

History of Halifax International Airport

Halifax International Airport was built by the federal Department of Transport near Kelly Lake, on land provided by the City of Halifax. It is presently operated by the Halifax International Airport Authority, and opened in June 1960, with a temporary license.

The Airport at Kelly Lake was not the first air base in the Halifax area. In 1918, the Canadian government, at the urging of Britain, set up its first military air unit in Canada at Baker's Point near Dartmouth. It was a base for the newly formed Royal Canadian Naval Air Service (RCNAS), which was to operate Curtiss HS-2L flying boats on anti-submarine patrol. Until Canadian personnel could be trained, the U.S. Naval Flying Corps operated the air station. The war came to an end before the RCNAS was ready, and the unit was disbanded. In 1920, however, the old base, then known as the Dartmouth Air Station, was used by the Air Operations Branch of the Air Board for the repair and maintenance of its seaplanes and flying boats. The station was included in the first published list of Airharbours available for use during 1922, as follows: "Halifax, Nova Scotia - Government Air Station for Seaplanes - over 800 yards square - licensed for Customs".

As early as July 5, 1919, the City of Halifax Town Planning Board asked the federal government to build an airfield for the Halifax area. The government replied that the civil aviation organization, under the Air Board, was not yet set up, but that generally the government would expect cities across Canada to provide their own airfields.

On January 19, 1927, the Civil Aviation Branch of the Department of National Defence asked the City of Halifax to consider the provision of an Airport in the area. If the City so agreed, the Department would lend technical assistance. This was the time the government was beginning to consider the feasibility of airmail service in various parts of Canada. It announced its plan to assist in the establishment of light airplane clubs, and in 1928, the decision was made to construct the Trans-Canada Airway, in which established municipal Airports played an important role. The City of Halifax was indeed interested, and many proposed sites were examined and rejected on technical or cost grounds. Finally, in September 1928, a site at Bluebell Farm was recommended by a Civil Aviation Inspector. The site was the only one available and would be expensive to

develop. The City held a plebiscite in April 1929, and received approval to spend \$190,000.

Construction began on June 16, 1930, on two landing strips: 1,800 x 600 feet and 2,000 x 600 feet. An Airport license was issued on January 9, 1931, and the City leased the Airport to the Halifax Aero Club for operation and maintenance. Profits, if any, were to be shared equally between the City and the club. The first airplane to land at the Airport was a Curtiss Robin of Atlantic Airways, pilot Cliff Kent, in February, 1931.

Donald Saunders managed the Aero Club, and also served as Airport manager. Mr. Saunders had been a Captain in the RFC during World War I and was a well-known pilot in the Maritimes. He later became Regional Manager of Airports for the Department of Transport in the Atlantic Region.

The Airport was closed in 1941, and a portion of it off Chebucto Road, fringing the Westmount housing development, became Saunders Park. A memorial was erected there marking the site of Halifax City's original Airport and commemorating Donald Saunders, "Mr. Flying".

During the winter of 1929-30, a contract was let by the Post Office for the conveyance of mail between Halifax and Montreal for connection with ocean steamers. This was later continued on a daily basis with a connection at Moncton until June 1931, when it was cancelled in the interest of the economy.

In 1931, Pan American Airways, on the basis of a U.S. Post Office contract and a Canadian permit, began to operate a daily service in the summer from Boston and Portland to Saint John and Halifax, with the option of extending the service to Sydney and St. John's. Pan American's permit to operate in Canada did not allow it to carry mail or passengers between Canadian points, a rule that did not please residents of Halifax and Saint John.

In a 1931 report, the Superintendent of Airways of the Civil Aviation Branch, stated that, at Halifax, "The changes there in the last two years are miraculous; it is now a really good Airport and has a good hangar and club house. Pan American added a small passenger station last year and their daily service during August and September helped to establish

confidence in the future of the Airport on the part of citizens." Two hundred and twenty five thousand dollars had been spent on the Airport.

In 1932, the Mayor requested the government to make some improvements to the Airport as an unemployment relief project, but nothing was done. In 1937, the new Department of Transport offered the City one-third cost-sharing assistance for Airport improvement. In late 1938, the Department finally undertook the extension of two runways by 200 and 250 feet.

Halifax International Air Terminal Building circa 1965

During 1938-39, studies were made to see if the Airport could be expanded for airline use. These led to the conclusion that Halifax Airport could not be adequately developed. It was decided, instead, that the new Dartmouth airfield being built for the RCAF could be used. Limited improvements to the Halifax Airport would make it suitable for use by light aircraft. Shearwater, the new Dartmouth Airport, was ready in early 1940, and the RCAF squadrons operating Digby and Hudson aircraft moved in. Work on the Halifax Airport ceased, and the City leased the site to the government as an army camp. The Airport license was cancelled on October 15, 1941. Lack of a suitable Airport at Halifax had prevented the extension of Trans-Canada Airline's (TCA) service to that City. Finally, in 1941, TCA began service to Dartmouth Airport and its trans-continental air service from coast to coast. Dartmouth continued to serve as the Halifax Airport until 1960.

During the war, the City of Halifax retained its interest in having a civil Airport. In October 1945, it asked the Department of Transport for technical assistance in locating a site for a new Airport. Many sites were examined and rejected during the next few years, and it was not until late 1954 that a site near Kelly Lake recommended by Trans-Canada Airlines, was approved. The Department of Transport agreed to construct and operate the new Airport, provided the City acquired the land and transferred it to the Department for one dollar. Both parties agreed and construction of two runways, 8,000 x 200 feet and 6,200 x 200 feet, began in November 1955. These were lengthened to 8,800 and 7,700 feet respectively prior to the opening of the Airport. Meanwhile, back in 1952, the Minister of National Defence, on behalf of the Navy, which now operated the Dartmouth Airport, agreed that the Department of Transport

could, at its own expense, extend the Dartmouth runways to meet TCA's needs.

The new Halifax International Airport became operational in June 1960, and a license permitting full IFR operation was issued on July 1, 1960. The Air Terminal Building was officially opened on September 10, 1960.

The Airport is located in the Halifax Regional Municipality, 38 kilometres (23 miles) north of Halifax, the provincial capital. Land near the Airport boundary is sparsely settled. The Aerotech Business Park, operated by the Greater Halifax Partnership, borders Halifax International Airport on the south and east boundaries. Major tenants of the high-tech park include Pratt & Whitney Canada and Litton Systems Canada. The closest communities are Enfield, 8 kilometres (5 miles) north and Waverley, 12 kilometres (7 miles) southeast.

Halifax International Air Terminal Building circa 1998

In 1960, the Airport provided the facilities for approximately 180,000 passengers. It became quite apparent in the early 1970's that the growth rate at Halifax International Airport was greater than the average Airport. As a result, a long-range development plan for the terminal was formed. This resulted in a new holding room facility being opened in July, 1976, adding approximately 5,000 square metres (54,000 square feet) of floor space to the original Air Terminal Building size of 21,940 square metres (236,171 square feet). In 1988, two temporary passenger walkways were constructed in an effort to increase the level of service to passengers using the two major regional carriers. The holdroom was again enlarged in December 1994, when the then Minister of Transport Canada, Douglas Young, officially opened the south expansion of 400 square metres (4,300 square feet). In the fall of 1998 the passenger check-in area on the Main Level of the Air Terminal Building was significantly expanded.

Since 1985, Halifax International Airport has evolved from a terminus operation for central Nova Scotia to a hub-and-spoke Airport operation for the entire Atlantic Region.

The number of passengers using the Airport has increased from 180,000 in 1960 to 1,700,000 in 1980, and to 2,500,000 in 1990; with 2,973,187 passengers utilizing the facility in 2003.

The employee population of the Halifax International Airport community is approximately 5,400.

The following is a list of the Airport General Managers who have served at Halifax International Airport since it opened in 1960:

- E.A. King 1960 – 1961
- G.W. Blatchly (acting) 1961 – 1963
- D.L. Forbes 1963 – 1964
- J.J. Cole 1964 – 1968
- H.B. Miller (acting) 1968 – 1969
- K.J. Robinson 1969 – 1973
- G.M. Knox 1973 – 1987
- J.R. Shrieves 1987 – 2000

February 1, 2000, marked a significant day in the life of the Airport, as Halifax International Airport Authority (HIAA) took over operational and managerial control of the facility, as a result of the National Airports Policy, which was announced in 1994 and called for the commercialization of designated Canadian airports, through divestitures, to community interests. The Policy enabled communities to take greater advantage of their airports, reduce costs, tailor levels of service to local demand, and attract new and different types of business. Negotiations to transfer the airport began December 18, 1995, following the signing of a letter of intent by HIAA and Transport Canada. A common understanding on financial issues was announced on September 16, 1998.

The following individuals have served as President & CEO for Halifax International Airport Authority:

- D. Rodgers 1999 – 2000
- B.F. Miller 2000 – 2001
- R.K. Milley 2001 – 2005
- P.O. Clarke 2005 – present (Acting President & Chief Operating Officer and Vice President, Finance)
- B.F. Miller 2005 – present (Interim Chief Executive Officer)

Since transfer, the Authority has undertaken a multi-year, multi-faceted Airport Improvement Program, worth more than \$110 million. Major projects that have been completed under this plan include construction and commission of a state-of-the-art water treatment facility; expansion

and opening of the international and domestic arrivals area; the opening of *Flight Deck* – a public observation area and *Airport Square* – a major expansion of the retail and main lobby area. In September 2004, HIAA announced the next phase of its Airport Improvement Program – a \$70 million investment to expand aviation facilities and services to meet security and technology advancements, increases in traffic, and to prepare for U.S. Customs Preclearance.

Halifax International Airport Authority is a dynamic and multi-faceted aviation enterprise that provides air access to the world, facilitates personal and business connections, and promotes regional economic growth.