

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 -----

Moving:

While the location on Balmoral Street has served NOAHC well over the past several years, the environment in the building had become increasingly unpleasant because of noise and vibration from the adjacent fitness club. There were also a number of maintenance issues that were not dealt with to our satisfaction. The Board therefore began to look for new premises. After a preliminary search by our president Liz Wieben and Robin Webster, the board considered several potential locations and decided upon a unit at 905 Victoria Avenue East.



The new Centre at 905 Victoria Avenue East

The unit was completely renovated ready for our arrival in mid-October. The move itself was relatively pain free, with packing being done by board members and volunteers, who also moved some of the smaller and more fragile objects in our collection. Cabinets and heavier items were left for professional movers. The office space is larger than at Balmoral, and although the total area of the new unit is not much larger the layout is more suitable for our displays. As well as display space the facility has a separate room for presentations and special events. The next step is to put together the various displays. Planning is already well under way, but it will take some time to get everything set up. The grand opening of the new Centre is expected to take place sometime in February 2017. Watch for the announcement

Reunion of Giants

On Thursday, November 10, NOAHC hosted a showing of *Reunion of Giants* at the West Thunder Centre, as a tribute to our local RCAF veterans. The movie documents the 2014 trip by the Canadian Warplanes Heritage Avro Lancaster bomber to Britain to appear in displays with the only other surviving airworthy Lancaster flown by the RAF. An appreciative audience of nearly 100 people enjoyed an excellent movie on West Thunder's big screen.

On Remembrance Day, Liz Wieben and Dave Kemp showed the movie at Pinewood Court Retirement Home to a group of about 15 residents and some staff members.



Mary-Alice Isaac and Jon Powers at our sales table



Copies of the official DVD are available from NOAHC at a cost of \$35.00

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Fighting a Forest Fire in the early 1940s.
from the journal of
Colin Macmillan

A large free-running forest fire in virgin timber is an awesome thing. The idea is to catch the fire when small and to hit it with more men and equipment than considered necessary.

During the six years I was with the Provincial Air Service, we had only a couple of large fires in the Pays Plat District. One of these occurred in the timber limits of Kimberly Clark. The fire started while I was on fire patrol and was returning to base. I was about ten or twelve minutes from Pays Plat when I flew over one of the Kimberly Clark drive camps on the Aquasabon River. I was flying at about 1000 feet and as I approached the drive camp from the east, a person came out of the cookhouse and walked along a well-defined path towards a W-C some 50 feet away. In the half minute it took that person to walk to the W-C, and for me to be overhead, a fire started in the grass beside the path. I could hardly believe my eyes. I made a tight circle and again flew over the camp. The fire was now some 25 feet across and headed for the woods. I headed for base and en route radioed in to report the fire and suggest we try to get some men and fire fighting equipment to the fire site as soon as possible as there was an off chance of keeping it from spreading into the tall timber that grew on three sides of the drive camp. However, by the time I tied up to our dock at Pays Plat, smoke from the fire was billowing up over the hills, and it was quite obvious that the fire was already into the timber stand. I loaded four men and their equipment into my plane and within a half hour of first sighting the fire we were back in the vicinity of the drive camp. From a small grass fire of 25 feet across, when I last saw it, it now was about 25 acres in area and racing up a hill to the west of the camp. I couldn't land on the river by the drive camp as there was much floating pulpwood scattered about, but I did manage to land in a wide section about half a mile down river, where a boom was holding the wood back. This boom had several hundred cords of wood behind it. As we were tying up to the boom, two men in a large, square stern canoe came upriver. We loaded the fire fighting equipment and men into it, to be ferried ashore. I then returned to Pays Plat to inform the Chief Ranger that we had the makings of a major fire on our hands. We stuffed in three more men plus the Chief and all the equipment my plane would hold, and returned to the fire site. On our arrival, we found the fire had jumped the river and was burning in mature Jackpine. It was obvious that we would need help from other districts, for we had neither the men nor the equipment at Pays Plat to combat a fire such as this one was shaping up to be. On returning to base, the Chief Ranger reported to the District Office at Geraldton and asked for anything and everything they could arrange to send us. Yorkie Fisker was the District Forester at Geraldton, and he and his staff worked all night getting extra planes, men and equipment lined up.

At our end, I flew back and forth over the 30 miles between Pays Plat and the fire until it was too dark to see. By that time we had practically all of the equipment and men from Pays Plat transported to the fire area. We had set up a camp on the north end of Owl Lake, having decided our best chance to stop the fire was along a line of small lakes running north of Owl Lake.

My first flight next morning was to one of Kimberly Clark's lumber camps on Long Lake about 30 miles north of the fire zone. This camp was home to about 100 German prisoners of war with military guards and camp foremen. These P.O.W.s were

mostly young fellows who had surrendered in North Africa. My orders were to start emptying this camp and fly the P.O.W.s to the fire zone. Fire fighting equipment was to be flown in by plane from Twin Lakes, Orient Bay, Port Arthur and other places as it could be procured. I made two trips to the P.O.W. camp, landing them on one of the small lakes about a mile north of Owl Lake. The other planes could not land on these small lakes, as none of them was equipped with flaps, which my SR9 Stinson had. It was agreed that the other planes would unload at Owl Lake, from where I would distribute the men and equipment to the small lakes as needed. In two days of dawn to dusk flying, I made more than 75 separate flights. Granted the distance was short, but this worked out at a return flight every half hour during daylight hour. In the half hour, my plane was loaded, flown to its destination, unloaded and returned to Owl Lake. On the third day, two large freight planes hired from Canadian Airways at Sioux Lookout arrived. One was a Bellanca Air Bus, powered by a 825 hp Wright engine. At the time it was the second largest bush plane in Canada. We had the fire under control on the third day of dawn to dusk backbreaking work. After flying all that equipment in, it all had to be flown out again to Pays Plat, but now there was no hurry. The firefighters walked out to Owl Lake through the burnt over area and carried much of their equipment with them. The P.O.W. boys were great firefighters. When an order was given, they jumped to it.

This was a classic case of getting sufficient or more men and equipment on a fire. With the fire under control we could now sort out who was responsible for starting the fire and who was to pay the cost of extinguishing it. Lightning is responsible for many forest fires, and in such cases the taxpayer picks up the tab. However, if responsibility can be pinned on a person or persons, or if there was lax application of fire regulations on the part of a lumber company, then they pay. In the case of the Owl Lake fire Kimberly Clark was found responsible and was charged \$25,000, a considerable amount at that time.

At the time of the fire, a regulation existed that prohibited either packaged cigarettes, a pipe or matches in possession of anyone, in any forested area, from early spring until late fall, especially around lumber camps and work areas. Only hand-rolled cigarettes and lighters were permissible. In the Kimberly Clark case, the cook at the drive camp was a woman, who claimed that she had to have packages of cigarettes and matches. She couldn't roll her own and lighters broke her fingernails, so a concession was made in her case. A very expensive one as it turned out.



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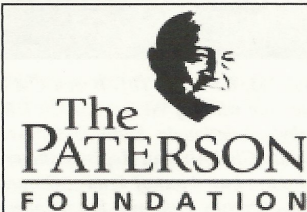
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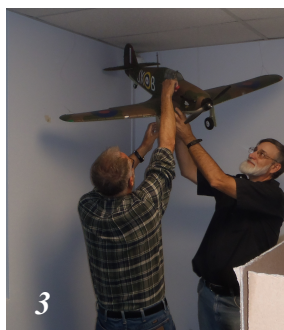
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On the Move:

1. Denise, Mary-Alice and David B. dismantling and packing.
2. The result.
3. Dave and Gerry taking down the Hurricane.
4. Inside the new, completely renovated Centre
5. First board meeting in new facility.

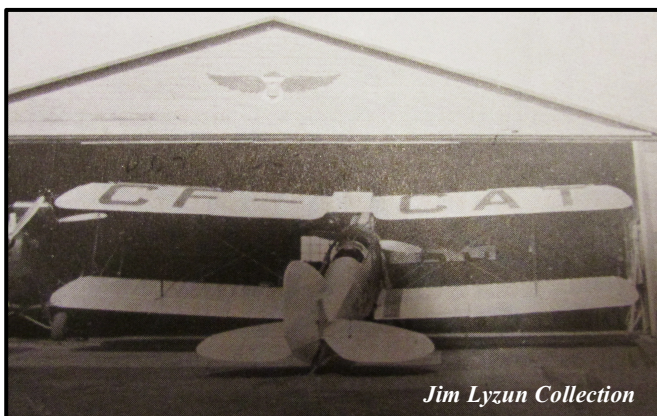
Pictures courtesy of Gerry Bell



Learning to fly at the Fort William Aero Club: The story of Marion Swaim

In June, 1929, The Fort William Aero Club (FWAC) was founded and established its headquarters on a 100 acre site in Rosslyn Village called Bishopsfield. The main aim of the club was to encourage the growth of aviation at the Lakehead and one of the ways it did that was to teach young people to fly. One of these young people was an 18-year old high school student, Marion Swaim.

Learning to fly and become a pilot was not a common occupation for a young woman in 1929, but Marion planned to become a commercial pilot and make a career of it. With that in mind she enrolled in the second course offered by the FWAC. At 5feet 4inches tall she needed an extension to the rudder bar and several extra cushions on the seat to allow her to reach the controls. Marion may well have been only the second woman to take lessons at the club and she was certainly the youngest.



Jim Lyzun Collection

Gypsy Moth CF-CAT at Bishopsfield. This is the machine in which Marion Swaim learned to fly and the one in which she had the accident that prevented her from continuing with a career in aviation

Doctor's comment on Marion's Medical Report

20. Remarks: *A good exam for a woman*

Marion planned to pursue a career as a commercial pilot and was working to bring her flying hours up to the 50 required to apply for a commercial license, when, on September 9, 1930, she was critically injured when CF-CAT crashed. The injuries were so serious that even after she recovered she was unable to pass her medical and her plans for a career in aviation were dashed.

Miss Marion Swaim,
18 Kamden Apts.,
Fort William, Ont.

Dear Madam:-

Enclosed please find your formal Private
Air Pilot's Certificate No. 613, which you are to sign
and retain.

You should obtain the signature of the doctor
who examined you to complete this certificate.

Marion's instructor was James Dickie; the cost was \$12.00 per hour and instruction took place summer and winter on wheels and skis in a FWAC DH Gypsy Moth. She flew solo for the first time on May 1, 1930 and by the time she applied for her pilot's certificate in July of that year she had accumulated 15 hours solo and 13 hours dual.

The Department of National Defence which set the certificate examinations required the applicant to pass a medical, which Marion did, although in these less politically correct times the doctor noted in his remarks, "a good exam for a woman". In her test on regulations she scored 83% and passed the flying test which included normal take off and landing as well as landing from 5000 feet and 1500 feet with the engine switched off. In addition, the applicant had to complete several figures of eight.



Marion Swaim, trainee pilot in 1930, age 18. This is the picture she included with her application for a private pilot's certificate.

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE CIVIL AVIATION BRANCH REPORT ON EXAMINATIONS (TO BE SUBMITTED IN DUPLICATE)

of Marion D. Swaim, 18 Kamden Apts., Fort William, Ont.
Name Address
for Private AIR PILOT'S CERTIFICATE for Light Flying Machines
at Fort William on a D. H. Moth aircraft, Reg. Mks. CF-CAT
1. AIR REGULATIONS Passed Date 7/8/30
2. TECHNICAL N. A. Date -
3. NAVIGATION N. A. Date -
4. TAKING OFF AND ALIGHTING Passed Date 7/8/30

Part of the official letter informing Marion
of the award of her Air Pilot's Certificate.
It was dated August 15, 1930

A report on Marion Swaim's accident appeared in the July-September 2015 edition of *Fly North*. This account of her earlier aviation activities was made possible when Sam Coghlan, Marion's son, discovered additional information about her training at the FWAC, which he kindly provided to NOAHC