

# From Legend to Historical Fact

A 1940s Aviation Mystery

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Growing up we heard rumors of an airplane having engine trouble and landing on Cassidy Lake in the winter. That was it. We were not smart enough to ask people like my grandfather, Allen, who could have saved us a lot of speculation.



We've had this picture in our archives for decades and struggled to fit it to the Cassidy story. We eventually determined it was not on Cassidy Lake and the building in the background is not the family cheese factory. The man, who we know was Fred McLong, was a close family friend who lived a few farms away. It was claimed it was his airplane, but we that has not been verified.

From the registration, we learn the aircraft is a de Havilland DH83 Fox Moth biplane. The plane was registered to Canadian Airways Ltd. on Feb. 2, 1933. It was damaged beyond repair in a gale in Cartierville, Quebec on Sept. 24, 1942. It was reduced to parts and spares.

However, it still might be the plane in question even if it was in the wrong location in this picture.

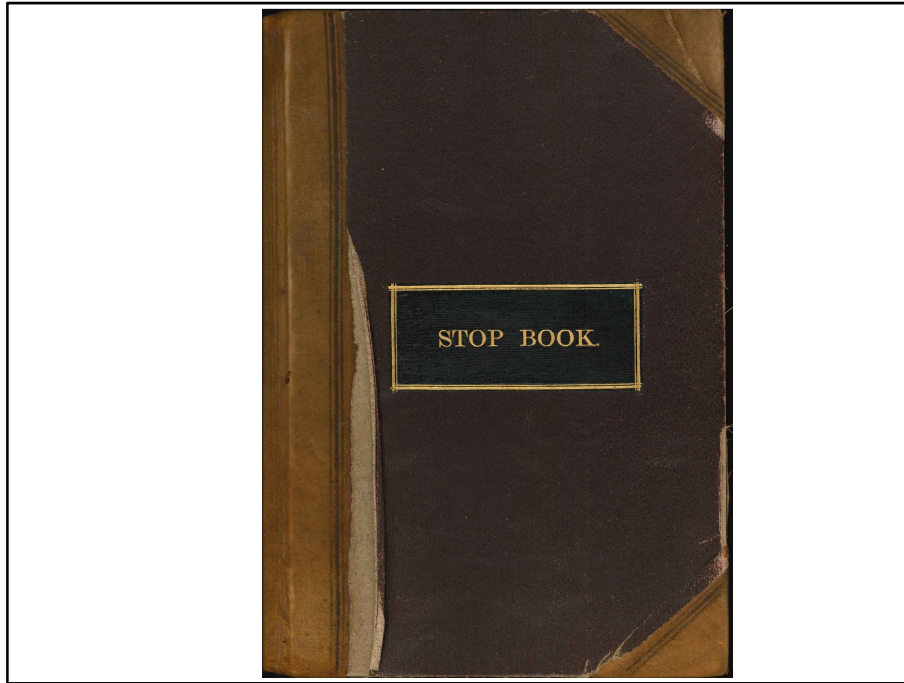


I received this photo in Feb. 2017 from Murray Monahan along with the previous one which we already had.

Murray's note said "This plane landed onto Cassidy Lake with engine trouble 1939-1940? Let me know if you have any info?"

So what about the plane in this picture? We can only make out the last two letters of the registration, "GO". None of the people in the picture are indentified.

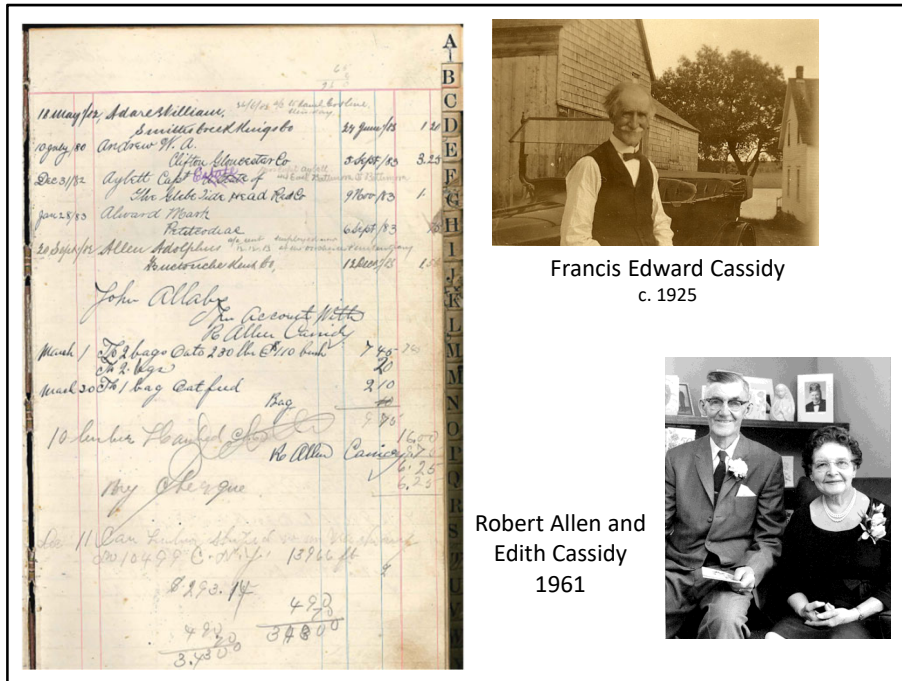
I sent this picture to my brother, Brian, in Fredericton who is also into family genealogy, to see if he could add anything.



The first real break in the mystery of the plane that landed on Cassidy Lake in the winter due to an engine problem came from this book.

It's called a STOP BOOK. We think that's a typo on the part of the printer and my great-grandfather, Francis Edward, got it for a bargain price. It's actually an account book in which they kept records of farm operations and of the family operated cheese factory. The first entries were made by Francis Edward starting in 1880. The majority of the entries were made by my grandfather, Robert Allen, from 1917 until 1942.

I inherited this family heirloom when my dad died in 1993.



At first glance the entries do not appear to be very inspiring. It's clear these guys were not CPAs. Here is a typical page. It's more a note book of transactions than an accounting register. My initial assessment was that it was not very informative and I put away in a closet. That was 24 years ago in 1993.

In 2016, after getting tired of it being in the way, I decided to give it one last look for anything of value. I'm not a pack rat, so it was potentially going to the trash. After careful study, to my surprise, I found it was a treasure trove of information.

Of particular relevance to this discussion are entries on page 145 regarding Canadian Airways.

1940 Canadian Airways airplane Account					145
			meals	\$	C
Feb	22	To Meals	2		
"	23	To Meals London On meal	7		
"	24	To Meals	4		
"	25	To Meals Sunday	2		
"	24	To hauling engine to Norton			4 00
"	23	To logs for derrick & work			2 00
"	22	To Meals	2		
March	20	To hauling engine from Norton			4 00
"	20	To meals	2		
"	21	To meals	8		
"	22	To meals	6		
			33		

Here we have the first piece of hard data on the incident. Robert Allen opened this account on Feb. 22, 1940; Canadian Airways Airplane Account. It starts with providing two meals on Feb. 22. Good guess is that's the day they landed and there were at most two people in the plane. Over the next 2 months they got 33 meals. It's reasonable to assume this included a bed for the night. There is no local "Holiday Inn" and while it's only 9 miles to Norton, a village of a few hundred, or 15 miles to Sussex, a town of a couple of thousand, getting back and forth would not be easy especially in winter.

On Feb. 23, Allen was paid \$2.00 for logs and his help in building a derrick. The next day he received \$4.00 for hauling the engine to the rail station in Norton using a team of horses. A month later, on March 20, Allen got another \$4.00 to haul the engine from Norton to Cassidy Lake.

So, there was in fact a plane that landed with engine problems that were serious enough it could not be repaired on site.



**Registration CF-BGO**  
**Stinson SR-9CM Reliant Jan 6, 1937**  
**Canadian Car & Foundry > Canadian Airways Ltd.**

Brian remembered a photo someone gave him a few years ago dated 1940. This picture turned out to be a gold mine.

The building in the background on the right is the church. The building to the left of it is the family cheese factory which was no longer in operation in 1940. (The structure was removed sometime later. By the late 1940s, only the foundation beams remained.)

We also have the plane's full registration "CF-BGO". Transport Canada's online registration database does not go back that far, but there is one in the UK that does and it identifies the plane as a Stinson Reliant model SR-9CM register on Jan. 6, 1937 to Canadian Airways, a subsidiary of Canadian Car and Foundry. The lightning bolt stripe on the side is classic Stinson paint scheme. The registration notes indicate it was stored by the Royal Norwegian Navy in Toronto July 18, 1941.

We know that Canadian Airways operated a regional mail and cargo service in the late 1930s and early 1940s. It would not be unusual for one of their planes to pass by Cassidy Lake.



Now we know it was a Stinson Reliant operated by Canadian Airways that made an emergency landing on Cassidy Lake on or about Feb. 22, 1940. There was no damage to the aircraft but the engine problems were serious enough that it had to be removed and shipped out to be repaired. A month later the repair was completed.

This picture is likely taken around March 22 as they were completing the repairs. The 4-legged stool looks like the one my grandfather kept in the farm workshop when I was there in the late 1940s. The person on the left sitting on the landing gear could well be my grandfather, Robert Allen. The build and facial features are similar.

We can conclude the crew onboard the plane were very lucky. The lake was the logical place to land. Roads, if they were plowed, would be narrow and likely, rough and rutted making for a tricky landing. The lake would certainly be frozen in late February. There is normally about a foot of ice in the winter and people cut foot-thick blocks from the lake to stock their ice house to provide “refrigeration” for the coming summer months. The question is how deep was the snow covering the ice. That part of New Brunswick gets a lot of snow in winter. It could be a foot or more deep and heavily crusted. We can see the plane is not equipped with skis. Fortunately, it appears there was only an inch or so of snow and the landing was uneventful. They also were able to complete repairs before the spring thaw. From historical weather reports at Saint John, 30 miles away, we know: (a) Feb 21-24 temps varied from high of 32F to low 5F and Saint John got 3” snow on Feb 24, the day Robert Allen hauled the engine to Norton and (b) March 20-22 temps were about the same as in Feb and it snowed every day. Not great weather to change an engine outside on a frozen lake.





I took this picture of Cassidy Lake in 2001. The lake is  $1\frac{3}{4}$  miles long and  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile wide. It's great for recreation though there is no public access and only a few private cottages.

The terrain is rolling hills. Good luck building an air strip. My dad considered putting one on the farm in the early 1950s to handle his Bonanza, but quickly decided it was not worth the effort.



This picture from 1954 is looking down from the homestead. This is likely close to what it would look like to the pilot in 1940, except covered in snow.

Landing on the lake would not be difficult. The approaches are good. I don't ever recall a float plane on the lake. The problem was the plan was on wheels not skis. The lake is certainly frozen. You pray there are no significant snow drifts.

### **Canadian Airways Plane Makes Emergency Landing on Cassidy Lake**

A Stinson Reliant aircraft, CF-BGO, operated by Canadian Airways Ltd. experienced engine trouble and made an emergency landing on Cassidy Lake, NB on February 22, 1940.

There was no property damage or injuries. The aircraft engine was shipped off for repair and plane departed from the frozen lake a month later on March 22.

Cassidy Lake resident, Mr. Allen Cassidy, housed the crew and aircraft repairmen in his home and assisted with the repair work including transporting the plane's engine to and from the railroad station in Norton, NB.

So, here's the short form of the story.

Reconstructing history is a challenge and this story is typical of how it can go. Think of it as assembling a puzzle where you have to search for the pieces and they could be anywhere. The information you seek is probably out there somewhere. Increasingly it's becoming available online. But more often than not it's tucked in a shoebox in someone's closet. Patience and perseverance are key in such a venture.