

Birds, Horses and Roads

*Stories from the "East St. Paul Centennial 1916-2016" book
Submitted by Mayor Shelley Hart*

This month's East St. Paul history piece offers three distinct snippets from our past, Birds, Horses and Roads.

Birds, as in the town of Birds Hill, was once called the Village of Roseneath. When this community originated in 1881, the location was said to be the outer two miles of lots 95-96 of St. Paul. These lots were owned by Dr. Curtis James Bird, a prominent figure of the time. Son of Chief Factor James Curtis Bird and Mary Lowman, Dr. Bird was born in 1838. In the first provincial election in 1870, he was elected member of St. Paul's parish and appointed Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. He died in 1878 after contracting pneumonia during a trip to England. The town's name was changed in Dr. Bird's honour. Today, the "unincorporated community" of Birds Hill is the hub of the municipality.

Horses or more specifically those needing their horses shod had a place to go in Birds Hill in the early 1900s. The town was home to an establishment called D. T. Reid's Blacksmith Shop. Located next to Chudleigh's General Store, the blacksmith shop was a gathering place as well as a needed service. It was built in 1909 by owner David Taylor Reid who charged \$2 for four horse shoes. In 1986, David's grandson Alf approached Cooks Creek Heritage Museum and found a lasting home for the building and its contents. Today, visitors can tour the shop, which was painstakingly reconstructed and showcases the tools of a bygone trade.

Roads, an essential part of every community, had a significant and lasting impact on our history. On January 4, 1916, 102 years ago this month, the rural municipality of St. Paul succumbed to its natural barrier, the Red River, and separated into the two municipalities of East and West St. Paul. Today, drivers take for granted the convenience of the Perimeter Highway, but this road did not exist until the late 1950s. Construction began in 1958 and the paving of the eastbound lanes from Henderson Highway to Highway 59 was completed in 1960. The westbound lanes and the Perimeter Bridge between East and West St. Paul were both completed in 1965. As most East St. Paul residents know, construction of the new interchange at the Perimeter Highway and Highway 59 has been ongoing for two years. This project is scheduled to be completed late in 2018.

