



RM OF EAST ST. PAUL

Maps of western Canada drawn by explorer Peter Fidler with East St. Paul connections

Charlene Erb (nee Sneesby) was born in Winnipeg in 1950, the year of the devastating Red River flood. She grew up in the west end and attended Laura Secord School. While visiting family in East St. Paul, she and her husband Horst learned about a local development being proposed - Country Villas. In October 1998, Charlene and Horst were one of the first 12 residents to call Country Villas home. Charlene is thrilled to be living in the community where she has such a strong historical connection.

As told by East St. Paul resident author – Charlene Erb

If the streets of East St. Paul are a roadmap to our past – and they are – we might be surprised to learn that several of them lead back to one central figure in Canadian history.

Names like Hoddinott, Pritchard, Mowat, Bowen and Bird are names of descendants of a man named Peter Fidler, a somewhat unsung hero in our country's history and the great, great, great grandfather of East St. Paul resident Charlene Erb.

Peter Fidler was an explorer, who was profiled in historian J.G. MacGregor's 1966 book *Peter Fidler*. MacGregor used Fidler's own journals – left to his employer, the Hudson's Bay Company, after his passing – to detail his travels and adventures and demonstrate Fidler's role in the development of Canada's west, his involvement with First Nations and the establishment of the Red River Settlement in 1812. Fidler was born in England in 1769 and died at Fort Dauphin, Manitoba in 1822.

MacGregor says Fidler "travelled the length and breadth of western Canada in the late 1700s, laying the framework for all maps of the area. He was the first white man to reach the fabled Athabasca country and the first to establish trade contact with the Kootenay Indians in the Canadian Rockies."

Erb has an extensive collection of old family photos, letters, postcards, newspaper clippings and documents that tell the story of her lineage. She's compiled them into an impressive scrapbook that gives a kind of in-depth visual family history.

Peter Fidler married a Swampy Cree woman named Mary and together they had 14 children. As Peter travelled across Western Canada surveying, map making and fur trading, his wife and children accompanied him and as years passed, his grown chil-

dren began settling in different parts of the west and the Red River settlement.

Erb discovered just how many relations she has when she attended Elk Point, Alberta's Bi-Centennial celebrations in 1992. Peter Fidler was honoured with a 40-foot statue and his relations came from far and wide to participate. "When we got there the number of Fidlers was staggering, they showed up from all over," she said.

Erb's grandfather was Peter Jasper Fidler, who went by the name Jasper. He and his wife, whom he met while overseas during the First World War, settled in East St. Paul on Wallace Avenue. Jasper originally assumed he would farm land in the municipality that was owned by his stepfather. His stepfather was also his uncle, as it was common in those days for a brother to marry his brother's widow.

Jasper's career as a farmer was derailed before it began, when he learned his stepfather had sold the land to a refinery for the sum of \$200. Erb says her family assumes that this land is a portion of the property where the Imperial Oil storage facility stands today on Henderson Highway.

Jasper found work ferrying people back and forth between what today is East and West St. Paul, though at the time the two sides of the river were collectively known as St. Paul. He also worked as a cook on the fishing boats that departed from Selkirk, travelling all over Lake Winnipeg.

The Cenotaph in East St. Paul's Memorial Park list those "who gave their lives in the Great War." Several descendants of Peter Fidler are named including William and Herbert Bowen, Henry Hoddinott and Reuben Taylor. Jasper, along with step brothers John and James are included in the RM of East St. Paul's Roll of Honour, listing those "Men who served in the Great War."

Even James Bird, who Birds Hill is named after, has a connection to the Fidler family – his granddaughter Amelia married Peter Fidler Jr.

There are hundreds of interesting stories that belong to the literally hundreds of descendants of Peter Fidler, and Erb is constantly learning new things about her family. She said she's fortunate that so much research has been done by his descendants and that her grandmother and mother were both staunch believers in keeping records and photographs.



Charlene Erb, above, is a descendant of Peter Fidler, an important figure in Canadian history. Fidler was her great, great, great grandfather. Below, Erb's grandfather, Jasper, and his wife, on a fishing boat where he worked as a cook.



It all serves to tether the ties she has to Western Canada's emergence and indeed, to Birds Hill as well.