

Flying boat museum opens in Botwood



MAYOR ELMER BURSEY

Just the beginning for Heritage Centre

By JEFF KOILLER
The Grand Falls Advertiser

Take yourself back through time, to a simpler day — a time before the Concord and a supersonic flight across the Atlantic lasting only three hours, a time when comfort and regality was more important than speed. You walk down a long wharf, maybe take a short boat ride out into a harbor. Just you and 19 other passengers — and 2,543 pounds of mail.

With a whine, slowly, a gigantic three-bladed propeller begins to turn — once — twice — then with a cough and a belch of smoke from the back of the cowl, the 1600 horsepower Wright-Cyclone engine roars into life. It is soon followed by three others.

A crewman casts off the mooring lines, much the same as the same person would do for a departing boat or ship. But although this particular craft floats on water, it is no boat. It is a four-engine, Boeing B-314 Clipper flying boat, and it comes with all the trappings of a luxury hotel to ensure the next 24 hours aboard the aircraft will be spent comfortably.

Some of the older residents of Botwood may well have been reminded of a day 50 years ago when the unmistakable droning of the massive Yankee Clipper could be heard low over the harbor on final approach for an overnight stop before carrying on to its next stop on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean — Foynes, Ireland. The flight would follow the Northern Route from Port Washington (N.Y.) to Botwood, and from there to Foynes and on to its eventual destination in Southampton, England.

More than a half a year of hard work on a shoe-string budget came together Tuesday night at the Botwood Heritage Centre for the official opening of the region's newest museum.

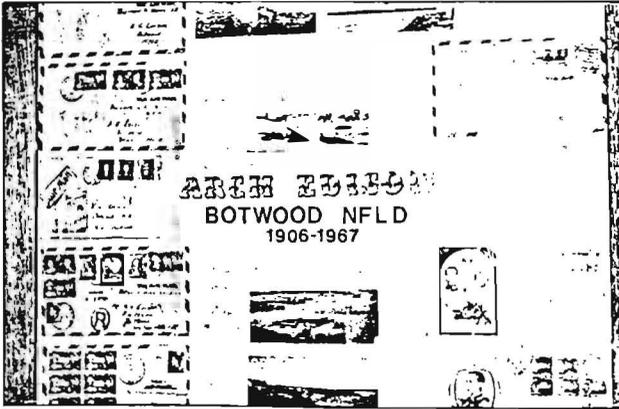
Among the dozens of visitors to the aviation exhibit was Margaret O'Shaughnessy, executive director of the Foynes Aviation and Maritime Museum in Ireland. O'Shaughnessy spoke of how the flying boat museum in Foynes had similarly humble beginnings when organizers first conceived the idea about two years ago. The Irish museum

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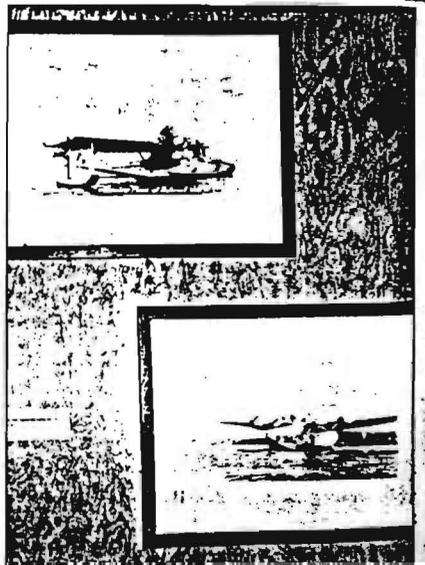
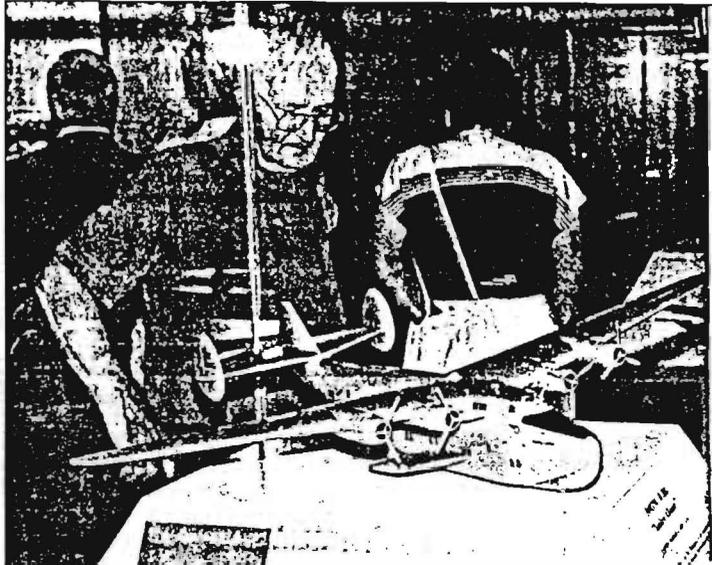
Clifford Evans, acting chairman of the Botwood Heritage Society committee, Margaret O'Shaughnessy, executive director of the Foynes Aviation and Maritime Museum in Ireland, and

Elmer Bursey, mayor of Botwood, cut the ribbon to officially open the town's heritage centre museum.



Margaret O'Shaughnessy presents Clifford Evans with a ceramic plaque from the Foynes flying boat museum marking the significance of the re-

lationship between the two towns in the history of trans-Atlantic flight 50 years ago.





**Flying boat
may
re-inact
trans-Atlantic
flight
next year**

Photos, models, artifacts all part of region's newest museum

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now has the only surviving flying boat from the period in the world.

She said that she hopes the four-engined Short Sunderland, expected to arrive at the Foynes museum for permanent display any day, will be able to re-enact the first trans-Atlantic crossing of a regularly scheduled passenger service aboard the flying boats next year.

Clifford Evans, the acting chairman of the eight-member volunteer Botwood Heritage Society committee, said this is only the beginning. Evans praised the efforts of the committee in getting the display off the ground, saying that he has seen far less professional results from more professional people with more time and money at their disposal. Evans is also the curator of the Mary March Regional Museum in Grand Falls, which became part of the Newfoundland Museum after extensive renovations were completed last summer.

"It is the beginning of a long-term project to preserve the physical evidence of Botwood's cultural heritage," said Evans, who originally came up with the idea of a museum celebrating the town's history. He said they eventually hope to consolidate the current display in what will become galleries

upstairs and bring in other displays that tell a little bit about Botwood's past.

The airbase itself is in need of major restoration, he said, as is Killick Island, the site of a former munitions dump. Otherwise in ten years you'll see all this paved over with houses built on top, said Evans.

The town of Botwood provided \$2,700 for "patch-up" work. Other money needed often came out of the pockets of members of the heritage society themselves. Evans said the whole thing was put together on a "shoe-string" budget and what really made it happen was the dedication of the people who volunteered their time through the heritage society.

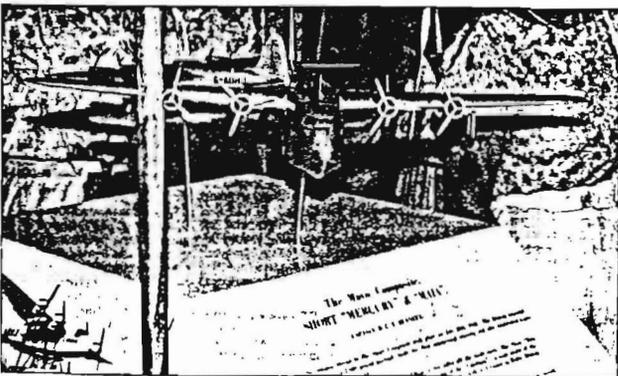
The society hopes to get a Canso flying boat of a type used for maritime reconnaissance and patrol during the Second World War for permanent display outside the Heritage Centre on the ramp of the airbase. The Canso is currently operated by the provincial Department of Forestry as a water bomber and is due for retirement soon.

Other possible displays in future years might include an exhibit commemorating the 50th anniversary of Botwood's involvement in the Second World War, expected next year, or the history of medical service in Botwood, or the town's ship building history or logging history (dating back to the 1880s).



Photographs, models, old newspaper clippings, a propeller and other memorabilia make up an exhibit commemorating Botwood's role in trans-Atlantic flight during the 50th anniversary year of the first regularly scheduled passenger service across the ocean.

PHOTOS BY JEFF KOLLER



Off to a flying start

First, we have to take our hats off to a small group of dedicated individuals who have volunteered their time toward the preservation of a town's history and cultural heritage. Congratulations are in order for the Botwood Heritage Society on the opening of their new museum.

Second, we have to draw the attention of the new government to the site of a crashed Boeing Clipper flying boat that has lain at the bottom of Botwood harbor for more than 40 years.

Two years ago, the Exploits Valley Dive Team discovered the wreck late in the season. They enthusiastically returned to the site last year to begin raising some of the pieces of the wreck to the surface. The largest single piece of the wreck, a three-bladed propeller, stands as a monument to their efforts in the Botwood Heritage Centre.

However, after the provincial government found out about the dives in the harbor to the site of the wreck, they imposed a ban on any dives conducted by the Exploits team or anyone else, subject to heavy fines for tampering with Newfoundland's historic and archaeological resources.

As an archaeological resource, the crashed flying boat isn't worth much at the bottom of the harbor. It will likely be forgotten about for the next 40 years until someone once again stumbles across it accidentally. In the meantime, who can even begin to imagine how much less will be left of the wreck by the time someone takes enough interest in the wreck to excavate it properly? How much more of what is there will be corroded by the salt water with time?

With the centre now in place and open to public viewing, it becomes all the more imperative that the government take an interest in seeing that whatever can be recovered from the site, is recovered — and as soon as possible.

If that requires getting a proper archaeological team to excavate the site, then that should be done. If there is no interest, then the Exploits dive team should be permitted to resume their dives for the both the sake of the heritage centre and for the sake of encouraging other similar discoveries.

The interest in the site is there now. How long will it take before we see some action on this?