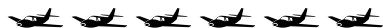




Fly North

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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 Activities: NOAHC continues to spread the word about its existence and activities by attending local exhibitions and conferences. In late August, the NOAHC booth was set up at the New Ontario Shooters' Association Gun show at Kakabeka Falls Legion. According to the NOSA webpage the display was "very well received by an interested public". At the Aircraft Maintenance Engineers' annual conference in early November, the NOAHC booth attracted young engineers interested in learning about Lakehead's aviation heritage, as well as veteran engineers interested in passing on their experiences. We received the donation of a couple of engine repair manuals and acquired the names of a number of people we might be able to interview for our oral history project. As part of our display we showed a video of the Lancaster visit, the roar of its Merlin engines as it taxied out for take off filling the hall and drawing lots of attention to our booth.

New window blinds are being fitted and the carpets are being cleaned, at the Centre's space on Waterloo Street, in preparation for an official opening for members in the New Year. Watch for the notice!

Recent NOAHC Acquisition

This compass came to NOAHC from the estate of Frank Bryan, courtesy of the Thunder Bay Yacht Club. It was used by Frank Bryan on a boat he built in 1952, but where he obtained it is not known. The information on the body of the compass and the attached data plate, indicates that it was produced by the Pioneer Instrument Company of Bendix, New Jersey in 1940. By the 1930s, the company had established itself as one of the leading manufacturers of ancillary instruments for military aircraft and during World War II, Pioneer-Bendix produced almost three-quarters of all the avionics used in American military aircraft. The D-12 model was installed as the master compass in the navigator's station of the B-17 Flying Fortress.

At the end of the war, these aircraft and the instruments they contained were declared surplus and as a result, hundreds of D-12 compasses went into the civilian market. This is presumably how this example came to be in Frank Bryan's boat.

A search of the internet shows quite a few of these compasses for sale, with asking prices in the \$200-250 US price range.

NOAHC would be happy to hear from anyone who can provide additional information.

Pioneer-Bendix Army Type D-12 Compass

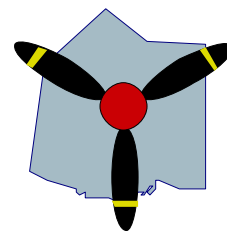


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Bishopsfield: The Lakehead's First Airfield



Oblique aerial view of Bishopsfield in the late 1930s with the clubhouse/admin building in the foreground

When the Fort William Aero Club (FWAC) was founded in 1929, one of its first requirements was a suitable airfield. The original idea was for the flying club to be involved with both land planes and sea planes, and with that in mind it looked at possible airfield sites close to the Kaministiquia and Mission Rivers. Neither of these sites had ground conditions suitable for the land planes, however, and the club moved west and selected a 100 acre site near Rosslyn village, adjacent to the Municipal Golf Course. The tree cover had to be removed, but the site was sheltered and well drained making it suitable for aircraft operations.

The name for the new airfield came about as a result of a contest held in the local elementary schools. As a tribute to Billy Bishop the Canadian WWI flying ace, "Bishopsfield" was chosen as the winning entry. The field quickly became the centre for aviation at the Lakehead and it remained as such until the Municipal Airport was built 10 years later.

The official opening of Bishopsfield took place on June 19, 1929. It was attended by a crowd of over 4,500 people who paid a 25 cent admission charge. After speeches by local dignitaries, the spectators were entertained with a flying display by Chief Instructor James Dickie and other pilots in the club's Gypsy Moths. Having such a large and enthusiastic crowd on hand, the club executive also offered memberships for sale and must have met with considerable success, since less than a year after the event, in 1930, the Fort William Aero Club had the fifth largest membership of the twenty-three clubs in the Canadian Flying Clubs Association (CFCA). Such enthusiasm undoubtedly encouraged the CFCA to include Bishopsfield as one of the stops on its Trans-Canada Air Pageant which crossed the country in 1930 giving air displays to promote the fledgling aviation industry. The two day Lakehead event attracted large crowds who were treated to formation flying, and dog fighting displays.

The main use of Bishopsfield was recreational flying - passenger rides cost \$5.00 - and instruction. Since the latter involved students with no previous experience of flying, accidents were not uncommon, some of which involved minor damage to aircraft, whereas a few more serious led to aircraft being written off. One of the latter brought about the death of the club's Chief Instructor, James Dickie. In September, 1930, his plane stalled in a turn and plunged into the ground about one mile from the airfield, killing him and critically injuring his passenger, Marion Swain, one of the first women pilots graduated by the club. Improper installation of the dual controls by the club's air engineer was blamed for the accident. He protested his innocence, but his licence was suspended and he left the club and the city.

Perhaps accidents such as this contributed to a decline in the club membership through the 1930s, but a more likely culprit was the general economic situation. Like all flying clubs across Canada, the FWAC had great difficulty making ends meet during that decade. The club's minute book for these years indicates the constant struggle to increase membership, cut costs and raise revenue. Existing members were offered free flying time if they recruited new members. Some income was generated from the rent of part of the field to Philroy Airways (\$30.00 per month), but the club's fortunes declined rapidly in the second half of the decade and in December 1937 it was wound up.

Recreational flying was not dead at the Lakehead, however, and in 1938, the Lakehead Flying Club (LFC) was formed at Bishopsfield. Its financial position was improved when Can-Car bought hanger space and carried the operating costs of the field so that it could be used to test the aircraft it was beginning to construct in its Fort William works. At about the same time, the club hired Orville Wieben as its operations manager, an experienced airman who brought a new optimism and vitality to Bishopsfield. He was instrumental in the purchase of a modern Aeronca aircraft and in August 1938, had a major role in the organization of a major airshow at the field sponsored by the LFC and attracting 5000 spectators.

War clouds were beginning to gather, however, and within a year the Club had relocated to the Fort William Municipal Airport where it became involved in pilot training. Bishopsfield remained as an emergency landing field for the elementary flying school, but saw little use and was not maintained after the war. A fire destroyed the buildings on the site and in the 1990s all traces of the Lakehead's first airfield disappeared beneath a new housing development off Rosslyn Road.

For more on Bishopsfield see:-

Jim Lyzun, *Aviation in Thunder Bay*, Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society (2006)

A FLYING VISIT

Gerry Bell—bush pilot

What is your first aviation memory?

I can't recall , but I just know that I had a fascination with everything related to flight as I grew up, from watching soaring hawks, to flying model aircraft and joining the 150 Tiger Squadron Air Cadets.

When was your first flight?

I first soared with the hawks on May 13, 1979 in a Piper PA38 Tomahawk C-GRQI on a 30 minute introduction flight with Peninsula Air Services in Mount Hope, Ontario.

When was your first solo?

On a cold and sunny February 28, 1980 in a Piper PA38 Tomahawk C-GNPD. While flying circuits at Hamilton airport my instructor requested a stop-and-go landing. When we stopped on the runway, without warning my instructor opened his door, hopped out and said "Take it around the patch and then pick me up". So with him standing on the side of the runway in a snow bank I made my dream come true!

My first solo on floats was quite memorable. My instructor's last words as he pushed me away from the dock were, "Where do you want to be buried?". That sure made me pay attention to what I was doing.

What prompted your career in aviation?

It just seemed that it was always meant to be and I was so enthralled with aviation that I was ready to do whatever it took to make it happen.

Tell us briefly about your flying career.

Born and raised in Hamilton, Ontario I found employment at the Mount Hope Airport progressing from Shipper/Receiver and later a Certified Aircraft Parts Inspector for Glenair Distributors to Products Manager for Interflight Aviation. Interesting work, but my heart was not in keeping other people flying, I wanted to fly. With my Private Pilots Licence in hand I resigned my position and headed north to fulfill my lifelong dream of becoming a bush pilot. I settled in Thunder Bay, earned my Commercial Pilots Licence in Gimli, Manitoba, helped form the Northwestern Ontario Air Search and Rescue Association in Thunder Bay and flew as a Pilot, Navigator, and Spotter. My first flying job was out of Pickle Lake, Ontario where I flew Cessna 180's on floats, and learned my trade as a bush pilot. My flying included everything from carrying passengers and supplies into remote cabins, often with canoes strapped to the floats, flying government charters, supplying mining and forestry camps. In the fall picking up moose from remote hunting sites in a Cessna 180 earned me the nickname of 'Dr. Death and his meat wagon'. When I got injured and stranded in a remote location my Search and Rescue Survival training made all the difference between a bad situation and a tragic one. From Pickle Lake I moved on to Red Lake where I flew bush aircraft like the Beaver, Norseman, various Cessnas and a Beech 18 for several years. Then it was back to Thunder Bay to flight

instructing on ultra lights, aerobatics, and conventional aircraft at Awood Air. When the company was bought by Thunder Airlines I flew King Air A100's on open charter work and became the King Air Training and Aviation Safety Officer. Unfortunately an injury while undergoing Company training and subsequent loss of my medical ended my flying career.

Can you think of a time when you looked out of the cockpit and thought "this is what flying is all about"?

I'll never forget my first solo – my first aerobatics solo routine - flying Search and Rescue and finding the subject of the search - flying medivacs and getting the critically injured people to medical help in time.

What has been your "worst" moment in the cockpit?

I've had my fair share of emergencies; engine failures - one requiring a forced landing on an ice flow in Lake Superior, cockpit electrical fire in IFR and icing conditions, landing gear failures, near mid air collisions, flying in the United States on 9/11.

What is your favourite aeroplane?

Bush planes like the Beaver and Norseman. Zlin 142C for aerobatics. An ultralight for relaxation.

What is your least favourite aeroplane?

My immediate response would be to say "A grounded one", but I can't say there is any one aircraft I dislike.



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Bishopsfield: Fort William Aero Club Activities

Three of the FWAC aircraft lined up beside the club buildings c. 1938



The photographs on this page appear courtesy of Elizabeth Wieben, daughter of Orville J. Wieben, operations manager at the Lakehead Flying Club (successor to the Fort William Aero Club) which operated out of Bishopsfield from 1938 to 1939 when it moved to the new Municipal Airport.

The administration office was later acquired by Wieben and moved to his property on the Kam river as a base for his seaplane operations.

The Club's three aircraft in the mid-1930s. Two Gypsy Moths and (far left) a Fleet



The 1938 airshow which included parachute jumps, formation flying and (as seen here) flour bombing of the club car



Perry Hall (Club President), Oscar Sideen (Board Member) and Orville Wieben (Operations Manager) with the Club's new Aeronca in 1938. By this time the Club had been renamed the Lakehead Flying Club.



Three of the Club's aircraft in 1938 or 1939. A Fleet (nearest camera), the Aeronca (middle) and a Gypsy → Moth (far right)



A Can-Car built Grumman G-23 which was stored at and flown from Bishopsfield after the Club sold the company a hanger in 1937. It was flown under civil registration as a demonstrator, part of Can-Car's attempt to sell 16 of the aircraft that remained from a suspended overseas order