

# History and its Makers Come Together

By Robert A. Fowler, O.L.S.

**A**s some of you might know, I have spent something over the last thirty years in the aerial survey and mapping business in Canada. So I figure I know something about it. But what humbles me is how much I don't know. This was brought home to me a couple of years ago when I went to a reunion of Ottawa area people who were (or still are) involved in some form of aerial survey. I walked into this crowded hall and to my amazement said to myself: "I don't know any of these people - where did they come from!" Of course, once I had passed the initial shock of so many faces, I began to recognize colleagues and acquaintances, but there were still numerous people who were complete strangers to me.

The aerial survey business in this country goes back to the early 1900s, pre-dating me by a few decades. Indeed the oldest aerial photograph in the National Air Photo Library is dated 1922, but aerial photography had actually been flowing prior to that.

I fear, it's going to be worse this year as a group of folks are organizing a super-reunion for anyone in aerial surveys from right across Canada. The reunion is to take place on Friday September 8th and Saturday September 9th 2000. The first event, a cocktail party, commences at 6 pm at the National Aviation Museum on the Eastern Parkway in Ottawa.

The cost is \$20 and includes admission to the museum, free parking, hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar. Amongst the various aircraft on display will be one of the first aerial survey aircraft donated by Virgil Kauffman of Aero Service Corporation - a company no longer in existence, although its successor can be traced to Intermap Technologies. They will also mount a collection of photos and memorabilia especially for the event.

On Saturday the planning group will have a "hospitality room" available at a central location, where people can meet

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and chat over old times. Then in the evening 6-11 pm, there will be a dinner at the Algonquin College Dining Lounge on Woodroffe Avenue. The price for this is \$40 per person and the Master of Ceremonies will be Jack Strath. Jack was president of the Kenting group of companies which, for a significant period during the 60s and 70's, was one of the dominant exploration, resources and aerial surveying companies in the World. Parts of the company still exist in several forms, the majority of it

Consequently the major Canadian mapping companies conducted mapping programs in Africa, Central and South America, and the Middle and Far East.

The heyday of the aerial survey industry in Canada was an exciting time for those in the industry. I have often believed someone should try to compile a history of this industry and its players, because, at least in the early days, there were many memorable characters with many memorable stories - mostly humorous in retrospect. While there are a couple of books

which reference the input from the commercial mapping firms, and Don Thompson's "Skyview Canada" delves into the topic, no one, including me, has gotten around to a book exclusively about the many of the people involved. Part of the reason is the tremendous amount of research it would require and finding the people still alive with the answers! Further there is the technical literary problem of making a

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being purchased by Trimac during the 80s.

The aerial survey industry in Canada was at the forefront of many technical developments, mainly because Canada was so large that the only way to survey the country was by air and the industry developed several novel ways of doing this. The Federal Government also recognized that it needed information about the country and fostered numerous programs to photograph and map the entire country both for topography and geology. These programs all involved the private mapping and exploration companies.

Further, it didn't take long for mapping companies to realize that for more than six months of the year, surveying in the north was not viable. To try and effect efficiencies they looked overseas so they could keep their aircraft and crews busy.

book of anecdotes which are unrelated to each other somehow flow and hold together. This is not the easiest thing to do, which is why, I suspect, no one has done it. Yet, while it would likely never be a best seller, it would record a unique aspect of Canadian history.

The sad part is already quite a number of the pioneers are now dead, and many others are aged and, unfortunately, as they pass on their stories are going to disappear with them. This event may be one of the last times many of the old timers will attend. It might be quite a show.

If you are or were ever employed in aerial surveys and are interested in attending, you can check out the website at [www.big-foot.com/~airsurvey](http://www.big-foot.com/~airsurvey) or you can call Ed Anderson at 613-692-4273 or Russ Hall at 613-722-6411. A pre-registration is absolutely essential if you wish to attend, and to enable the people organizing to arrange the appropriate catering. You should do it as soon as possible. The organizers cheerfully admit that if perchance you die before the event - you will get your money back!

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