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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Old Article Recalls First Airport Here

By NEIL A. MATHESON

“THE ENTERPRISE, initiative and the will to render a community service have been responsible for giving Charlottetown and the beautiful Garden Province of Prince Edward Island an airport of which any people might well be proud,” Canadian Aviation said in 1932 in its first issue published under the auspices of the Canadian Flying Clubs Association. The reference was to Lt.-Col. J. S. (Dr.) Jenkins and Mrs. Jenkins.

Referring to the Airport which Dr. Jenkins developed on his Upton Farm near Charlottetown, the magazine said:

“There are gently rolling fields, bordered by spruces, maples and silver birches, a private race-track – scene of many a day of thrilling sport – the whole centered around a picturesque house.

“This is ‘Upton Park’, the home of Lieut-Col. J. S. Jenkins, DSO and Mrs. Jenkins. And it is to Col. Jenkins and his enthusiastic wife that the thanks of the Island are due for one of the finest personal contributions to the advancement of aviation anywhere in the Dominion. It is a large part of this beautiful farm that has been utilized for Upton Airport.”

THE LOCATION was West Royalty where Lank Brothers have their herd of Red Poll cattle at present. The land across the Hurry Road, now owned by the Research Station (Experimental Farm) also was a part of the Upton Farm property, I believe.

The magazine notes that it took seven hours “by ordinary mode of travel” to reach Moncton from Charlottetown – I wonder if that has improved so much now, if we exclude motor travel, and air.

The magazine story explained that the reference was to train from Charlottetown, then Port Borden, ferry nine miles to Cape Tormentine and rail again to Moncton.

The magazine said “it was on the occasion of an extended trip by air through the Southern United States early last year (that would be 1931) that Dr. Jenkins decided it was time that something be done to bring about a faster mode of transportation between his Island and the rest of the country.

Canadian Airways – Remember?

“THANKS TO the determination with which Dr. Jenkins pursued the idea, one may now comfortably travel over the same distance by air in 50 minutes . . .and be received on a good airport. Transport planes of Canadian Airways Limited now cover this route on regular schedule every day”, the story notes.

The story notes that Dr. Jenkins “played practically a lone hand” in developing the Island’s first airport and actually pioneering the air age in this province.

With the advice of airways inspectors he . . . removed fences, rows of trees, stones and other obstructions until there was opened two runways in the shape of the letter L. One was 2,800 feet, the other 1,600 feet. These are short by present day standards but

they were adequate for the planes of that time. And provision was made to extend the runways later, the story added, when the need for longer runways developed.

Canadian Aviation warmly commended Dr. Jenkins for building a hangar – it was in “a pretty, tree-sheltered area”. In addition, the story added there is a small but very accommodating administration building complete with office, store room, lounge with a comfortable fireplace, and a well equipped kitchen. . . Dr. Jenkins personally directed construction, the whole presenting a picture of fine architectural design.”

Trans-Canada Air Pageant 1931

DR. JENKINS and Mrs. Jenkins who qualified for her pilot's license, incidentally, hosted the Trans-Canada Air Pageant on August 31. The crowd in attendance was estimated at 8,000 people and one reliable observer tells me that the lineup of vehicles stretched back beyond the Queens Arms and far up the North River Road. One story said the Mayor of the City had to be taken from his car far from the scene and make his way on foot the rest of the way, so great was the crush of traffic.

Just a few days earlier, on August 24, the first aircraft had landed. They were three Gypsy moths and an Autogyro, piloted by Junior Jones of Sussex, N.B. – he's well known in Charlottetown now – Harry O'Leary of Richibucto, N.B.; G.M. Ross, Ottawa and Geoffrey Dean, Montreal. This marked a new era “Canadian Aviation” said, in linking Canada's Garden Province of the Gulf with its sister provinces.

There is reference to the “excellent hospitality” of the Jenkins family as the “guest is ushered in through a drive-way emerging from a little wood to find a picturesque home with gardens sloping down to the river . . . The air traveler becomes conscious of a new and fascinating use of aircraft for touring purposes where such good air and delightful scenery and hospitality await him.

“The Jenkins’ . . . in addition to converting a large part of their valuable farm . . . have incurred a heavy personal expenditure to make available to their community, and province, Canada's newest and most attractive airport,” Canadian Aviation said.

The generosity of the Jenkins family stands out even more in contrast with the manner in which other Maritime airports were developed.

At Halifax, the magazine said, “the airport involved a municipal expenditure of nearly a quarter of a million dollars; St. John cost \$80,000, at Moncton it was a lesser \$20,000.

Good Will Flight Is Recalled

THE SAME magazine spoke of a “good will flight” in the interests of aviation, when six Prince Edward Island men flew from Charlottetown to Halifax. They carried letters from Premier J. D. Stewart of P.E.I. to Premier Harrington of Nova Scotia; from the Mayor of Charlottetown to the Mayor of Halifax, and from Reuben MacDonald, editor of the Patriot to Andrew Merkel, Atlantic superintendent of the Canadian Press.

In the party were Dr. Jenkins, E.M. Phillips, Mayor T.B. Rogers, Harry G. Rogers, Wellington MacNeill and Ray Clark. The pilot was Walter Fowler of Canadian Airways Limited who was in charge of the Fairfield 712, which was used regularly at that time on the Moncton-Charlottetown route.

Col. Jenkins said at the time he hoped to establish a regular service from the Island to Halifax in 1932 to connect with the Pan-American planes to Boston. The special trip across the channel, the old magazine reports, was made in one hour and three minutes, beating the time by train and ferry by some six hours.

Columbia Incident Interesting

DR. JENKINS – he's out of the province now – told me once that he thought it was his connection with "The Columbia" when she 'rested' at Tea Hill for 10 days back in 1930 that probably gave him his inspiration for initiating the boost to aviation in this province.

The Columbia came down in a field on the farm of the late John MacRae at Tea Hill at 5:30 p.m. in early September, 1930. The monoplane took off at 12:48 noon, 10 days later and landed that evening at St. John's, Newfoundland at 5:30.

The plane was piloted by Captain Errol Boyd with Lieutenant Harry Conners as navigator. They were on their way across the Atlantic – the Columbia made two crossings – and the flights were in days when Atlantic flights were still news.

Dr. Jenkins befriended the two airmen when they were on the Island.

Mrs. Jenkins had a pilot's license and their "Puss Moth" plane was named "CF-P.E.I." The letters were granted in appreciation of what the Doctor had done for aviation here, and the letters are still reserved for the Jenkins family, I understand. They have never been given to anyone else.