



Coyote hunting
on the Tsuu
Tina reserve,
1914, Glenbow
NA 959-3

These sporting events lent a sense of gentility to a sometimes rough and arduous life in the West. The rodeos, hunts and polo matches must have been a welcome break from the grim day-to-day business of ranching, and were anticipated with excitement by both participants and spectators.

Springbank Airport

Almost directly across the highway from Calaway Park is one of the busiest little airports in the country.

On November 1, 1927, six months after the first trans-Atlantic flight by Charles Lindbergh, a group of Calgarians interested in flying met and initiated what was to become the new incarnation of the Calgary Aero Club. The previous club had faded into oblivion, but the experiences of World War I had encouraged the Canadian government, through the Department of National Defence, to offer cash subsidies and loans of aircraft to groups that were willing to commit themselves to training pilots. The new club elected Frank McCall as its first president, and the first ground school was in place by the middle of November, with an enthusiastic

group of more than 100 students enrolled for pilot training. By the end of that year, members had a total of 349 hours of flying on record, and one commercial and nine private pilots had been certified. Membership in the club was growing rapidly.

By this time, the Bowness Flying Field had proven inadequate to the demands of newer aircraft, so this activity was based out of the Banff Coach Road Airport, and later the Calgary Municipal Airport, northwest of central Calgary.

Calgary International Airport was opened (at the time named McCall Field) in 1938, and club activity relocated to that site. In 1946, the group changed its name to the Calgary Flying Club. But McCall Field was becoming increasingly busy with large-scale international flights, and accommodating a busy schedule of small aircraft was becoming a challenge. The solution came in 1969, when the federal government selected a site in Springbank for a “reliever” airport to handle the light-aircraft traffic coming into Calgary.

The establishment of the airport meant the expropriation of a farmstead. The MacLaurin farm was purchased, their land becoming property of the Crown as Transport Canada set up shop. By 1971, the airport was open for business, and



Aerial view of Springbank Airport, Calgary Airport Authority. Note the extended north-south runway, for the Forestry Air Tanker Base, located on its north-east corner.

the Calgary Flying Club based its activities from this new location.

By the 1980s, the federal government had become interested in getting out of the business of operating airports and commenced an airport divestiture program, and in 1997 Springbank was transferred from Federal control to the Calgary Airport Authority. It was designated a “Tier 2” Certified Aerodrome, which established certain standards for how airport operations would take place at the facility. In subsequent airport master planning the airport was limited to Code B type aircraft, which means planes smaller than the Dash 8 typically flown by Jazz Air, with one exception – read on...

One of the improvements that Springbank pursued was the extension of the north-south runway. The airport is 1,200 metres above sea level, and aircraft performance drops considerably with elevation. So on hot days many planes could fly only with limited loads, because the runway was too short for takeoff in those conditions. Thus a flight to Seattle, for example, which would normally be a direct flight, would have to be interrupted for a refuelling stop.

The runway extension also allowed for the exception to the Code B traffic limit that permitted a single category of larger planes to use the Springbank runway. Up to that time, the Alberta government had leases for its Forestry Air Tanker Bases in Pincher Creek and Rocky Mountain House, but it had found that it could not effectively fight fires in Banff and Kananaskis from these locations. It was seeking an additional location midway between them. Springbank was perfectly situated, and it became the third site for firefighting operations, using large Code C tanker aircraft. In wet years, these large craft may fly very infrequently, but in dry years the Forestry Air Base can be active 16 hours a day, every day. The current spread of the pine-beetle infestation from B.C. into Alberta and the controlled burns that are being conducted in connection with this puts the Forestry Base on an even higher level of alert.

Besides the runway extension, two other recent developments have upgraded the Springbank facilities considerably. The installation of an instrument landing system allowed





all weather operations to take place under instrument flight conditions. Also, in 2003 Springbank became a border facility that provides Canada Customs services. How these services came into effect is interesting. Prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., the airport had been testing management of entry into Canada through a program called CANPASS, by which a pilot could apply for special ongoing clearance status that is usually confirmed with a phone call on each entry. But 9/11 put that out the window. A method of international entry was still needed to meet demand, since Alberta had only four ports of entry (while B.C. had about 20), so it became necessary to add full Canada Customs services to the Springbank facility.

The airport now covers an area of 1,040 acres and has two paved runways of 1,524 and 1,043 metres, respectively. It operates 24 hours per day, year-round, seven days a week. In 2007, it was the seventh-busiest airport in all of Canada, and the second-busiest (after Calgary International) in Alberta. The original MacLaurin farmhouse still stands on the site, just behind the new control tower. It is now operated as a fly-in accommodation, called the Tie Down B&B.

Springbank
Airport control
tower, 2009

The Elusive Outlaw

For a period in the early 1900s, Springbank and the surrounding area were kept in a state of fear by the desperate actions of a slippery criminal who passed through the region several times, leaving a series of households gripped by terror. Ernest Cashel had started life as what we would now term a troubled youth. Born in Kansas, he was abandoned by his single mother when he was 14. He fended for himself on the streets and became a great aficionado of the popular dime-store novels about Nick Carter, a rough-and-ready western version of Sherlock Holmes. Cashel's other obsession was Jesse James, the American outlaw of the Wild West. As a writer in *Canadian Cattlemen* magazine commented, "He could not handily emulate the fictitious super-sleuth, Mr. Carter, so he compromised by doubling for the Missouri bandit, on a penny-ante scale."³ Cashel moved around the American Midwest, gambling and stealing, and soon found himself in jail for larceny. Thus the pattern of his life continued. In 1901, he broke out of jail in Buffalo, Wyoming, was rearrested, broke out again, and headed for Canada.

Once in Canada, Cashel initially seemed to try to turn over a new leaf and abandon his criminal ways. He worked as a ranch hand, and also tried his hand at barbering. Yet Cashel soon returned to his old tricks and started forging cheques. One of his victims put together a few pieces of information and realized that the new barber in town was behind the forgeries, and the victim reported this to the police. Cashel was located, by then working on a ranch near Ponoka, where

Top left: the
McLaurin
farm, ca. 1969,
Calgary Airport
Authority

Top right: The
McLaurin farm
today - as the
Tie Down B&B,
2009