While this website is focused primarily on “Old Gander” from 1935 to 1959, every now and then a story from a later period pops up that is worth mentioning.

One such “story” is in fact a 186-page book I came across recently about Gander, when thirty-eight airplanes carrying almost 7000 people dropped for a few days on a certain 11 September.
An Afghani girl, an American boy, and the resilient residents of a small town are thrown together on 9/11

Fourteen-year-old Rabia, her mother, and her younger brother have escaped the brutal rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan and are on their way to the United States to start a new life. Their flight is scheduled to land in New York City on the morning of September 11th, 2001. On the same plane, Colin and his mother are returning home after a holiday. While Rabia is worried about the future, Colin too is troubled as his parents seem to be heading toward divorce.

Neither of them could have predicted what was to come. The terrorist attack on the United States causes all incoming flights to be diverted, forcing their flight to land in the small community of Gander, Newfoundland. While the world struggles to assess what has happened, the residents of Gander provide shelter to the stranded passengers. As Colin and Rabia struggle to cope, they are each taken under the wing of a Gander family. In the middle of tragedy they find unexpected kindness, surprising adventure, and the hope that the future can still be bright after all.
The author of the book, Alice Walsh, grew up in northern Newfoundland and now lives in Nova Scotia. She has also written seven books for children and a number of articles and short stories.

The book itself was written for a younger audience and does it fairly well. My only comment is that I would have liked to see more references to specific Gander points, for example, “as they went up Nungesser” or “stores in the Fraser Mall stayed open”. Another possible phrase could have been something to the effect that “The Aviation Museum on the highway reminded her that Gander had been a beacon for international travellers since the first Hudson bombers flew across in late 1940”.

While it sometimes can have a slightly moralistic overtone, it does provide an appropriate happy ending.

And the characters in the story are pure Gander!

“A long way from home”
Alice Walsh
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