

ROBERT S. ATKINSON COLLECTION  
FOND P206  
PHOTO ALBUM 1  
INTRODUCTION AND SOME NOTES

The Kapuskasing album is a wonderful collection of photos showing people and places in and around Kapuskasing and other nearby parts of Northern Ontario. Research on the photographs reveals that most images would have been captured approximately between 1930 and 1935. The identity of the owner of the album is unknown but some inferences can be made. Many of the photos in the album show scenes of the Kapuskasing Dominion Experimental Farm and the people who worked there so the owner probably had a very close connection to the farm or was actually a worker there.

The archival description for the Atkinson Collection states that some of the images depict the construction of the smoky Falls dam and the Paper Mill in Kapuskasing. That description is incorrect. Both the dam and the mill had been in operation for years before the time period of these photos. There are many photos in the album that feature the completed dam and mill but not their construction.

I was able to establish the story behind a series of photographs spanning pages 18 to 38. Those photos relate to an exploration effort by a group headed by A.E. Hilder. Information was gleaned from newspaper reports of the day to flesh out the story.



**Background information for pages 18-38** (Page numbers correlate to the numbers assigned to the digital representation of the album on the website. The front cover of the album was considered page 1)

The following info was mainly gleaned from news articles in the Porcupine Advance that published in Timmins. Those articles either quoted heavily or reprinted information that appeared in the Kapuskasing paper, The Northern Tribune. If one could find archived copies of the Tribune, more details of Hilder's work would possibly be found. Online you can find this excellent source for the Porcupine Advance here as of November 2022:

<https://news.ourontario.ca/timmins/details.asp?ID=1119392>

Enter the search term “Hilder” at the above link and all the articles related to the project between 1931 and 1936 will be viewable.

In 1931, a civil engineer by the name of A.E. Hilder participated in some exploration of an area on the banks of the Mattagami River, approximately 7 miles north of Spruce Falls Power & Paper Co.'s Smoky Falls Hydro Dam, in conjunction with the Ontario Dept. Of Mines. The site was at Long Rapids (a hydro generating station is now located there). Hilder's primary interest was in the clay deposits of what is known as fire clay as well as silica. Over the next five years or so, Hilder continued work and got the backing of investors to attempt to recover these valuable materials. He formed a company named General Refractory Products Ltd. in 1933. He held the title of Managing Director.

Much work was done over the summer and winter of 1933 and into 1934 to make an access trail to the site from Smoky Falls, drill cores, dig test pits and otherwise make ready to start production. Hilder named the camp he established there as “Rock End Camp” on the banks of the Mattagami R. at Long Rapids. It was set up in 1933 for the workers who would continue work over the winter.

The photos in Album 1 of the Robert Atkinson collection from page 18 to 38 primarily focus on the establishment of the camp, the exploration sites and then the major work that was done in the summer of 1934 to remove the overburden to expose the deposits. There are also various scenery shots and also a few shots of the Smoky Falls Dam operations that were probably taken by the photographer on the way to Rock End Camp.

It is most likely that all the photos were taken between 1933 and 1934.

The heavy equipment and supplies were brought to the end of steel at Smoky Falls by rail, including the large gas engine shovel/digger that is seen in many photos on pages 29, 35, 36 and 37 in the album. A trail had been cut for the 7 mile trip to Long Rapids. It was an arduous task to transport everything. In one article, Hilder reported that it took 13 days for the shovel, operating under its own power, to cover the 7 miles over muskeg, gullies and ridges.

Hilder is pictured and identified in 3 photos. Also identified in a couple of photos are Arline Stutts and Guy Morris. It is not known what their association with Hilder was. Miss Stutts appears in other photos in the album and it is believed that she was an employee at the Experimental Farm.

Hilder promoted the claim for years, promising that a rail line would be extended from Smoky Falls to the deposit and that the materials would be processed and products manufactured at a plant to be constructed in Kapuskasing, beginning later in 1934.

Hilder continued to promote the project optimistically according to articles in the Advance right up to 1936. A rail line does not appear to ever have been completed and there was no further news of the project after that.

No large scale production ever took place. Another company that acquired the claims in 1940 had a small amount of production but it does not appear that any significant developments have occurred since then.

Researchers with a specialty in mining could probably dig up more details.

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I also include a note regarding two photos that relate to the establishment of the Kapuskasing airport with the title **TUDHOPE AND AIRPORT INFO** that occurred in the time frame represented by the album.

**CONTEXT FOR PAGES 44 AND 45**  
**(pg #'s refer to numbers in actual album)**  
**Major Tudhope and Kapuskasing Airport**

**Photos 44a and 44b:** Have caption below reading “Major Tudhope preparing to leave at 45 [degrees] below”.



The caption refers to Major John Henry “Tuddy” Tudhope who flew in and out of Kap often.

As aviation developed in Canada there was a push to develop a coast to coast air mail and passenger service. The federal government initiated an effort to build the infrastructure necessary for this around 1929. It was named The Trans Canada Airway System. One of Major Tudhope's many tasks, as Superintendent of Airways for the Dept. Of National Defence, was to survey a route through Northern Ontario. He and his team chose the sites for a series of airports and emergency landing strips through northeastern Ontario that would be built adjacent to the tracks of the T&NO railway and the CN tracks west from Cochrane. The communities of Porquis Junction, Kapuskasing and Hearst were designated as airports. Emergency strips, which were unmanned, housing radio beacons for navigation and fuel supplies, were built in between these points. One emergency airfield located southwest of Smooth Rock Falls was named after Tudhope. Others as one came from South River were at Diver, Gillies, Earlton and Ramore.

The aircraft pictured is probably a Fairchild FC2 Razorback. In an article on Tudhope it is mentioned that he was flying that particular model of plane in scouting locations and visiting the construction camps during the building phase.

These airfields were built between 1932- 1936 or so. It was during the Depression and work crews were recruited from the ranks of the homeless and unemployed.

In photo 44a(above) you can see some of the Dominion Experimental Farm buildings in the

background. This photo would probably have been taken prior to the completion of the airport and Tudhope was landing on a field close to the farm temporarily. The airfield work site would have been farther west.

**Photos 45a and 45b:** Caption underneath them reads “Kapuskasig Airport 1933”. The Dominion Experimental Farm had ceded 300 acres of its property in the westernmost section for the project. It shows some rudimentary buildings and tents which would have housed the workers constructing the facility. The airport is still located here.

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The album also includes some interesting photos of distinguished visitors to Moose Factory. It was on August 1, 1931 that Charles Lindbergh and his wife Anne Morrow made a planned landing at Moose Factory during a 7000 mile flight to Tokyo Japan. You can read the Buse, Brown, Martin article in the Beaver at the link: <https://canadashistory.partica.online/canadas-history/the-beaver-apr-may-2002/flipbook/38/> for some more details of the visit.

I don't believe that this photo of Anne has ever been published in the past. She is sitting down with a group of curious children behind her. Reportedly she was sitting on the beach near where the plane was tied up while Charles with pants rolled up and barefoot saw to inspecting and refuelling the **plane (photo 68a)**. That info was told to the Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Col. Thomas Kennedy who



visited Moose Factory the day after the Lindberghs left. He headed a delegation that included the superintendents of the Northern Experimental Farms, one of whom was Smith Ballantyne of the Kapuskasing Station. As has been written, 25 year old Anne was not simply a passenger on the journey. She had her pilot's license, was trained in navigation and Morse code, and handled the operation of the radio during the journey.

There are a number of photos showing a fire destroying a barn at the Experimental Farm. That fire occurred on August 25, 1931. The September 3, 1931 issue of the Porcupine Advance published a detailed report on the fire that was supplied by the Kapuskasing newspaper, the Northern Tribune. See next page. To see the article online, here is the link(as of 2022).

<https://news.ourontario.ca/timmins/3457011/page/10?q=ballantyne&docid=OOI.3457011>



THE ARTICLE CAN BE SEEN ON NEXT PAGE

It is hoped that others with a knowledge of the history of Kapuskasing can flesh out more stories about the people and places depicted in the album.

JB NOV. 2022

## Silo Fire Destroys Kapuskasing Barn

Spontaneous Combustion in Silo at Experimental Farm Said to be Responsible for Destructive Fire.

The Northern Tribune, of Kapuskasing, last week told of the destruction of the large cattle barn at the Kapuskasing Experimental Farm. The Northern Tribune says:—

"With startling suddenness, fire swept through the hay mow of the large cattle barn at the Experimental Farm on Tuesday night a few minutes after six o'clock, when the threshing machine had just shut down after blowing feed into the mow. Spontaneous combustion arising from the new season silage is the only accountable reason for the fire, which could not be checked until the cattle and the horse barns were completely razed.

"Four boys providentially escaped from the mow after they noticed the belch of smoke that preceded the raging blaze which followed, sweeping through the whole upper part of the barn. The ruins smouldered for two days afterwards.

"Threshing had just started on Tuesday, and the day's work went along without eventuality until about five minutes before quitting time, when Superintendent Ballantyne went up to the mow to see if the straw from the blower was being distributed right. His ten-year-old son Teddy was with him, also Jacques Belzile and two other boys, sons of a farm hand. Mr. Ballantyne noticed nothing wrong, and descended. The boys remained behind to gambol in the sweet-smelling new straw, as youngsters love to do. Teddy Ballantyne noticed a cloud of smoke come up through the hay from the silo underneath, and he and his companions at once scrambled for safety. They made their exit safely, but it was only a matter of a minute later that the mow was an inferno.

"At the same time that the boys were hurrying down to raise an alarm, Assistant Superintendent A. Belzile, beside the threshing separator, noticed the menacing smoke and rushed to the office to phone an alarm over to town. The fire was actually noticed by citizens before the whistle sounded, so quickly did the flames mount through and above the barn. Messrs Ballantyne and Belzile directed the hurried evacuation of the valuable young live stock quartered below. Some of these gave trouble because of their panicky state, but all were at length removed and secured.

"Meanwhile the large chemical extinguisher at the farm had been used, but it could not check such a large outbreak, and the fire spread to the feed room. The Kapuskasing fire brigade soon arrived to lend their utmost aid, and the forestry department rushed over portable fire pumps which soon had streams from the nearby river playing on the surrounding buildings to save them. The fact that it was an almost windless sundown saved the situation considerably, otherwise a general conflagration of most of the farm buildings might have resulted, with a chance that sparks would also carry, across the river to the paper mill's large block piles.

"The buildings destroyed were of modern type, with cement foundations. In the dairy barn milking machines were employed, and everything was kept spotlessly clean. Every year thousands of visitors walk through the barns at milking time to admire the fine animals and their surroundings. Over four hundred tons of hay and cattle feed were burned; running the total fire damage up to perhaps \$30,000.

"The Dominion government does not insure its buildings, carrying its own risks. As soon as word of the fire was heard at Ottawa, the authorities telegraphed for particulars of the damage done. Superintendent Ballantyne is drawing up estimates for replacing the lost buildings, and it is anticipated that authority will be received to proceed without delay on the reconstruc-

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