

Chapter 3 - Communication and Transportation

The CPR Arrives at Theodore

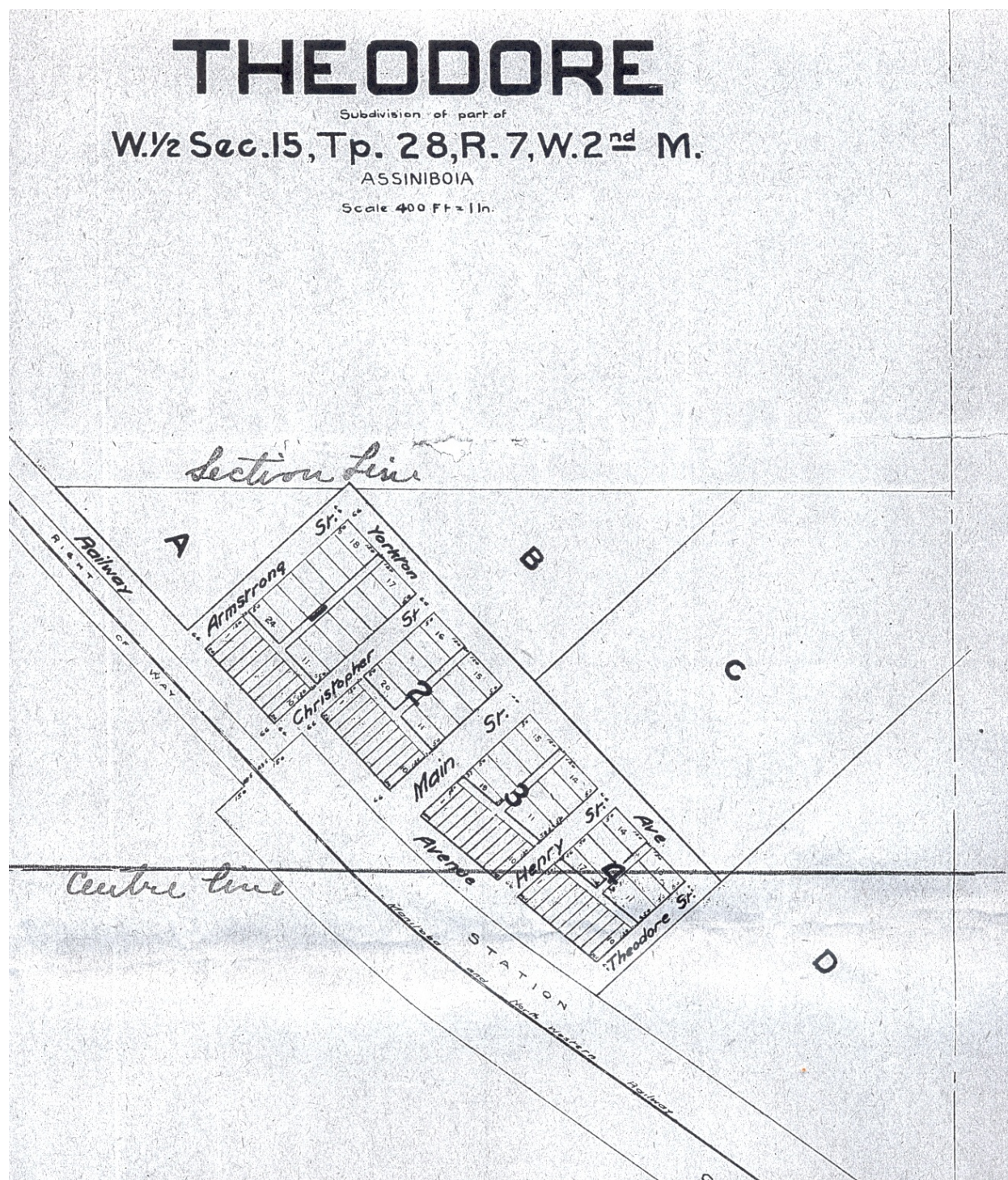
Construction

Although the village of Theodore did not exist before the arrival of the railway in 1902, there had been many calls from the people of the Theodore district for the M.&NWR to extend its line west of Yorkton as had been promised from the very inception of the railway in the mid 1880's. A chronic shortage of cash, however, prevented the railway from fulfilling its commitment and nothing happened until the line was taken over by the CPR at the turn of the century. The hopes and desires of the people for the railway found a voice in the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* who in 1900 wrote, "People are quite elated over prospects of the railroad being continued this summer."¹ In 1902, he again wrote, "Most of us are looking forward to the long looked for railway. They say it is certain this time."²

After the rails were laid during the summer of 1902 the location of the village became an topic of discussion in the area, and the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* wrote:

Now that we have the rails laid the next thing is where is the town to be, at the siding 13 miles from town or at the siding 23 miles from Yorkton. We believe that there is a petition in circulation in favour of the town at the first mentioned location.³

The CPR, however, chose to locate its station at mile post number 25, and set aside the two quarters of section 27-7-W2 on west the village town site.⁴ According to McVey, W. Jones was the Engineer in charge of the survey work, J. Cotton supervised the track laying, and the road building was done by Italians.⁵



First Map of the Village of Theodore 1903

Saskatchewan Archives Reference #: A150.69 (S) First Map of the Village of Theodore 1903

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One of the first and probably the most long lasting challenges faced by Theodore's residents arose from the CPR's choice of land for the town site. The simple fact of the matter is that the site chosen for the villages was and still is one of the wettest in the immediate area. Commenting on the drought that Theodore experienced in the early 1930's the Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* wrote that one could hardly find sufficient water to float a duck in the neighbouring sloughs and compared the situation to that of some 20 years earlier when some visitors described the village as being similar to Venice, almost entirely surrounded by water.⁶

The fact that the two quarters designated for the town site were very wet meant that the residents of Theodore spend decades dealing with flooded cellars and basements, muddy roads, and a host of other water related problems. Some people have speculated that one of the reasons for choosing this location was that it was too wet to be easily sold to any prospective farmer and similar comments have been made about other communities along the CPR railway lines. The following item appeared in the Theodore news column in 1919.

Ever since Theodore was first placed on the map it has been a matter of regret among citizens that a more suitable site was not chosen for its location – several thousand dollars have been raised by debenture and spent in the past ten years in an endeavour to fill up sloughs and holes but there is still much need of further expenditures to put the town in good shape. However, if each one does his share in improving his own property in this regard, a great change can be made in the appearance of our town without much public expenditure; and when one considers the tremendous amount of business done here each year, surely our village is worthy of every effort put forth to beautify it.⁷

In the summer of 1923, the Village Council engaged Mr. A. E. Gregory to construct a ditch along the south side of Railway Avenue in order to obtain better drainage of the business section of the village.⁸ While the drainage ditch did provide some relief to the residents who had to contend with

the water logged streets, the problem did not go away, as indicated by a 1925 news item which stated that some of Theodore's streets resembled muskegs.⁹ It was not at all uncommon for motor vehicles to become stuck in the mud on Theodore's main thoroughfares.¹⁰ The drainage ditch was supplemented by two large cement culverts placed across Railway Avenue in the summer of 1930 in the hope that they would eliminate some the trouble caused every spring by insufficient drainage which caused the ground to heave and damage building.¹¹

Even the CPR had to face the problems caused by the water. When in 1927 it places a carload of cinders on the elevator road along their right-of-way, it was pointed out that what was really required was to raise this road sufficiently high to protect it from the water.¹²

Another interesting feature of Theodore's location was that while there were many sloughs and potholes on the surface there was no good source of potable water for drinking and cooking. Water for these purposes would have to come from wells that reached depths of one hundred feet and more.

By 1903 the town site had been surveyed and a map showing several streets and avenues had been produced. One interesting feature of this first map of Theodore is that it does not show any railway crossings. However, it appears that at some point a railway crossing was established on Henry avenue to provide access the elevators from the north and to the village from the south.¹³ In 1911 that the CPR closed the crossing on Henry Street and opened the railway crossing on Christopher Street.¹⁴ This new railway crossing soon became the primary way of accessing the businesses in the village from south of town and from highway 14 after it was built in the late 1920's.



CPR Station at Theodore 1940. Courtesy the Bruce Frederickson Collection



Theodore Historical Museum - The Author's Collection

The First Train To and From Sheho

Even though the tracks were laid by the fall of 1902, and people were hoping to be able to take the train to Yorkton in 1903, it wasn't until January 1904 when the first train ran from Yorkton to Sheho, some seventeen miles west of Theodore. On 14 January, 1904 *The Yorkton Enterprise* carried the following story on its front page.

First Train To and From Sheho

CPR Inaugurates New Passenger Service out of Yorkton Once a Week Accommodation was Poor but Improvement is Promised for next Saturday

On Saturday last there was inaugurated the weekly passenger train service between Yorkton and Sheho.

At precisely 8:30 o'clock on the morning of that day Conductor McDonald, in whose charge the first CPR passenger train was run into Sheho, gave the signal to Engineer Green of engine No. 531, at the Yorkton Station, to go ahead. The train crew included Brakemen McKagne and McDonald.

On board the train was Divisional Superintendent Brownlee, of Brandon, who was making his first trip to Sheho.

The passenger list was not heavy, being made up chiefly of travellers. On arrival at Sheho nothing in the nature of a demonstration took place. Seemingly to the citizens of the new town the coming of the first regular passenger train was but a matter of ordinary moment.

After two or three hours the return journey was commenced to Yorkton, the train arriving here at 5:30 in the evening.

Coach was Missing

The accommodation provided for the passengers was not up to the standard. All who made the trip were huddled into a caboose, the coach it was intended to have placed on the run not having arrived. It is promised for next Saturday that the coach will be on hand and that the comforts of passengers will receive greater consideration than on the initial trip.

For the first few years, the CPR ran only one train between Yorkton to Sheho each week. The people living in Theodore, however, were not satisfied with this level of service and worked toward improving it. At the end of January, 1909 it was reported in *The Yorkton Times* that beginning on 23 February, there would be two trains each week running between Yorkton and

the new western terminus at Wynyard with trains going west on Tuesday and Thursday and returning to Yorkton on Wednesday and Friday.¹⁵

On 18 March 1909, it was reported that the Theodore Board of trade, which had been organized in 1908 had written to Vice President Whyte of the CPR, requesting better train services.¹⁶ The result was that the service between Yorkton and Sheho was upgraded to three times each week. Daily train service through Theodore began in early of May 1910.¹⁷ Eventually, service improved to the point where there was a westbound passenger train going through Theodore each morning and an eastbound passenger train every evening.



Unidentified passengers on the railway platform at Theodore
Courtesy Glenn Lundeen [Http://www.prairie-towns.com](http://www.prairie-towns.com)

Rumoured Railway Expansion

Sheho remained the “end of the line” for several years. In 1909, however, the Theodore correspondent to *The Manitoba Morning Free Press* wrote:

The extra gang above mentioned has been employed here for the past month ballasting the track between Yorkton and Sheho. Another gang of about the same size (over 80 men) is working on the western part of the line, between Sheho and Wynyard. Four trains have been busy the entire month hauling gravel, and when finished this branch will be in first-class shape to handle the crop next year. It is said that when the ballasting is finished the company will lay a few miles of steel between Wynyard and Lanigan giving a direct line to Saskatoon, and later to Edmonton, which will no doubt become the main line to Edmonton when the other end of the line is completed.^{18]}

In the years prior to World War I there were numerous rumours concerning the possible expansion of railway facilities at Theodore. On 5 May 1909, for example, it was rumoured that the CPR was looking at Theodore as a possible divisional point.¹⁹ A second rumour was that the CPR planned to build a line from Theodore to Nokomis. The Theodore correspondent to *The Yorkton Enterprise* wrote:

We fail to see any mention in this year’s programme for the building of the Nokomis to Theodore line. This is a disappointment, but to those who are patiently awaiting the advent of this road, we might say indications point to its early construction.²⁰

The rumour still existed a year later when it was rumoured that the Nokomis to Theodore line of the CPR would be commenced that summer and the Theodore correspondent simply said “We hope it is true.”²¹ The line between Nokomis and Theodore was never built.

Rumors of any CPR expansion from Theodore to those districts lying south west of the village remained alive until March, 1927. In 1921, for example the Canadian government authorized an extension that would have run from Theodore to a point somewhere between Govan and Lanigan.²² Theodore was still waiting for that extension four year later.

The proposed extension of the CPR branch from Theodore to Govan, due west, has raised new hopes in the hearts of farmers located along the proposed route, many of whom have waited patiently for twenty years for the coming of the rails. It is gratifying to know that the company must commence operations on this branch within two years to protect their charter. Then watch Theodore grow. Those with foresight will secure a little real estate while the buying is good.²³

In the fall of 1926 there was another rumour of a CPR extension from Theodore. This time the new line was supposed too run from Theodore to Duval.

In Tuesday's issue of The Enterprise notice is given by the Manitoba and Northwestern Railway Company of their intention to apply to the next parliament for permission construct a railway line from Theodore to a point at or near Duval, on the Pheasant Hills extension. This is good news to residents of this village, and especially to farmers residing in the territory west of town, that will be served by the proposed railroad. There are thousands of acres of valuable farm lands along the route and the advent of the railway will see the land quickly snapped up, and rendered productive. Theodore may yet be known as the junction town of the west. Here's hoping.²⁴

At the beginning of March, 1927 hope was expressed that work on a CPR line from Theodore to Duval would begin that year, but those hopes were dashed when at the end of March it was announced that the CNR would build a branch from Yorkton to Willowbrook, much to the satisfaction of those living in that area.^{25 26}

One of the immediate results of the CNR's extension to Willowbrook was an increased interest in farming south west of Theodore.²⁷

Mr. Nick Lipak last week purchased a quarter section some six miles south west of Yorkton from the Hudson Bay Co. The price being in the neighbourhood of \$2500. This would indicate new interests in land in that district, owing no doubt to the construction of the Willowbrook, Crowtherview line further west. It might also be stated that there are thousands of acres of land close to this new line, that can be purchased at the present time very cheaply.²⁸

The increased interest in farming south west of Theodore in turn resulted in the construction of new communities and new grain elevators at points along the new line, and much of the grain that

has in past years been delivered to Theodore, Springside and Willowbrook, would be marketed at these new points.²⁹ It is worth noting that neither the opening of these new elevators nor the establishment of new communities appears to have had any negative impact on Theodore. Railway business in Theodore continued to grow and in 1927 the CPR enlarged its yard at Theodore and provided an assistant for the station agent.^{30 31} The following item reflects the general feeling in Theodore toward the new communities along the CNR's new line.

A first visit to the new town of Jedburgh reveals quite a hamlet already in existence and new buildings are being erected all the time, although only a half hour's drive from either Theodore or Springside, the Jedburgh people evidently have ambitions of their own. And will soon have a nice tidy little town where only a year ago there was little but a farm house. Our heartiest congratulations are due our friends in Jedburgh.³²

Theodore's Station

Once the tracks were laid the CPR began the construction of several track side facilities. One of the first to be build was, of course, the station. The Canadian Railway Station at Theodore was designed by Ralph B Pratt in 1899.³³ The station, officially listed in the CPR records as No. 6579, was built in 1902 at a cost of \$4,000, and measured 75' x 26' on the main floor. Only a few stations were built following this design, and this is the only type 9 station in Saskatchewan of the "Pratt Design" which is still in useable condition.

One of the important parts of all railway stations on the prairies was the freight room which, in the case of the Theodore station, was located at the east end of the building. It was here that items being shipped from Theodore such as crates of eggs, cream or milk cans, and all other goods were stored until the train arrived. These items were loaded on to large wagons that were

pulled over to the train when it arrived. The empty wagons were then loaded with freight and pulled back into the freight room until arrangements for its delivery could be made.

Delivery of freight items was made to various businesses and residences by horse drawn drays. It should be noted here that in addition to the usual freight items destined for the merchants in Theodore were the trunks that contained the settlers' effects. Sufficient freight was brought into Theodore that by the spring of 1914 the village had three licensed draymen.³⁴

The second important part of the station was the waiting room which was furnished with wooden benches and a stove or heater for the comfort of the passengers. Some of the early designs for the Pratt stations had a beam running the width of the room that was meant to be part of a wall dividing the space into two rooms, one for the women and the other for men. However, between the time when the architect's plans were drawn and the actual construction date, many of the plans were changed to include only one room.³⁵ There is no evidence that the Theodore station ever had two waiting rooms. Numerous news items state that the station waiting room was often used as a public facility in which church services and other events were held.

The station agent and his family lived upstairs at the station. The size of the dwelling area was fairly spacious for the time, as the job of the station agent was considered to be prestigious.³⁶ Because there was only one train per week in each direction in 1904 and three each week in 1909, the CPR decided that it was not necessary to have a full-time station agent at Theodore. This meant, of course, that the CPR telegraph service which was essential to both the operation of the railway and businesses in the community, had to be set up in one of the local stores.

The people who lived in the Theodore district, were no happier with the lack of a station agent than they were with the level of rail service during those early years, and believed that the

presence of a full-time station agent was essential part of obtaining better rail service. Efforts to secure a station agent for Theodore were well under way as early as 1906 when the people of Theodore sent a petition to W. W. White, a vice president of the CPR pointing out that towns doing a smaller amount of business already had agents, that more than one hundred thousand bushels of grain had been shipped from Theodore, and that another hundred and fifty thousand bushels would likely be shipped before next harvest.³⁷ The petition also mentioned the amount of cordwood that was shipped out of Theodore together with the fact that Theodore was “an excellent stock district.”³⁸ The petition must have been effective because in the spring of 1907 Theodore’s first station agent, H. W. Baldwin arrived to take up his duties.³⁹

Other Track Side Facilities Constructed by the CPR

The loading ramp and platform already mentioned in Chapter 9 proved to be inadequate by the early 1920's. In early November it was reported that eight cars of grain had been loaded at one time in one week. Six of those cars had been loaded from the ground because the loading platform only accommodates two cars at once.⁴⁰ Theodore loaded and shipped at least 74 cars of grain over the loading platform, or from the ground in 1923.⁴¹

In addition to the loading ramp and livestock pens mentioned in Chapter 9, other early structures were soon erected by the CPR. The first was the section house in which the foreman of the section gang, as track maintenance crews were called, resided. According to *The Winnipeg Tribune* on 17, March 1911 the CPR called for tenders to build a section house at Theodore. Mr. J. O. Spencer and his family moved into the new section house in early September of that year.⁴²

Finally, the CPR built a water tank at Theodore. Little information could be found on this structure other than that it and the station were painted in the summer of 1910.⁴³ Because of a lack of water suitable for the steam locomotives in the village, the CPR laid a pipeline from Hanson's Lake, also known as Theodore Lake, located about a half mile from the village, to the water tank in 1925.⁴⁴ The water tank served the railway until 1926.

During the high winds of Friday afternoon the big round building containing the CPR water tank crashed to the ground with a roar that could be heard all over the town. For a time it was feared that some of the village children might have been buried in the debris, as they had been in the habit of playing around the tank, but such was not the case. The building and tank are a total wreck.⁴⁵

Theodore had been using water from the CPR water tank to flood its skating rink and the loss of tank created an added expense for the Community Club who now had to haul water for the rink.



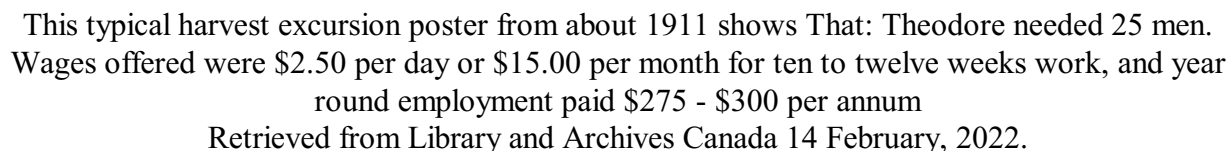
Loading Platform on the Seeman Ranch - Courtesy Bruce Frederickson

Transporting People - Excursions

Although the CPR had a monopoly on rail transportation in the area and could set its rates to suit itself, it did not always do so. There were many occasions when the CPR offered special excursion rates to the residents of western Canada. One well-known example of this was the special rates given to eastern Canadians who wished to earn money by helping with the harvests in the west. A second example was the special rates that were sometimes given to people who wanted to explore homestead opportunities in the west, but were unwilling to make a commitment until they had seen for themselves what the west had to offer. In both cases the railway stood to make more money in the long run than what it might lose by offering special rates. Grain that was harvested with the help of eastern labour had to be shipped to the ports by the railway, and everything that the new settlers bought or sold was carried by the railways.

Another form of CPR excursions were the special rates that were often given in order to attract people to certain sporting events in the larger district. For example, when Theodore held its first annual picnic in 1905 arrangements were made with the CPR to hold the train at Theodore until 8 p.m. so that attendees from east of town could spend the whole day at the picnic.⁴⁶ In the same way, arrangements were made for a special train from Theodore to Yorkton on June 8, so that people could attend the ball game for the Garry cup.⁴⁷ By the end of August, 1911 passenger traffic through Theodore had increased to the point that an extension of the station platform was needed because the length of the passenger trains has increased so greatly.⁴⁸

In many cases railway excursions were a good value. Once in a while, however, they were a source of great disappointment. One such disappointment occurred in March, 1938 when a number of people from Theodore attended a hockey game in Yorkton. Disappointment first came



I wasn't late enough.

TRAVEL

Special Train
TO
YORKTON
EXHIBITION

JULY 15-18

Special Will be Operated on
JULY 17th

Lv. Wynyard	6.15 a.m.
Mozart	6.34
Elfros	6.47
Leslie	7.03
Foam Lake	7.22
Tuffnell	7.37
Sheho	7.53
Insinger	8.08
Theodore	8.26
Springside	8.51
Orcadia	9.08
Ar. Yorkton	9.25 a.m.
Returning	
Lv. Yorkton	11.00 p.m.

ONE WAY FARE
AND ONE THIRD
FOR ROUND TRIP

Tickets on Sale from all stations Birtle to Wynyard inclusive July 14 to 17 and on July 18 for trains due Yorkton before 2.00 p.m. Final return limit July 19th.

G. D. BROPHY,
District Passenger Agent,
REGINA, Sask.

CANADIAN
PACIFIC

Special Train Service

to

Yorkton Fair

FROM SWAN RIVER
AND INTERMEDIATE POINTS

Wednes., July 16

Leave SWAN RIVER	6.00 a.m.
" KENVILLE	6.23 a.m.
" DURBAN	6.42 a.m.
" BENITO	6.54 a.m.
" ARRAH	7.14 a.m.
" PELLY	7.37 a.m.
" NORQUAY	8.03 a.m.
" HYAS	8.20 a.m.
" STENEN	8.32 a.m.
" STURGIS	8.51 a.m.
" HASSAN	9.04 a.m.
" TADMORE	9.14 a.m.
" AMSTERDAM	9.28 a.m.
" CANORA	9.45 a.m.
" BURGIS	10.09 a.m.
" GORLITZ	10.26 a.m.
" EBENEZER	10.41 a.m.
" MEHAN	10.53 a.m.
" YOUNG'S SIDING	10.59 a.m.
Arrive YORKTON	11.10 a.m.
RETURNING LEAVE YORKTON	11.00 p.m.

FROM WYNYARD
AND INTERMEDIATE POINTS

Thursday, July 17

(C. P. R. RAILWAY TIME)

Leave WYNYARD	6.20 a.m.
" MOZART	6.39 a.m.
" ELFROS	6.52 a.m.
" LESLIE	7.08 a.m.
" FOAM LAKE	7.27 a.m.
" TUFFNELL	7.42 a.m.
" SHEHO	7.58 a.m.
" INSINGER	8.13 a.m.
" THEODORE	8.31 a.m.
" SPRINGSIDE	8.51 a.m.
" ORCADIA	9.08 a.m.
Arrive YORKTON	9.25 a.m.

(Returning Special Train Will Leave Yorkton 11 p.m.)
Information from Local Agent.

Notes:

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2. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 April, 1902.
3. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 18 December, 1902
4. McVey, Gladys. "A Chronicle of the Theodore District," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. I* August, 1940.
5. McVey, Gladys. "A Chronicle of the Theodore District," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. I* August, 1940.
6. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 23 September, 1932.
7. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 September, 1919.
8. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 19 June 1923.
9. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 May, 1925.
10. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 May, 1926.
11. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 June, 1930.
12. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 10 May, 1927.
13. Profit, Dorothy, "Village of Theodore History," Theodore Historical Society, *Theodore and District History*. Regina, Focus Publishing. 1985. p. 7.
14. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Times*. 20 April, 1911.
15. "Sheho Extension: Through Train Service to Wynyard," *The Yorkton Times*. 25 January, 1909.
16. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 May, 1910.
17. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 May, 1910.
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19. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 5 May, 1910.
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21. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 3 April, 1913.
22. "CPR To Extend From Theodore And Tuffnell," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 31 March, 1921.
23. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 May, 1925.
24. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 29 September, 1926.
25. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 1 March, 1927.
26. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 25 March, 1927.
27. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 August, 1927.
28. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 27 November, 1928.
29. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 28 September, 1928.
30. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 20 August, 1927.
31. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 11 October, 1927.
32. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 14 May, 1929.
33. "Morden CPR Station" - 1905/06" Retrieved 2 August 2014 from
<http://www.threshermensmuseum.com/old-stuff/old-stuff/heritage-buildings>
34. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 12 March 1914.
35. "Morden CPR Station" - 1905/06" Retrieved 2 August 2014 from
<http://www.threshermensmuseum.com/old-stuff/old-stuff/heritage-buildings>
36. "Morden CPR Station" - 1905/06" Retrieved 2 August 2014 from
<http://www.threshermensmuseum.com/old-stuff/old-stuff/heritage-buildings>
37. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 December, 1906
38. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 13 December, 1906
39. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*., 19 April 1907
40. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 6 November, 1923.
41. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*. 4 December, 1923.
42. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise*., 7 Sept 1911

43. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.*, 14 July 1910.
44. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 5 May, 1925.
45. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 31 August, 1926.
46. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 12 July 1905
47. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.*, 5 May 1910
48. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Times.* 24 August, 1911.
49. "Theodore," *The Yorkton Enterprise.* 3 March, 1938.