

A Helping Hand from the RAF Welfare Fund

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During the Second World War, the RAF Ferry Command detachment at Gander established the RAF Welfare Fund, with contributions coming from civilian employees. Administered by a local committee and presided over by the detachment's commanding officer, Group Captain David Anderson, the fund provided sports and other welfare facilities for the benefit of detachment personnel. Documents at the provincial archives in a file entitled "RAF Welfare Fund" reveal that residents of Gander benefited from this fund beyond the war years.

With the closure of Gander's RAF detachment in 1946, and because many of its former employees were now with the Newfoundland Department of Civil Aviation, RAF officials gave a proportion of the fund, a cheque for \$3,000, to the Newfoundland Commissioner for Public Utilities, suggesting that the money continue to be used as originally intended. The commissioner, in turn, sought the advice of Newfoundland civil aviation director H.A.L. Pattison.



HAL Pattison, airport manager, shows a map of overseas routes to LG Machin, member of the former Commission of Government, summer 1950.

In a letter to the commissioner in July 1946, Pattison worried that a decision on how best to use the money might prove difficult. Many former RAF civilian employees were now members of the Newfoundland Airport Club (similarly mandated to provide social and recreational amenities), but before handing the full sum to them, Pattison proposed that they analyze the figures of those workers who contributed to the original fund and remained in Gander, together with the members and non-members of the Airport Club. His analysis revealed that one hundred personnel employed at Gander were former members of the RAF detachment, and that one-half were members of the Airport Club. Consequently, Pattison recommended that the sum be held in trust by the Department of Public Utilities, "and we could make recommendations in the future should any need become apparent from which payments from this fund would be suitable." The commissioner concurred, forwarding the cheque to Pattison in September 1946 for deposit, with instructions that he make no withdrawals without government approval and a proposal explaining the need for the withdrawal. The funds sat untouched in the Royal Bank, Gander branch, for the next five years.

Following confederation with Canada in 1949, Pattison became airport manager at Gander under the federal Department of Transport. In a February 1951 intra-departmental memo to the Newfoundland provincial government, he revealed that to date he had neither made a withdrawal from the fund nor received a proposal that met the criteria, which held that projects benefit the community as a whole, although there had been requests from hockey and baseball organizations. However, a Gander film council had recently formed under the National Film Board of Canada, supported, Pattison explained, by local schools, churches, Boy Scouts, Elks, Lions, unions, and the Gander Consumers' Co-operative Society. The film council proposed to control and operate a film projector, with the parent organization and the provincial Department of Education supplying films at no charge. The film council had raised \$100 of the \$600 needed to purchase the projector equipment, so Pattison requested \$500 from the unused fund. Government was receptive, but now desired to dispose of the fund in its entirety.

With confederation, control of Gander had changed hands, leaving the Department of Public Utilities "diffident about accepting authority for the disposal of this money," which now amounted to \$3126.67.

Nevertheless, the department agreed, “somewhat reluctantly,” wrote the assistant deputy minister, to share in the responsibility for its distribution. The minister approved the \$500 for the film council, and suggested that they allocate the balance to the Amalgamated School Board and the Roman Catholic School Board on a per capita basis. In June 1951, Pattison and administrative officer Eric Winsor proposed a



Eric Winsor, administrative officer

broader arrangement. Besides the film council, which had received its cheque for \$500, they asked that Gander public library receive \$250, the Lions Club \$200 for a public playground, the Gander community centre \$800, the amalgamated school \$1103.27 (422 students), and the Roman Catholic school \$363.40 (139

students). Government approved all but the community centre funds, arguing that “the activities of the centre are not sufficiently broad in their scope” to qualify as beneficial to Gander as a whole. Instead, government suggested that the \$800 be allocated to the schools using the present formula. Pattison and Winsor were “keenly” disappointed with this decision, explaining to government that the centre had been operating successfully for a year with a voluntary management and paid-up membership of 500 single and family members, representing a total membership of one thousand or more. The Department of Transport had provided the centre with a building and furnishings free of rental, and “is most anxious to see this project continued.” Government recognized the community centre as a worthwhile activity, came the response, but “felt that it is not fully representative of the persons who subscribed to the [RAF Welfare] fund.” Government, anxious to close the fund, held firm that allocating the \$800 to schools would ensure the widest range of application for the benefit of Gander as a whole. Correspondence in the archival files ends there, leaving the writer to speculate that the community centre was not among the beneficiaries of the wartime RAF Welfare Fund.