

FLY NORTH



NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO AVIATION HERITAGE CENTRE

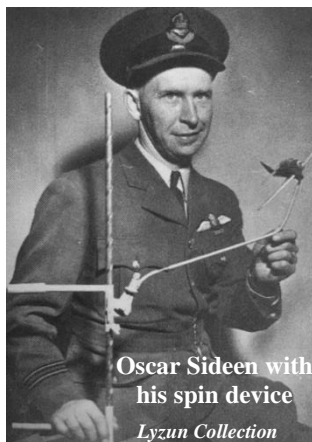
Preserving and celebrating the history of aviation in the northwest through the collection and preservation of artifacts and the stories of persons and events that made this region unique in aviation history

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NOAHC News ...

Acquisitions

The Sideen family has donated a device designed by Oscar Sideen as an instruction aid for novice pilots. He was the Chief Instructor at the No. 2 Elementary Flying Training School in Fort William in the early 1940s where basic training was provided to turn new recruits into pilots for the RAF and RCAF. As an instructor he not only taught the pilots the essentials of flying, but also introduced them to some of the more complex situations that they might encounter while flying. One of these was the spin in which the plane had entered a steep corkscrew-like path towards the ground. If no recovery was made a crash was almost inevitable, so student pilots had to be trained to regain control. Oscar Sideen designed a device that illustrated the physical complexities of a spin, which allowed student pilots to be introduced to the characteristics of a spinning plane on the ground before experiencing the real thing in the air.



Oscar Sideen with
his spin device
Lyzun Collection

Visitors

In mid-August NOAHC had a visit from Jane and Grant Wilson of the Blenheim Military Museum and Resource Centre, which includes all services – army, navy and air force. Jane was particularly interested in our Can-Car display and finding out more about Elsie MacGill's role in the Fort William plant's aircraft production. Grant is a member of Flight Ontario, the flight simulation organization from which we received our simulator. He checked it out and added new scenery to the system, specifically coverage of the city as it was in 1943. Unfortunately, some bugs need to be ironed out, but it will soon be possible to fly over the city of 80 years ago in aircraft such as the Tiger Moth or Hurricane, which would have been here at that time.

Display work-party

In early August, a team consisting of George Holborn, Denise Lyzun, Mary-Alice Isaac, John Hill and Dave Kemp set out to renovate and reorganize some of the Centre's displays. This included adjusting picture and poster frames, fixing broken models, relocating and relabelling artifacts. The main effort went into refurbishing our Snowbird and Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources displays (see page 4)

In the planning stages is a display to commemorate the centennial of the RCAF in 2024. It will include uniforms, mainly from the WWII and Cold War era as well as pictures of personnel and aircraft from the air force's first 100 years. The display will also include models suspended from the ceiling representing planes, flown by Canadian flyers.

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Bearskin Airlines celebrates its 60th anniversary

In July of this year, Bearskin Airlines, a mainstay of the aviation industry in northern Ontario for decades, celebrated the 60th anniversary of its founding. It was established in 1963, by John Hegland, with a base at Big Trout Lake, but named after Bearskin Lake, where Hegland had a general store. Initially it provided charter services to remote northern First Nation communities, flying bush planes such as the Beaver, Otter and Norseman, on floats or skis as required by the season. The year 1977 saw the introduction of scheduled flights, firstly between Big Trout Lake and Sioux Lookout then progressively to Thunder Bay, Kenora and Winnipeg. By this time, the company was owned by the Friesen brothers, Harvey and Cliff, along with Karl Friesen (no relation), Rick Baratta and Brad Martin and began a period of expansion. In the 1970s and early '80s, the Ontario government began a construction program to provide all-season airfields at remote First Nation locations in the north. Bearskin saw this as an opportunity to develop scheduled service among these communities and ultimately provided flights to more than 20 of them. At about the same time, the company acquired the Fairchild Metroliners, that were to become the sole aircraft type in its fleet. and expanded its offerings in the south adding flights to Toronto/Buttonville, Waterloo, Ottawa and Minneapolis-St Paul. By 2003, Bearskin was providing scheduled services to almost 40 destinations. That same year, however, it sold its northern First Nation routes to Wasaya Airways, an airline wholly owned by a number of First Nations in northwestern Ontario, allowing it to refocus and consolidate its routes in the southern part of the region. The next important event for the company came in 2011, when it was acquired by Exchange Income Corporation which also owned Perimeter Aviation and in 2017 Bearskin and Perimeter were merged, but the decision was made to retain the Bearskin name and brand within the larger unit. Since then, market conditions and competition from companies such as Porter have brought about a reduction in the number of destinations served by the airline. Currently, as well as Thunder Bay and Winnipeg, flying its 22 Metroliners, it provides service to nine communities in north western and north eastern Ontario from Kenora and Fort Frances in the west to Sudbury and North Bay in the east and to Red Lake and Sioux Lookout in the north.

As well as being an important component of the aviation industry in northern Ontario, Bearskin Airlines has contributed to the wellbeing of the communities it serves. For example, it sponsors an annual golf tournament to raise funds for the Meno Ya Win Health Centre and other charities in Sioux Lookout. Over the past 25 years it has also sponsored the Bearskin Airlines Hope Classic, an annual curling bonspiel to raise funds to fight breast cancer. The bonspiel was first held in 1997 and since then it has raised more than \$3.5 million.

The airline has also helped NOAHC by providing complimentary flights which allowed researchers from the Centre to visit places and interview individuals important to the history of aviation in the north west.

NOAHC extends its congratulations to Bearskin Airways and hopes that the company's aircraft with their iconic bear paw logo will be seen in the air above northern Ontario for many years to come.

Jim Milne 1931-2023

With the death of Jim Milne on August 19, 2023, NOAHC lost one of its founding members. He served as President from the time the Centre was incorporated in 2008 until 2015, when he stepped down, but remained as a board member until 2020. For much of his



Jim at an event in recognition of his years as President of NOAHC

time with NOAHC, Jim dealt with the organization's memberships, recording names, addresses and e-mails, while keeping tabs on annual dues and maintaining accurate membership lists. He was always ready to describe the purpose and aims of NOAHC to the media and various organizations around the city. A fount of knowledge on all things connected with aviation, not only in the north-west but also on a wider scale, he was always available and able to answer even the most obscure aviation questions. He remembered seeing his first aeroplane flying over his schoolyard when he was 8 years old and later the Hurricanes and Helldivers from Can-Car flying over Westfort. His interest in aviation continued to grow and develop from that time on.

Jim's aeronautical knowledge was put to good use instructing local air cadets in the intricacies of flight, in part by introducing them to aeromodelling, one of his passions. He was instrumental in the establishment of two model aircraft flying clubs in the city - North of Superior Flyers Model Aeroplane Club and Lakehead Aeromodellers - and was a long-time member of the Model Aeronautics Association of Canada (MAAC), serving for a time as Assistant Zone Director of the Association. As an avid RC model builder and flyer he travelled to meets and competitions across the region, other parts of the country and into the United States.



Jim Milne – RC model pilot

NOAHC very much appreciates the time and effort that Jim put into the establishment and operation of the Centre and extends its condolences to his family and friends.

(With thanks to Tom Skoropad for the picture and material on Jim's life and to Denise Lyzun and Archie Gribben for additional information)



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Royal Canadian Mint issues a special loonie to commemorate Elsie MacGill



Elsie MacGill at work at Can-Car



The coin

On August 1, 2023, the Royal Canadian Mint unveiled a coin to commemorate the life of Elsie MacGill, nationally recognized as an aeronautical trailblazer and champion of women’s rights. The Mint’s webpage notes:

“We honour and celebrate Elsie MacGill with the 2023 \$1 commemorative circulation coin – a tribute to the lasting legacy of her life’s work”

The unveiling took place at the Hangar Museum in Calgary, Alberta, which has a restored Hawker Hurricane, built at the Fort William plant of Canadian Car and Foundry in 1942 when Elsie MacGill was the Chief Engineer in charge of Hurricane manufacture. By the time production was complete, 1450 aircraft had been built. In addition to managing Hurricane production, Elsie MacGill designed a training plane, the Maple Leaf II while at Can-Car and set up the assembly line for the Curtiss Helldiver, which followed the Hurricane at Fort William.

The coin was designed by Claire Watson, an artist from Tofino, BC. The design includes two aircraft, a Hurricane in flight illustrated in a camouflage colour scheme and the Maple Leaf II. Elsie MacGill is shown, appropriately for a Chief Engineer, carrying two rolled-up blueprints. The hand that holds the blueprints bears the ring of a professional engineer, which she received in 1938 when elected to the Engineering Institute of Canada - the first woman to be recognized by the Institute. On the lapel of her jacket is a pin representing her membership in the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Clubs and recognizing her contribution to women’s rights.

Three million coins will be minted, with two million being the coloured version. They are to be introduced into general circulation so will begin to appear in change shortly, but uncirculated copies can also be obtained directly from the Mint. (<http://www.mint.ca>)

Elsie MacGill commemorative display beneath the wing of a restored Can-Car built Hurricane at the Hangar Aviation Museum in Calgary.

For more on the Hangar Museum see FlyNorth, Vol12 No 1, Jan-March 2020



NOAHC Miscellany

The results of the August work party



(Above) The Snowbird Display, including wreckage that survived the crash of one of the team’s Tutors prior to a display in Thunder Bay in 2005. On the lower level there are models of the Sabres of the Golden Hawks, a display team that preceded the Snowbirds.



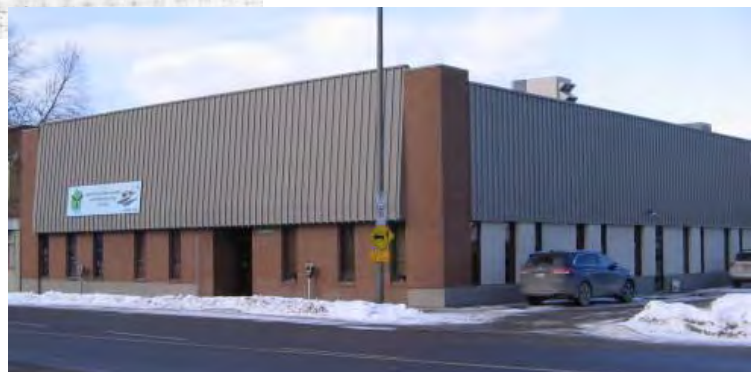
(Right) Ministry of Natural Resources Aviation Services with some emphasis on the suppression of forest fires using water bombers.

NOAHC: Then and Now



(Left) The Safeway building as it appeared when it opened in August 1950. It is a “Shoebbox Store”, being converted later to the style retained in the NOAHC building. It was closed in 1966 when Safeway moved to Centennial Square.

(Right) Sometime in the 1950s or early ‘60s, the building was renovated creating the structure that now houses NOAHC. The design was similar to that of other Safeway stores in Manitoba and the U.S. One feature that survives from the 1950s store is the distinctive corner pillar.



*For more information on the architecture of Safeway supermarkets see:
<http://www.andrewturnbell.net/safeway1.html>*