



Jim Spilsbury

Jim Spilsbury immigrated to BC Canada from England as an infant and moved to Savary Island when he was 12. He lived on the B.C. coast the rest of his life.

Jim was fascinated with the possibilities of radio and at 17 he built his first Crystal set. After starting as a salesman for his own radios in logging and fishing camps up and down the coast, he became Canada's largest exporter of radio-telephone equipment. In 1941, he founded Spilsbury and Hepburn, which later became Spilsbury and Tindall Ltd. And his products were used worldwide.

Jim was travelling up and down the coast by boat, and he realised that he would be able to serve his customers better travelling by floatplane. In the 1940's he co-founded **Queen Charlotte Airlines** (otherwise known as 'Queer Collection of Aircraft'). The airline became a lifeline for the "loggers, fishermen, stump ranchers, hermits, remittance men, Greek scholars, ex-prostitutes and outright lunatics".

At the outset of **QCA**, Jim's planes were irreverently referred to as "whistling shithouses" due to their rudimentary toilet facilities, but by 1955, when the airline merged with **Pacific Western Airline**, Jim was the co-owner of Canada's third largest airline. Pacific Western morphed into Canadian Airlines, chief competitor to Air Canada.

Most Airlines in Canada were started on a shoestring by bush pilots. **QCA** on the other hand, though started on a shoestring was founded by a passenger. Jim did not learn to fly until well into the aviation business. His first lessons, on a Tiger Moth, were not a success story but a year later, he finally learned to fly on an Aeronca Tandem, a much more forgiving plane. He bought a pair of aviator's sunglasses and took on some of the commercial flying for the airline.

There had long been strong competition between **QCA** and Russ Baker's **Pacific Western Airlines** for routes along the BC Coast and in 1955 **QCA** merged with **PWA**.

After he retired Jim became a raconteur and painter of coastal scenes. He co-wrote a book about **QCA**, published a collection of his coastal photographs called Spilsbury's Album and had his first exhibition as an artist. He had a huge collection of black and white photographs which is housed in UBC Special Collection, and a documentary film, screened on CBC, called Spilsbury's Coast was made about him.

After Jim's death from a heart attack in 2003, The National Museum in Ottawa erected a permanent "Spilsbury booth" to represent West Coast Culture.

Born: 1905

Findhom, Derbyshire,
England

Died: April 20, 2003

Family: Wife Winifred

2 sons, 2 daughters

9 grandchildren

4 great grandchildren (2024)

Owned Spilsbury and Tindall
Exporter of Radio
Telephones

Founded **Queen Charlotte
Airline**

Painter

Author (with Howard White)
The Accidental Airline,
Spilsbury's Coast

Order of B.C.

50th Commemorative Medal
for the Golden Jubilee of HM
Queen Elizabeth II

For more information on Queen Charlotte Airlines and Jim Spilsbury see 'The Accidental Airline' by Jim Spilsbury and Howard White, available from the BCAM Library/Resource Centre

