

The Layout of Old Gander's Terminal (Hangar 22) circa 1955 (v2)

(by RG Pelley 2025-04-02
bobsganderhistory.com)

One often sees photos outside the terminal building of planes from airlines such as Pan American, BOAC, El Al , Lufthansa, Air Lingus, KLM, Air France, TWA and the like being refuelled, serviced and sometimes repaired. Trucks from Shell Oil and Esso were constantly going about their business on the ramp. Intermixed with them were other vehicles such as tugs, auxiliary power units, mobile staircases and the infamous "honey wagon".

Inside the terminal building was the welcoming passenger lounge, with the ticket counters, a lunch counter, the Novelty Booth and, of course, the famous Big Dipper bar.

This was that wondrous time of zero security when Ganderites rubbed shoulders with the "Important People" of the world.

But there was much more to hangar 22 than just the passenger lounge and the hurried but careful bustle on the ramp.

This article hopes to show much more about the real activities that took place in hangar 22. But first a historical note. The hangar, seemly a staid old ex-wartime structure, was the object of constant change over the years. The "first" domestic terminal - after being at one time in Gander's first hangar, the round-roofed hangar 20 - was hastily constructed after the war, with an official opening in 1946. A newer version, especially of the lounge, was available in 1949, coinciding with Confederation and changes in aircraft types and passenger services. There were other gradual changes over the years, until finally a completely new terminal was opened by the Queen on 19 July 1959.

The terminal described in this article is circa 1955. It is based on a floor plan from 1945-46, and modified based on newer photos and information from other varied texts and people who were familiar with the area.



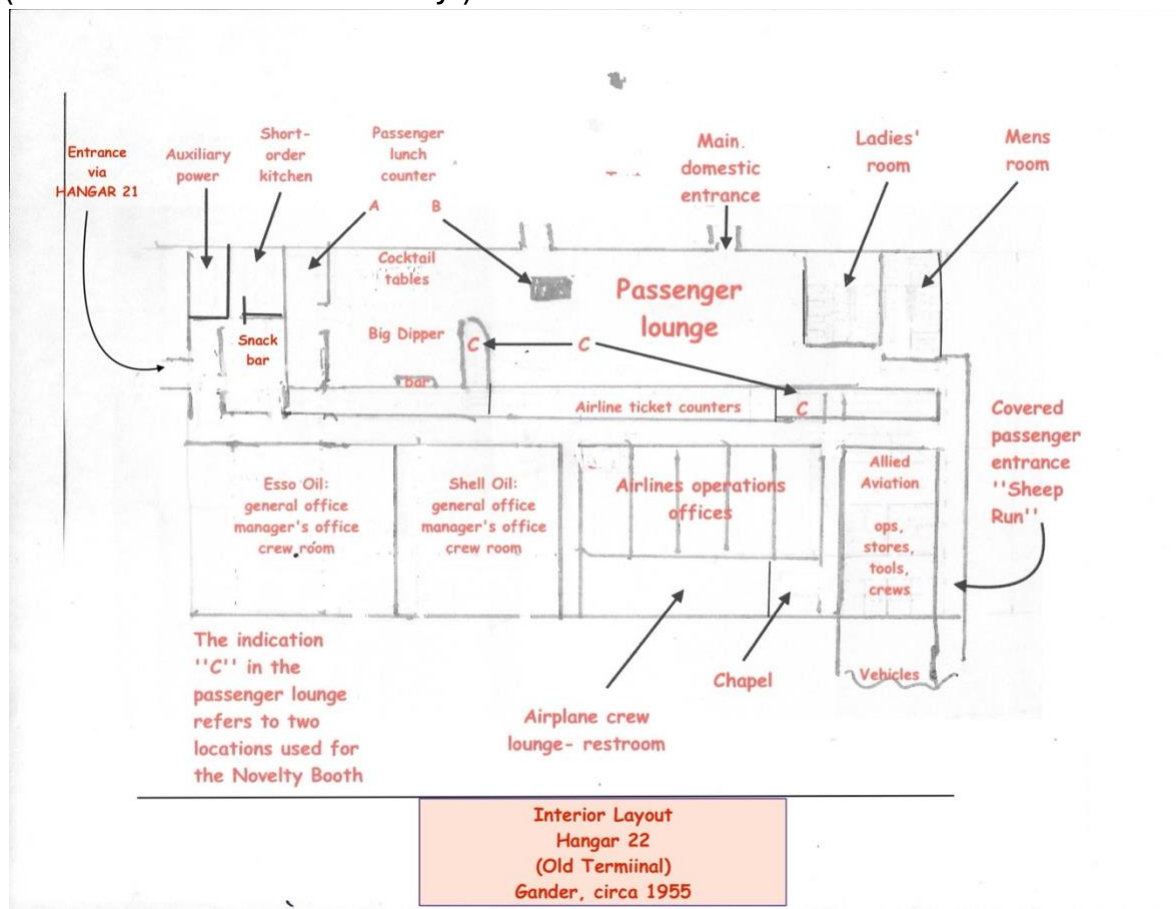
Lounge 1949



Lounge 1954

The following sketch represents the interior of the hangar. It is not perfectly to scale but fairly close. It is based on a 1944-45 document provided from the Miami University Pan Am collection, with the help of Darrell Hillier. It was updated from the author's own experience as the son of an employee from Shell who worked from hangar 22 and was further revised with the help of Cliff Powell who worked there as ramp employee for Allied Aviation.

(Use the zoom as necessary.)



This sketch can be best visualised as two sections, divided by a long corridor from the wall of hangar 21 running toward the ramp.

The "domestic entrance" to the interior of the hangar can be seen in the top right-hand corner. One came in through a door in hangar 21, turned left and

crossed a fire door. A quick turn to the left led to the auxiliary electric power unit. While the two hangars were connected to Gander's power supply, this generator was always available if a storm or other knocked out main power.

A short right turn led toward the corridor and, much more importantly, the Snack Bar. This was run by Commercial Caterers and was a favourite Sunday afternoon hangout. Even young kids would think nothing of walking the lengthy road from the "American side" to get the best fries in Central Newfoundland, a glorious banana split or a coke float. In fact, experienced airline crews were often seen there, preferring this to the sandwiches sold for the longest time in the passenger lounge.

In the corner next to the snack bar and the auxiliary power was the Commercial Caterers short-order kitchen. As can be seen, this kitchen also serviced passengers who passed through the Big Dipper bar area to get to it. This lunch counter was later moved into the main passenger lounge. But there was a logical reason for this.

Back in the days of early trans-Atlantic aviation, pretty much only rich adults were able to fly. Therefore having a snack bar accessible only through a bar for adults was not a problem. But as time went on, lower-cost flying became available. Economy fares were introduced and families were now going on trips. The snack bar was therefore moved to the main concourse for general access. It was also, it has been hinted, a good way to make sure that airline crews didn't get tempted by a scotch and soda on the way for an order of fries.

Information on the lounge area has already been explained on this website. Several points however are worth mentioning. Firstly, though the "official" domestic entry was between hangars 21 and 22, there was just the same a main entrance to the passenger lounge area. It was not "illegal" for locals to use it, but there was always an "unwritten law" that when one went in through that door, it was almost like going to church. Behaving like well-brought-up folk and wearing "good clothes" was sort of expected. After all, who knows when a king or president might walk by.

The passenger area had a “Novelty Booth” with the usual candies, magazines and souvenirs. It was first placed next to the corner where adults went into the Big Dipper. Some say that it was placed there to be well seen by the rich travellers, especially those happier on the way out than on the way in. It was later moved very close to the main entrance to better cater to a more varied class of travellers.

“Time” magazine of 18 January 1953, in referring to the passenger lounge, said the following:

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 location of this theatre was not found in the hangar. It is possible that the reporter only heard about it but didn't actually see it. There is chatter, but nothing more, about a theatre of some sort in the building in front of the hangar which was used for accommodation (Skyways Hotel).

To give an idea of the traffic that went through the passenger lounge, in 1957, around 11000 aircraft landed in Gander with slightly over 450000 passengers. The info on the lounge area can be seen in this article:

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

This brings us to the part of the hangar that most people did not get to see, namely the section on the other side of the corridor, the ‘hangar floor’ side.

On leaving the snack bar, one is immediately at the beginning of the corridor. A short distance down, there is a narrower hallway leading to the inside of the hangar. If one comes back towards hangar 21, there were two large offices. One, closest to hangar 21 was occupied by Esso Oil. There was found the general office which took care of finances, payments for fuel, resupply and the like. It also had the managers' office and a large crew room for up to eight people per shift, variable according to expected airline traffic.

The other office, with similar functions, was that of Shell Oil. It should be noted that these were more than just offices. It was also a great place for a young fellow to go, sit quietly and learn about the world just by listening to older men chat about ordinary life.

A bit further toward the ramp were operations offices of the major airlines. It was here that flights were planned, aircraft weights and balances were calculated and where anything airline was taken care of. One important function was to take care of VIPs, especially those who got lost and ended up fishing some strange pond during their "inspection tour"!

Just behind the airline ops rooms were two areas of importance. One was an airline crew lounge. This room was equipped with chairs that looked like a cross between a deck chair and a recliner. Rumour has it that when plane crews didn't need them, local employees sometimes felt obligated to keep them warm.

This area also had a small chapel, compliments of Trans World Airlines, a company that no longer exists.



The altar was provided by a local parish priest. The vestments and other facilities were loaned from the Shrine Church of the Sea in New York. The pews were made by Leonard Saunders of Gander maintenance.

By December 1950 it was used 15 times for mass and countless visitors had come to view this quaint chapel. In the photo is Gerry Wakeham, chief TWA transportation agent at the time.

Further along, on the ramp side of the hangar, Allied Aviation occupied the space.

At the start of airline operations in Gander, each airline had its own maintenance, for example for engine repair, avionics, and similar tasks. This

led inevitably to duplication of efforts. In 1948, all this was folded into one operation under Allied Aviation, which had done the same thing in New York.

In simplest terms, Allied's ramp operations were conducted from Hangar 22 in order to be as close as possible to the aircraft they serviced. Maintenance such as engine repair or replacement was done in the larger Hangar 21. The maintenance team was headed by Sammy Blandford, a Newfoundland who learned his trade under the careful eye of Joe Gilmore, who led the wartime RAF maintenance first in the Montreal area and then in Gander.



Joe Gilmore, Sammy Blandford

But we can't end the story of hangar 22 without talking about the monkeys. Yep, good old fashioned banana-eating monkeys. Rhesus monkeys, to be more specific.



As most know, the “Rh factor” gives different blood types in humans. And as it works out, the Macaque Rhesus monkeys’ DNA is quite similar to that of humans. In the 1950s in particular, a great number were flown in from India and Pakistan for research. One of the airlines having a contract to bring them in was Seaboard and Western.

One day one of their DC-4s, full of monkeys, had to be hangared briefly for some small problem – of course, about a 1/2 dozen or so got loose. They immediately headed for the rafters and there was no way to go get them down. One chap wanted to help out with a pellet gun until some Allied employee chased him out of the hanger.

The plane left without them and they were for a while an attraction for local tourists, especially as they liked copulating in public view. They finally got hungry and a “banana trap” was made up to catch them. One young fellow who shall go unnamed managed to get one that he hoped to train but public health officials put a stop to that.

Air Traffic Control had no problem picking up these aircraft as they flew into Gander. Apparently, controllers could smell them before they actually picked them up on radar.