

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Fri., June 12, 1964

ACROSS THE ISLAND

First Air Mail Flight Made To P.E.I. In 1919

By NEIL A. MATHESON
Provincial - Farm Editor

THE FIRST authorized air mail in Canada was flown between Charlottetown and Truro, Nova Scotia in September 1919, it develops from research that I have done this week with the help of people like Dr. Jack Jenkins and Earl Taylor. The key word in that sentence is "authorized", for some mail had been flown in Ontario and Alberta, a copy of a stamps magazine reveals, but Charlottetown Postmaster Joseph McCarey made the statement, after investigation, in September of that year that the carrying of mails between Truro and Charlottetown was the first authorized flight in Canada.

CAPT. L. D. STEVENS, now of Montreal, and Lieutenant J. M. Stevenson of Charlottetown flew a Curtis biplane here on September 18, 1919 and they were also the first ones to fly a plane to the province and land it here.

They carried a number of letters - including one to Mayor G. D. Wright from the mayor of Truro, and one to Postmaster McCarey.

Though this was the first plane to fly in here, a plane had flown on the Island seven years earlier when one was brought here crated, assembled and flown as a provincial exhibition attraction. It was then taken apart, re-crated and shipped out again. Apparently a flight across the Northumberland Strait was not considered practical at that earlier date.

MY REASON for talking today about the pioneer flights is that a letter was received this week by Publisher W. J. Hancox from Mr. Stevens asking particulars about the flight. Stevens was general manager of Devere Aviation Company Ltd. At Truro. He is now in Montreal.

My first enquiry was to Dr. Jack Jenkins who recalled the incident, and put me in touch with Earl Taylor who had gathered the early history of aerial flights to and from the province, and kindly loaned me the pictures and documents on the 1919 flight. Dr. Jenkins loaned me a picture of the 1912 plane.

THE FIRST air mail letters were stamped in Truro at 1pm on September 24, 1919 and stamped here at Charlottetown at 2 o'clock exactly one hour later. The plane, called "The Jenny" was owned by the Devere Aviation Company. Lieutenant L Logan Barnhill, Jr. was chief instructor and a Charlottetown man, Lieutenant J. M. Stevenson was listed as manager for this province.

Dr. Jenkins recalls that J. M. Stevenson was the son of Matty Stevenson who ran a tinsmith shop on the site of the present federal building on Queen Street. Mr. Stevens says in his letter that Stevenson accompanied him on the flight to Charlottetown.

Islander At Controls

INFORMATION AVAILABLE in an old issue of a stamps magazine "BNA Topics", official journal of the British North America Philatelic Society, indicates that Stevenson was at the controls of the plane as it took off from Truro.

"A return flight to Truro had been planned for the same day", BNA Topics reveals, but Charlottetown Postmaster McCarey refused to allow mail to be carried unless the Post Office department would wire its permission. Authority having arrived on September 24, some 30 letters from Charlottetown were flown back to Truro with Capt. Stevens and Lieutenant Barnhill flying the Jenny. The aircraft left at 3:40 p.m. and because of headwinds arrived at about 5 p.m."

A LETTER carried from Postmaster McCarey here to Postmaster F. Smith, Truro on the return flight noted that it was "the first authorized dispatch (of mail) by air in Canada". There had been some earlier flights in Ontario and Alberta apparently, but the old stamp magazine suggests "it is possible that no official permission had been given except by the local postmasters."

The Truro air company had a short life as it discontinued operations on November 19 of the same year, the magazine indicates.

The picture of the 1919 plane shows Capt. Stevens with Lieut. Stevenson. Others in the picture, I have been told are Percy Turner, Postmaster McCarey and C. Coulson Gardner, and for this information I have to thank people like Harold Palmer. Q.C. and R. E. Sutherland.

Another picture Mr. Taylor loaned me is of a letter mailed to Horace Hazard, 17 Upper Prince Street, Charlottetown. It was postmarked at Truro at 1:00 p.m. and stamped at Charlottetown exactly one hour later, which was sensationally fast mail service at the time. It would even be fast today between the two points.

Dr. Jenkins loaned me a picture of the first plane flown in the province. It was flown, Mr. Taylor tells me, by a man whose name spells phonetically like Powley, though I understand that was not the way he spelled it.

Festival Of Male Voices

PEOPLE WHO like "Barbershop quartets" are in for a rare treat on the evening of July 11 when something more than a dozen quartets from across the province - they hope to have 15 and would like to have many more - will compete at Kensington's version of the Centennial celebration.

"The response has been wonderful from all over the province," I am told by Don Wood who is in charge of this development. Judging will be done by the "Air Force Four", an exceptionally fine quartet from Ottawa which will give a 15 to 20-minute performance. This group will stay around for some down-to-earth harmonizing around the piano in which competing quartets will be invited to join.

Entries in this far are from such widely scattered spots as East Baltic, Montague, Brooklyn, Freetown, Coleman and Victoria.

Calf Fumigated With Burnt Leather

AN EXTRACT from a diary of 1859 is interesting. It says "our heifer calved today.

A man was hired to rub hogs' lard on her udder and fumigate her with burned leather . .
. Five days later we started to use her milk."

That bit about fumigation with burnt leather is unusual. At least I've never heard about it, though probably some of our older readers have.

The extract is from a diary kept by Don Robbins who apparently was an accountant or assistant to the provincial treasurer, in the period of a little more than 100 years ago. It was passed along to me by Ralph Cameron who is searching through it for material for a historical edition of this paper that will be published later this summer.