

“Let There Be Light”: The Opening of Gander’s Power House

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The clearing of land at Hattie’s Camp railway siding, future site of the Newfoundland Airport, began during the summer of 1936. By year’s end, buildings at the rapidly developing aerodrome included a construction headquarters, workshops, cookhouses, dining huts, and living quarters. The following year, work went into full swing with upwards of 800 people employed during peak periods. Bulldozers and Athey wagons were in constant motion, leveling ground and removing earth as workers cut, grubbed, burned, drained, and ditched hundreds of acres of land at the planned runway locations. From Benton Quarry, now renamed Hall’s Quarry to honour the project’s chief engineer T.A. Hall, railway ballast dump cars delivered 60,000 tons of crushed rock to a siding at the airport to be re-crushed to the desired grade for surfacing the runways. The cable ship “Leapin’ Lena” laid cable across Gander Lake for Lorenz blind-landing navigation equipment and railway tank cars delivered colas from a plant in Clarenville for paving the runways. Hattie’s Camp was a busy place.

By the fall of 1937, workers were busily engaged clearing land for the erection of wireless transmitting and receiving buildings and had started construction on an administration building, hangar, and power house. Once completed, the wooden power generating plant rested on a concrete foundation and measured 82 feet by 32 feet. The building housed four diesel engine generators, each capable of 110 horsepower and weighing more than 17,000 lbs. Under the watchful eye of electrical engineer N.A. Paton, electricians installed two high and low voltage switchboards of 8 and 25 feet in length. Engineer Hall drew up the building plans, which featured an arched roof to match that of the adjacent hangar. The cost of the building and plant came in at \$70,000.

On 1 December 1937, reported the *Evening Telegram*, the generators were started for the first time. The following day, William Watson, B.Sc., Newfoundland representative for the International General Electric Company, along with engineer Paton, carried out a series of tests, all of which proved satisfactory. The first building to be lighted was the administration building, its wiring and lighting having been completed under contact by the electrical department of Bowring Brothers Ltd. Next to receive light was the staff house, wind tee, and marker beacons. “The actual lighting of the airport,” informed the *Telegram* that December, “will not take place before next year.” There was still much work to be done on the new aerodrome, but now with the new power house lighting the way.

More information on old Gander's electrical system can be found by visiting:

<http://bobsganderhistory.com/GdrElectrical.pdf>

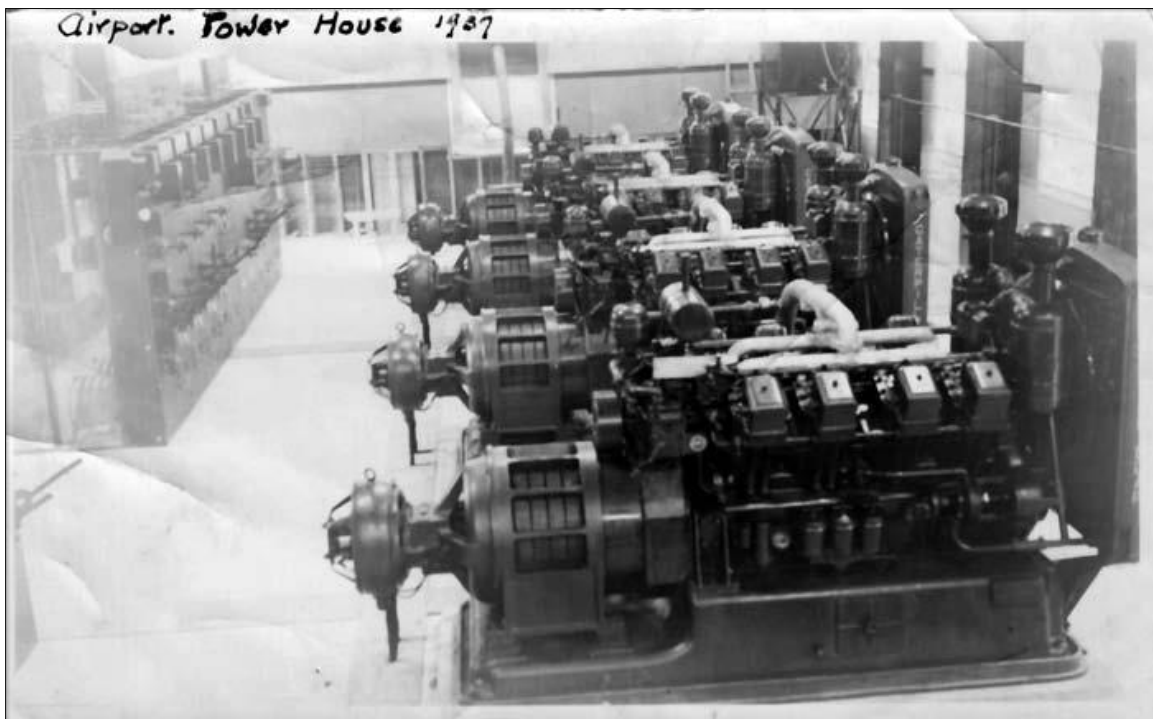


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