

Local transportation in "Old Gander"

(by Robert G Pelley, 23 September 2020)

bobsganderhistory.com

Anybody familiar with early Gander, both military and civilian, knows that it was very advanced as far as economical and climat-respecting travel was concerned. A heavy carbon foot print was replaced by a very light human foot print. Everybody walked!

Going for a swim in Twin Ponds, 10 kilometres "out the road", was not a challenge even for young teenagers. Walking the long way around the runways was not a big deal, though not a few cut across them, if they were sure there were no airplanes in the sky.

A few kids had bicycles, but since everything came in by train, it was not all that easy to get a good bike at a decent price. The one advantage though of living in small isolated locality is that everyone knew everyone - and what kind of bike one had. So nobody stole someone else's.

By the mid-50s, North American cars had become the norm, brought by flat-car from dealers like Hickmans and Marshall Motors in St. John's.



Typical cars near bldg 108 Fosse Avenue

Because Newfoundland was a former colony, some of the earliest cars came from England. The most exciting was probably the two-seat sports car owned by Willian Heath, possibly a Triumph or MG. The kids always marvelled that the speedometer went to 165! Nobody had the heart to explain to them the difference between the British kph and Canadian mph, as it was at the time.

At the end of war, there was of course little civilian infrastructure. Men working in Gander were basically hands-on fellows, used to making do, fixing and repairing whatever they were lucky enough to have available. This included repairing their own vehicles: Many men built garages out of post-war materials. One good example was recycled Quonset huts. The south side of Roosevelt Street on the American side was lined with garages, as was Reside Street, next to the railway line, on the South on Foss Avenue.



Reside Street

But soon, some of the men start showing a penchant for business and started their own service stations. The first one popped up in the 1950 phone book.

GARAGES

GANDER SERVICE STATION
Leo G. Lannon, Proprietor.

Dial 413

Agent For:—
 Chrysler, Plymouth, Hillman and
 Kaiser cars and Fargo trucks.
 Complete service to all makes of cars
 and trucks.
 Body work and welding.
 Gas and oils.

EFFICIENT AND COURTEOUS
SERVICE TO ALL

Dial 413

By 1954, three service stations were in operation. In addition, to Mr Lannon's garage on Hull Street, there was another one on Hull owned by Bill Bennett, a long time Trans Canada Air Lines employee.

The other service station was situated just west of the Banting Memorial Hospital, in the former RCAF fire hall, with its two large truck doors. It was known as the "Airport Service Station".



In that same photo a sign can be seen over the office entrance saying, "Gander Taxi". As shown in the difference telephone books, there were many taxi companies in operation at the same time.

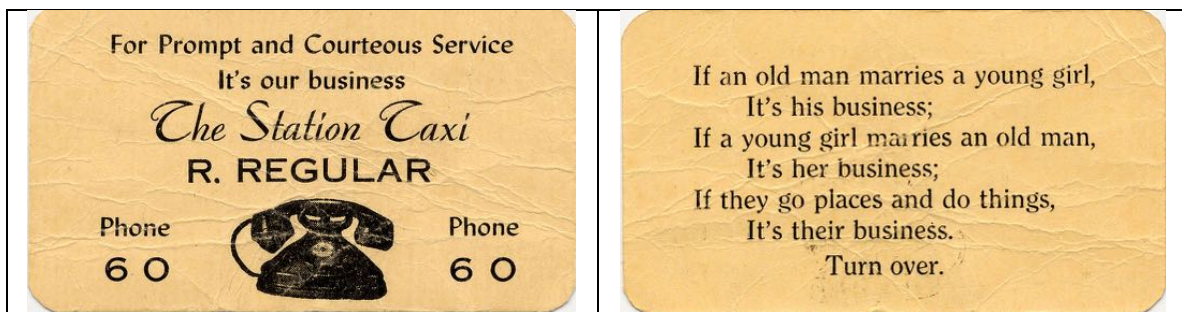
In 1949 there were three taxi companies mentioned in the phone book:

Gander Taxi had three phone numbers:

- office phone 298
- terminal phone 85
- staff house phone 314

It was impossible to identify what was meant by "Staff house", as there were quite a number of these, all over Gander.

The two other taxis were Hotel Taxi (phone 367) and Station Taxi (phone 60) : The following card is from Station Taxi, probably started some years before:



"Hotel Taxi" probably referred to one of two places. A first possibility could be near the old terminal (hangars 21 and 22) as there were several hotel buildings immediately north of the hangars. The other possibility was the Airlines Hotel on the American side, located in the area of the exit from the present day terminal parking.

The situation changed quite a bit over one year. In 1950 there were now four companies, including two owned by women.

TAXIS

DON'T BE LATE Dial 412

GANDER TAXI (& Trucking Service)
H. C. Newhook, Proprietor
 Day and Night—24 hour service.

TELEPHONES:

Dial 412
 Dial 985

7 new cars—2-way radios.
 Passenger Insurance.

HOTEL TAXI

Mrs. R. G. Pinsent, Proprietress
 Taxi and Hotel Service
 24 hour service

Dial 476

STAR TAXI

Mrs. Robert Faulkner, Proprietress
 24 hour service.

Dial 331

The "Hotel Taxi" shown above does not appear to be same as the one given in the 1949 list, as the phone number is different.

In the 1954 phone book only one company is listed:

GANDER TAXI:

31 George Street	412
31 George Street	985
McClure Street	960
Garage, 25 Hull Street	2251

The above addresses do not coincide with those of the previous Gander Taxi, so it may have changed owner. Below is an envelope sent by MA Hoddinott of Gander Taxi to Marshal Motors in St John's, dated 1947. It would seem that Gander Taxi had had three different owners.



There were of course a few more adventurist souls in Gander, those who preferred the wind in their hair. There weren't many in those days, with at least one notable exception, Leif Rosenblad, an employee of SAS (Scandinavian Airlines System). Seen below are two photos of his son Tom. The first motorcycle is a BSA while the second was a Royal Enfield.



Gander, like other developing communities, needed what modern towns called a "mass transit system". Well, as can be seen below, Gander had one of those!

There was always a bus or two available in Gander. The first bus belonged to the Royal Air Force Transport Command. After the war, they had no use for it and it was apparently repainted and used locally for a short while.



I am not sure about the next but it was described as a school bus in the 1950s, near the end of Power Street, near the line of hangars.



All around old Gander there was a route called "Circular Road" that went through the town and around the ends of the runways. There was a bus dedicated to this route. One could theoretically get on it in the morning and drive around all day. The photo below from March 1947 shows the bus near Caledonia Camp, on the south boundary of the airport, which was used by British Overseas Airway Corporation.



Dick Graham and Janet Huntley, Caledonia Camp

(Note: This may have been a BOAC bus rather than the town bus.)

The good thing about people in Gander is that however they went, by foot, by taxi, by family car or on a bus or motorcycle, they all got along!

A number of people have contributed photos and quite useful information over the years.

For this article, I'd like to thank in particular:

- ° Rick Stead - motorcycle photos
- ° Michal Crowe - Caledonia bus photo