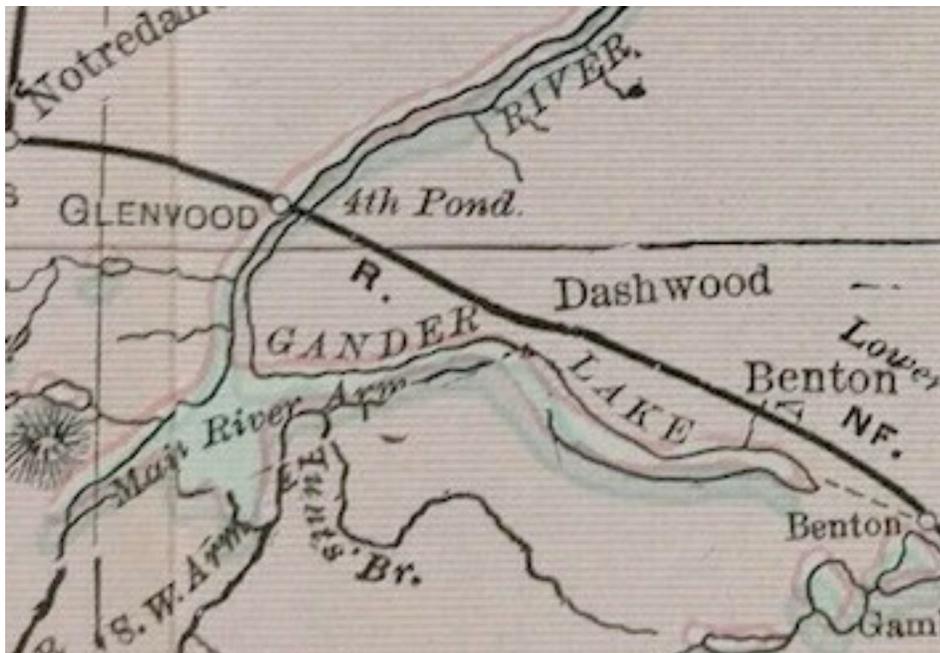


# The many names of Gander, Newfoundland

(by Robert G Pelley, 2020-12-26)  
bobsganderhistory.com

To many living in Gander, especially newcomers or those who do not know much about "old Gander", it is, was and will always be just "Gander". The town, despite questions about the future of aviation, is basically an island of serenity, where, except for an unfortunate horrible crash or a sudden influx of passengers, change is gradual. One day follows the next with metronomic regularity.

But it wasn't always that way. At the turn of the 19th century, it wasn't called Gander. It hardly had a name at all. But, though just a point on some maps, it existed, known mainly a few hunters and later to railway workers, as "Dashwood".



This spot on the map is named after Captain Richard Lewis Dashwood, an officer in British Army, who spent ten years traipsing around the woods of Eastern Canada and parts of the northeastern US. His exploration lasted from 1862 to 1872, the last two years of which he spent in Newfoundland.

At the time, Dashwood was neither a siding nor whistle stop, as the railway between Glenwood and Benton was not finished until the summer of 1893. It was however a convenient vantage point halfway along Gander Lake.

Newfoundlanders owe a lot to Capt Dashwood, as to him was attributed the idea of bringing moose to the island. When he returned to England, he published in 1872 a book "Chiploquorgan, or, Life by the Camp Fire in the Dominion of Canada and Newfoundland."

In his section on Newfoundland he wrote:

*How I wished that there were moose in Newfoundland! What a place it would be to call on the lakes by our camp. As the moose are now becoming so scarce on the mainland, it would be an excellent plan and one worthy of consideration of the Newfoundland Government, to turn up moose in the island. They would not migrate like the caribou, but remain in the depths of the forest, far out of the reach of the settlers living on the coast. In a few years they would become numerous, and there is plenty of good feeding ground in the woody parts of the interior of Newfoundland."*

In 1878, the first pair of bull and cow moose were imported from Nova Scotia but they just would not fall in love. In 1886, a try was made with another pair and this time a romance blossomed, giving rise to the sport of moose hunting for which Newfoundland is famous.

In passing, the name "Dashwood" was not found on a map later than 1906.

Not much happen in the Dashwood area for the longest time. The Reid Railway company had woods concessions jointly with the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company. For reasons of cost and lack of access to timber rights, Reid had to cease its involvement in both the Grand Falls and Corner Brook plants. This however did not keep them from proposing a "third mill" based on the resources of remaining blocks of land in the area around Gander Lake. To carry out its proposed development, Reid borrowed heavily and the company was placed in receivership in 1931. In 1938 the receivers sold the Gander blocks of timber to Bowaters-Lloyd.

This may be reason for a small camp in the former Dashwood area, established in early 1900s by a logger from Nova Scotia, by the name of Hugh Hattie. With the existence of this more permanent "Hattie's Camp", it is logical that the name "Dashwood" became less popular. Oral tradition has it that Mr Hattie left the camp sometime during the period when it became clear that the projected Reid timber operations were not going to happen.

This camp was at "Milepost 213", meaning it was 213 miles east of St.John's. At Milestone 216, three miles east, there was another camp, namely Cobb's Pond. This was related to railway security and, though rudimentary, had some small structures.

Given where the survey for the new airport was actually done, the most accurate names for Gander in the 1930s would therefore be "Hatties Camp" and "Milepost 213".

It was however described inaccurately in some official documents as being located at Cobb's Camp. For example, in an article by Gander historian Frank Tibbo, we are told about a government official, JT Meaney, who said the following:

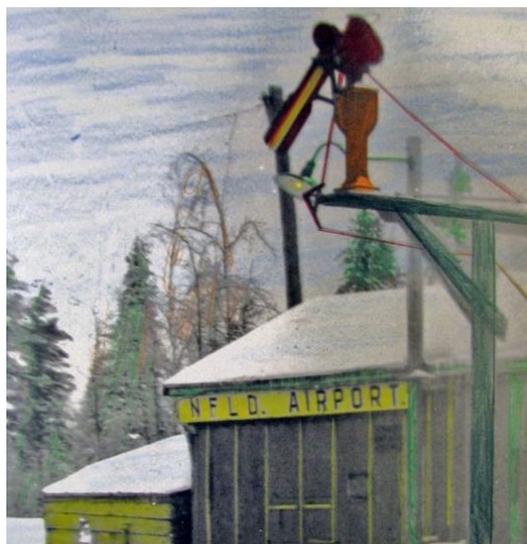
*"The Imperial Airways Airport now under construction in this country is situated at Cobb's Camp, 213 miles by railway from St. John's. Its location is about 500 feet above sea-level, on a high, dry plateau, without obstruction from any direction. There will be four runways – three of 1500 yards long and 200 yards wide, one of 1600 yards long and 400 yards wide."*

When construction started in the summer of 1936, workers who came in by train went to place called for a short time - and for an unknown reason - "Camp 24".

The name "Hatties Camps" continued to be used by some up to the early 1940s, while workers from the outposts often said they were going to work "in on the Gander". At the same time, the name "Newfoundland Airport" was starting to be used semi-officially. It was used at least as early as July 1939 in a conversation that HAL Pattison, aerodrome control officer (manager) had with a reporter. This was in principle cleared up by a government proclamation of 21 May 1940, giving three-months notice that:

*the Settlement, Railway Station and Post Office situated at the 213<sup>th</sup> Mile Post on the Railway West of St John's hitherto known as "Newfoundland Airport" be named "Gander". The Airport itself will continue to be called "Newfoundland Airport", but the postal address will be "Newfoundland Airport, Gander".*

The equivalent to this in another part of Newfoundland would be as if one said, "Torbay Airport, St-John's".



It would appear however that in RCAF circles, the term "Gander Airport" was used at least on occasion as early as summer 1940.

**114.**

**NPA GN1/3 320/35**

*Le commandant de l'aviation, région aérienne de l'Est,  
au commandant, aéroport de Gander*

*Air Officer Commanding, Eastern Air Command,  
to Officer Commanding, Gander Airport*

**S 30-3  
SECRET**

**Halifax, June 17, 1940**

**SUBJECT: AIR DEFENCE OF NEWFOUNDLAND**

**1. A review of the Air Defence of Newfoundland has been made and it is considered expedient to take every precaution to prevent the possibility of the Enemy seizing undefended air bases in that colony with the object of conducting air operations against important objectives on the Atlantic Coast and shipping off the Atlantic Coast.**

As the Americans became concerned by potential warfare on the Atlantic coast and eventual involvement in Europe, the idea of having access to a modern airport able to support strategic operations was of great interest. Nine months before Pearl Harbor, on 09 March 1941, the first American weather personnel of 8th Weather Squadron, under Captain Clark Hosmer, arrived at what they called "*Gander Field*" to support the later arrival of the US 21st Reconnaissance Squadron

During this same period, in meetings of the Canadian-American "Permanent Joint Board on Defense", it is referred to as "the airport at Gander Lake" (18 Oct 41).

From a review several hundred pages of official documents from that era, it would be safe to say that Milepost 213, Cobb's Camp and Hattie's Camp were seldom used names by the end of 1940. "In on the Gander" existed in everyday language among workers for apparently a much longer time. By spring of 1942, Gander Airport, or more simply Gander, was pretty well in usage, even by the Americans.

Gander, as most people know, was made up of "sides" such as the RAF side. In that particular case, the "occupying force" changed name as the scope of their mission changed. Globally, ferry operations in Gander were first run via the Canadian Pacific Air Service. On 10 May 1941, the ferry operations were taken over directly by the British Ministry of Aircraft Production itself through its ATFERO (Atlantic ferrying organization). The Canadian Pacific agreement was thereby terminated.

The ATFERO was however short-lived, for this responsibility was now assumed by the Royal Air Force Ferry Command, 01 August. That name lasted around two years. On 25 March 1943, to meet the needs of military transport, which had become global, rather than simply trans-Atlantic, the Royal Air Force formed a larger Transport Command in which Ferry Command was renamed the No. 45 Atlantic Transport Group. A year later, on 20 July 1944, as ferry flights were down, it was renamed the 83 Staging Post.

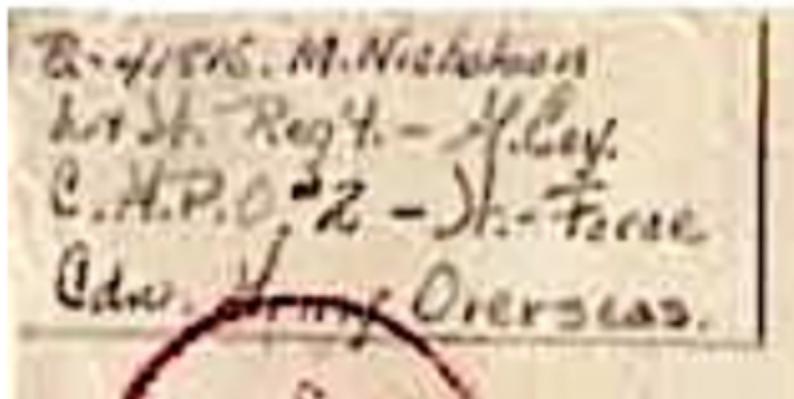
There were no comparative name changes on the American, RCAF and Army sides.

An intriguing question was what in people in Gander used as "home address" when they sent letters. Civilians quite simply used Gander, as in this TCA First-day cover of 01 May 1942.



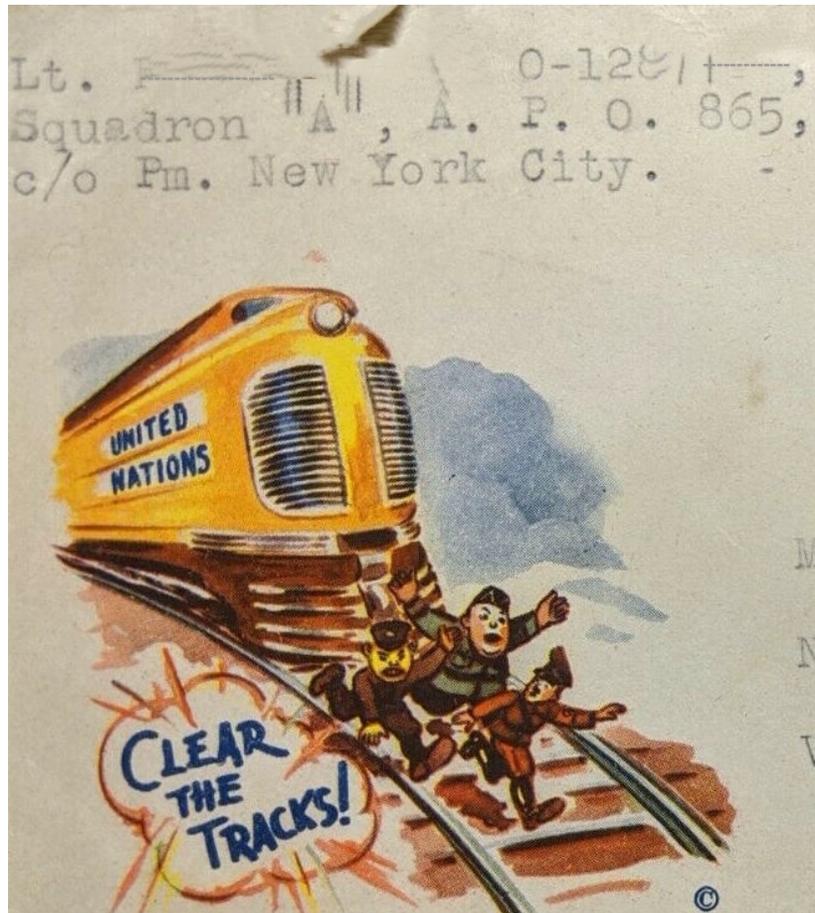
Later mail from civilians remained as Gander, but soon after this First-day operation, civilian mail became subject to censorship.

Military mail however was a completely different deal. So the enemy can not identify where individual military units are operating and therefore deduce friendly plans, unit addresses are generally well hidden. Canadian forces used "Canadian Army Post Offices" which moved with the troops and brought mail up to the front lines. In Gander there were two such main CAPOs with several sub-branches. The home address would therefore be as follows:



Instead of giving the unit address as Gander, it was CAPO#2, Canadian Army Overseas.

The American system followed the same general principle, with the exception that several main city post offices concentrated and sorted the mail to and from the units in the field. Early in the war the Americans in Gander had a military Army Post Office 801C, which became APO 865 later in the war. In the American case, the mail went neither to Gander nor the Army Overseas. It went rather to the Postmaster, New York City.



Between Dashwood, Hattie's Camp, Newfoundland Airport and the other names, the one group who certainly had this already sorted out were the Germans. They certainly knew where Gander was and what all this CAPO and APO was all about!

The only thing that could have been worse was if the name were changed again. It would have been called Airlandia had the feds gotten their way. Luckily, local authorities in the mid-50s said nix to that!

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## **Main sources of information:**

- ° Notes on the development Newfoundland Railway, by Gar Pardy
- ° A number of references in articles by Frank Tibbo
- ° Digital version of "Chiploquorgan, or, Life by the camp fire in Dominion of Canada and Newfoundland" by **Captain Richard Lewis Dashwood, 1872**
- ° DOCUMENTS ON RELATIONS BETWEEN CANADA AND NEWFOUNDLAND  
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Edited by Paul Bridle, dept of External affairs