

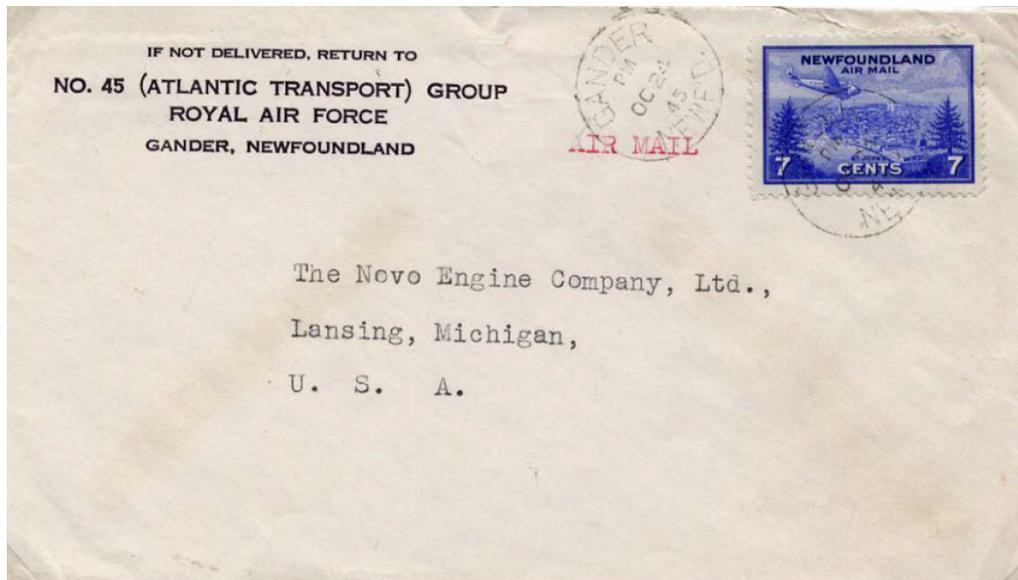
Funny RAF "Novo" pump Gander, Newfoundland

(Robert G Pelley, 18 March 2018)
<http://bobsganderhistory.com>

Sometimes on seeing an envelope, one is immediately able to give it context and possible meaning. For example, a letter from a War Department on the 1940s addressed to a mother or father might speak of the fate of a son overseas. Documents from the Canadian War Cabinet sent to the Newfoundland Commission Government in the early years of the 2nd World War could well announce the arrival of Canadian military forces. A message from the RAF Ferry Command to the Lockheed Aircraft Company would most likely be about the Hudson bombers they ferried across the Atlantic.

But other letters, on the contrary, "just don't click", and lead us to wonder what in heavens was that all about??

One such letter is shown below. It was sent on 24 October 1945 by the 45 (Atlantic Transport) Group of the RAF Transport Command in Gander to the Novo Engine Company in Lansing, Michigan, USA.



A quick history note - up to early days of the 2nd World War, the British Royal Air Force was convinced that it was impossible to fly bombers across the Atlantic and sent them across by boat, losing very many to German U-boats. In July 1940 a ferry group called ATFERO (Atlantic Ferry Organisation) made up of civilian crews were crazy enough to try it - and it worked.

The RAF Ferry Command took over this civilian operation in August 1941. Over the next two years the RAFFC became increasingly efficient and started ferry efforts in other parts of the world. On 25 March 1943, it therefore became the RAF Transport Command in which the Atlantic operations became a sub-group, with the name shown on the envelope.

What was this Novo Engine Company to whom the envelope was addressed? Given the nature of the RAF, one might think that it would have something to do with aircraft engines. At least they would have had some relation with airplane functions of some sort, such as an auxiliary power unit used to give a boost during aircraft start-up.

In fact, Novo engines had very little to do with the aeronautical world. Over the years they were known to have made two-cycle marine engines, small farm pumps, and vertical four-cycle "hopper-cooled" (closed-circuit water-cooled) engines ranging generally between 2 and 15 horsepower.



So why would the RAF Transport Command in Gander want to communicate with the Novo Engine Company if it built that type of engine?

Could it have something to do with their ground installations based near hangars 21 and 22, on what was called the RAF side?

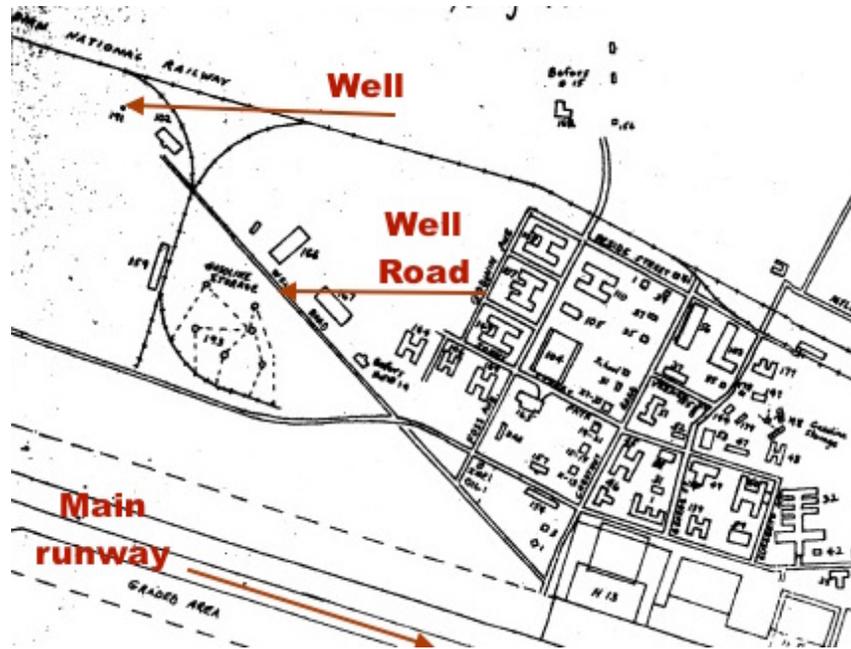
The answer to that would most likely be no. It is hard to think what it would be used for - In any case, not for pumping drinking water.

When Gander was being constructed, the first water was pumped from a well in the area of the Railway station and Administration building.

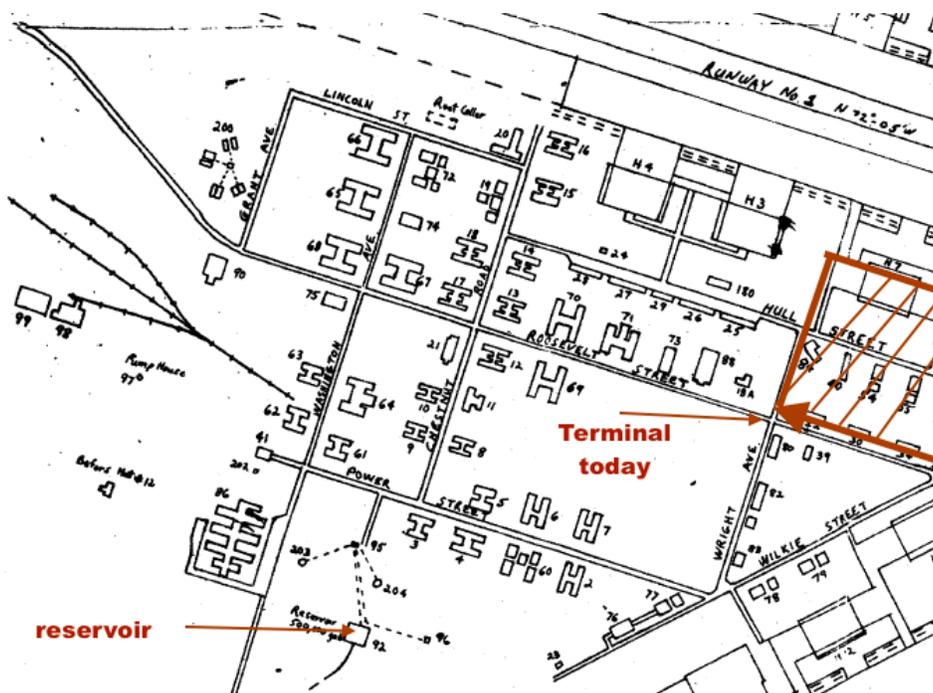


Charlie Hoddinott using the hand pump, 1937

In the 1939-40 period, water came from two different places. For the RAF area water came primarily from Deadmans Pond, about 1/4 km away. At the same time, a well to the west of the Canadian/RCAF side became fully operational. It was on the end of the aptly named Well Road, close to the railway line.



A pump house was later built on the shores of Gander Lake, with a 500,000 gallon reservoir on the "American side" near what was then the American hospital and the present day Radar station.



There is another reason why the water supply would not have been the reason for the RAFTC contacting Novo Engines - namely because it was none of their business. In fact, at that time the RCAF was unique responsible for the operation of the whole airport complex.

As well, this envelope is dated October 1945, after the war, and the RAFTC was closing out its ferry operations in Gander. It is highly unlikely that it would have invested money on updating or repairing infrastructure that it would no longer use.

This letter could of course have referred to a multitude of things, perhaps an unpaid bill or maybe a motor used elsewhere than Gander. On the other hand, who knows, maybe some English gentle farmer who was also a Vice-Chief Marshall of the RAF needed a pump to irrigate his garden back in merry England.

Where are you, Sherlock, when we need you!

Much thanks to Jerome C Jarnick of Troy, Michigan, for use of the envelope photo. The early Gander water pump photos were given me by the late Fred Smeaton. The Novo photos are post-copyright.