

The “Old Gander Terminal – a less than glowing report”

(by Robert G Pelley 21 August 2016)

“Time” magazines of 1953 came out during the worst of the cold war period. General Dwight “Ike” Eisenhower of World War II fame became the new president of the US and Mamie Eisenhower became “First Lady”



1953 was the year that saw the “coup de état” in Iran that ousted Prime Minister Mossadegh and lead to his replacement by the Shah. In Korea it was still a war situation, with intensive deadly patrolling in the no-man’s land. In England a certain Elizabeth with her movie-star look became the Queen. In Hungary, the restlessness that preceded the Hungarian Revolution, especially that of Budapest’s students, was becoming more visible.

In the US, Marilyn Munroe had become a young star and had already posed nude on the cover of Playboy. Senator McCarthy was looking for Communists under every chair, to the point that the great comedian Charley Chaplin wouldn’t - or perhaps couldn’t - return home. Happily that new rock and roll music was starting to give people something else to occupy their minds.

In the middle of all this bustling international activity, Time of 19 January, 1953, still managed to find a place to talk about the terminal in Gander.

~~INTERNATIONAL: Winning War / FORMOSA (International).~~
BATTLE OF KOREA: Death Underground (International / BATTLE OF KOREA).
International: Down to the Bottom (International).
International: NEW FRENCH PREMIER (International).
EGYPT: Shifting Trade Winds (Foreign News / EGYPT).
PAKISTAN: Red Interlude (Foreign News / PAKISTAN).
GREAT BRITAIN: Insecure Security (Foreign News / GREAT BRITAIN).
HUNGARY: On Time (Foreign News / HUNGARY).
YUGOSLAVIA: How to Win Friends (Foreign News / YUGOSLAVIA).
Foreign News: Mossadegh Loses Friends (Foreign News).
ITALY: The Cat of Cats (Foreign News / ITALY).
FORMOSA: Bright Feather (Foreign News / FORMOSA).
RUSSIA: Praise for Loose Opinions (Foreign News / RUSSIA).
KOREA: Visiting Tiger (Foreign News / KOREA).
Neurotic Explosion: The Yen Arcade (Foreign News / Neurotic Explosion).
THE AMERICAS: The Not-So-Brave Bulls (The Hemisphere / THE AMERICAS).
The Hemisphere: New Front Door (The Hemisphere). ←
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: Strongman's Whimsy (The Hemisphere / DOMINICAN REPUBLIC).
Foreign News: Neurotic Explosion (Foreign News).

This is what Time had to say:

In the postwar air age, Gander Airport in northeastern Newfoundland has replaced the seaport of Halifax as Canada's front door. More than 300,000 transatlantic air travelers landed there in 1952; many get their first and only impression of Canada at the field. Gander's 8,600-ft. main runway, its instrument-landing equipment, and the high-intensity runway lights now being installed make it technically one of the world's most up-to-date airports. But in the creature comforts by which most tourists form their opinions of a port of call, Gander Airport is as outmoded as a whaling ship.

Arriving at Gander, passengers are herded off their planes through long, wooden ramps appropriately called "sheep runs." The ramps lead to a vast, gloomy hangar built in 1941, when Gander was expanded to serve as a bomber ferry base. Grounded travelers, hung up in Gander for periods varying from an hour or two for refueling to several days for bad weather, have little choice but to haunt the airport's brawling, barnlike waiting room in a bedlam of children's cries and squawking announcements by 20-odd airlines. Grand Falls

(pop. 16,059), the nearest town of any size, is three hours away by slow train. Three-day-old newspapers, and long, morose drinks of potent Newfoundland "screech" (rum) at the crowded bar* are the chief available diversions from the monotony of staring at the cheerless landscape.

Realizing that Gander's grim aspect is the worst kind of advertising for Canada's tourist trade, the Department of Transport recently flew a group of government officials into Gander to see what could be done about improving the place. Last week some of the experts' proposed changes began to take shape. A new catering firm was signed up to improve the dining service. Architects went to work on plans to brighten the interior of the hangar waiting room, to tear down the sheep runs and replace them with paved walks. The raucous confusion of airline announcements will be replaced by a single announcer system; newscasts and soothing music will be piped into the waiting room.

Workmen already have converted a section of the hangar into a small but comfortable movie theater. The National Film Board is supplying the theater with documentaries about Canada's modern cities and its showier tourist places (e.g., Banff, Lake Louise, Niagara Falls), all frankly calculated to reassure travelers that the inside of Canada's house is not so forbidding as its bleak front porch.

*The only bar in Canada open 24 hours a day.

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It seems to be perhaps all a question of perspective. This Collier's article from 03 May 1947 tells a different story, lauding all the comforts available to visiting passengers.

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

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