

## Early Aviation

Flying was first introduced to Prince Edward Island in 1912, when an aircraft, piloted by 18 year-old pilot Cecil Peoli from New York completed the first powered flight over Prince Edward Island. He landed at the exhibition grounds in the City of Charlottetown. It was not until 1931 that an airport became a reality for Charlottetown. At that time, Dr. J.S. Jenkins, Chief Physician at the Charlottetown Hospital developed a portion of his farm at Upton to be used as an airport. The airport, Upton Field served as the Island's first and main airport for 10 years. During that time, Louise Jenkins, Dr. Jenkins's wife trained as a pilot in Quebec and Florida to become the Island's first woman pilot in 1932.

In 1927 there was an airmail service provided between Moncton, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Also in 1927, the federal government introduced a plan to assist light aeroplane clubs in Canada. The Prince Edward Flying Club was formed and in May 1929 selected a site that, after investigation by a civil aviation inspector, was recommended for licence, provided the land was acquired by the club. No action was taken on this recommendation since the Club never purchased the land. In April 1930, the Charlottetown Flying Club, which was being organized, asked the Civil Aviation Branch of National Defence to do a survey for an aerodrome in the area. Again there was no action.

In a report on November 24, 1931 the Superintendent of Airways dealing with airport inspections in the Maritime Provinces, had this to say about Charlottetown:

*"an aerodrome provided by Dr. J.S. Jenkins is part of his farm, two miles north of the City: Province and City to provide machinery and Dr. Jenkins to pay the cost of labour; it will be an excellent aerodrome; Canadian Airways will use it for daily service between Charlottetown and Moncton; Mrs. Jenkins is a pilot; he is taking instruction and may buy an aircraft."*

The site was called Upton Airport and was licensed on January 16, 1932. It had two turf landing strips 2800 and 1600 feet long. The airport was leased to Canadian Airways Ltd. from October 9, 1932 to October 9, 1938. The license remained in force until June 30, 1938.

In 1938, the federal government offered the City of Charlottetown \$25,000.00 to expand the Upton Field. Charlottetown decided to develop a new airfield after considering two sites, Upton Airport and a 300 acre property at Sherwood Station on the Brackley Point Road. Future expansion at Upton Field was severely limited whereas the property at Sherwood Station offered expansion opportunities for the future. For this reason the federal government accepted the city's recommendation for development of the Brackley Point Road site. The city purchased the 300 acres in what was known as Central Royalty for \$30,000. The city negotiated with the Provincial Government to bear half the cost of the site; the province agreed to do so, on condition that it receives half the profits derived from the airport revenue. The city would operate the airport.

The city's objective in wanting the airport, apart from the necessity of transport by air, was to help alleviate the unemployment situation in the city. All labourers for the project were to come from the city's relief lists. On September 2, 1938 the Department of Transport let a contract for clearing the area and in July 1939 work began on three landing strips.

## **Wartime Development**

In December 1939, the Charlottetown City Council wrote to the Deputy Minister of Transport, Mr. V.I. Smart, and offered free use of the airport to the Canadian Government for defence purposes until the conclusion of the war. The government accepted, and on May 1, 1940 the Department of National Defence announced the establishment of No. 5 Bombing and Gunnery School at the Charlottetown Airport under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP). A miniature town rapidly took shape at the airport. Some forty-three buildings were erected, including six hangars.

The field was officially handed over to the Royal Air Force (RAF) on June 15, 1941 by which time three hard-surface runways had been constructed. During this time it was called RAF Station Charlottetown. In early 1941 the airport was established as No. 31 General Reconnaissance School instead of the Bombing and Gunnery School as originally planned. This was changed because local lobster fishermen objected to the bombing range which would require the closing of valuable lobster grounds on the North Shore between Covehead and St. Peters.

Under the BCATP three more aerodromes were built on Prince Edward Island; No. 9 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) operated at Summerside (the airport was operated by the Department of National Defence until 1990, at which time it was transferred to the Slemon Park Corporation) and two aerodromes to relieve pressure at Summerside; No. 1 at Mount Pleasant and No. 2 at Wellington.

Commercial air services operated out of the Charlottetown Airport under the management of Canadian Airways Limited. Canadian Airways was founded in 1930 and was the first airline to operate regular air service to Prince Edward Island. This service linked Charlottetown and Moncton.

In April 1941, Trans Canada Air Lines inaugurated a feeder service linking Charlottetown and Summerside, with a mainland flight to Moncton. A Lockheed Electra ten-place airplane was used on this service. In mid-October the air service was taken over by a new company organized by Carl Burke and known as Maritime Central Airways (MCA). This company operated commercial air services out of the Charlottetown Airport until 1963, when MCA was purchased by Eastern Provincial Airways (EPA). Eastern Provincial Airways served Prince Edward Island and other parts of Eastern Canada, providing competition for the government owned Trans Canada Air Lines, later Air Canada.

The Royal Air Force operated Charlottetown Airport under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. In February 1944 the Royal Canadian Air Force took over from the RAF and the station became known as RCAF Station Charlottetown and operated the No. 2 Air Navigation School.

In late January 1945 local politicians were advised that the R.C.A.F. Navigation School at Charlottetown was being transferred to Summerside in February. This was distressing news to Charlottetown City Council who felt that if the navigation school was transferred to Summerside, they would also lose the civil airport to that city as there was a good possibility that the Charlottetown Airport would not continue to operate. After much discussion with Defence authorities in Ottawa, Charlottetown had the order rescinded.

On July 7, 1945, the B.C.A.T.P. School at the Charlottetown Airport officially closed. In a little over four years, the school had graduated 1200 students. A twin-engine Anson aircraft was used to conduct the training. The students were from such places as England, France, Norway, Poland,

Australia, New Zealand, United States and Canada. Approximately 200 to 300 air force personnel were on staff along with 100 civilian workers at the time of the closing.

### **Civilian Operations**

On February 1, 1946 the Department of Transport took over the Charlottetown Airport from the R.C.A.F., returning the airfield to civilian use. William "Bill" Gillespie took charge as airport maintenance foreman. The following employees helped him run the airport: C.R. Matheson and D.C. Moore as mechanics; E.G. Walker and G.C. Burgess as airport attendants; Nadine MacMahon provided clerical support and Earl Clark was the electrician and cleaner.

Although the Department of Transport had taken over the airport from the RCAF in 1946 it was envisaged that the City of Charlottetown would accept the airport under the terms of the wartime lease. Negotiations to that end failed and the Department of Transport assumed full responsibility for the operation and further development of the airport in July 1947.

Some sixty-five buildings on the airport that had housed the air force training school were turned over from the Department of National Defence to the War Assets Corporation. Many of the buildings went to the City of Charlottetown. In 1946 when veterans returning from overseas caused an acute housing shortage, the city turned the airport buildings they had acquired into an emergency housing project known as Maple Hills. (250 Maple Hills Avenue is the present street address for the Charlottetown Airport.) The project proved to be an expensive one and the City soon found it could no longer afford such a venture. The entire project was turned over the Provincial Department of Reconstruction which operated the housing project until late 1948.

A significant number of the buildings at the airport were disposed of over time. Many were purchased at minimal cost and were tore down or moved to land purchased by veterans. The buildings that remained, mainly the larger ones, were turned over to the Department of Transport to administer; many were leased or sold. It was well into the 1950s before disposal of most of the buildings was completed. The City of Charlottetown had purchased one of the hangars and it was torn down in the early 1970s. Of all the air force buildings located on the airport in 1945, none remain.

The last building, Hangar No. 4, housed the maintenance garage and fire hall for the Department of Transport and later housed the Enamel and Heating Products Limited maintenance shop at the airport. Enamel and Heating Products Limited started its operation in March 1960 and ended in late 1963. The company carried out repairs and routine maintenance on the Sabre jet, better known as the F-86. Some modifications were also carried out on Lancaster bombers. The firm also did the maintenance on the F-86s for the air force aerobatics team, the Golden Hawks. The operation ended when the Sabre jets were removed from active service. The building was dismantled in 1979.

The first wood-frame construction air terminal building was built in 1941. It was never an air force building but housed the terminal and the radio range station of which Mr. George Champion was officer-in-charge. Mr. Champion came to the Charlottetown Airport in the beginning of 1939 and first operated the radio in an old farmhouse near the site of the first air terminal building.

Bill Gillespie retired on March 31, 1959 after being the airport maintenance foreman for more than fourteen years. Hiram Noel became the first airport manager in 1959 and remained in the

position until 1963. He was followed by Charlie Matheson who was appointed to the airport manager position in 1964 and remained in that position until late 1969. Mr. Matheson had been employed formerly as an airport mechanic. Les Clarke became the next airport manager in 1969 and remained there until July 31, 1972. He was followed by Donald MacMillan who had been employed at Department of Transport headquarters in Ottawa. Mr. MacMillan remained in the position until October 1975. He was replaced by Mr. R.E. Howard who relocated from Wabush Airport in November 1976 and remained in the position until his accidental death in April 1982.

### **Airport Redevelopment**

No major construction work was undertaken at the Charlottetown Airport until 1960, even though city council and local politicians had tried to implement plans for expansion. The opening of the new 03-21, 7,000 foot runway at the airport on September 29, 1960 was described as a “tremendous boom” to the province. To Islanders, the runway meant larger jet aircraft could operate from the airport providing easier and faster access to and from the mainland. Runways 09-27 and 18-36 were upgraded. In 1960, Maritime Central Airways operated DC-3 and C-46 aircraft at the airport. The airline purchased the Dart Herald in 1962 which replaced the DC-3 on many of the scheduled runs. As mentioned earlier, MCA was sold to Eastern Provincial Airways in 1963, which continued to operate these aircraft from Charlottetown. In 1969 EPA operated the first jet aircraft through the airport - the Boeing 737.

The next major expansion to the airport was enlargement and improvement of the terminal building in 1970. The original terminal building was designed to accommodate twenty-five to thirty people. With new jet aircraft, ninety and one hundred passengers were embarking and disembarking within minutes of each other making a very crowded facility. The Air Terminal Building was enlarged by 82 feet in length and included new washrooms, airline offices, ticket counter areas and a waiting room.

Two additional extensions of 32 feet in length each were made to the terminal building in 1971 and 1973. A further extension was built in 1974. It consisted of new and enlarged washroom facilities attached to the west or ground side and a passenger lounge constructed on the east side of the building. During the early 1970s the ramp and the parking lots were enlarged and paved. Improvements to the parking lot helped eliminate parking on the highway. In early 1975, Air Canada began direct air service from Toronto to Ottawa to Charlottetown. Upgrading of the air traffic control facilities became necessary since air traffic had increased significantly. A temporary steel control tower was installed and began operations on June 4, 1975. A further extension, of approximately five meters in length, was added to the air terminal building in 1980. This provided an additional area for baggage claims and the installation of the new “racetrack” baggage conveyor system.

The old Air Terminal Building housed various airlines over the years, such as: Canadian Airways, Trans Canada Air Lines, Maritime Central Airways, Eastern Provincial Airways, Air Canada, Air Atlantic and Canadian Pacific Airlines.

A Master Plan for the future of the airport had been prepared in 1974. It recommended that the present site be developed rather than move to a new location. It also recommended the construction of a new terminal building, runways and the acquisition of additional land. The rebuilding and modernization was expected to cost \$21 million but this figure later rose to \$30

million. The plan met with much local opposition regarding the cost, necessity and impact on land development.

Implementation of the Master Plan recommendations commenced in 1979 with the decision to move the airport operations centre to an area located approximately 2500 feet (762 meters in length) north of the existing location. Modernization and re-construction commenced in 1979 with the construction of a new, modern 21,000 sq. ft. (1950 m<sup>2</sup>.) Combined Services Building. This building would house the fire hall, maintenance garage, heating plant and maintenance shops. In addition, a new 600 ft. by 300 ft. concrete aircraft parking apron was also constructed at this time in preparation of the construction of a new Air Terminal Building that would be built later as part of the reconstruction program for the Charlottetown Airport.

The airport was closed for approximately six weeks commencing August 15, 1983 to permit the re-construction of the main runway 03-21. Construction on the new east/west runway 10-28, commenced at the same time with emphasis placed on constructing the area where the new runway intersected runway 03-21 to ensure the airport was not closed any longer than absolutely necessary. This closure resulted in both Air Canada and Eastern Provincial Airways operating out of CFB Summerside. Passengers were bussed to and from the Charlottetown Airport for each flight. Construction of the new 5000 ft (1524 m) cross-wind runway, designated runway 10-28, necessitated the acquisition and appropriation of land and the re-routing of the Union Road. Enough land was acquired at the time to facilitate the future extension of this runway to 7000 feet should noise emissions become an issue over the City of Charlottetown with aircraft utilizing runway 03-21.

The year 1983 was an extremely busy year for airport officials as it was also in 1983 that work started on the construction of a seven-story (105 ft high) Air Traffic Control Tower. The Control Tower completed in 1984 was, and remains to this day, the highest occupied structure on Prince Edward Island.

The construction of the new 35,500 sq. ft. (3300 m<sup>2</sup>) Air Terminal Building in 1985 was the culmination of a three-year \$30 million dollar expansion project. Construction of a new air terminal building necessitated the construction of a new access road and new parking lot, fencing and landscaping. At a cost of \$5.8 million, the air terminal building features extensive seating areas, modern baggage handling equipment, a restaurant, lounge and gift shop and the airport administration offices. By now the airport was getting air service from Air Canada and its partner, Air Nova; Canadian Airlines International and its partner airlines, Air Atlantic and Inter Canadian.

The new airport terminal building and complex became operational in March 1986. The old terminal building was leased to the PEI Flying Association for use as a clubhouse and office space. This structure housed the association until 1992 when it was torn down in preparation for the construction of a new facility. The new facility, aptly named Skyplex Building, provided a home for Prince Edward Air as well as private aircraft storage.

The air terminal building currently houses a permanent exhibit consisting of artifacts, documents and photographs, depicting the history of the airport and local aviation from the date of the first recorded flight at the Charlottetown Exhibition Grounds on September 24, 1912.

## **Airport Divestiture**

Following Mr. Howard's death in April 1982, Mr. Michael D. Campbell, a native of Charlottetown, became airport manager. Mr. Campbell was the longest serving manager of the airport when he "semi-retired" from the airport manager position in December 1998. He "retired" from Transport Canada to become the general manager of the Charlottetown Airport Authority, effective January 1, 1999. However, Transport Canada still owned and operated the airport and would continue to do so until March 1, 1999 at which time the airport was "divested" or transferred from Transport Canada to the Charlottetown Airport Authority. Mr. Eugene McDonald transferred from Wabush Airport to become the interim airport manager from January 1, 1999 until February 28, 1999 at which time he accepted the position of manager, operations & maintenance with the Authority. At that time Mr. Michael Campbell became the general manager of the Charlottetown Airport Authority whose sole purpose was to operate the Charlottetown Airport.

The National Airport Policy (NAP) was announced in July 1994 by then Minister of Transport, Doug Young. This policy shifted the role of the federal government from that of owner/operator to landlord/regulator. The NAP created three different types or class of airport, namely: National Airports System (NAS) airports, of which there would be twenty-six (26) as of July 1994 and the government would retain ownership but financial and operational control would be transferred to an authority; regional local airports of which there would be 71 airports and the ownership of these airports would be offered to provincial and local governments, airport commissions, private businesses or other interests, in that order; and finally, remote airports which provided the only reliable, year-round transportation link to isolated communities and which the federal government would continue to support.

NAS airports include any airport located in a capital city of a province or territory or had 200,000 or more enplaned/deplaned passengers per year. These 26 airports handled 94% of air travellers in Canada and would remain part of the National Airports System (NAS). The NAS Airports were deemed part of a vital "National Transportation System" network owned by the Government of Canada and leased via a long term lease to Canadian airport authorities.

The regional-local airports were seen as having economic value to the community they served but not necessary as part of a "National Transportation System" network. These airports would be sold outright to provinces, community interests or private individuals in that order if necessary.

Remote airports would continue to be supported by the Government of Canada because they served as the only transportation link with the outside world.

The 26 NAS airports would be divested or transferred to Canadian airport authorities established as "not-for-profit" corporations. The government, through the proclamation of the NAP, stated that locally operated airports were better able to function in a more commercial oriented and cost-efficient manner while being more responsive to local needs and be better able to match levels of service to local demands. Consequently, Canadian airport authorities each formed a board of directors made up of various levels of government representatives as well as representatives from local community organizations.

Charlottetown Airport is part of the NAS group solely on the basis of being located in a capital city. The Charlottetown Airport Authority Inc., (the Authority) a "not-for-profit" corporation, was established in 1997 to negotiate the transfer of financial and operational control of the

Charlottetown Airport from Transport Canada to the Authority. The negotiations resulted in the transfer of full operational and financial control of the facility on March 1, 1999. The Authority has full operational and financial responsibility for the airport and is leased from Transport Canada under a 60-year lease arrangement.

At the time of transfer, the Authority employed 19 full-time employees who would perform all administrative, maintenance and firefighting duties required to maintain the airport operations.

### **Post Transfer Development**

The Charlottetown Airport is now in the final stages of a very intensive capital works program which commenced in September 1999. Runway 03-21 underwent a major reconstruction that included narrowing the runway from its former 200 ft width to 150 ft wide. Reducing the runway width will lower operations and future capital costs with no negative impact on the type of aircraft that may utilize the airport. This project involved installing a new drainage system, a new edge-lighting system and finally milling of the runway surface and recapping it with a new, two inch layer of asphalt. The total cost of this project was \$2.54 million dollars with work completed on this project in mid-June, 2000.

In July 2000, the Charlottetown Airport Authority embarked on the establishment of a business park at the airport with financial assistance from the City of Charlottetown and the Province of Prince Edward Island. The Authority's financial commitment to the establishment of this park was the construction of a parallel taxiway that connected two aircraft parking aprons with the threshold of the main runway. Constructing this taxiway was required to permit the development of five building lots having direct airside access. Since the government owns the property, the Authority must lease the land to tenants. The rates makes development very attractive since banks and financial institutions look favourably on such any arrangement that lowers the capital expenditure for purchase of land.

The total cost of constructing the parallel taxiway was approximately \$2.0 million dollars. This taxiway, in addition to opening five new airside lots would also provide for more efficient and safe use of the runway and taxiway system since aircraft will can now use the new taxiway to get into take-off position without having to travel on the runway for an extended period. Construction of this new taxiway was completed in August 2000.

Just as this taxiway was complete, construction on Phase 1 of the Business Park commenced. Work in Phase 1 included construction of an access road (opposite MacAleer Drive) connecting Brackley Point Road to the existing airport entrance road, installation of underground electrical and telecommunications systems, street lighting, water and sewer. This Phase will provide services to the five airside lots previously mentioned and five non-airside building lots. Total cost of Phase 1 will be approximately one-half million dollars.

Interest in the Business Park has been keen. Several lots in the business park have been leased and have successful businesses operating on them. There is ample land available to develop further twenty-one lots in Phases 2 & 3, in addition to other airport lands available for industrial development. Air-side access lots have been and are being developed, with only a few lots presently available. Development of the Business Park will help ensure the viability of the Charlottetown Airport in the future.

Repercussions following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks affected the air transport industry through increased security measures and regulations, including updated and new security equipment. Screening of carry-on luggage had always been done but the baggage that went into the hold of the aircraft was not screened. This changed following 9/11. The air terminal building was extended in 2004 to handle the new hold baggage screening equipment and additional personnel. The passenger screening process was taken over by the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA). CATSA is a Crown corporation, created April 1, 2001 as part of a comprehensive package of air security initiatives.

New pre-board screening equipment was installed following 9/11. In 2004 an extension was added to the south end of the building for the hold baggage screening area, housing the latest in x-ray and detection equipment. In 2006 the departures area was increased by 50%. 2007 saw a major extension to the north end of the building, consisting of an international arrivals area, a second baggage conveyor belt and the local services office of the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA). This building extension was a shared funding project under the Canada-Prince Edward Island Municipal Rural Infrastructure Program.

In July of 2007 Mike Campbell retired as the chief executive officer, with over 36 years in the aviation industry, 25 of them with the Charlottetown Airport. Doug Newson became the chief executive officer in June of 2007. The airport staff compliment is now 21 full time positions.

Passenger traffic increased over the years, with an all-time high of 253,224 in 2007. There are presently 5 airlines operating out of Charlottetown in 2008 to 7 destinations. Air Canada Jazz, and WestJet provide year-round service and Northwest Airlines, Sunwing Airlines and Delta Air Lines provide seasonal service.

Air Canada Jazz provides daily service to Halifax, Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa, utilizing Dash 100 series and 300 series aircraft as well as "RJs", Canadian Regional Jets. WestJet operates direct flights to Toronto using Boeing 737 jets. Seasonal summer flights are provided by Northwest Airlines to Detroit, Sunwing Airlines to Toronto, and Delta to Boston and New York. Sunwing also provides several late winter flights to warm destinations each year.

A major expansion to the main apron, Apron I was made in June of 2008, which increased the area by 7,200 m<sup>2</sup> from 18,394 m<sup>2</sup> to 25,594 m<sup>2</sup>. This provided added aircraft parking and manoeuvring space for the increased traffic. The airport continues to grow and improve to provide service and facilities that will benefit air travellers, our tenants and the people of Prince Edward Island.

## **Sources**

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