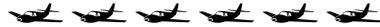




Fly North

Volume 3, Number 3:
July—September, 2011



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 Annual General Meeting:

NOAHC's second Annual General Meeting was held on June 2, 2011 at the Centre on Waterloo Street, with 30 members in attendance, to receive reports from members of the Board and to conduct the business of the organization.

Dave Bryan chaired the meeting and introduced those making reports. Linda Parker read the minutes of the first AGM held in 2010. These were approved by the membership. Jim Milne, President, gave the President's Report which provided a summary of NOAHC's activities over the previous year. In the absence of Dave Sutton, Treasurer, he also read the Treasurer's Report, which contained an audited statement of the organization's financial situation, provided through a Balance Sheet and a Profit and Loss Statement. The Treasurer's Report was accepted as read. The AGM also included the election and re-election of members to the Board. Four existing members and one new member, Helen Kyle, were appointed to the Board by acclamation. Following the business portion of the meeting, Dave Kemp (Newsletter Editor), gave a Power Point presentation outlining the goals of the organization and current progress in achieving these goals. Liz

Wieben provided a report on the activities of the Oral History committee, which is in the process of interviewing former aviators and those involved in aviation in the area in earlier times. The most recent interviewee, Ruth Parsons Moore, attended the meeting (*see p. 2*). An integral part of the process is the audio and video recording of interviews, which is made possible by collaboration with NextLibrary Inc., a local company run by Ian Dew and Kathy Crewdson. Ian talked about the processes involved in making the recordings and preserving them for future generations to view. He also showed excerpts from some of the interviews already completed. The committee is always on the lookout for additional contacts. If you know of anyone you think we should interview, please contact us at noahc@tbaytel.net or at the mailing address shown on page 1.

For many the highlight of the evening was the chance to view NOAHC's new facilities. Some of the Centre's artifacts and aircraft models were on display along with presentations illustrating the aviation history of Thunder Bay and the northwest.

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Picture Presentation



Local artist Greg Zelinsky (centre) with a painting that the late Vic Stevenson commissioned for the Centre. Aldo Mascarin (left) and Jim Massey (right), two of NOAHC's founding members, are shown with Greg when the finished painting was handed over to the Centre in late August.

NOAHC BOARD MEMBERS

Jim Milne (*President*)

Liz Wieben (*Vice-President*)

Denise Lyzun (*Executive Secretary*)

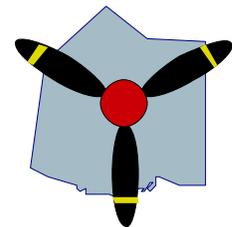
Dave Sutton (*Treasurer*)

Don McRae Dave Kemp

David Bryan Aldo Mascarin

Kevin Hlady Helen Kyle

Linda Parker, (*recording secretary*)



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A FLYING VISIT—Elizabeth Wieben interviews Ruth Parsons Moore.

Ruth Parsons Moore is one of the Parsons flying family who ran several air charter businesses in the northwest from the mid 1930s on. She and Liz Wieben were two of the first woman to fly bush planes commercially in northwestern Ontario.

When did you first become interested in aviation, Ruth? What sparked the interest?

My older brothers Hank and Bud started aviation businesses in the 1930s. Hank started in 1935, Bud in 1937 and then later Keith in 1946 after the war. Keith and Bud had Parsons Airways in Kenora; Hank had Parsons Airways Northern in Flin Flon, Manitoba. I was just a couple of years old and my big brothers would come home at ice break-up and at ice freeze-up and talk about airplanes. It was just part of my life. From the time I could say “pilot”; I knew I wanted to be one. I grew up in Thunder Bay and by the time Grade 8 came along I had pretty much made the decision to learn to fly.

Tell me about your first solo?

I started flying Sept. 8th, 1951 and went solo in 7:25 hours in an Aeronca Champ on wheels. I don't think it had a starter; certainly there was no radio. I got my Private Licence with 30:00 hours in Feb. 1952...by that time we were flying on skis. We used to land on the infield with the skis, right alongside the runway. The airport maintenance crew rolled the snow to compact it. I remember the hangar, Thunder Bay Flying Club on one side and Superior Airways on the other. I think it was one of the old Elementary Flying School hangars.

Did you know other women flying at that time?

Well, there women around the club...I mean Social members, I don't remember anyone flying...but I remember seeing you walking around with your logbook, not sure how old you would have been?

What do you remember about your early days at the Thunder Bay airport?

We used light signals from the tower instead of radios as we didn't have any radios, or maybe just radios that did not work! We would taxi out to a visible spot on the taxiways, turn the nose of the airplane toward the tower and wait for a green or red light. Coming in to land you would have to wiggle your wings to acknowledge the clearance from the light.

Once you got your Commercial Licence, where did you start flying? Tell me about that.

In the summer of 1954, I checked out in a Cessna 170 and flew that on floats doing sightseeing flights in Kenora...this was for my brothers. It was a hard airplane to get airborne on floats, but I only weighed 123 pounds so I could fly loads the fellows couldn't. In the spring of 1955 I flew a Fairchild 24 on wheels at the Thunder Bay airport for Orville Wieben, of Superior Airways mostly doing sightseeing flights. I went to Kenora again to fly floats in the

Cessna 170 for the summer; I flew a little bit of everything...tourists, camp supplies and material and workers for the dam they were building at Whitedog.

Can you tell me briefly about your flying career?

In the fall of 1955, I met a woman named Barbara Machin who said she would buy an airplane if I would fly it for her! I had been teaching school in the winters so this gave me a chance to really get started on flying. I started with her in 1956, living at the tourist camp and doing her flying. It was a Stinson 108 ; I flew it in the summer for her and in the winter I flew it on skis doing charter for Parsons Airways (my brothers). We took the battery out often to keep it warm so that the airplane would start....as for a heater, it might have had one, but you would never know it! I got holes in a brand new parka trying to get the battery out. The radios in use at that time, at least in what I flew gave pretty poor communication....most of the time you were just out of contact.

In 1957, I got my Flight Instructor Rating, we thought us two gals would start a Flying Club...but that didn't work out.

In 1958 I married my husband, and moved to Red Lake where he worked as a Provincial Police Officer. Later we bought aircraft for our own use...first an Aeronca Champ and then a Cessna 180 which we still own.

Do you have memories of a “best” flight or moment in the air when you thought “Ah, this is what flying is all about”?

Yes, actually I do. It was the fall of '56, I remember it like it was yesterday (50 years ago!). It was a fall flight, north of Kenora. I was alone in the airplane, the leaves had all changed colours, the sky was blue, the air was smooth and I had such a beautiful, peaceful, feeling of freedom. That feeling has stayed with me a long time.



Liz Wieben (left) and Ruth Parsons Moore (right) at the NOAHC AGM.

Fly North believes that Ruth and Liz were the first two female commercial pilots in the northwest, but wonders if any of our readers knows of other contenders for that distinction.

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Aerial view of the Lakehead Aviation maintenance base in the 1990s (from the Jim Lyzun Collection)

Seaplane bases in the northwest

Transportation in north-western Ontario has a long tradition of using the area's rivers and lakes. From the time of the original aboriginal peoples, through the fur trade era to modern lake freighters, the region's waterways have made an essential contribution to life in the northwest. The rapid expansion of aviation activities in the region following the First World War continued that tradition. In an area that had few landing fields, but with an abundance of lakes, it was inevitable that floatplanes would play an important role in aviation. The planes that began to appear in the skies over the northwest in the 1920s included flying boats such as the Vickers Vedette and the Curtiss H2-SL, designed specifically for work on water, or the Gypsy Moth, Stinson and later Norseman, Beaver and Otter, built as landplanes, but capable of being converted for use on water. At the Lakehead the members of the Fort William Aero Club (FWAC), flying out of their land base at Bishopsfield were well aware of the importance of floatplanes and annually converted some of their machines for use from their seaplane base next to the Richardson Terminal on the Port Arthur waterfront. From there the club offered float training and ran charters to lakeside communities such as Silver Islet. In the winter, the aircraft at the waterfront operated on skis.

By the mid-1920s, the Ontario Provincial Air Service (OPAS) and the RCAF were carrying out aerial survey work and flying fire patrols, while private operators helped to supply mining and forestry operations in the area. Almost all of that activity involved floatplanes and until the Second World War, floatplane traffic easily surpassed that operating from land bases. As late as 1936, at a time when a new airport for the Lakehead was under consideration, the opinion was expressed at an FWAC meeting that in the choice of a land-based or water-based facility '...a seaplane base was preferable'. Although that was not to be, the 1930s marked the heyday of the seaplane bases at the Lakehead. The OPAS was well established at the northern end of the harbour and the Flying Club operated from its base next to the Richardson Grain Terminal. Individuals such as 'Doc' Oakes, a former OPAS pilot, operated Oakes Airways out of Port Arthur between 1935 and 1943, while his former colleague at OPAS, Al Cheesman, formed Explorer Airways in 1933. It operated until 1939 when its one aircraft was lost in a crash on the harbour. Cheesman tried again in 1947 with Thunder Bay Airlines, flying two Norsemen, but the venture was unsuccessful.

After World War Two, traffic at the Lakehead seaplane bases declined considerably. Superior Airways, which had its base on the Kam River, and provided a passenger service from the Port Arthur Marina, was the main private operator. For a time, Frank and Mary Kearney ran a maintenance base at the mouth of McVicar Creek. At the north end of the harbour, Cominco leased land from the Shipyards for a base from which they flew two Cessna 180s. This was taken over by Harry Melnick in 1956 and eventually became the Lakehead Aviation floatplane maintenance centre. More recently Wilderness North established a fly-in fishing and hunting operation on the adjacent property, which had been the long-established OPAS facility. The third remaining seaplane base at the Lakehead was established by Bob Oja in 1982 on Marina Drive not far from the waterfront facility once used by the Flying Club.

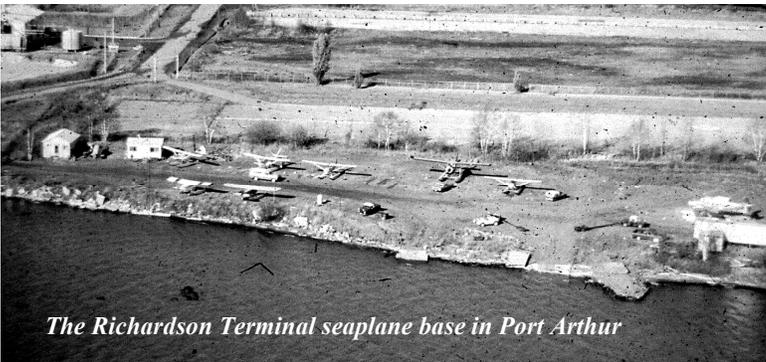
The seaplane industry at the Lakehead is much diminished from what it was even twenty years ago. Many northern communities that once depended upon float planes now have all-weather gravel or paved runways and the drone of heavily laden Beavers and Otters heading from the harbour, to the north and northwest is much less frequent. However, the floatplane industry is far from dead. A simple Google search shows that there are more than 30 designated seaplane bases in north-western Ontario and the Confederation College Aviation Program continues to train a new generation of floatplane pilots at its base on Lake Shebandowen west of the city.

Floatplanes that opened up the north



(courtesy Gerry Bell)

The Norseman Monument at Red Lake ON. The pilot of the aircraft taxiing across the lake is Gerry Bell, one of our members



The Richardson Terminal seaplane base in Port Arthur



(courtesy Liz Wieben)

A Waco ZQC-6 on a northern lake



Two Superior Airways floatplanes on the Kam River. A Stinson Reliant (foreground) and a Gipsy Moth.

(courtesy Liz Wieben)

below - Curtiss HS-2L flying boats of the Ontario Provincial Air Service. In the 1920s these were a common sight in the north, used on fire patrol or for aerial survey work. The machine below is tied up on an unknown lake while that on the left is undergoing engine maintenance on the Port Arthur waterfront. Note the Whalen Building in the back ground

