

## Reiach Family

### Charles (Charlie) Reiach

- Charles (Charlie) Reiach was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, in December 1907 to a domestic servant and a railway porter.
- The surname Reiach is from Clan Farquharson (variations Rioch or Riach).
- He grew up in straitened circumstances, losing a brother to tuberculosis and himself surviving diphtheria at age 12.
- At age 14, Charlie was expected to leave school and earn a living. His father began hiring the boy out to work as a farm labourer.
- Just as Charlie would feel relieved that he had finished one contract, he would learn that he was assigned to yet another.
- At 18 he found adventure. A kindly farmer passed newspapers onto Charlie, a move which changed everything.
- An advertising campaign in Scotland captured Charlie's imagination: "Wanted immediately for the Hudson's Bay Company – sturdy youths of good courage, having the spirit of adventure and prepared to rough it."
- Charlie enthusiastically signed on and immigrated to Canada in 1926 with the prospect of a lifelong career with the 'company of adventurers.'
- Charlie became an apprentice fur trade clerk at various northern points – some much more northern than others.
- His first summer was spent at Fort Chipewyan, Alberta.
- From late 1926 until 1928, Charlie learned the fur trade business on Lake Athabasca, at Fond du Lac, Saskatchewan.
- "This boy is making splendid progress. Neat and methodical. Does his full share of work in the store," his first performance review read.
- Charlie received an early honour after his first year in the Hudson's Bay Company's service. A water body in Saskatchewan was named after him by a Dominion land surveyor in 1927. Riach Bay, though misspelled, was cherished by its namesake.
- 1928 was spent at Aklavik, Northwest Territories, and the next year at Fort McPherson on the Peel River, Northwest Territories.
- Charlie was apprentice clerk-in-charge at Fort Wrigley from 1930-1932, and clerk and then fur trader from 1932-1935 at Baillie Island, 70 degrees north where the sun disappears south below the seemingly infinite horizon for 56 days annually.
- In the 1930s, Thomas Scurfield arrived in the western Arctic to become Charlie's apprentice. Through their friendship, Charlie met Tom's sister Hazel, whom he married in 1938.
- In June 1938, Charlie and Hazel headed for the Northwest Territories to his managerial posting at the mouth of the mighty Mackenzie River, at Tuktoyaktuk.
- He was transferred to manage the larger Aklavik post in April 1939.
- During their move to Aklavik by dog sled, Charlie recorded many scenes with a Kodak Brownie camera for which he had paid \$3.25. "The camera worked well enough for three of its snaps to appear in *National Geographic Magazine* in 1938," said Charlie. In addition, some of the long evenings inspired Charlie to write articles for *The Beaver* magazine.
- Into his 90s, Charlie still wrote for publications.
- Charlie was a font of information about northern living, and his tales were tall but true.
- He nearly drowned on the Mackenzie River. As he walked on the ice one spring, it broke apart and he had to jump rapidly from floe to floe to eventual safety. "I could taste fear," Charlie insisted.
- There were other interesting times: when the HBC Governor Sir Patrick Ashley Cooper visited Aklavik, and the night Charlie spent baling a record 10,000 muskrat pelts.
- His son, Charles Jr., was born in 1941. With his education in mind, Charlie accepted a transfer to McKenzie Island, Ontario.
- The family made the great trek from Aklavik to the Red Lake District in September 1945.
- "There was a school for our son, a movie show for Saturday night, then we could rush home to hear Foster Hewitt broadcast on radio the hockey game," Charlie remembered.
- Charlie participated in the Burns Night banquets at Cochenour Hall in the 1950s, and tried his luck in buying stocks of various area mines.

- Charlie was transferred to Madsen to manage its HBC store in October 1953. It was to be his 13th and final appointment with the company.
- After Charlie spent nearly 20 years managing the Madsen store, the Hudson's Bay Company elected to close it in May 1972.
- After 46 years of service, Charlie took early retirement. Ultimately, he greatly enjoyed a 30-year retirement.
- As in other communities in which he lived, Charlie took an active interest in Winnipeg when he moved there with Helen in the 1970s, donating to such causes as The Winnipeg Foundation.
- Although quiet and retiring, elfin Charlie was wholly engaging as a husband, father, grandfather, uncle, supervisor, conversationalist and correspondent.
- His family wrote that Charlie "was proud of his family's successes and valued a good education. He was a gentle man, loving life and complaining little. He took pleasure in the simple things in life: the success of his potato crop, flying a kite with his granddaughters, and wandering the paths of his son's island at Lake of the Woods."
- Charlie railed against the stereotypical portrayal of the "dour Scot" but laughed heartily when, in his 90s, he discovered this comment on a 1920s performance review, now in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives: 'is a Scotsman but has a sense of humour.'
- Reiach died in his 96th year, on October 19th, 2003 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- Despite nearing his centenary and inhabiting a frail body, Charlie's remarkable memory awed family and friends alike.

### Hazel Reiach (nee Scurfield)

- Hazel grew up in the town of Clearwater, Manitoba.
- She was a secretary in a Winnipeg stationary store when she met Charles.
- When she moved to Winnipeg from Clearwater as a young woman, it was unfathomable to think that her life would shift so dramatically.
- Hazel was not only a good sport, but also incredibly strong and self-reliant in her determination to join Charlie in the far north.
- Hazel, like her husband, loved adventure and gamely accepted the unnerving isolation, darkness, and extreme cold of the beautiful and terrifyingly vast Arctic.
- She gave birth to their first child, Charles Jr., in 1941.
- Hazel arrived with her family at McKenzie Island in 1945, and later Madsen in 1953.
- Unlike countless women who wondered if they had reached the end of the earth when they landed in Northwestern Ontario, Hazel was more experienced than most in remote living.
- Hazel died on January 10th, 1999 in her 91st year.

### The Couple

- Hazel and Charlie were married in a simple ceremony in Winnipeg in April 1938.
- "Back in the 'dirty thirties,' weddings were much more low key than they are now...but many lasted," Charlie noted.
- In June 1938 the Reiachs departed Winnipeg by train. From Waterways, Alberta they travelled 1400 miles by river steamers to Aklavik, Northwest Territories. The formidable journey continued to Charlie's managerial posting at the mouth of the mighty Mackenzie River, at Tuktoyaktuk. This part of the trek involved travelling by barge. The Reiachs sat amidst their wedding gifts and their worldly goods, which, Charlie noted, "weren't all that worldly." At one point, the barge capsized and little was salvageable. It took exactly two months to reach their destination from Winnipeg. Hazel and Charlie were the only non-Eskimos resident in Aklavik that winter.
- When Charlie was transferred to manage the larger Aklavik post in April 1939, the Reiachs moved themselves with the help of two dog teams hauling possessions for 140 miles over a two-day period. In winter, the only means of conveyance were either by dog team or on foot, or a combination of both.
- Four years after their son Charles Jr. was born, the family moved from Aklavik to the Red Lake District in September 1945.

- They lived in many places over the decades, but the Reiachs did not exactly move easily. Due to Charlie's career with the Hudson's Bay Company, they lived literally from one remote geographical locale to another – from the Arctic to McKenzie Island and Madsen.
- The Reiachs' daughter Heather Ann was born in 1950.
- Charlie and family saw many changes in wake of the second gold rush to the Red Lake District in the late 1940s: "We saw the highway come into Red Lake – a trifle bumpy for a year or two," Charlie explained.
- Charlie and Hazel especially enjoyed curling.
- They were also faithful adherents of the Red Lake United Church, where they made friendships which were to last 50 years or more.
- After Charlie's retirement from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1972, the Reiachs moved to Winnipeg, then spent several years in Hazel's hometown of Clearwater, Manitoba, returning to Winnipeg in 1994.
- The Reiachs were deeply pleased to have celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in 1998. Charlie's inimitable sense of humour was in fine form as he mused, "What Hazel saw in me I still don't know, but we have had a wonderful life together."

## Children

**Charles Thomas Jr.** was born in an Anglican hospital at Aklavik, Northwest Territories in 1941.

**Heather Ann** was born in 1950 in the Margaret Cochenour Memorial Hospital at Cochenour with the late Dr. C.F. (Bud) Galway attending. Both children attended Madsen Public School, Red Lake District High School, and went on to earn university degrees and enjoy lengthy careers in education.