

# FLY NORTH

Volume 7, Number 3:  
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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 -----

#### Annual General Meeting 2015

The Northwestern Ontario Aviation Heritage Centre held its Annual General Meeting at the Centre on Thursday, June 25, 2015. The purpose of the AGM was to receive reports and to elect the Board of Directors. The President's Report was presented by Jim Milne, and the Financial Report by our Treasurer, Dave Sutton. Reports on other activities of the Centre, such as interviews conducted by the Oral History Committee, the acquisition and cataloguing of artefacts, the development of presentations and displays and the production of the quarterly newsletter were also provided.

Twelve individuals were nominated to fill the vacant positions on the Board of Directors. Further nominations were requested from the floor, but no additional names were brought forward and those nominated were elected by acclamation.

At a subsequent meeting of the new Board, the Executive was chosen. See list above.

#### New Sign

NOAHC now has a new sign attached to the north-facing wall of the Centre. Large enough to be easily seen from Waterloo Street there is now no reason for anyone to miss us.



Come along on Sundays 1-4 pm, give it a closer look and then drop into the Centre.

#### NOAHC: Board of Directors 2015

**PRESIDENT:** Liz Wieben  
**VICE-PRESIDENT:** Gerry Bell  
**TREASURER:** Dave Sutton  
**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY:** Denise Lyzun  
**RECORDING SECRETARY:** Mary-Alice Isaac

**BOARD MEMBERS:**  
David Bryan   Dave Kemp   Helen Kyle  
Aldo Mascarin   Don McRae   Jim Milne  
Kathy Watt

#### Acquisition

Peter Dunham of Dryden has donated a propeller to NOAHC. It is said to have come from a de Havilland Fox Moth CF-DJB, the first aircraft operated by Max Ward at the beginning of his aviation career in 1946. He founded Wardair in 1953 and by the mid 1970s it had grown to be Canada's largest international air charter company. It was sold to Pacific Western Airlines in 1989 and became part of Canadian Airlines International.

The donation is much appreciated.

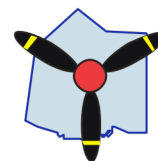
If members have photographs, papers or any objects that they think might be of interest to NOAHC, they can visit the Centre on Sunday afternoon or contact us by telephone or e-mail.

#### Can-Car Hurricane Restoration

In the August issue of the aviation magazine *FlyPast* there is a report of another Hawker Hurricane XII restoration. This plane was originally built in Fort William in 1942 as RCAF 5487. Refurbished in England over the past several years it has recently been delivered to a private collector in Stuttgart, Germany who will fly it in the markings of a 1944 Rhodesian Air Force Hurricane. It is one of 12 airworthy Hurricanes, at least 6 of which were built by Can-Car.

#### Inside this issue:

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### ***Marion Swaim and the Fort William Aero Club***

By the late 1920s the Canadian government had begun to recognize the advantages that aviation had to offer in a country such as Canada with its great distances, isolated communities and limited road network. To promote flying, the government introduced the Light Aeroplane Scheme in 1927, offering two light aircraft to any registered club that could provide its own airfield, provide a licensed instructor and engineer, had at least ten qualified pilots and at least thirty pilot trainees. One of the clubs that applied to join the scheme was the Fort William Aero Club (FWAC), which received its planes in May 1929. Operating out of Bishopsfield, west of Fort William, it included a group of ex-World War I pilots, with James A. Dickie as its chief instructor and Bill Francis as its air engineer.

Among the Club's first group of trainee pilots were several women, one of whom was a high school student named Marion Swaim, who graduated from Fort William Collegiate and Technical Institute on June 13, 1930. Marion's father was the section foreman with CN in Larson, some ten miles from Upsala. The family also operated a general store and mink-farm in the community, operations which were lost when a forest fire swept through the area at the beginning of June in 1930, less than two weeks before Marion's graduation. They were lucky to escape with their lives, racing ahead of the fire on a 'gasoline speeder' railcar sometimes using soaked blankets to protect themselves from a rain of sparks and burning branches. Fate was not done with the Swaims, however, for later that year Marion was involved in a fatal plane crash while flying as a pilot trainee with the FWAC.

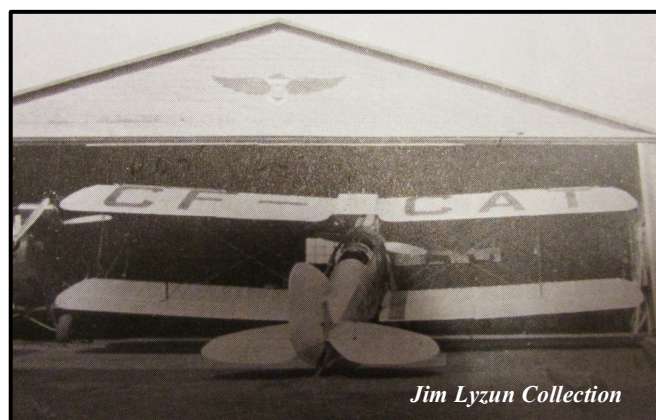
On September 9, 1930, Marion went up in one of the FWAC Gypsy Moths, CF-CAT, with James Dickie, the Club's chief instructor. Marion was at the controls in the rear seat. According to her family, the flight was set up so that she could show that she had mastered a specific maneuver required before she would be eligible for her pilot's license. About a mile and a half west of the airfield and at a height of about 150 feet witnesses said the plane started a turn, seemed to hesitate then stalled before plunging into the ground. Dickie was killed and Marion was badly injured. Both of her wrists were broken, one of her eyes was gouged by her goggles and she suffered internal injuries. Afterwards she could not recall the accident. She remembered flying and then waking up in hospital. For the rest of her life she suffered pain from her wrists and the damage to her eye meant that she could never receive her license. The doctors told her that as a result of her internal injuries she was unlikely to be able to have children, but less than a year after the crash she married Daniel Coghlan and together they had eleven children.

Marion did not like to talk about the accident, and when too many questions were asked she began to get angry. Her family felt that perhaps she was feeling survivor guilt, particularly when the pilot was held in such high esteem in the community. Since the newspapers reported that she was at the controls at the time of the crash, she received hate mail for some time accusing her of killing a heroic pilot.

However, at the subsequent crash inquiry, both the instructor and pupil were absolved of blame. The cause was identified as a control malfunction. The dual controls had previously been removed from the forward cockpit to allow passengers to be carried, but when they were reinstalled a locking pin was left out, preventing them from operating properly, and the Club engineer, Bill Francis, was found to have been at fault. He protested the finding and was supported by members of the FWAC familiar with his professionalism and quality of work. Nevertheless his license was suspended for six months and he left the Club.

Marion Swaim never did obtain her pilot's license. After the accident she hated flying and even commercial flights were a real ordeal for her.

*(with thanks to Sam Coghlan for supplying details of his mother's life, before and after the accident)*



*Gypsy Moth CF-CAT, the plane in which Marion Swaim was flying when the accident occurred. It is sitting outside the Fort William Aero Club hangar at Bishopsfield*



*In this picture Marion is sitting in the first Gypsy Moth that the Fort William Aero Club owned. Unfortunately it too was lost in a crash in 1936, killing both the pilot and passenger. Obviously flying in the 1930s was not the safest of activities.*

*In the April-June edition of **Fly North** Marion Swaim's name was printed as Marion Swain. The editor apologizes for that error*



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**James A. Dickie**

James Arnold Dickie was born in Grandview, Manitoba on February 10, 1893. He trained as a pharmacist/druggist and worked in Vancouver, between 1910 and 1914 for the Vancouver Drug and Chemical Company. He enlisted in the Manitoba Regiment on January 27, 1916, but in September 1917 he transferred to the RFC as a 2nd Lieutenant. After flight training in England on the Maurice Farman Shorthorn and Armstrong Whitworth FK3 he progressed to the BE2e and FE2b. He does not appear to have flown any combat missions and his military service ended in March 1919. He returned to Canada after the war and in 1925 moved to Fort William where he opened a drug store. When the Fort William Aero Club was formed in 1930 he became its first instructor. Dickie was also active in aviation outside the city, being the secretary-manager of the Canadian Flying Clubs Association, which had been formed to promote aviation across the country. He was recognized as an extremely competent instructor, well thought of by the Club members, and his death in a training accident in September 1930 came as a major blow to the Club. He had married Jamesina Henderson Burnett of Perth, Ontario in 1929 and they had one son who was born shortly after his father's death.

*(A contribution to the Thunder Bay World War One Centennial Project)*



## The Can-Car Gregor Fighter – FDB-1



The precision required in the production of the Gregor Fighter can be seen in this collection of components used in its construction. The experience gained in tooling and machining them no doubt contributed to the high quality attained in the company's later Hurricane and Helldiver production.

Engine runs such as this took place at Bishopsfield in December 1938. Some sources claim that the first flight took place there also, but recent investigation suggests

that the aircraft did not take to the air until April, 20, 1939, at St. Hubert, Quebec. Flights by an RCAF test pilot showed the Gregor Fighter to be a strong, highly maneuverable plane, but with controls that were too sensitive for the average pilot, a canopy that needed to be strengthened and flaps that were too large. These issues could have been dealt with relatively easily, but in reality the day of the biplane fighter was over and the FDB-1 never went into production. The prototype built in Fort William was destroyed in a hangar fire in the mid-1940s in Cartierville, Quebec.

### Was the FDB-1 the most advance biplane ever built?

In terms of construction and strength, it probably was. On a test flight it survived a force of 7 Gs pulling out of a 403 mph dive with no damage to the airframe. Among its contemporaries listed in the adjacent table it was the only all-metal aircraft. It had an exceptional range and an outstanding rate of climb, but in the other categories it was unremarkable. The RCAF pilot who tested the FDB-1 thought that at low levels it was sufficiently maneuverable to hold its own against the monoplane fighters then flying but since it did not fly in combat that was never tested.

For more on the FDB-1 see: J.G. Kirton *Canadian Car and Foundry Aircraft Production at Fort William*. TBHMS (2009)

The FDB-1 (Fighter:Dive Bomber-1) was an all-metal biplane, designed by Can-Car's Chief Engineer, Michael Gregor and built at the Company's Fort William plant in 1937-38. Gregor was a proponent of the biplane as a fighting machine and in the FDB-1 produced what was arguably the most advanced biplane ever built. The fuselage was a monocoque shell of circular cross section, covered by flush-riveted, stressed skin. The upper wings were attached to the fuselage in a gull-wing configuration, which improved visibility in level flight but created major blind spots on take off and landing. The flying and landing wires common on biplanes were replaced by solid struts and the undercarriage was retractable. Unlike many biplanes of the time the FDB-1 incorporated a large, sliding canopy. The overall result was a sleek, solid aircraft that looked every bit the high performance aircraft that it was designed to be.



Jim Lyzun Collection

	FDB-1	Fiat CR42	Gladiator	Polikarpov
Maximum Speed (mph)	275	274	253	280
Range (miles)	985	485	400	292
Service Ceiling (feet)	32,000 (estimated)	33,500	32,800	35,100
Rate of climb (ft/min)	3,500	2,340	2,300	2985