

## December Meeting



Speaker Dr. Robert Galway  
Photo Credit - Neil McGavock

Topic: “Captain Wm. Roy Maxwell – The Forgotten Pilot of Canada’s North”

Speaker: Robert Galway

Reporter: Gord McNulty

The Toronto Chapter Annual Christmas Gift Exchange meeting began with Bill Wheeler, former *CAHS Journal* editor and a member of Canada’s Aviation Hall of Fame, introducing Dr. Hugh Robert Galway. Born 7 January, 1937, in Kenora, Dr. Galway grew up in the small gold mining community of McKenzie Red Lake Gold Mine in the Red Lake area of northwestern Ontario. His father was on the original Gilbert Labine Exploration Party flown by C.H. “Punch” Dickins to Great Bear Lake in 1929, when the radioactive uranium-rich mineral Pitchbende, now known as Urainite, was discovered at Pine Point near Great Slave Lake.

Dr. Galway attended Red Lake High School until the early 1950s. He also played “hookey” regularly to load bush planes at Green Airways and Chukuni Airways, to earn a ride to commercial fishing camps and trappers’ camps in the area. He first flew an aircraft at age 15, a Stinson Reliant SR9 registered CF-BGN. Dr. Galway left Red Lake permanently in 1955 for school in the east. He graduated from the University of Toronto in 1958, with studies in Economics and Geology. He worked for ten seasons as a geologist/geophysical operator throughout northern Ontario, Quebec and Labrador, employed by mining exploration companies including Franc Joubin Assoc., Prospector Airways, Falconbridge, and Labrador Mining and Exploration.

Dr. Galway returned to Medical School during one of the periodic economic downturns in the mining industry. He graduated in medicine from U of T in 1963 and McGill post-grad 1967-68. Completing specialty training at U of T – Surgery, in 1970, he was admitted to the Royal College of Surgeons Canada, in November 1970. He practised Orthopaedic Surgery in Toronto, from 1971 to 2008 and retired in 2009.

Dr. Galway obtained a pilot licence with a float endorsement and IFR rating. He owned Cessna 182 Skylane CF-ZBB and shared in ownership of Cessna 210 CF-YCP. He now lives part time in Collingwood and enjoys skiing, boating on Georgian Bay and golf. Writing is a large part-time hobby. He and his wife, Anne, enjoy their children Sean and Gina plus grandkids Dylan and Jordan. Son, Sean, a survey engineer with a specialty in Oceanography and Lidar Aerial Survey Technology, teaches at the British Columbia Institute of Technology.

Captain Wm. Roy Maxwell is best known as founder and first Director of the Ontario Provincial Air Service, which began operations with Curtiss HS-2L flying boats, based at Sault Ste. Marie from a large waterfront hangar, complete with slipway on the St. Mary’s River. The legacy continues at the Sault with the Canadian Bushplane Heritage Centre, which displays several OPAS aircraft as part of an impressive collection in the original OPAS hangar. Maxwell’s OPAS introduced many of Canada’s well-known aviation personalities. They mastered wilderness operations and were exemplified by “Doc” Oakes, Alex Milne, Stan Knight and Jack Dillon whose stories are in the *CAHS Journal*.

In a stellar presentation illustrated with prized photos, four scrapbooks of Maxwell's with news clippings, a "wings over the bush" brochure and even an audio tape, Dr. Galway labelled Capt. Maxwell as "The Forgotten Pilot of Canada's North." At one time the "go-to man" for information on aviation, Maxwell was quoted in newspapers including national publications at least five or six times a year until his forced resignation from the OPAS in 1934. From then he disappeared from Canadian aviation history. Books by notable aviation authors such as Peter Pigott, let alone Wikipedia, do not list Maxwell's name in their index. No comprehensive biography has been produced about a man who had an intriguing and significant aviation career and made a remarkable contribution to Canadian aviation and industry.

Dr. Galway presented a matrix of images showing how Maxwell contributed to the formative years of Canadian aviation. Maxwell, who had licence number 34, started his aviation career in 1919 with a barnstorming group led by H.A. Wilshire, based at Burlington Bay in Hamilton. A year later, Maxwell helped form the Canadian Aero Film company, with two cinematographers who are now in the Canadian Cinematography Hall of Fame, Blaine Irish and Roy Tash. From there, Maxwell went to the Laurentide Company, owned by Cornelius Van Horne, founder of the CPR. Maxwell was replacement chief pilot to take over from Stuart Graham, who was Canada's first bush pilot when he went to Laurentide in 1919.



Avro 504K G-CAAE at Moose Factory 1922  
Photo Courtesy - Maxwell Collection

In the winter of 1922, Maxwell flew a ski-equipped Avro 504K, G-CAAE, from Cochrane to Moose Factory as part of a mining exploration contract for John Mack, who for a peculiar reason thought he could find oil in the James Bay Lowlands. Maxwell was accompanied by Herve St. Martin, who is in the Quebec Air and Space Hall of Fame. The aircraft was owned by Canadian Aerial Surveys. Investor and Montreal merchant Thomas Hall had a large financial stake in the firm and ultimately financed Laurentide

Air Service. Laurentide wanted to leave the aviation business when Maxwell returned, but with financial support from Hall and help from Wilshire, Maxwell established Laurentide Air Service. The company spread its wings from eastern Quebec to the Manitoba border, with major bases at Remi Lake near Kapuskasing and Minaki, the summer home of Canadian aviation pioneer James A. Richardson.

The OPAS was created in 1924 when the Ontario government brought all of its survey work in-house. At the same time, the RCAF had a near-monopoly on aerial photo surveying in Canada. These factors bankrupted Laurentide Air Service. It was a time when the growth of Canadian civil aviation was at a standstill. The number of pilots, planes and firms engaged in flying dropped sharply. Maxwell left to form the OPAS and in the winter of 1926, he befriended Harold "Doc" Oakes, a pilot and mining engineer. Oakes left the OPAS to stake claims in the great Gold Rush at Red Lake in 1926. Using money from the sale of those claims, Oakes bought a Curtiss Lark in New York. He called on



Curtiss Lark G-CAFB at Sioux Lookout  
Photo Courtesy - [www.semiofficials.ca](http://www.semiofficials.ca)

Maxwell to fly the Lark to Red Lake, where Oakes set up Patricia Airways and Exploration Co. From there, Maxwell unexpectedly ran into the political whirlwind of colourful Liberal Premier Mitch Hepburn. He incurred the displeasure of Hepburn, who took office in 1934, and ultimately was more or less forced out of the OPAS. His career eclipsed, he seemingly disappeared from the public record.

In 1935, however, Maxwell reappeared as an economic consultant to E.P. Taylor in a company called British North American Airways (BNAA) based at Toronto Island Airport and hopeful of establishing a Canada-wide air service. That didn't happen. Maxwell then formed Baillie-Maxwell Air Services, of Nakina, ON, north of Lake Nipigon. They were granted a monopoly to trade with the First Nations people in the Albany River drainage basin, with a base at Ogoki. They traded for freshwater sturgeon, stripped of its caviar, and shipped to high-end restaurants in New York and Chicago. The air base was located on the CNR line. Baillie-Maxwell owned two working aircraft, a DH Fox Moth CF-API and a Bellanca Pacemaker CF-BMO. "That really in a nutshell is the civil aviation career of Roy Maxwell," Dr. Galway said. "People in this room today now know more about Roy Maxwell than any other living soul in this country, if not North America."

But there was more to Maxwell's life than civil aviation, as Dr. Galway noted. In fact, his civil aviation was book-ended by service including the Royal Flying Corps in World War I, and the RCAF in World War II as Wing Commander at Western Air Command headquarters at Victoria, BC. He was in charge of patrols to locate Japanese submarines engaged in releasing incendiary balloons to set fire to coastal forests. Then he became ill in 1943 and had to resign.

Discussing Red Lake, Dr. Galway noted that it had "the busiest airport in the western world" when he was born in 1937 – not only in terms of the landings and takeoffs that took place from ice or water but also the air freight volume. The 1937 frenzy, a rebirth of the original 1926 Gold Rush, happened when President Roosevelt raised the price of gold to \$35 an ounce from \$22. That was the difference between profit and loss in the mining industry.

As for Maxwell's personal side, Dr. Galway went back to June 14, 1892. It was grey and quiet in Toronto, a day when not even the birds were singing. By day's end, however, death and destruction hit North America. Tornadoes left six dead in St. Rose, Quebec, and 55 were killed in Minnesota. Into this cauldron of meteorological mayhem William Roy Maxwell was born to parents William Henry "Hy" Maxwell and Reubena Bell Maxwell. Within a few months, the family moved to Hamilton, to continue Hy's career as a confectioner. Hy was born in Oswego, NY, of Canadian parents from the Ottawa Valley, who migrated to a village in western Illinois – Tampico – birthplace of Ronald Reagan. En route, Hy Maxwell was born. He appears in the American census with two sisters in 1880. For whatever reason, he turned his back on his family and came to Canada.

Hy trained as a mechanic in 1865 but found employment in Toronto as a confectioner and met his wife in the store, owned by a Hamilton businessman. They quickly moved to Hamilton where he continued as a confectioner. A year and a half after the move, Roy Maxwell was joined by his sister, Hazel. He grew up on the same street as the Hazell family, green grocers in the area. Both families were in the same Methodist Church congregation. Lester Pearson's father was the minister of the same church. Roy Maxwell attended Central Collegiate, as did Lester Pearson (who was also an RFC pilot).

Dr. Galway showed interesting illustrations of Hamilton in the early 1900s, including the Jolley Cut mountain-lower city access road. In 1909, a young architectural student was so delighted by J.A.D.



McCurdy's Silver Dart flight that he built his own glider and glided down the Jolley Cut. The whole city was excited, and young Roy Maxwell must have known about it. In 1911, the third inter-city flight and air meet in Canada came to Hamilton, hosted by the Motor League of Canada. McCurdy won the inter-city air race between Toronto and Hamilton. Roy Maxwell gained his papers as an apprentice electrician at Westinghouse in 1912, but tragically, his father died of heart failure at 44. That negated any opportunity for Roy to know his grandparents on the paternal side. He didn't have any contact with aunts, cousins or whatever. His mother and sister moved to Toronto while Roy left Westinghouse and moved to northern Ontario.

Thanks to Hamilton Public Library Research Librarian Margaret Houghton, Dr. Galway learned that the oral history of Hamilton showed that Maxwell became a civil survey engineer for McKenzie & Mann, owners of the Canadian Northern Railway. The daughter of Maxwell's boss, Sir William Mackenzie, married French aviator Count Jacques de Lesseps in a world-famous romance. De Lesseps made a big impression on Torontonians when he became the first man to make a complete air circuit over the city at the second inter-city flight and air meet in 1910. The airfield at today's Trethewey Drive became known as de Lesseps Field. Grace Mackenzie was invited by de Lesseps to join him at the next air race at Belmont Park later in 1910. Her sisters were chaperones. Grace and Jacques were married in England and lived in Paris. De Lesseps later flew air survey work and died in a crash in 1927 along the Gaspé coastline in Quebec.

The McKenzie & Mann Railway went bankrupt in 1915. Roy Maxwell appeared to disappear, but resurfaced in the Royal Flying Corps as an officer in 1918. In September, 1918, he married Dora Louise Hazell, sister of Willie Hazell, a Grade 1 classmate of Roy circa 1899/1900. In 1920, he made a flight to Moose Factory, but was forced down on the Mattagami River by engine failure, spending the night with just a campfire. He later told his life story to Toronto Star reporter Fred Griffin, mentioning his experience in the RFC among other things. Maxwell said that in 1912 he arrived in Moose Factory, became a civil engineer with the railway, and then learned to fly. He was quoted: "I'm glad I learned to fly. It freed my soul and it made it worthwhile turning my back on everything I had been trained to do before that time."



A Curtiss JN-4 on the perimeter road at Armour Heights Aerodrome following an accident.

*Photo Courtesy - Canadian Forces College*

Dr. Galway cited evidence to show that Maxwell was overseas with the RFC, as far back as 1916. He may have served in the Western Front, though records are thin. Returning to Canada, after an initial period with the RFC at Camp Borden, Maxwell went to the School of Special Flying for advanced pilots at Armour Heights. The school was set up to address the substantial accident rate in the RFC at the time – a rate which led Toronto newspapers to urge cancellation of the RFC training Canadians. They cut the toll in half by adopting a British-style, much more disciplined approach to flight training, with many more hours including ground school at the U of T. From this, Maxwell adopted the maxim, "discipline is safety."

Why was he called "Captain" Maxwell through his life? Dr. Galway isn't sure, but Maxwell habitually called any pilots who flew with him or for him by their war title if they had one. He was buried at Prospect Cemetery, Toronto, honoured with a headstone as "Group Captain W. Roy Maxwell." He died as an RCAF veteran, book-ended by both wars.

Maxwell's early flying was part of a movie and picture, presented by Ken Molson at a CAHS convention, showing a stunt plane flown by H.A. Wilshire in the Burlington Bay area in 1920. The chase/film plane was flown by Maxwell, who became most familiar with the Curtiss JN-4 Canuck. Maxwell and Wilshire were forerunners in aviation cinematography and that led to Maxwell's 1920 contract to survey the James Bay lowlands for the Ontario government in an HS-2L, G-CAAZ. A government surveyor joined Maxwell for the flight from Burlington Bay and was with him when they were forced down on the Mattagami River. Five flights were made to the Moose Factory area on James Bay from Remi Lake in the summer of 1920. During the Moose Factory ventures, Maxwell made the first medical evacuation in Canada when he flew a patient with meningitis to Cochrane. The patient, a fur trader, was transferred to Montreal for specialty care after his airborne Medivac and survived the ordeal. Ken Molson wrote about Maxwell's accomplishments in the *CAHS Journal* in 1971 but given his knowledge at the time, he wasn't aware that Maxwell continued to fly after resigning from the OPAS. When Maxwell landed at Moose Factory, the aboriginals thought he had arrived in the "devil bird." Some people fired at it with shotguns. Dr. Galway played a short audio tape about the first landing as recalled for native elders years later by Andy Faries, who was an eight-year-old boy at the time. Faries eventually became manager of the Hudson's Bay post at Ogoki, where Maxwell ended his flying career trading for caviar.

The first week Maxwell went to fly with Laurentide, a sister ship HS-2L crashed with engine failure in a farmer's field near Grandmere, Quebec. The engineer, who survived the crash, was greeted by Genevieve, a pretty lady who rushed out of the farmhouse. She inadvertently outed a romance when she asked, "Oh, Romeo, Romeo, are you all right?" Lo and behold, the engineer was not Romeo Vachon, future Aviation Hall of Fame pilot, who married Genevieve six months later. Maxwell flew a Curtiss Seagull for Laurentide. In 1921, it stalled in a flat spin at 4,000 feet but somehow he managed to land and all three people survived. The crash was initially listed as pilot error, when in fact the poor flying characteristics of the Seagull were at fault. It had inadequate rudder size to allow recovery from an inadvertent stall and spin. Only the considerable flying skill of Maxwell averted disaster.

With creation of the OPAS, Laurentide Air Service desperately attempted to prevent financial disaster in early 1924 by setting up the first scheduled passenger and airmail service in Canada, from Haileybury, ON to Rouyn, QC. LAS received government approval to print what were known as "semi-official" airmail stamps. Fourteen other bush companies received similar approval between 1924 and 1932. Today, semi-official postage forms a multi-million dollar market. Google the Canadian Aerophilatelic Society (CAS) at [www.aerophilately.ca](http://www.aerophilately.ca). Prices for these stamps range between \$150 to \$400; covers can bring \$500 to \$600 each.



Haileybury - Rouyn Air Mail Stamp

More photos included the original OPAS crew members who joined Maxwell when he founded the service, quickly establishing the headquarters and main hangar facilities at Sault Ste. Marie. The new hangar opened for the 1925 flying season. Thirteen HS-2Ls formed the initial OPAS fleet, followed by two Loening Air Yachts. Although beastly-looking, the Loening set a world record for altitude and was a favourite of Maxwell. However, both Loenings were soon destroyed in landing accidents at Ramsey Lake in Sudbury. Maxwell photographed the area, including an iconic shot of steamboats lining up to enter or exit the Sault harbour. The Sault was chosen because the freezeup was three weeks later and the breakup was three weeks earlier than any other area in the Great Lakes, so it extended the flying season by six weeks.





Maxwell (centre) with a group of early OPAS pilots in 1924

*Photo Credit - MNR*

As mentioned, Canadian civil aviation struggled until the summer of 1925 when the Howey brothers of Haileybury discovered gold in Red Lake, a relatively inaccessible place 200 miles north of Kenora. It was served by neither roads nor rail and portages for large loads were impossible. The Howey brothers approached mining promoter Jack Hammell, who persuaded the OPAS to loan him five HS-2Ls to fly men and equipment into Red Lake in the fall of 1925. They took off from outside Richardson's cottage on the Winnipeg River at Minaki. Romeo Vachon was one of

the pilots on that initial safari, as well as "Doc" Oakes, who staked claims and sold them for a profit. Oakes invested with Toronto financier Frank Davison and as mentioned they formed Patricia Airways and Exploration Co.

Oakes convinced Maxwell to fly the Curtiss Lark G-CAFB from the Curtiss factory on Long Island, NY, to Red Lake. Toronto Star reporter Fred Griffin accompanied Maxwell on the epic three-week flight from mid-March to April 13, 1926. The Lark was forced down on Lake Pogamasing on the day they left Sudbury after changing from wheels to skis. They encountered blizzard conditions with icing and whiteouts in what was a miracle flight. Griffin documented the venture with more than 130 envelopes he addressed to himself for delivery in Red Lake. His envelopes became rare, very valuable aerophilatelic items. In fact, it would have been more lucrative to invest in that than gold! The rarest items – three private letters, addressed to Maxwell by F.G. Erickson – are valued at \$4,000 to \$5,000 and owned today by Steve Johnson, president of the CAS. The book, *Lake Pogamasing: The Story of a Northern Lake*, by Andy Thomson, has a chapter on the adventure.



OPAS DH Gipsy Moths 1927 - *Photo Credit - MNR*

In 1927, Maxwell went to England and persuaded de Havilland to strengthen the undercarriage and structure of the D.H. 60 Moth, replacing the Cirrus engine with a Gipsy engine, making it more suitable for bush flying. By 1932 the OPAS had 13 Moths. Maxwell's photo collection includes a Stinson SB-1 biplane owned by Patricia Airways. It was the forerunner of an SM-1 Detroit monoplane that Maxwell was selected to fly, with Terrence Tully of the OPAS, in the Sir John Carling race from London, ON, to London, England. Maxwell, however, was denied a leave of absence. Tully

resigned over the issue, and took James Medcalf, also of the OPAS with him. The pair disappeared in their *Detroiter* after setting off from Harbour Grace, Nfld., on the risky flight to London.



Wm. Roy Maxwell (kneeling with a commercial grade camera) at Moose Factory in the early 1930's.  
Aircraft CF - OAJ is a Boeing Hamilton H47  
*Photo Courtesy - The Maxwell Collection*

With the OPAS, Maxwell flew mercy missions, search and rescue, and treaty/VIP flights beyond forestry service. His true scope was found in his annual reports he filed to the cabinet minister. Ten years of activity were summarized in the 1933 report, which proved to be his last. Totals for the decade included 75,000 flying hours in 10 years over a distance of 4¾ million miles. OPAS carried 30,000 passengers. Only one passenger fatality occurred in the 10 years, remarkable in those relatively early days of bush flying. Five pilots were lost. Some 41,000 forestry workers were carried for fire suppression and other duties.

However, despite his magnificent achievements, Maxwell incurred the personal displeasure of temperamental incoming Premier Hepburn. In office, Hepburn went on an ostentatious display of cost-cutting and firing civil servants. He fired every game warden and medical officer of health in Ontario. Hepburn even tried to abolish the office of lieutenant governor, until his own attorney general told him he couldn't be sworn into office without the lieutenant governor!

The premier also created a commission, headed by defeated Liberal candidate Daniel Webster Lang, to study malfeasance at OPAS. While some wrongdoing took place at OPAS, it was far outweighed on balance by Maxwell's accomplishments. Hepburn basically forced Maxwell's exit after Maxwell took a beating at the commission hearings. Maxwell resigned from the OPAS in 1934, proud of what he had done. Interestingly enough, G.E. Ponsford, who succeeded Maxwell, was Hepburn's chauffeur and drinking companion in the campaign.

Maxwell, isolated and out of work, was reduced to modelling men's suits for Tip Top Tailors. But he bounced back, as mentioned, to be hired first by E.P. Taylor for BNAA, which flew a de Havilland Dragon Rapide and flew two Stinson Reliants, including CF-BGN, which went to the OPAS and then Green Airways at Red Lake. The first aircraft Dr. Galway handled 60 years ago, it's now displayed at the Centre. Ironically, Maxwell's next venture, Baillie Maxwell Air Service at Nakina, was granted a monopoly by Hepburn's government to trade with First Nations people in the Albany River drainage basin for freshwater sturgeon and caviar shipped to high-end restaurants from New York to Chicago. They had a Fox Moth, CF-API, and a Bellanca Pacemaker, CF-BMO.



CF-BGN at the Canadian Bushplane Heritage Centre  
*Photo Credit: www.bushplane.com*



In 1939 Maxwell enlisted in the RCAF. With his amphibious experience, he was posted to Western Air Command headquarters at Victoria, BC, then on to Ucluelet and Tofino. He was responsible for the coastal patrol squadrons equipped with Curtiss Kittyhawks and Supermarine Stranraers. When he resigned in 1943 with cerebral vascular disease, Maxwell returned to Brampton. In 1945, when his son Bill was born, he suffered his first stroke. He sustained a second stroke six months later and died on March 15, 1946, at the relatively young age of 54. He was buried in the RCAF Veterans Plot of Prospect Cemetery with the rank of Group Captain.



The Maxwell Family - Son Ryan and Father Bill attending the  
Dec. 6, 2014 CAHS Toronto Chapter Meeting  
Photo Credit - Neil McGavock

Many accolades and tributes flowed Maxwell's way over his career, exemplified among others in a 1945 greeting signed by good friend Eddie Rickenbacker and a 1944 tribute by early aviator and publicist Harry Bruno, author of *Wings Over America*. Bill Maxwell and his son, Ryan, attended Dr. Galway's presentation, as did Dave Fenwick, son of A.R. Fenwick, a senior lands and forests officer who was in the James Bay forest survey that Maxwell flew.

Dr. Galway suggested Maxwell's most important contribution was outlined in Fred Hotson's history of

de Havilland Canada. The purchase of Gipsy Moths for the OPAS by Maxwell in 1927 was decisive in establishing DHC in Toronto, a company which as Bombardier Aerospace earned \$19 billion in revenue for Canada's economy last year. Dr. Galway said this contribution, alone, should justify Maxwell being named to Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame. He described Maxwell's omission from the Hall as regrettable. Ironically, Maxwell is better remembered by aboriginal people than ourselves because of his mercy and treaty flights into First Nations, for whom he had great respect. Bruce West's 1974 book, *The Firebirds*, has excellent coverage of Maxwell's OPAS career.

Dr. Galway's passion for the story of Roy Maxwell was obvious as he delivered his compelling and exceptionally well-researched presentation. Chapter Volunteer Bob Winson expressed thanks to Dr. Galway for a much-appreciated talk. Let's hope the fascinating and richly deserving Maxwell will finally be honoured in the Hall of Fame.

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