawa.

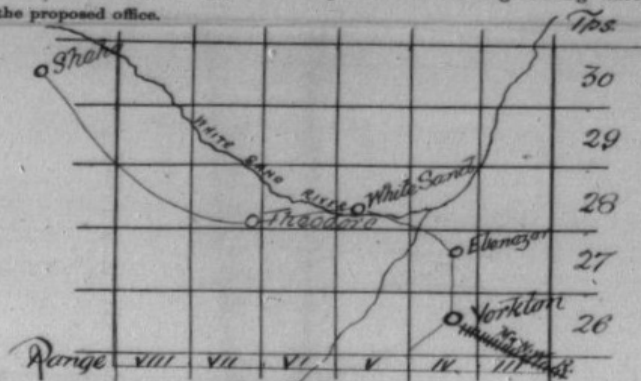
114 A.-1,000-25-1-92.

7. Mode and frequency of service Weekly by the Sheho and Yorkton
mail courier, the proposed office being on his route.

8. Estimated cost of Service, \$ Nil. per annum.

9. Probable Revenue, \$ 50.00 per annum.

10. The map-sketch below shows the positions of the neighbouring offices and of the proposed office.



FURTHER OBSERVATIONS.

There is one general store in the immediate neighborhood of proposed Theodore but the settlement is purely an agricultural one. It is stated that the proposed extension of the Man. & North Western Railway will pass at or near Theodore.

In this connection I beg to return the letter from Mr. Wm. Lamport dated at Sheho the 11th. July, offering to serve any Post Offices which may be established on the line of his route without extra cost. Mr. William Lamport is the Contractor for the SHEHO & YORKTON weekly mail service at the rate of \$350.00 per annum as notified you by my report No. 408 of the 23rd. instant.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

W. W. Lamb

For many years there were two trains bringing mail to Theodore. Mail from the east arrived in the morning and mail from the west in the evening. The postmaster was required to meet both trains in order to receive and dispatch Theodore's mail. According to Olga Mellan, mail bags were transported to and from the station first in a wheel barrow and later in a two wheeled cart built locally by William Quinton.⁵ In 1960 mail service to Theodore was discontinued by the CPR and the mail was delivered directly to the post office by truck.



A. C. Tracy's General Store and Post Office on Main Street 1905 Courtesy Bruce Frederickson



Theodore's Main Street in the 1920s
 Theodore Drug Store (left), Post Office (centre), and John Hooe's building (right)
 Courtesy Dwight Mercer 0

The Post Office Controversy 1919

Louis Kelson was officially listed as the postmaster between the years 1912 and 1919, and it appears that the post office was a very busy place during those seven years. The first indication of the increased business at the post office occurred in the fall of 1915 after the government had introduced a "War Tax" which was paid by using postage stamps issued for the purpose. The Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* commented"

Whether the War Tax is making any difference to the general revenue of the country or not, we are not in a position to state, but the postmaster here reports his office doing double last year's business in stamp sales, and continually increasing.⁶

A second indication of increased business at the post office is the mention of a number of people who served as assistants to the post master. So far the following persons have been mentioned in the Theodore news as working in the post office: In 1915 it was announced that “Miss Mabel Reese has accepted a position in the post office here.”⁷ in 1918 it was reported that “J. Frank Baxter has resigned his position in the post office and will build a home on his farm,” and that David Smith was now assistant postmaster. No one more accommodating than genial Dave.”⁸ In 1921 J. S. Anderson, Theodore’s correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise*, provided a brief description of his experiences working in the post office:

Several years of post office work proved to your correspondent just how tiresome and monotonous this work can be. The holiday seasons, such as Christmas, proved the most trying and arduous time of all - Daily handing out parcels of Xmas presents and taking them in, but seldom were any addressed to the postmaster – who it seems is looked upon as a part of the government machine, whose over-wrought nerves never seem worthy of any consideration.⁹

As the Great War drew to a close, in 1918, there was a popular sentiment that the position of postmaster should be transferred from Louis Kelson, to one of the soldiers returning from the war, thereby causing a minor controversy in the village and surrounding area. Theodore’s correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* wrote:

Now that a suitable man has returned from the front it would be a graceful act on the part of Postmaster Kelson, if he were to step out and make room for one whose claims are greater. We hope to see this come to pass.¹⁰

In a letter to the editor of *The Yorkton Enterprise* an unidentified resident of the Theodore area described an encounter between Kelson and some local residents:

. . . It is a well known fact here that Mr. Kelson was waited on by several citizens as asked to resign and also asked to recommend the appointment of a returned soldier, but he refused to do so. . . . Mr. Kelson has many times stated that he would be willing to resign

in favour of the first returned man who was capable of handling the office but it appears these previous promises have been forgotten. . . .¹¹

Another letter to the editor casts further light on the situation:

Sir, - A returned soldier who has unwittingly become the subject of a controversy amongst the people of Theodore, wishes to make it known that the post office was offered to him by the present postmaster some two weeks ago, but offered in such a manner that unless the soldier's spirit were impaired to a greater extent than his physique he could do no other than refuse it. To accept it his spirit would of necessity be as poor in quality as that in which the offer was made.

Returned soldiers do not ask charity – or accept offers accompanied by whines and crudely veiled accusations as to their taking another person's livelihood. The morale which Canada expects her representatives "over there" to show the world at large must be allowed for surely when they return.

If the postmaster instead of proclaiming aloud his unbounded patriotism were to offer like a man to set aside for a returned soldier it would well become him.

If one could not be found from among those who have gone from Theodore, a letter to the office in charge of Soldiers' Re-establishment, Winnipeg, Man., would be a quick way to obtain a capable, responsible patriot to hold the position.

And a Theodore returned soldier who cannot now in honour accept the post office asks the people of Theodore to see to it that they do have for this position a disabled soldier.

14871 Sergt. E. J. Leicester
78th Battalion
Theodore, Sask.¹²

Although Harold Halkier was dismissed from his post office clerkship by Kelson in February 1918 to make room for a returned soldier, it appears that nothing further was done to secure a returned soldier for the position of postmaster at Theodore until the summer of 1919.¹³ In July 1919 it was announced that R. W. Mercer, a returned soldier, was the "head push" in the post office.¹⁴ The controversy ended with the following news item:

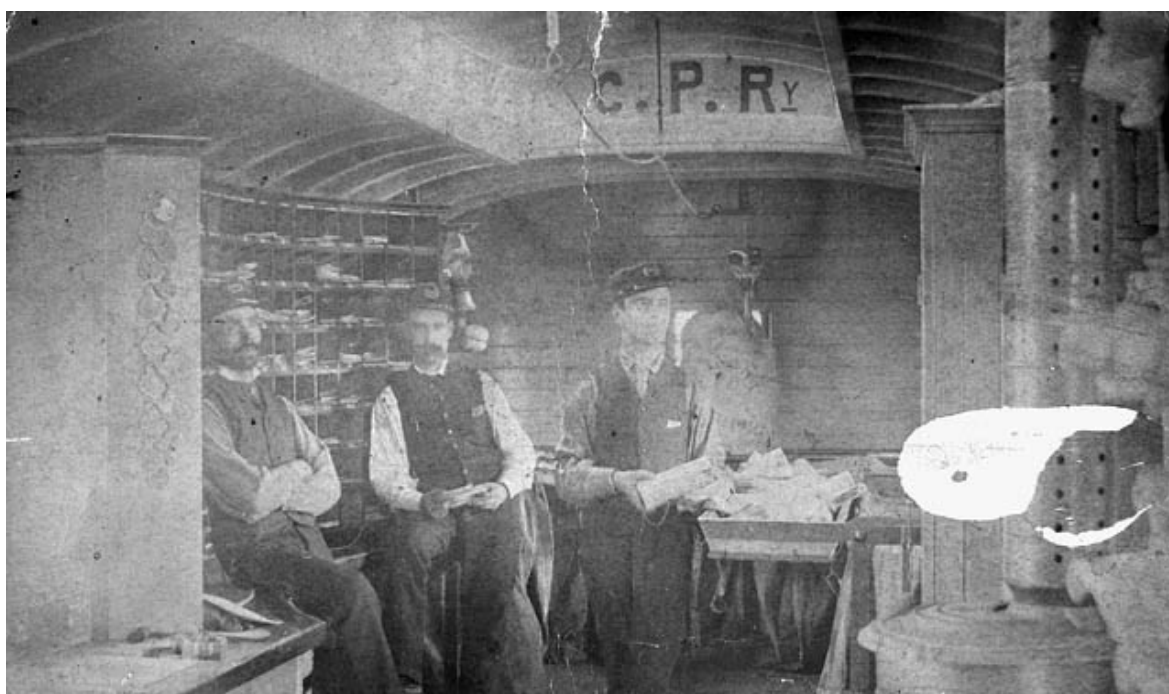
It is stated on good authority that Mr. Louis Kelson has resigned the office of postmaster, and patrons will be pleased to learn the Mr. R. Mercer has been recommended to succeed him. Dick lately returned from overseas, where he saw nearly four years service, is deservedly popular and will fill the position acceptably to all.¹⁵

Prior to the summer of 1919 the position of postmaster had been held by one of the local merchants, and the post office was located in the postmaster's store. With the popular sentiment demand that a returned soldier be given the job of post master it became evident that the location of the post office would have to change, and the people of Theodore were determined to have a post office in a centrally located building and not connected with any store.¹⁶ Consequently in the fall of 1919 the Theodore correspondent reported that Dr. Ekins was erecting a building next door to his drug store to be used as a postoffice.¹⁷ The new post office was opened in November, 1919 , and served the community for the ensuing 46 years.

Postmaster Mercer has installed his fine new office on Main Street next to the drug store, having moved boxes and office fixtures on Saturday. The new location proves more satisfactory to all concerned being much more central.¹⁸

It is interesting to note for that some years the mail for several smaller post offices in the area was first delivered to Theodore by train and then an independent contractor would deliver it to these smaller post offices. This practice came to an end in 1930, and was announced to the readers of the Theodore news as follows:

After having been served by mail from Theodore for many years the post offices of Jedburgh and Crowtherview will, after May 15th. receive their mail by train twice a week. Mr. L. W. Peterson of Theodore has acted in the capacity of mail driver over this route for several years and until a year or so ago the route included Beaver Dale and Gladwin post offices as well, and it is only fair to say that Mr. Peterson has proven as obliging and efficient as any one possibly could be and has never failed to get through, in spite of roads, which at times were impossible for anyone but "Lou."¹⁹



Railway Post Office Car about 1900. Library and Archives Canada



Railway Post Office Car 1920 - Archives Canada

The growth of Other Postal Services

It is interesting to note that certain services normally expected of a modern post office were not available in Theodore during the yearly twentieth century. For example, it was not until the fall of 1921 that parcels could be insured. According to an item in *The Theodore Tattler* that explained the new procedure the post master would issue a receipt with the value of the parcel, and if the parcel was lost, the sender would present the receipt and would be paid the value of the parcel. According to the article:

The premium for insurance is 3c for parcels value not exceeding \$5.00, 6c for parcels value more than \$5.00 but less than \$25.0, 12c for parcels value more than \$25.00 but less than \$50.00, and 30c for parcels value over \$50.00 but less than \$100.00.²⁰



This postcard from Mrs Mary Anderson, the author's grandmother, to her sister-in-law Lena Hanson of Yorkton was found on ebay 28 December, 2021 and is now in the author's collection. The text reads as follows: Dear Lena, I hope you received my letter and will send the silk as soon as you can, as I should fix Mabel's dress for Xmas if you are you not coming to Theodore for Xmas hope this will find you well, Good bye write soon.

Notes:

1. Westerhaug Rachel, "Guest, Thomas John Family" *Theodore and District History*. p.241
2. "Theodore," *Leader*, Regina Assiniboia. 2 February, 1893.
3. "Theodore," *Leader*, Regina Assiniboia. 28 December, 1893.
4. Mellen, Olga, "Theodore Post Office History," Theodore Historical Society, *Theodore and District History*, 1987 p. 29.
5. Mellen, Olga, "Theodore Post Office History," Theodore Historical Society, , *Theodore and District History*. p.29-30.
6. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise* 16 September, 1915
7. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 August, 1915.
8. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 15 August, 1918.
9. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 21 July, 1921.
10. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 5 September, 1918.
11. "Theodore Postmastership, *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 12 September, 1918.
12. "The Theodore Postmastership," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 26 September, 1918.
13. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 5 September, 1918.
14. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 17 July, 1919.
15. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 24 July, 1919.
16. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*, 27 February, 1919
17. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 9 October, 1919
18. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 November, 1919.
19. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 April, 1930.
20. "Insure Parcels in Mail" *The Theodore Tattler*. 29 September 1921.