

# FLY NORTH

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## NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO AVIATION HERITAGE CENTRE

**Preserving and celebrating the diverse history of aviation in the northwest, through the collection and preservation of artifacts and stories of the persons and events that made this region unique in aviation history**

### NOAHC News -----

#### 2018 Visitors and Volunteer Roundup:

Since this is the first *FlyPast* of 2019 it is appropriate to record some of the statistics that apply to NOAHC and its activities in the previous year. In 2018 there were 480 visitors to the Centre. These came mainly on Wednesday and Sunday our official open days, but with Jonathan Sheppard, our Assistant Curator present, visitors were also welcomed at other times.

With only one paid employee, NOAHC depends very much on the contributions made by its volunteers. In 2018, 1788 volunteer hours were recorded. This is very much a minimum number based on volunteer work done at the Centre and does not include uncounted hours spent by volunteers at home or in the community working on such things as the newsletter, researching artifacts and material for displays, or preparing presentations.

An important development in 2018 was the training of 18 volunteers to handle the monthly bingos that NOAHC hosts at the Superior Shores Gaming Association on Memorial Avenue. This entails a commitment of two hours every 2-3 months at most and the revenues from these events make an important contribution to the Centre's finances.

Volunteers require training, before being allowed to participate. This is provided by Superior Shores. If you are interested in being involved in bingos, fundraising workshops have been arranged for April 27, and May 26.

For further information, contact the Centre.

#### Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society

In mid 2018, the Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society requested an article on the origins, aims and development of NOAHC, to appear in the TBHMS's annual *Papers and Records* as part of an occasional series on local museums. The article was published in Volume XLVI (2018), pages 87-93, of the *Papers and Records*. It was written by NOAHC Newsletter editor, Dave Kemp.

### Acquisitions:



Leonard Merkoske has donated a picture of a USAF B-47 bomber similar to one that crashed in Northwestern Ontario in 1956. The bomber came down near Seagull Lake, north-east of Thunder Bay in November 1956 with only one survivor from the crew of four. Great Lakes Paper Camp One was located relatively close to the crash site and helped to feed the personnel involved in the search and recovery operation. As a token of appreciation for their help, the commander of the 301<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Wing, the unit from which the crashed bomber originated, donated the picture and dedicated it to the Dining Hall Staff at the camp.

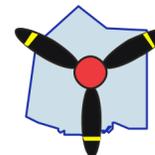
### Donations

NOAHC is a charitable organization and as such benefits from donations from its members and the general public. Receipts for tax purposes are issued for these donations. Through association with *Canada Helps*, NOAHC is able to receive donations via its webpage [www.noahc.org](http://www.noahc.org). To donate visit the webpage, click on the **Donate Now** button and follow the instructions provided

**Being the first newsletter of the new year, it is appropriate to remind readers that 2019 membership fees are now due**

### Inside this issue:

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## *Airspeed Oxfords: from Fort William to the west – 1941-42*

Following graduation from an Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS), of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. (BCATP) students went on to a Service Flying Training School (SFTS). Graduates from No 2 EFTS at Fort William mainly travelled west to one of the numerous SFTSs on the Prairies. There they were introduced to more powerful and complex aircraft, such as the North American Harvard for potential fighter pilots, or the Avro Anson, Cessna Crane or Airspeed Oxford for those destined for multi-engined aircraft. Those who graduated to the Oxford may well have flown in a plane assembled on the airfield in Fort William.

By 1940-41 the BCATP was expanding rapidly and although the Canadian aircraft industry was growing steadily, producing more types and increasing numbers of aircraft, it could not keep up with the demand. It became necessary to import entire aircraft, engines and other components from Britain and later the United States. One of the aircraft was the Airspeed Oxford, a low wing, twin engined monoplane, designed by R.J. Mitchell, of Spitfire fame. Built mainly of plywood, it was powered by a pair of Armstrong Siddeley Cheetah X air-cooled radial engines. It first flew in 1937; 8586 were built and some were still flying with the RAF in 1956. The RCAF acquired 25 in 1938 and with the expansion of the BCATP a total of 821 flew in Canada before the plan wound up in 1945.



***Airspeed Oxford***

The Oxford was designed as a training aircraft, which could be adapted for multiple roles. In its basic form it was used as a trainer to allow pilots, who had graduated from EFTS with the ability to fly single engined aircraft, to progress to twin-engined planes and eventually the big, multi-engined bombers. Other Oxfords were configured for navigation and wireless training and some flew in gunnery schools. Half-a-dozen SFTSs including those at Moose Jaw, Medicine Hat, North Battleford and Swift Current were equipped with Oxfords and other stations might have one or two that were used for communication or to transfer ferry pilots.

The planes were built at the Airspeed factory in the south of England, and given the distances involved it was obviously not possible to deliver them by air to Canada. Following construction and testing they were dismantled again and crated for delivery by sea. In many ways the Oxford was ideal for this approach. It was built from a number of components that were bolted together. The fuselage, for example, comprised two sections, the cockpit and

rear fuselage which included the tail, while the wings could be dismantled into three sections, the centre section and the outer wing panels.

Being accessible by water, through the St Lawrence and Great Lakes, and within easy flying distance of western Canada, Fort William was an ideal site for the reassembly of the aircraft. Preparation for what was called the Oxford Assembly Scheme involved the arrival of two contingents of RAF aircraftsmen, to complete the assembly. At the height of the scheme in October 1941, 103 RAF personnel were on the station. The first three Oxfords were delivered to the Canadian Steamship Lines dock on July 11, 1941 with regular arrivals continuing until mid-1942. The number of crates delivered varied quite a bit depending upon the timing of the convoys in the North Atlantic, with 42 crates arriving in August 1941, for example, but only 4 in October that year. Once at the airport, assembly was efficient. The first Oxford was completed in 6 days, but since assembly took place outdoors, there were occasional weather delays. However, in September 1941, completion rates averaged more than one per day and in October 56 planes were completed and flown off west.

Delivery was undertaken by a pool of ferry pilots, who were flown in to the station in a Cessna Crane or previously completed Oxford. In a number of cases these pilots delivered Tiger Moths for the EFTS, before turning round and flying west to Winnipeg with the Oxfords. The western flights consisted of as many as 12 aircraft at a time, but some flew singly or in groups of two or three. The system worked well, with the occasional diversions or return to Fort William because of bad weather *en route*, or because of engine problems. By the time the scheme was completed in mid 1942, more than 170 Oxfords had been delivered.



***Airspeed Oxfords awaiting final assembly at Fort William Airport in 1941***

By the end of October 1941, the program was beginning to be run down with RAF personnel numbers being reduced initially to 73 from a maximum of 103. Totals fell from there to 20 by the end of the year and a few remained until May 1942, but by then the original RAF Oxford Erection Party was no more. An attempt was made to resurrect the program in May, using RCAF airmen and although more than 50 men were seconded from No 8 Repair Depot in Winnipeg to prepare for a second season in 1942, only 8 Oxfords were completed and the scheme was terminated on June 22, 1942. One plane was left at Fort William awaiting spares, but it was completed on June 28nd when it flew west to Winnipeg, effectively marking the end of the scheme.

***Much of the information for this article was obtained from the daily reports of No. 2 EFTS, Fort William***

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NOAHC continues to host a monthly bingo at the Superior Shores Gaming Association on Memorial Avenue. The returns from these events make an important contribution to the Centre's revenue.

To become a corporate supporter, contact us at [noahc@tbaytel.net](mailto:noahc@tbaytel.net) or (807) 623-3522

**Corrections:**



In *FlyNorth* Vol10/No3 this picture was described as 'Bill (Dicks) at the dock with a Superior Airways Norseman' As Ron Bell has pointed out, the aircraft is actually a Bellanca



Ron has also brought to our attention an error in the caption for this picture of the Starrat Airways fleet, which appeared in *FlyNorth* Vol10/No4. The partially obscured D.H. 60 Moth, second plane from the front, was identified as CF-APO. In actuality it was registered as CF-AGX.

*The editor is always happy to receive information that improves the quality and accuracy of the content of FlyNorth*

## *The Saga of the Burnelli CBY-3 Loadmaster*

*Even as it was building the Hurricane and Helldiver in Fort William, Canadian Car and Foundry decided that when the war ended it would continue in the aircraft construction business and set about finding an appropriate design. It turned to Vincent Burnelli with whom they had worked in the 1930s in search of a suitable aircraft to take it into the post-war era. Burnelli was a proponent of the lifting fuselage. The extra lift available from the fuselage was expected to provide short take-off and landing characteristics and the box shape of the fuselage allowed for easier loading and unloading of cargo than possible with conventional tubular fuselages. By 1943, design work had begun on what was to become the CBY-3 Loadmaster, a high wing, twin-engined monoplane with Burnelli's characteristic aerofoil section main fuselage. Power was provided by two Pratt and Whitney Twin Wasp radial engines. A prototype, the only unit built, was completed in July 1945.*



**Freighting trials in northern Quebec in March 1947**



**Pilots' cabin and engine mounts pre-restoration**



**Post-restoration**



**The Loadmaster under construction at the Can-Car plant in Cartierville, Quebec, 1945**



**The CBY-3 as it was when hauling freight in the US and Venezuela between 1952 and 1960. The restored aircraft will be displayed in this colour scheme**

*The Loadmaster was acquired by the New England Air Museum (NEAM) in Windsor Locks, Connecticut in 1960. It sat in the open, exposed to the elements, until 2015, when the decision was made to restore it to static display. The process is ongoing and time consuming but there is a hope that the project will be completed by 2020, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the aircraft's first flight*



**Restoration of the twin booms and tail**

*With thanks to Larry Pope, an enthusiastic promoter of Burnelli's designs, who has advised the project team on various aspects of the Loadmaster*