

October Meeting

Topic: “Earl Hand – Toronto’s Forgotten Aviation Pioneer

Speaker: Chris Hargreaves

Reporter: Gord McNulty

CAHS Toronto Chapter President Sheldon Benner introduced Chris Hargreaves, a retired high school teacher and active amateur historian, living in Kingston, ON. Chris has a special interest in the history of commercial aviation routes, the development of air mail services, and the lost romance of aviation. As a boy, he collected stamps and longed to travel the world, to fly, and to be a pilot. He joined the RAF and learned to fly, but resigned due to chronic ear ache. Nowadays, he flies regularly as a passenger, but never looks forward to it. His friends who travel the world on business complain about lineups, cramped seats and jet lag. Chris still enjoys stamps, and collects the souvenir covers that used to be produced for new airline services and air mail routes. They are an artifact from the time when “everybody” dreamed about travelling the world, and flying was romantic. He has edited *The Canadian Aerophilatelist*, quarterly journal of the *Canadian Aerophilatelic Society*, since 1994. This has enabled him to co-ordinate several research projects, including one into National Air Transport – the forgotten airline run by Capt. Earl Hand, which was once “Toronto’s Oldest and Largest” airline. This research was described In the CAHS Journal, Summer 2005, Vol. 43, No. 2.

Chris is a Past President of the Canadian Aerophilatelic Society; editor-in-chief for the revised catalogue of *Air Mails of Canada and Newfoundland*; and Canadian representative to the Aerophilatelic Commission of the F.I.P. (Federation Internationale de Philatelie). In 2015 he was inducted into the American Air Mail Society’s Aerophilatelic Hall of Fame. He is also Chair of the Kingston Field Naturalists’ Conservation Committee, and a member of the Ontario Invasive Plant Council’s Research and Control Committee. Contact information: address, 4060 Bath Road, Kingston, K7M 4Y4; email, hargreavescp@sympatico.ca; phone, 613 389-8993. The Flypast illustration for Chris’s talk, an advertisement showing “Captain Earl M. Hand, distinguished flying ace” with a Buckingham cigarette in hand, underlined how aviators were popular choices to endorse commercial projects in the 1930s. Hand was a celebrity at the time, although he is now little-known. In his talk, Chris credited 14 people with providing most of the illustrations, including Barry Countryman, John Irvine, Richard Sanders Allen, Jonathon Johnson, Neil Hunter, Bill Wheeler, Fred Hotson, C.D. Long, Fred Hitchins, Terry Judge, Ron Davies, and most recently, Robert Galway, George Fuller, the City of Toronto Archives and Bob Winson.

Two questions surround Hand’s story. If he was forgotten, how did anyone learn about him? What accomplishments of his should now be remembered? Chris learned about Hand with his interest in the lost romance of aviation, beginning with the 1928 Golden Jubilee Year of the Canadian National Exhibition. Special events that year included “the first international aircraft show,” advertising “thrilling displays reminiscent of war days, air battles, thrilling formations of 30 planes in one flight, commercial and stunt flying demonstrations and airplane exhibits.” An air mail service between Windsor and Quebec was to be inaugurated on Friday, August 24. That



Speaker Chris Hargreaves
Photo Credit Neil McGavock



National Air Transport Buhl Bull Pup at Barker Field

Photo Courtesy - Getty Images

was slightly overstated. There were in fact specially arranged flights, providing an air mail service between Montreal and Toronto. The CNE decided to expand that, to bring air mail from Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa and Kingston in the east, and from Windsor, London and Hamilton in the west. The Post Office gave these flights a special souvenir hand stamp, charging five cents per letter, rather than the regular two cents. Each city had a different hand stamp. Thirty-two thousand covers were flown to Toronto by the special flights from the east, while 29,000 covers came in from the west.

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Toronto Air Harbor, foot of Bay Street. **\$5** Per Flight
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National Air Transport Air Services Ad

One from London came with a special air mail sticker on the envelope, with a letter suggesting it was sent to arrange for correspondence to be sent on the first air mail delivery, with a request that the envelope and all be saved. The letter mentioned that the Aug. 24 event was to "a big celebration time." A year later, the Post Office established a regular air mail service extending from Toronto to Windsor-Detroit, via Hamilton and London. It was operated by Canadian Airways, which was already flying from Montreal to Toronto. The Post Office initiated separate cachets (hand stamps) for the inaugural flight of each new air mail connection. For example, Toronto dispatched 19,000; Hamilton 12,000 and London, 27,000, so it was really popular. The U.S. also produced hand stamps, but they tended to be a rather stylized design, whereas Canada chose a pictorial design. Canadian stamps became very popular collectibles in the States.



National Air Transport Buhl CA-5 Airedan G - CATO at Leaside Airfield C. 1928 -

Photo Courtesy - Chris Hargreaves

Chris's research started after he received a cover with a letter written on National Air Transport Ltd. letterhead, in place of the normal Canadian Airways Ltd. Who was National Air Transport, a company that operated a daily Toronto-Windsor service without ever being mentioned in any aviation books? Barry Countryman found newspaper articles confirming that National Air Transport did in fact operate the

service and had been a forgotten airline. Chris then wrote his article for the CAHS Journal, "National Air Transport Limited: Canada's Forgotten Airline." It was clear that Earl Hand was the major force in creating and running this airline. He, in turn, was Canada's forgotten airline pioneer. Born on March 10, 1897, Earl Hand joined the 227th Battalion in March, 1916. He was five foot ten, healthy, and served in France for six months. He was promoted to sergeant, then applied to the Royal Flying Corps to train as a pilot. Sent to Camp Borden, he was in the first training course of pilots and soloed after only 2½ hours of instruction.



North Toronto Airports of the past - Artwork Nat McHaffie - Photo - J. Bertram

Hand went to the western front near Ypres with 45 Squadron and flew Sopwith Camels. He achieved his first victory on Nov. 15, downing an Albatros D.V. The squadron was transferred to Italy by year-end and engaged in combat fighting in Austria. On Jan. 11, he was in a dogfight that sent two aircraft out of control, then scored four more victories. By May 9, he had five victories, qualifying him as an ace. He was promoted to captain and awarded the French Croix de Guerre. Then, as reported in the Sault Daily Star, June 10, 1918, Hand's parents received a telegram reporting him missing as of June 1. On July 23, his parents learned he had been taken prisoner. What a difficult six weeks that must have been.

Writing an account in the Toronto Star in 1934, Hand stated he had been leading an early morning patrol escorting Italian bombers. He was shot down at an altitude of 3,500 feet, and his gas tank was set on fire. He then sideslipped to the ground. When he got out of his aircraft, his clothing was on fire but there was a heavy dew on the grass. He was able to roll on the grass and put the flames out. But he was burned and spent six months in Austrian hospitals. Hand was awarded the DFC and returned to Canada in 1919. In civilian life, he studied law, graduated and became a partner in a couple of law firms. He remained involved in aviation. A Toronto Star story on Sept. 9, 1927, outlined how airmen Tully and Medcalf had disappeared while trying to fly across the Atlantic from London, ON, to London, England, to win a prize offered by Carling Brewery. Various people were invited to comment as to what might have happened, and Hand was among them. Hand was also involved in the Toronto Aeronautical Association, which lobbied city council and the federal government to create an airfield in Toronto. The association morphed into the Toronto Flying Club at Leaside and Hand became its first president, serving from 1927 to 1930. In July, 1928, he founded the airline that was National Air Transport Ltd. Hand flew the Windsor to Hamilton leg, transferring to another aircraft --- a Buhl Bull Pup --- that was flown to Toronto. In November, 1928, daily service from Toronto to Windsor was announced. In July, 1929, Canadian Airways Ltd. took over the Toronto-Windsor route.



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, Item 4585

National Air Transport Captain Earl Hand and his Buhl Airsedan airplane - *City of Toronto Archives*

It was obviously a blow to National Air Transport, which bid for the air mail contract but lost to Canadian Airways, which was already serving Toronto-Montreal. However, National expanded to eight aircraft by the end of November. Hand was elected to the board of directors of Canadian Air Express Ltd. They kept their aircraft busy, flying prospectors to northern Ontario and an air mail service from Leamington to Pelee Island. Competition from Canadian Airways, however, ended the Toronto-Windsor service. In 1930, National could claim to be Toronto's oldest and largest air transport company.

Hand became a celebrity and was endorsing cigarettes by then. In 1931, National's eight-plane, safely operated service was featured in a major article in Canadian Aviation magazine. The company moved its headquarters from Leaside Airport to Barker Field on Lawrence Avenue. Billy Bishop was among the officials who attended the official opening in 1931. In 1932, National began service between Toronto and Buffalo. Two connecting routes were flown from Buffalo to New York. In November, 1933 Hand made a mercy flight to rescue an injured hunter who could be reached only by skis. He picked up the hunter and flew him back to Toronto. However, the Great Depression led to the end of the Toronto-Buffalo service in September, 1933. Several accidents reduced the fleet to five aircraft. In 1935, another aircraft was written off in an accident. Then, in November, 1935, a fire at Barker Field destroyed five airplanes, including National's four remaining aircraft. All of the aircraft were in the hangar at the time. It was suspected that a tramp had entered the hangar and set it afire trying to keep warm. The airline lost its licence in 1937 and didn't fly again.

Earl Hand continued his storied career. In 1937, he was among those promoting a better Toronto airport. During the Second World War, Hand was general counsel and assistant manager for the Mutual Benefit Health and Accident Association. He was actively involved in veterans' affairs, but not in military service. After the war, he continued in law, was made a King's Counsel in 1949, and appointed a magistrate in the County of York in 1954. When he died on March 19, 1954, his death made front-page news in the Toronto Telegram. In short, we have a Toronto aviator who was a First World War ace, oversaw a major expansion of aviation in Toronto in the 1920s, established National Air Transport and continued to advocate for what eventually became the airport at Malton. He became both a celebrity and a well-respected contributor to the community. The question Chris asked: "Why isn't Earl Hand in Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame?" Our speaker was among a group that nominated Hand for the Hall in 2005, but wasn't successful. Chris has always felt Hand should be there, and closed by suggesting that Chapter members take up the cause to put one of Toronto's very own aviators in the Hall.

During the question period, Robert Galway, author of *The Early Airfields of Toronto*, noted that Toronto Mayor Alan Lamport, who had been a pilot who also flew air mail, was also an investor in Canadian Air Express. After the fire at Barker Field, it was proposed to make the Canadian Air Express field on Dufferin Street, north of Barker Field, a major new Toronto airfield with three runways. But it was limited by adjacent urban development. Malton was chosen as the site after considerable political machinations and a most unusual flight, described in the handwritten

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Buffalo, N.Y.	\$8.00	\$14.00

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Buffalo to:	Single	Return
Rochester	\$3.34	\$6.38
Syracuse	8.76	14.69
Albany	10.88	19.32
New York	23.06	41.11

MARTZ AIRWAYS		
Buffalo to:	Single	Return
Scranton	\$15.00	\$25.00
Wilkes-Barre	16.00	28.00
New York	22.00	35.50

BAGGAGE: Thirty pounds will be carried free on each full fare ticket. Any excess will be charged at the rate of five cents per pound. Schedule of rates subject to change without notice.

Reservations and Information
TORONTO—National Air Transport Limited, Barker Field, Kenwood 6894. All hotels and travel agencies.
BUFFALO—Emergency Flying Service, Buffalo, Niagara, Niagara Falls, American Airways, Buffalo Airport.
At Major Airlines Offices—American Airways office and at leading hotels and travel agencies.

TRAVEL BY AIR

TORONTO — BUFFALO NEW YORK
via
WILKES-BARRE; SCRANTON
or via
ROCHESTER; SYRACUSE
ALBANY

4 HOURS
Toronto—New York
Planes leave Barker Field, Toronto and Buffalo Airport daily except Sunday

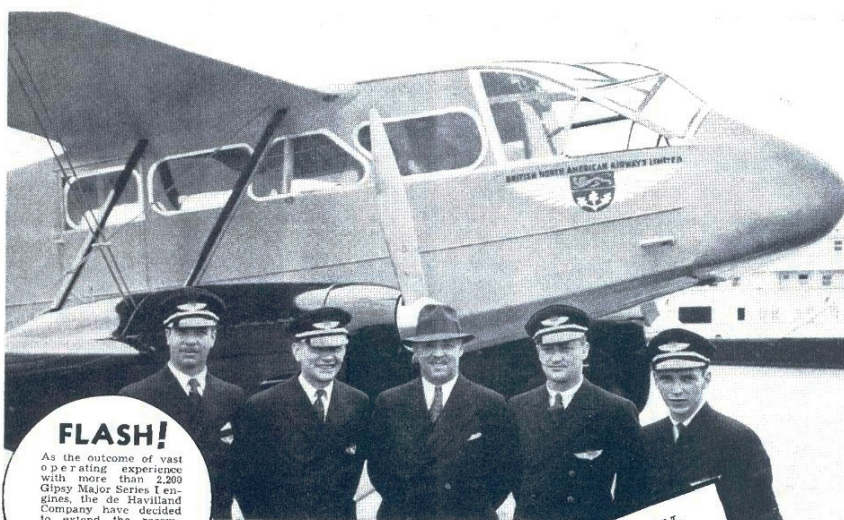
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Timetable

OCTOBER, 1937

17

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Pilots and Operations Manager of British North American Airways Limited, Toronto. Picture is taken in front of one of their new de Havilland Dragon Rapides. Left to right: W. B. Buckworth, R. M. Smith, W. Roy Maxwell, "Mac" Herald, and H. C. Umphrey.

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notes of former CAHS President Fred Hotson. Robert noted that British North American Airways, then based at Toronto Air Harbour, received a call one day in 1937 to take a group of executives on a 2½ hour flight over northwest Toronto in a Dragon Rapide with powerful federal cabinet minister C.D. Howe aboard. No questions were to be asked. The aircraft was flown by BNAA pilot Harry Umphry, a colleague of Fred's. At the end of the flight, five of the six executives left without so much as a thank you. The one remaining executive, none other than Mr. Howe, then came to Mr. Umphry, thanked him, and said: "My name is C.D. Howe and you have just managed to select the site for the new Toronto Airport."

Chapter Volunteer Bob Winson thanked Chris for a most informative overview of Earl Hand's significant contribution to aviation and a valuable elaboration on his excellent article in the *CAHS Journal*.

BNAA Advertisement - Courtesy Larry Milberry / Canav Books

Flypast V. 51 No. 2