A Gull Pond Chronology

The following chronology has been compiled by comparing the information gathered in numerous interviews with the scant documentary evidence available. To help assess the credibility of various elements of the story I have made distinctions among the several types of sources and labeled each element accordingly:

* Designates a contemporaneous written source.

✬ Designates a first-hand anecdote (the later recollections of an eyewitness).

✩ Designates a second-hand anecdote (hearsay).

It also helps to know that Patrick’s Cove is about 2.5 miles south of Gooseberry Cove on the western coast of the Cape Shore. The Gull Pond is 8.5 miles back in “the country.”

**Late spring, 1927**

Nicholas McGrath (pronounced McGraw), 48 years old, of Patrick’s Cove, is trapping muskrat along the Branch River several miles south of the Gull Pond when he hears three explosions in rapid succession off in the distance. He can not imagine the cause.✩

**Winter 1928**

While hunting caribou, Nicholas McGrath takes a short cut across the ice of the frozen Gull Pond and notices metal jammed in the rocks of the pond’s small rocky island. He decides it must be airplane wreckage and wonders if it explains the explosions he heard the year before.✩

**Winter 1932**

Patrick “Patsy” Judge of Gooseberry Cove, age 20, recovers a piece of metal from the Gull Pond.✬

**Winters during 1930s**

James Joseph Doyle of Gooseberry Cove, age mid-50s, recovers numerous pieces of metal for use in repairing sled runners.✩

**Winter 1940**

Anthony McGrath, age 27, and Ronald McGrath, age 14, (both of Patrick’s Cove) see a 4 or 5 foot long piece of lightweight, blue colored metal sticking out of the ice at the Gull Pond. Anthony breaks it off by working it back and forth but decides not to carry it home and “stashes it back in the tuck” (the underbrush) instead. He believes he is the first person to find the metal at the pond.✬

**Winter, sometime in the 1940s**

Patrick McGrath, the teen-age son of Nicholas McGrath, “finally gets to see the metal at the pond.” With him are his cousins Leo McGrath, early 20s, and Ignatius McGrath, age unknown.✬

**1947**

Patsy Judge, now 35, gives part of the piece he recovered in 1932 to Ralph Martin, 42, a visitor from England and the first “foreigner” Patsy has ever met. Martin returns to England and gives the piece to people at the Avro Aircraft company plant about five miles from his home in Bradford, Yorkshire. Avro writes to Patsy and says that the piece of metal is, without a doubt, part of ??? - Patsy apparently lost the letter and later could not remember whether it said the piece was part of the Bluebird or the White Bird. (There was no Bluebird.) ✬

**1948**

Patsy Judge writes a letter to Mr. C. Noonan, a businessman in St. John’s, reporting his discovery of “parts of an aeroplane” on “the island of Great Gull Pond.” “I was wondering if it might be the plane called the BLUEBIRD, as it has spots of blue paint still on it. ... I am sure it must be fifteen or twenty years since the plane fell as the iron is rusted out.”

Noonan refers the report to the Commissioner for Public Utilities who forwards it to the Civil Aviation Division. They reply, “We are inclined to agree with Mr. Patrick Judge that the plane might have been at Great Gull Pond for 15-20 years as we have no knowledge of of any civil aircraft being missing in this area in recent years. It will be recalled that there were a number of aircraft left Europe about twenty years ago of which no trace of them has been found. It does appear that we cannot or need not take any action for further investigation ...” ★

**Summer of 1971**

Nicholas McGrath’s son Patrick, now 48, goes to the Gull Pond with Hubert McGrath, age 24, and Father Charlie McCarthy, age unknown, to search for pieces of “the plane in the pond.” The priest swims around the small rocky island with a snorkel and mask but all they find is a badly rusted metal strap attached to a tightening device. The artifact is later lost.✬

**Spring 1974**

A Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) reporter named Rob Parker hears about “the plane in the pond” and tries to collect enough information to do a story. He interviews local residents including Patsy Judge and learns of the Avro letter. He contacts Avro but they tell him that a fire has destroyed much of their old correspondence and they can not verify the story. Parker flies over a pond in a helicopter but sees nothing and he isn’t even sure he has the right pond. Eventually he gives up.★

**June 1974**

Patsy Judge, now 62, writes to Ralph Martin in England, now 69, saying “there is a group searching in the pond where I found this plane and they are trying to deny that I was the first to find this part (in 1932) and trying to say it was years later. So if you could write me a letter concerning the transaction between you and I in 1947 this would prove that I am right.” Patsy has apparently lost the 1947 letter from Avro and now can’t remember whether they said the airplane was the White Bird or the Blue Bird. He asks Martin if he “can find out which plane they were searching for here in 1928.” Martin writes back confirming the events in 1947 but says he never had a copy of the Avro letter.★ (There was no search in 1928 but in the summer of 1927 the Nungesser/Coli Search Expedition used a Fokker Universal on floats to search the Newfoundland coastal areas for the White Bird.)

**October 1992**

TIGHAR conducts a metal detector search of the rocky island in the Gull Pond and finds an as yet unidentified metal artifact with blue paint on its surface.

Of all the pieces of the plane in the pond reportedly recovered over the years, only the piece found by TIGHAR is known to still exist.

July 1993

Ric Gillespie interviewed Ralph Martin who confirmed that Patsy Judge had given him a piece of metal that Patsy believed was “part of the undercarriage” of an airplane. He described it as about 12 to 14 inches long, about 3 inches at its widest part. It was bent and somewhat crumpled, with a lot of strange numerals stamped on it. He thought it was aluminum or stainless steel as it showed no sign corrosion and was bright and shiny. No wood or rivets. Martin confirmed that he gave the piece of metal to someone (he didn’t remember a name) at a nearby Avro factory that made Lancaster bombers. When he gave it to Avro they asked where he got it and he told them the story. They got very interested but Martin never heard anything further about it. The Avro facility later burned.

Further TIGHAR expeditions established that there is no “plane in the pond” - at least not in the southern end of the pond. Two other ponds and their shorelines were searched without result.

Facts:

* There was “rusted out” airplane wreckage with “spots of blue paint” on the island in the Gull Pond as early as 1948.
* The steel components of the White Bird were painted blue.
* The Civil Aviation Authority concurred with Patsy Judge’s speculation that the wreckage may have been from one of the lost transatlantic flights.
* A piece of wreckage from the Gull Pond was given to Avro for identification. The result of their investigation is undocumented but alleged to be that the piece was from the “Bluebird” or “White Bird.” There was no transatlantic aircraft called the “Bluebird.”
* Other pieces of possible aircraft wreckage were recovered on or near the small island in the Gull Pond, including one found by TIGHAR that had flecks of gray/blue paint.
* None of the documents or anecdotes mention an engine. All aircraft have engines and all aircraft engines are relatively large and durable.

Conclusions:

* The airplane parts seen and recovered from the island in the Gull Pond were probably put there for safekeeping by someone (prime suspect Jim Joe Doyle) who had discovered the wreck nearby and intended to salvage out the useful bits.
* The wreck was probably that of the White Bird.
* The engine of the aircraft - whether or not it was the White Bird - is somewhere within a reasonable distance of the island in the Gull Pond.