

# PERTH MUNICIPAL AIRPORT

## An Idea That Didn't Fly

Shortly before 5:00 p.m. on Thursday October 7, 1948, a small aircraft appeared out of a cloudless cobalt blue sky, flying low over the northern outskirts of Perth.<sup>1</sup> As the two-seater Tiger Moth proceeded at roof-top level above the downtown business district, the plane was trailing smoke, and the stuttering engine betrayed the pilot's efforts to stay airborne. Rapidly losing altitude, a wing clipped the top of an elm tree behind St. John's Catholic Church, burst into flames, and sent the plane slamming into the back yard of 25 Arthur Street, home of Town Councillor George A. Flemming (1887-1963). Residents of the neighborhood rushed to the scene, attempting to rescue the occupants, but were driven back by the flames. Within minutes, nothing remained but the engine, metal frame and the charred bodies of pilot, Lawrence J. Rathwell (1919-1948) and his passenger Percy Moore (1919-1948). Rathwell could be identified only by his watch.

When he died, Rathwell was attempting to make an emergency landing on an airstrip just across the town line in North Elmsley Township -- a rudimentary landing field developed only a few months earlier by Perth businessman Graydon Keays (1915-1990) with a view to attracting American tourists<sup>2</sup>. Keays had cleared and smoothed a strip of ground on a north-south axis parallel to the Rideau Ferry Road<sup>3</sup>, arranged with the nearby Donaldson's Service Station, at the corner of Gore Street East and the Scotch Line, to stock high octane aviation fuel and lubricants, and thus established Perth's first 'airport'.



*Fairchild PT-19 Cornell*



*De Havilland DH.82 Tiger Moth*

Keays' efforts were, however, plagued by bad luck. Less than a year later, on September 15, 1949, another pilot, Eva Lucinda Devlin (1922-1949)<sup>4</sup>, died when her two-seater Fairchild P-19 Cornell aircraft overshot the runway and crashed into the Fair Grounds. Over the years that followed, Perth's rudimentary airport would claim other lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Rathwell and Moore were WW2 veterans of the RCAF, Rathwell a bomber pilot and Moore a ground crewman, and both were Smiths Falls residents, Rathwell a CPR brakeman and Moore a barber. Both left wives and children. They had flown from Smiths Falls to Carp earlier in the day and were on their return flight to Smiths Falls when their aircraft came down at Perth.

<sup>2</sup> Keays owned a hardware store that sold fishing gear and bait.

<sup>3</sup> North Elmsley Township C-10/L-27.

<sup>4</sup> Daughter of Joseph H. Devlin (1877-1948) and Mabel May Whyte (1891-1942).

Although the Keays airstrip was the first to host a take-off and landing at Perth, it represented the third attempt to establish a local airport.

In 1941, at the height of the WW2, a committee of Town Council led by Deputy Reeve Carl Reinhardt (1876-1962), promoted Perth as an ideal site for a military airport and training camp. Reinhardt believed that Perth was “a logical center, geographically, for such a scheme [with] distinctly favorable terrain conditions at various localities close to town”.<sup>5</sup> He found no takers at the Ministry of Defence, however.

A few years later, hardware merchant George Sutton James (1868-1964) and Bank Manager Frederick A. Robertson (1882-1962) joined in an effort to create an airstrip on the outskirts of town beside Drummond Concession-2. “Inspectors came from Ottawa to view the site but somehow it did not materialize”.<sup>6</sup>

In 1953 Graydon Keays’ proto airstrip was adopted and improved by Dr. H. Ray Drysdale (1904-1973) of Rochester, New York, a summer resident at Dalhousie Lake<sup>7</sup>. In partnership with “10 interested Perth businessmen, [who] assisted in purchasing the land”<sup>8</sup> the property was fenced, and the runway extended to 1,600 feet (488 meters) by turning the axis of the strip from north-south to east-west, thus running parallel to the Scotch Line. Too late for Rathwell, Moore and Devlin, the improved field could, according to the Doctor, “be used as an emergency field for disabled planes” and “a DC-3 could land if there was a 20 mile an hour headwind”.<sup>9</sup> When work on the remodeled airfield had been completed under the direction of Keays, Drysdale declared the field “open for the landing of any and all aircraft” with no charge levied for its use. Town Council extended a vote of thanks to the Doctor for his “splendid work to increase air traffic to Perth”.<sup>10</sup>

The first aircraft, other than that of Dr. Drysdale, to visit the new Perth airport was a two-seater Globe Swift, flown by Harry L Jobes of Chicago. Over the next few years, it was followed by a trickle of wealthy American fishermen. But, in late 1954, the greater benefits that an airport might bring to the town became clearly apparent when Central Wire Industries Ltd. located a plant in Perth, bringing a dozen new jobs. Central Wire’s choice of Perth was influenced in part by the fact their executives could commute by air to company offices at Montreal and in the United States.



**Globe Swift**

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<sup>5</sup> *Perth Courier*, February 13, 1941.

<sup>6</sup> *Perth Courier*, August 16, 1956.

<sup>7</sup> Drysdale had been born at Forrest, Ontario, and taught at the University of Rochester School of Medicine.

<sup>8</sup> *Perth Courier*, August 24, 1970.

<sup>9</sup> *Perth Courier*, July 30, 1953.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Prompted by these developments, the local Chamber of Commerce investigated the possibility of developing a fully licensed airport. At their invitation, an inspector from the Provincial Department of Transport visited Perth in October 1955. He examined the Keays-Drysdale airstrip and concluded it required only the removal of some fences and trees and a minimal amount of levelling.

The inspector's visit was followed by a public meeting to formulate a plan of action. Although only a few representatives of local business and industry, and handful of others, attended, Chamber President J. J. 'Jack' Finnegan (1909-1989) told the meeting that it was vitally important Perth proceed with the project. Industries were looking for locations with an airport, he said, as had been proven by Central Wire. Despite the poor turnout, \$2,000 was pledged toward making the scheme a reality. At the Chamber's annual dinner in January 1956, local businessman and airport cheerleader Joseph A. Perkins (1908-1990) told the gathering that *"Perth must have an airport. There are 63,000 privately-owned planes in the United States, while there are 21,700 corporations across the border using planes to move their executives about. It was up to Perth to keep 'in the swim'."*<sup>11</sup>



Three months later, responding to a plan proposed by the Chamber of Commerce, Perth Town Council agreed to purchase the 18-acre Keays-Drysdale airport site in north Elmsley Township<sup>12</sup>, *"for a price of \$6,500, the Deed to be vested in the name of the Corporation of the Town of Perth"*.<sup>13</sup> As the new plan called for extending the runway, the municipality also leased an additional 11.5 acres of the adjoining farm<sup>14</sup>. In addition to the landing strip, the property included a house and a barn. The council then leased the properties to the Perth Flying Club, for 15 years at an annual rental of \$500, with the Flying Club undertaking to develop the field for use and to pay all municipal taxes, insurance, and maintenance. At the time, airport

enthusiast Jack Finnegan was President of both the Flying Club and the Chamber of Commerce.

By mid-summer 1956 the airport was operational. It offered a graded and fenced runway 3,000 feet (915 meters) long and 500 feet (152 meters) wide, landing lights, and a telephone connection so arrivals might summon a taxi from town. The Flying Club had also purchased a Fairchild Cornell training plane (the same model in which Eva Devlin had died) and appointed a flying instructor. On Saturday August 25, 1956, the Perth Municipal Airport was officially inaugurated.

<sup>11</sup> *Perth Courier*, January 19, 1956.

<sup>12</sup> Part of North Elmsley Township C-10/L-27 – the Taylor Farm.

<sup>13</sup> *Perth Courier*, March 15, 1956.

<sup>14</sup> Part of North Elmsley Township C-10/L-28 – the McLaren Farm.

More than 3,500 spectators, “one of the largest crowds ever witnessed at any event in Perth” turned out to see the airshow. “The traffic was so heavy that the cars travelled bumper to bumper from James Brothers corner to the airfield on the town limit”.<sup>15</sup> Addressing the crowd Joe Perkins, in his capacity as President of the Eastern Ontario Development Association, predicted that “in 10 or 15 years from now, an airport would be as necessary as a railroad”.<sup>16</sup> Kingston MP William J. Henderson (1916-2006) cut the ceremonial ribbon.



**On August 25, 1956, William J. Henderson, MP for Kingston, snipped a blue & yellow ribbon held by LAC Robert Duncan of Toronto and LAC Jean Mignault of Montreal to officially open the Perth Municipal Airport. Others in the group -- Joseph A. Perkins, Eastern Ontario Development Association (EODA) President; Harry Cullen, Manager EODA; Jack Finnigan, Perth Chamber of Commerce President; R. W. R. Hughes, master of ceremonies; George Doucett MPP; Scott Burchell, Perth Mayor; J. R. Ken Main, Assistant Controller of Civil Aviation; Mr. Burke; Dr. W. G. Blair, MP Lanark; and Haydon Stanton, MP Leeds. (Perth Courier photo)**

The air show opened with three low sweeps by a formation of four T-33 jet trainers from CFB Trenton, followed by another demonstration of formation flying by three Harvards. Floyd Shaw, Chief Instructor of the Ottawa Flying Club, also “thrilled the crowd with low level stunt flying in his De Haviland Chipmunk”.<sup>17</sup>

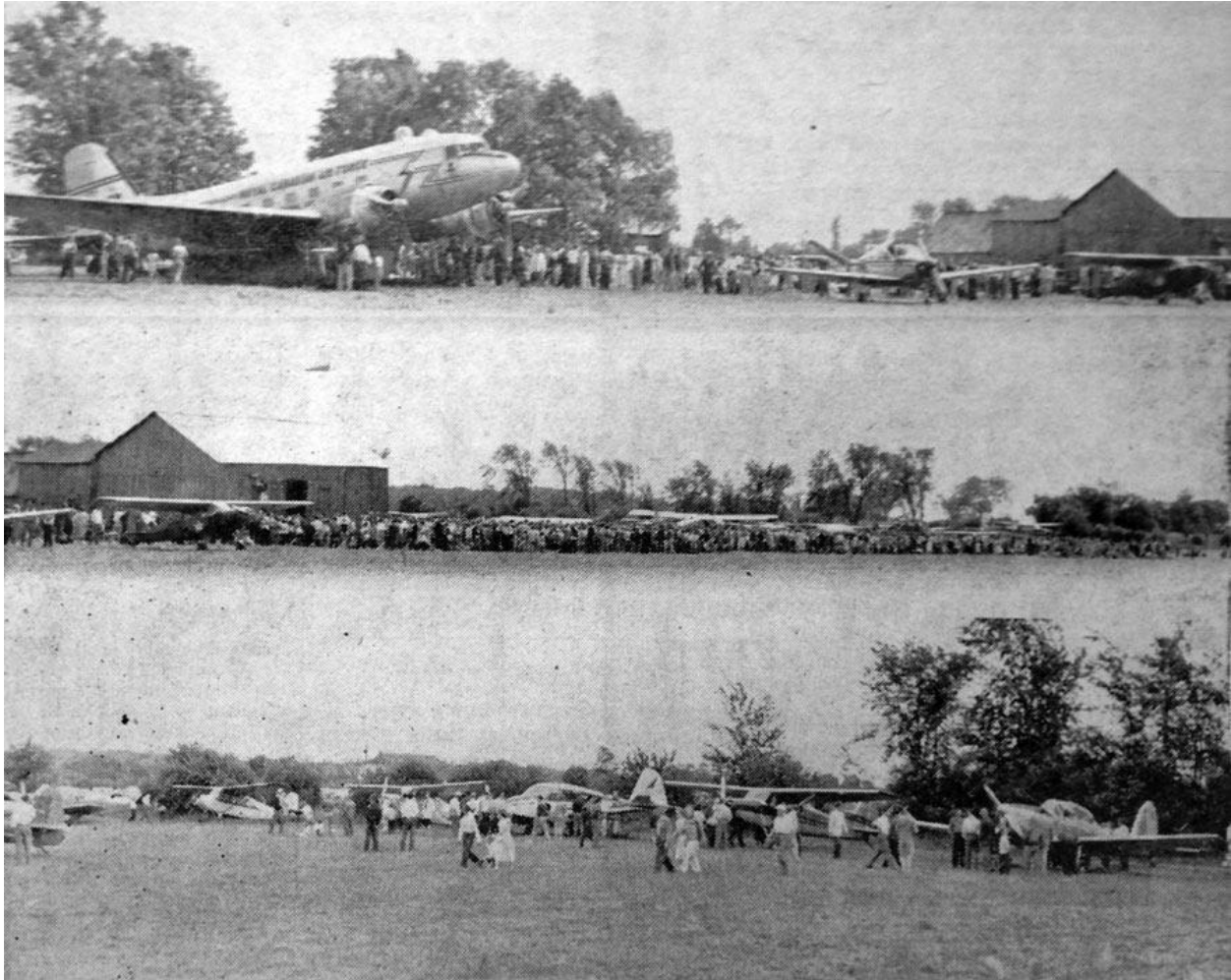
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<sup>15</sup> *Perth Courier*, August 30, 1956.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

A Douglas DC-3 from the RCAF Search and Rescue Division at Toronto was displayed on the ground and more than 30 visiting planes from various flying clubs in Ontario and Quebec lined up for inspection. The show was closed by three CF-100s from Ottawa making a fly-past salute.



**Opening day at the Perth Municipal Airport, August 25, 1956  
(Perth Courier photo)**

When the Municipal Airport celebrated its second anniversary with another airshow, visitors found the facilities had been expanded to include a new clubhouse and hanger, a customs office, further levelling and grading, and installation of fuel tanks. The 1957 show headliner was Flying Officer 'Buck' Buchanan of RCAF Rockcliffe demonstrating a Favel Tailless Glider, who *"thrilled the crowd with a series of perfect loops at a height of 2,500 feet before going into a steep, soundless downwind glide, which sent him shooting across the airport at a terrific speed at low level"*.<sup>18</sup> The other major attraction was a parachute demonstration by three members of the Kingston branch of the Parachute Club of Canada.

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<sup>18</sup> *Perth Courier*, October 3, 1957.



**Favel Tailless Glider**



**Canadair CT-133 Trainer**



**CF-100 Canuck**



**de Havilland DHC-1 Chipmunk**

That year the first class of six students began flying lessons at the airport and, in December, when Santa Claus arrived to participate in the annual parade, he (allegedly) landed at the airport, as he would do for the next decade.

World-Wide Airways<sup>19</sup> prompted considerable excitement in early 1958 when the company announced its intention to apply to the Air Transport Board for a license to fly a daily DC-3 passenger service along a Toronto-Oshawa-Peterborough-Trenton-Kingston-Perth-Ottawa-Cornwall-Montreal route, with connections to the United States. A decade later RoyalAir Ltd. of Dorval, Quebec, created another stir when it circulated a questionnaire among Perth residents to gauge interest in a twice daily service from Montreal to Toronto via Pembroke, Perth and Peterborough. Periodically there would be other promises of commercial air services at Perth Airport, but none ever came to fruition.

That summer of 1958 saw an increased number of American tourists arrive by air and Canadian military aircraft occasionally used the facility as a refueling stop. The airport also played an important role in a mercy flight when local doctors Charles Basil Church (1906-1983)<sup>20</sup> and David O. Craig<sup>21</sup> secured a Sikorsky Helicopter from the Air Rescue Flight stationed at Rockcliffe to fly a critically ill patient to the Montreal Neurological Institute.

<sup>19</sup> A Canadian airline started in 1947 by Donald McVicar (1915-1997), a former RAF Command pilot. Based at Montreal's Dorval Airport it flew supplies to the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line in Canada's far north and livestock and foodstuffs to embargoed Cuba during the 1960s.

<sup>20</sup> Dr. Church had served 1941-1945 as Squadron Leader, RCAF Medical Service WWII, and landed at Normandy on D-Day +2.

The increased activity on the Scotch Line masked growing problems, however. The Flying Club, responsible for managing the facility, was in financial difficulty, partly because they no longer had an aircraft with which to offer lessons. A student had wrecked their uninsured Fairchild Trainer when trying to land in a crosswind. In September 1958 it was decided to place management of the airport in the hands of a special committee comprised of two members each from the Senior Chamber of Commerce, Junior Chamber of Commerce, the Flying Club, and the Town Council.

Although no longer drawing crowds comparable to opening day the annual airshow remained popular, but in 1959 Perth Airport claimed two more lives when the show ended in tragedy. About midway through the event, the crowd of approximately 1,500 watched in stunned horror when a RCAF Cessna L-19 Bird Dog from Camp Petawawa crashed, instantly killing pilot Lieutenant A. W. Pylypow, of Glasyn, Saskatchewan, and observer Sergeant C. Gallant, of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.



*Remains of the Cessna L-19 Bird Dog on John Palmer's farm adjoining the airport, July 1959  
(Perth Courier photo)*

*The tragic accident occurred after the plane had been in the air for about ten minutes demonstrating spirals, rolls and flips at about 1,500 feet. Suddenly the aircraft went into a tailspin and nosed toward the ground ... Many of the spectators at first believed the plunge was part of the show until the craft failed to come out of the dive ... The pilot appeared to make a desperate effort to straighten the aircraft out as it neared the earth. However, he failed to regain control and the plane crashed into a field on the farm of John Palmer about 200 yards from the runway ...*

*The aircraft hit the earth with an audible thud, and shortly afterwards smoke began pouring from the wreckage. The force of the crash tore the wings from the plane, throwing them some 50 feet from the badly smashed fuselage. Due to the prompt action of the Perth Fire Department, stationed on the ground, every precaution was taken to stop the plane from bursting into flames.<sup>22</sup>*

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<sup>21</sup> Dr. Craig practiced at Perth from 1955 until 1976 when he moved to Ottawa. He also served on Town Council in the 1960s.

<sup>22</sup> *Perth Courier*, July 9, 1959.

Not everyone was as enthusiastic about the municipal airport scheme as were the Flying Club members. When its license came up for renewal in January 1960, questions were raised at Town Council about the project's viability and its murky relationship with the Flying Club. In response Reeve W. George Livingston (1909-1974) explained that,

*... the Flying Club consisted of a number of young people who were working tools for Council, as they had been giving their services free and raising money in order that the Airport would continue to function as a municipal effort. A number of the Flying Club members, he continued, were businessmen who were interested in the town and wanted to encourage tourists and industrialists to come to Perth.*<sup>23</sup>

Councilor Frank Frizell (1918-1987), however, said *"he thought the Airport was a plaything for a few people"*<sup>24</sup> and Councilor Robert Echlin (1910-1975) warned that council should *"look into the licensing matter very carefully as, in his own opinion, the town could be in for a liability suit that could cost thousands of dollars"*.<sup>25</sup>

A *Perth Courier* report in 1962 concluded that, apart from a few American tourists, only three men used the field consistently; John Millard (1905-1989), owner of Millard Electric Co., Keith Cavanagh (1920-1991), Superintendent of the same firm, and Dr. Ray Drysdale of Rochester, New York, the man who had purchased and improved the strip in 1953. Millard flew his twin engine craft on regular trips to Toronto, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, Cavanagh's flying was *"strictly sport"* and Dr. Drysdale landed on seasonal visits. Graydon Keays, founder of the airport, had given up flying altogether. The only other activity of note that year was when 10 bottles of blood were flown in from the United States, a donation to the local hospital by a person who had received an equivalent amount while a patient there. In his January 1963 inaugural address, Mayor Scott Burchell (1914-1979) observed that *"unless there is more active interest shown, there won't be much apparent future for the municipal airport"*.<sup>26</sup>

Although they remained the leaseholder, and responsible for maintenance and operations, the Perth Flying Club was effectively defunct by the early-1960s, and the airport had fallen into a state of disrepair. When application was made to renew the operating license effective August 1963, the Department of Transport responded with a list of required upgrades - fill holes in the runway, repair and fence the fuel tanks, provide fire extinguishers, repaint and place runway markers in their proper position, repaint hydro poles at east end of the runway, keep the grass cut, and ensure an attendant was on duty during daylight hours.

The Town Council had no budget for operating an airport, and when the Chamber of Commerce called a public meeting to consider what might be done, it attracted only 20 citizens. The license expired. The Perth Municipal Airport, operating as an unlicensed airstrip continued to see a handful of takeoffs and landings during the summer months, but the grass grew taller, the windsock hung in tatters, the hanger sagged further, and the runway continued to

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<sup>23</sup> *Perth Courier*, January 7, 1960.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Perth Courier*, January 10, 1963.

deteriorate. Council made an effort to secure Federal and Provincial grant funding for airport improvements, but the matter came to nothing.

In the spring of 1966, the Chamber of Commerce took up the challenge and the airport was restored to licensable standards that summer. In 1967, a project to widen Rideau Ferry Road required that Ontario Hydro move its power line back to the edge of the new road allowance and, in the process, it was agreed that the line crossing the east end of the airport runway would be buried, effectively extending the runway by nearly 500 feet.

In May that year, when Minister of Education Bill Davis (1929-2021) arrived to open the new Centennial Wing of Perth and District Collegiate Institute (PDCI), his plane landed at Perth Airport. Davis was followed in November by chicken-king Colonel Harland Sanders who landed his helicopter at the airport when he arrived to open a KFC franchise on Highway-7. Later days later, however, another helicopter pilot, running low on fuel, could not find the municipal airport because of darkness and its lack of lights. He put down behind a brightly lit Highway-7 gas station, fueled up and went on his way.

After a hiatus following the fatal crash of 1959, an airshow returned to Perth Airport in June 1968, this one sponsored by the Civitan Club. *“The grass has finally been clipped. Now planes coming in for a landing can see the building and windsock without having to fly over once or twice to make sure it is the airport and not someone’s hay field”*.<sup>27</sup> The two-and-one-half hour show included a Harvard aerobatic team from Hamilton, a fly-past of RCAF C-130s, stunt flying in a Chipmunk, Department of Lands and Forests water bombing, skydiving, and airplane rides.



**Canadian Harvard Aerobatic Team  
(Photo courtesy of Canadian  
Aviation Historical Society)**

Lack of use and budget limitations soon saw the airport once again slide into disrepair. Cutting the grass alone cost \$3,000 per season, a bill that neither the town, the Flying Club, nor the Chamber of Commerce were prepared to cover. In the spring of 1969, several arriving aircraft had to be towed out of wet patches, leaving deep ruts in the runway. In October a Caribou aircraft from CFB Trenton used the strip as a short takeoff and landing (STOL) training site, prompting the *Courier* to observe that *“the terrain warrants its use as a practice ground for crash landings”*.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, the continued existence of the airport did not come into serious jeopardy until Town Council began considering its official plan in January of 1970. In presenting his recommendations, Town Planner Norman Pearson (1938-2017) pointed out that the municipality had only 60 or 70 acres of land available for development and *“suggested that a good area that could be used for industrial development would be the airport, which he noted was now obsolete”*.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Perth Courier*, June 13, 1968.

<sup>28</sup> *Perth Courier*, October 30, 1969.

<sup>29</sup> *Perth Courier*, January 22, 1970.

Councilor Glenn Crain (1934-2008) did not agree and, with the license renewal due in just four months, urged that the airport be brought up to minimum standards at the very least. *"The day of airports is definitely here, and to let the license lapse would be a backward step".*<sup>30</sup> Mayor William A. Warren (1913-1993), however, was of the view that *"maintaining the airport would simply be providing a service to non-residents of the town, while it would be of little service to the average ratepayer".*<sup>31</sup> For its part, the *Perth Courier* editorialized that,

*If anyone has an old sock around the house, I'm sure the Council would appreciate having it. That's an airport windsock, not a foot-type sock. Council said they would be getting a new one shortly, but still the old, bedraggled windsock keeps flying out at the airport.*<sup>32</sup>

In 1970, Claude M. Brunet (1935-2006), manager of the Ottawa Flying Club, proposed that the Ottawa group could establish a satellite club at Perth, *"if enough interest is shown"*. Promoting the idea, the Ottawa club gave half-hour sightseeing tours from Perth Airport, at *"the cost of \$5.00"* and offered introductory flights with an instructor *"allowing passengers to take over the controls under his supervision"*.<sup>33</sup> Interest proved minimal, however.

As part of the town's summer festival, on July 22, 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau (1919-2000) and his wife Margaret Sinclair (b.1948) visited Perth -- but their helicopter landed in Stewart Park rather than at the airport. Later that year,



**To Residents of Perth:**  
We wish to thank you for your assistance Sunday, Oct. 31st, 1971, in locating a few wandering parachutists and apologize for any inconveniences caused. I would also like to compliment Perth for the conduct of its citizens at the airport and their genuine interest in parachuting.  
— Many thanks, Duncan Grant, Safety Officer, Carleton University Sports Parachute Club.

Notice published in the *Perth Courier*, November 11, 1971

*... Big crowds were attracted to the skydiving exhibition demonstrated at the Perth airport last weekend by members of the Carleton University Sport Parachuting Club. It must have been early in the season for some of the parachutists because they weren't always on target. The skydivers were seen landing as far away as Frankin Fence & Furniture, in the fields near Acritex, as well as in the bushes around the airport. Despite these embarrassments, the parachutists will return each weekend until the weather forces them to cease their entertaining activities.*<sup>34</sup>

Although the Perth Municipal Airport managed to hold onto its license into the early 1970s, maintenance was severely lacking, and the facility was barely operational. In February 1972, when the pilot of a single engine aircraft tried to land for refueling one Sunday afternoon,

<sup>30</sup> *Perth Courier*, January 29, 1970.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Perth Courier*, June 18, 1970.

<sup>33</sup> *Perth Courier*, August 24, 1970.

<sup>34</sup> *Perth Courier*, November 1, 1971.

... he was surprised to find the airport covered with drifting snow. Fred Bishop and wife Marilyn, from Burlington were on their way to Quebec City. Fortunately, no one was injured when the plane hit a snowbank and jackknifed into the air, landing upside down. Damage to the plane was minimal.<sup>35</sup>



*Perth Municipal Airport c1970 - uncut grass, tattered windsock and sagging hangers.*

From 1971 through 1975 Joseph Chow operated the Perth Sport Parachuting Center<sup>36</sup> from the municipal airport in exchange for assuming responsibility for “*all chores required to maintain year-round operational conditions at the airport*”.<sup>37</sup> Parachute Center activities brought some life to the moribund air strip, at least on weekends, and, on Sunday July 9, 1972, some drama.

*At 3:10 p.m. novice parachutist Roger D. Begin of Point Gatineau, Quebec, missed his target and landed on 44,000-volt hydro wires on the Scotch Line. Two of the seven wires were broken causing second and third degree burns to the jumper’s body. Begin was sent to Ottawa hospital with severe injuries. The youth, who jumped from 2,500 feet, was the first student, after 300 other jumps have been made on target at the airport, to be involved in an accident.*

*Power to the town was out from 3:10 to 7:10 p.m. Chow and 18 of his students attended the subsequent town council meeting. Chow promised that in future, if the wind blew towards town, there would be no jumps by inexperienced students. Chow, who had earlier promised that his school would ‘in no way interfere with anyone or the operation of the town’ apologized for the power outage.<sup>38</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> *Perth Courier*, February 24, 1972.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Chow went on to found ‘Skydive Toronto’ in 1972, the largest private jump school in Ontario.

<sup>37</sup> *Perth Courier*, March 15, 1973.

<sup>38</sup> *Perth Courier*, July 13, 1972.

Occasional efforts by the Parachute Club maintained the strip in a barely operational state, but conditions remained seriously substandard. A few weeks after the student jumper hit the power lines, a single engine aircraft overshot the runway.

*One propeller bent and the fuselage was slightly damaged when the plane struck a fence and came to rest in the ditch along the Rideau Ferry Road. The long, wet grass was said to be one of the factors affecting the landing ... and too little wind for an east-west landing. Pilot Peter Hodgins of Brockville was not injured.<sup>39</sup>*

The July accident and the anticipated return of the Carleton University skydivers in the summer of 1972 promoted push-back from at least some residents. Town Council received complaints that Department of Transport regulations were being ignored and a petition complained that the jumps were associated with *“a lot of trespassing, which means damaged crops and fences”*. However, other citizens living around the airport found the entertainment provided by amateur parachutists well worth the disruption. One resident, David Reed, told the local newspaper that no one had approached him with a petition. *“It’s probably one grouchy farmer trying to create trouble”* he suggested. *“What else are we going to do with a deserted airport?”*

By the end of 1972 it was becoming clear that the future of Perth’s airport looked dim. In December the Ministry of Transport & Communications renewed its license but enclosed a letter stating that the facilities were judged *“very limited and fall short of the prescribed minimum”*. The Ministry stipulated that the Town report on *“plans to correct the situation”*<sup>40</sup> or the license renewal would be revoked. The letter included a brochure outlining minimum requirements, including parking space, adequate refueling facilities, a telephone, power outlets, shelter areas and lavatories, none of which were available at Perth Airport.

Federal and Provincial funding for engineering studies and upgrades were available, but securing a grant meant financing from the Town as well, money that the council felt it did not have. Grant criteria also demanded that the airport serve a wider area and population than Perth alone. Feelers suggesting a joint airport proposal were sent to Smiths Falls, but no response was received.

Despite the silence from Smiths Falls, Perth continued to promote a joint airport and even purchased a 20-acre plot in North Elmsley Township as a possible site. In October 1974, Claude Bennett, Ontario Minister of Industry and Tourism, endorsed the idea. In a letter to Perth Mayor Glenn Crane (1934-2008), he expressed the hope *“that you are successful in arranging for a new airport halfway between Perth and Smiths Falls and that you get good cooperation from Smiths Falls and from the Federal Department of Transport in this regard. It sounds like a very practical idea and certainly would be of assistance”*.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, the state of the Perth Municipal Airport continued to deteriorate, leading to more accidents.

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<sup>39</sup> *Perth Courier*, September 7, 1972.

<sup>40</sup> *Perth Courier*, January 4, 1973.

<sup>41</sup> *Perth Courier*, October 10, 1974.

*A cottage owner from Burlington who didn't believe in taking chances, hit the airport fence last Saturday afternoon. Melvin S. Garelick, piloting a Beach-19 low wing plane, was taking off for his home in the United States when he decided to cut the engines as he was of the opinion that the plane would not clear the trees on takeoff. The plane rolled into the cedar rail fence and slightly damaged the nose cone and the propellor.<sup>42</sup>*



*Beechcraft-19 Musketeer Sport*

When a Transport Canada inspector visited the airport in the summer of 1976 his report blasted the town. At about the same time Provincial Minister of Transport Claude Bennett re-entered the debate. In a letter to Town Council, he advised that while *“an airport is required to service the Perth, Smiths Falls and Almonte areas ... it should be centrally located so as*

*to attract industry to all areas of the County”<sup>43</sup>*. He also advised that provincial funds were available to acquire land and develop an airport, but that operations would not be subsidized by the province.

Prompted by the Bennett letter, Perth Town Council authorized the Industrial Development Committee to investigate the feasibility of developing a County Airport in cooperation with other Lanark County municipalities. Carleton Place and Almonte supported the idea, but Smiths Falls launched an independent bid to secure federal funding for its own airport.

A July 1977 a Ministry of Transport and Communications study of six possible airport sites in the County concluded that locations at Smiths Falls and Franktown were the only ones suitable for a general aviation license. Lanark County Council, however, voted 29-8 against adopting the central airport project as a county endeavor. In August, Minister of Transport and Communications James Snow (1929-2008) personally inspected the proposed sites and announced that a decision of which, if either, of the two airport development proposals would be approved for provincial funding, would be made *“before the snow flies”*. Meanwhile, when supporters of the Perth Municipal Airport floated plans for a \$200,000 expansion of its grass runway, local MPP Douglas Wiseman (1930-2020) called the idea *“absurd ... there is no way you are going to get any subsidy to do any work on the Perth Airport”<sup>44</sup>*. In October 1977 the Province announced that funding would go to development of the site proposed by Smiths Falls.

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<sup>42</sup> *Perth Courier*, August 28, 1974.

<sup>43</sup> *Perth Courier*, September 6, 1976.

<sup>44</sup> *Perth Courier*, December 8, 1977.

The Perth Municipal Airport and the Perth Flying Club would struggle along for another five years, but the end was at hand. In 1976, the town planning board had begun discussing the creation of a new industrial park on the airport property and in early 1982 the town agreed to re-zone and sell a portion of the airport to Albany International of Cowansville, Quebec.<sup>45</sup> The Flying Club filed a formal objection with the Ontario Municipal Board, but negotiators reached an agreement whereby the town would pay the Flying Club a relocation fee of \$4,000 and the club would withdraw its objection. The sale proceeded and the Perth Municipal Airport and the homeless Perth Flying Club passed into history.

- Ron W. Shaw (2024)

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<sup>45</sup> Albany International Corp., located at 2947 Rideau Ferry Road, Perth, produces fabrics and process belts used in the manufacture of all grades of paper products.