

Imperial Oil – The Oil Refinery and the Community

*Stories from the “Heritage II, A History of East St. Paul” book (1992)
Submitted by Mayor Shelley Hart, excerpts from original story by George Mulder*



Imperial Oil depot at 2925 Henderson Highway (taken in 2016)

A new chapter was being written into the future economic history of East St. Paul in 1947 when an Imperial Oil drill crew discovered oil at Leduc, Alberta. It was a welcome and vital transfusion for all of Canada, when men and money were only two years out of the grips of an energy draining World War.

Hardly a community across Canada failed to feel the revitalization which the oil find brought. East St. Paul was one of those communities, and it hasn't looked back. Within a year of the Leduc discovery, companies, men and capital flowed into western Canada.

As Canada became more self-sufficient in petroleum products, it moved from a position of being able to supply only 7 percent of its need to 70 per cent after the discoveries. The national economy received a major boost with the new found oil, and the outflow of Canadian dollars to the United States for the purchase of petroleum products was reduced by hundreds of millions.

It wasn't just by accident that East St. Paul was selected as the site for Imperial Oil's refinery in 1950. To get the new found oil into the expanding Canadian market, a new distribution system was to be developed and East St. Paul fit into this plan. Here was a community that offered all that was required for a new refinery and package warehouse.

East St. Paul had a far-sighted Council that was prepared to provide the necessary zoning laws in order that this industry could develop. Physically, East St. Paul had everything that a refinery needed – an abundance of natural water, proximity to transportation, electrical power and land. Imperial acquired 400 acres of land, which was essentially, River Lots 101 and 102 which extended from the Red River to Raleigh Street.

On April 17, 1950, Premier of Manitoba, Douglas Campbell, turned the first sod to make way for the new refinery. Many residents of East St. Paul were employed in the construction of the refinery and later, as many as 300 local residents became permanent employees.

By the time the refinery was completed in June 1951, at a cost of just over \$10 million dollars, a crude oil spur line from Gretna into East St. Paul was ready to move crude into the new plant. The spur line was 77 miles long with a capacity of 30,000 barrels per day.

After 25 years of operation, the decision was made to shut down the refinery. In 1975, the operation was converted to a pipeline terminal facility. Along with this change, Imperial Oil donated all of its river frontage property to the Province of Manitoba. This area was converted into a park, now known as Hyland Provincial Park, and is now maintained by the R.M. of East St. Paul.