Lesson: Margaret Rutledge

Appendix 2: **A Brief History of Women in Canadian Aviation**

Margaret Fane Rutledge (April 13, 1914 – December 2, 2004) was born in Edmonton, Alberta. She took her first airplane ride in 1928 at the age of seventeen. Margaret grew up with a father who had built his own glider, and around age twenty she was inspired to become a pilot by “dare devil” pilots performing in her hometown. At the time there were few women pilots. In 1930, Daphne Paterson became the first Canadian woman to obtain a commercial pilot license. Eiliane Roberge Schlachter obtained hers in 1932. Margaret enrolled in flight training and obtained a private pilot’s license in 1933 and in 1935, aged twenty one, became the first woman in western Canada to obtain a commercial license.

CanMusFlight-na-MargaretRoutledge-nd-NIS - Copy.jpg

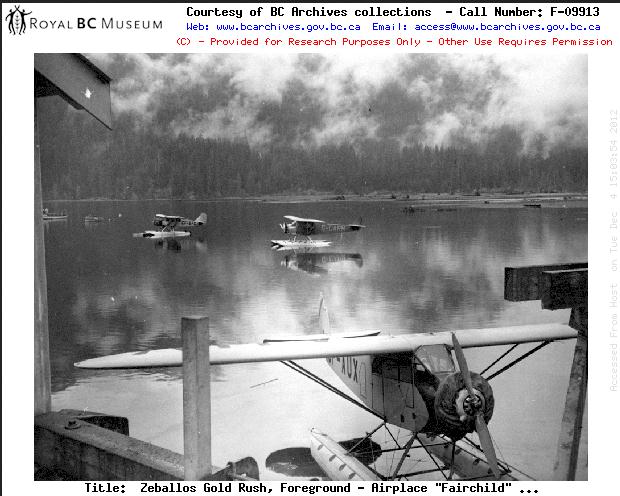
While a few Canadian women such as Rutledge began to get licenses they nonetheless faced overwhelming odds landing jobs as pilots. Rutledge worked as a secretary and bookkeeper. In order to pursue her passion of flying, she earned flying time at the Edmonton and Northern Alberta Aero Club by performing bookkeeping and chores such as fabric stretching over the wooden ribs of airplanes. In the late 1920s, the Canadian government encouraged and funded flying clubs across Canada. As women were not envisioned to ever become pilots, no law prohibited them from flying with these clubs. Eiliane Schlachter, for example, was first hired as a secretary at Yukon Southern Air. Only after convincing owner, Grant McConachie, of her pilot skills did she sometimes accompany McConachie on flights in the right hand seat as his unofficial co-pilot. Not one female was hired as a pilot in Canada before the Second World War.

After meeting in California with Amelia Earhart who had formed a flying club called the 99s, Margaret Rutledge realized there were too few female Canadian pilots to establish a chapter in Canada and so Margaret formed the “Flying Seven” in Vancouver on October 15, 1936. This was a milestone in Canadian aviation as the club goals including encouraging more female pilots, and promoting higher flight standards in general.

When World War II broke out in 1939, and at a time when clerical, teaching or nursing work were the occupations seen open to women, the job of engine or plane repair, and especially of flying an airplane into the masculine arena of combat was not seen as proper women’s work. Women applied to the Royal Canadian Air Force, 10,000 of them finding jobs in virtually all departments except flying airplanes. By 1943, however, five Canadian women had moved to Great Britain to fly in its Air

Transport Auxiliary, a civilian organization that flew new and repaired military airplanes, sometimes on trans-Atlantic flights. Meanwhile, despite applications to do so, no woman flew in the massive British Commonwealth Air Training Program stationed under relatively safe Canadian skies. When Rutledge and the women of the Flying Seven Club applied as pilots, they were flatly denied, but offered jobs as cooks. In response, they formed the Flying Seven Auxiliary, a school for women who trained in kkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkk aviation-related work such as parachute packing and fabric work. The Auxiliary disbanded upon the formation of the Women’s Division of the RCAF which concentrated on ground-based support for flying men with thousands of women working under the banner, “We serve that men may fly.”

CVA-CVA 371-987-SixOfFlyingSeven-c1940-NIS.jpg

Considering the post-war cult of domesticity, it is not surprising women remained on the fringes of Canadian aviation even as commercial flights expanded enormously throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Flying Clubs and then bush operators were the first to begin to accommodate females in the cockpit. The Canadian public simply did not regard as plausible the idea women should fly commercially. Grant McConachie, who became president of the Canadian Pacific Air Lines in 1947, and who had once flown with Schlachter as his unofficial co-pilot, considered it uneconomical to hire women as pilots because the public would simply boycott their flights. As Shirley Render remarked in her book, *No Place for a Lady: the Story of Canadian Women Pilots*, 1928-1992, women who hoped to become pilots thus remained on the fringes of aviation activity. At best they became flight instructors. Considered the lowest paid and least prestigious of paid flying positions, instructing was “the first and last rung on their career ladder.”

The 1970s marked the entry point of women pilots into major Canadian airlines, in the military, and in a limited manner, for the government. In 1973, Rosella Bjornson joined Transair to become the first female pilot to be hired by a major Canadian Airline. In 1978, Judy Cameron became the first female pilot at Air Canada. Women pilots were, and still are a minority. Aviation, like mining and logging, illustrates the sexual division of labour. Most women who work in the three industries fulfill roles other than being a “pilot,” “miner,” or “logger,” each of which is still perceived as a “gendered occupation.” Today, for example, according to Canadian census data, 6.5% of private and only 3% of commercial pilot’s licenses are held by women. This level of participation compares very poorly with the 45% average recorded for women working in other occupations in Canada.

**Appendix : A Profile of Commercial Pilots by Gender; 1996**

***Type of Pilot Male Female Male Female***

Specialty Aerial Work 283 12 241 5

Air Taxi 372 16 126 3

Commuter 188 12 48 1

Airlines 1,005 33 \_ \_

Corporate 207 8 34 2

Government 109 1 53 1

Military\* 46 - 22 1

Cargo 226 14 61 1

Flight Schools 214 29 20 2

Other 139 12 50 2

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Airplane Sector Helicopter Sector

Source: Commercial Pilot Survey, 1996. \* indicates civilian pilots working for the military.