

## *Air Canada: The History* by Peter Pigott

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shore of a local lake or spearing them by jacklight. Likewise, he nets as many fish as he can and hunts to kill as much game as he is able without regard to conservation regulations; on one occasion he brazenly dismisses a game warden's admonition about fishing out of season with the retort, "there is no law here". Finally, he jubilantly screams "Hurrah" after having killed a bear that had been ravaging his family's corn crops. To Osborne these were simply questions of survival, whereas today such behaviour would be likely to draw gasps and scorn.

Ultimately, this book amply rewards its readers with an elegant ode to a simpler way of life and the unadulterated joys it delivered. As a result, Boyer's peroration is an apposite one. "What we celebrate in *Reluctant Pioneer*", he writes on the book's final page, "is not only the resilient adaptability of humans, nor even the act of survival itself, but above all else the spirit of optimistic realism which infuses both".

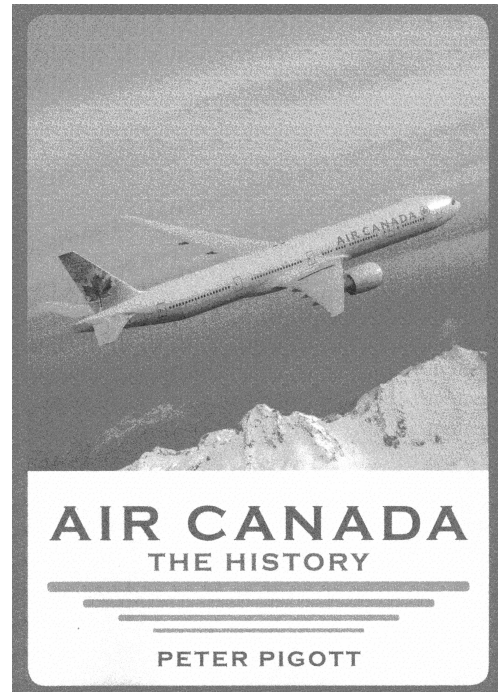
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## *Air Canada* *The History*

By Peter Pigott

Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2014. 328 pages. \$35.00 paperback. ISBN 978-1-45971-952-1. \$4.99 eBook. ISBN 978-1-45971-954-5 ([www.dundurn.com](http://www.dundurn.com))

Peter Pigott has produced an interesting, fact-filled survey of Air Canada's long history, from its early rough and tumble years as Trans-Canada Air Lines (TCA) to one of today's leading global airlines. He traces Air Canada's evolution from a public to a private institution and from the "one big happy family" paternalism and sexism of the 1940s to the diverse unionized work force of today with its associated contract negotiations and occasional labour strife. He starts with the creation of TCA in the late 1930s under the watchful and protective eye of Liberal Minister of Transport C.D. Howe, followed by the early growth during the Second World War, the establishment of the first transatlantic air service, and the postwar era of rapid expansion. Other key events are examined, including the official name change to Air Canada, the impact of the oil crisis



of the early 1970s, the era of deregulation and "Open Skies" of the 1980s and 90s, and the new uncertainties of the 21st Century. Along the way he examines the impact of new aircraft and other technological developments, the advent of the jet age, the long standing rivalry with CP Air and the competition with regional and other small airlines,

the introduction of bilingualism, the Airbus scandal (Pigott doesn't really take a stand), and the various problems and tensions that arose with different governments and ministers of transport (some good, some bad, the best being Howe, Jack Pickersgill, and Don Mazankowski). He ends with an exhaustive review of the two most important developments in Air Canada's recent history: first, the privatization of the airline (1988) and second, the merger of Air Canada and Canadian Airlines (1999-2002).

Each chapter is presented as a selection of short – often unconnected – sections, dealing with aircraft purchases, labour troubles, crashes and hijackings, changing uniform styles, problems with the Department of Transport, etc. The book's organization (and each chapter) is based on the tenure of the company's presidents and as such it is very much top-down history of the company. Over the years, Pigott writes, the "kudos and complaints of passengers have changed little" (p. 10); at the same time, the "story of Air Canada is the vision that [presidents] Gordon McGregor, Claude Taylor, and Robert Milton had for it, their influence, for better or worse." (p. 11) This may be a defensible choice of perspective, but it does leave a few gaps. For example, the transfer of the maintenance base from Winnipeg to Montreal in the early 1960s may have been a logical decision from the perspective of the President's office and boardroom but in his telling of the story Pigott overlooks the enormous impact this move had on the lives of hundreds of Air Canada employees and their families. Still, it made sense to base Air Canada in Montreal (with its parent company the CNR, along with the headquarters of the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Air Transport Association) and Montreal's gain was Toronto's loss – Toronto is mentioned only as a potential – and tempting

– replacement head office location in response to the rise of Quebec separatism.

As is common in popular histories, there are, sprinkled throughout the book, lists of airplanes, heroic pilots, long-time employees, various staff and crew, passenger lists on particularly important flights, the names of the first person to accomplish this or that feat, and so on. In addition, there are many photos and several dozen little boxed sections of short anecdotes, employee reminiscences, funny poems, letters from customers, etc. Former employees of Air Canada and their families and friends will especially enjoy this aspect of the book. Conversely, the book has less academic value in that there are only a handful of notes and a slim bibliography, which is not surprising in a popular history. Pigott mentions the Air Canada Papers a few times, but it is difficult to follow or assess the author's use of sources.

Pigott has produced an informative history of Air Canada. What is lacking, generally, is an overarching thematic unity in the book assessing Air Canada's role and importance in Canadian and international air transport history. The epilogue, which might have been used to address some of these larger issues, is short and rather perfunctory, and Pigott does not take the opportunity to speculate on the airline's future, other than by naming his epilogue "The Dream Continues." The book is called *Air Canada: The History*, not "A" history, suggesting that the author means this to be the definitive history of Canada's largest and most prominent airline. Appearing soon after Air Canada's seventy-fifth anniversary, one suspects that if the airline survives to one hundred there are more histories of this important Canadian company yet to come.

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