

Early History of The Central Analysis Office (CAO) in Ottawa

by George W. Robertson¹

As I recall.....

I received notice early in 1950 that I had been successful in a competition for Central Analysis Office (CAO) staff. We sold our home in Edmonton and traveled by car to Ottawa in late October. On the way east we met Hugh Cameron and his family in a motel in Sault-Saint Marie. He was on his way east from Winnipeg also to join the CAO Staff. When we arrived at the CAO we found that the Officer-in-Charge, Jim Leaver, had already established a small office in a temporary building along Wellington Street and acquired a small staff consisting of Ralph Anderson from Winnipeg and Don McClellan. All original staff members were former wartime MetMen (1) (2).

Prior to his appointment in May 1950 as OIC of the CAO, Jim was OIC of the District Aviation Forecast Office (DAFO) at Rockcliffe Airport. It appears that he may have established a temporary quarters for the CAO at the Rockcliffe Airport before moving to the Wellington Street site. The office at this site was in a temporary wartime building on the right-hand side of the U-drive around the quadrangle upon leaving the Supreme Court Building to enter Wellington Street.

A small unit of technical support staff and map plotters was recruited in 1950 and early in 1951. Sometime in 1951 Barney Boville (1) (2) joined the professional staff.

During the time that the CAO was in Ottawa it did not become an operational unit. We were mainly concerned with consolidating analytical and prognostic techniques and exploring new ideas. Our equipment was meagre: a teletype terminal for receiving weather reports, an electric-mechanical calculator, and other routine office equipment available at that time. Computers and other digital equipment were unheard of.

The most sophisticated piece of technical apparatus was the "wobble-wagon" for studying waves in the westerlies. This machine was constructed from parts of my son's Meccano Set. Jim made a request to MSC HQ in Toronto to build a more sturdy instrument with more sophisticated mathematically-adjustable parameters but at the same time he made the prediction that when the mathematical and engineering geniuses at HQ became involved they would never produce a practical workable model. His prediction proved correct.

The main technical concern of the Centre at this formative stage was the development of waves in the easterly flow of

the upper air and their propagation rate. In this connection the first scientific reports issued by the CAO were prepared at the Ottawa Centre (3) (4) (5).



George W. Robertson in
2005

Although we were not operational we did keep abreast of current synoptic weather conditions across the country and often received queries from the field concerning problem situations. Also, since we were the only MSC office in Ottawa, local radio and television stations and newspapers took advantage of our availability. Jim looked after most of the requests from the media and often was pitted against Ottawa's famous and long-time weather expert, Bill

Baker, an employee of the Central Experimental Farm who kept climatic records from Agricultural Experimental Stations across Canada. For all Jim's efforts, some of which were not too successful, one local news paper dubbed him "Pluvius Leaver".

During the winter of 1950-51 news leaked out that the CAO was scheduled to be moved out of Ottawa. It appeared that Dr. Andrew Thomson (2), then Controller of the MSC, favoured a move to Toronto, but Air Vice Marshall A. de Niverville (2), the Director General of Air Services Branch, vetoed this move on the basis that Toronto already had the Headquarters for the MSC and opted for a move to Montréal (Dorval).

This caused some consternation amongst certain staff members. I for one was not happy with the idea of making another move so soon. We had just purchased a new home in a developing area of Ottawa and the family was well adjusted to the new school and church in the area. Hugh Cameron was of the same mind. Nevertheless we made several trips to Montreal to look at prospective residential areas and houses. At the same time we scouted around for other applications for our meteorological training and experience. Hugh found a requirement for his services in the Department of Forestry and I found one in the Department of Agriculture at the Central Experimental Farm. At this time secondment was one of the options offered by the MSC and Hugh and I were both kept on as employees of the MSC but seconded respectively to Forestry (February 1951) and Agriculture (December 1951).

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Our vacancies on the CAO staff were not filled until the Centre was moved to Montréal (Dorval) in 1952.

The relocation of the CAO appears to have taken place during the summer of 1952. I checked Ottawa Telephone Directories for the period 1951 to 1953. Jim Leaver's name disappeared from the Directory published in February 1952 so it is assumed he moved to Dorval late in 1951, possibly to prepare accommodation and facilities for staff arriving later. The names of Ralph Anderson, Don McClellan, and Barney Boville were still in the February 1952 Directory but were missing in the Directory issued December 1952. It appears that they all moved sometime during the summer of 1952 and the CAO in Ottawa closed. The temporary building was demolished shortly afterwards and the area was landscaped with lawn and trees.

Acknowledgement

At this point I wish to acknowledge Morley Thomas's encouragement regarding the preparation of this brief report and thank him for providing information on staff and related administration matters.

References

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4. CAMERON, H. and ROBERTSON, George W. 1954. Short period and long period components of the geopotential change at the 500 mb. level. *Tec. Bul. No. 175*; Meteorological Division, Dept. of Transport, Toronto.
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Central Analysis Office (CAO) Montréal Staff. Photo taken in September 1953 to commemorate the inauguration of the national facsimile circuit. The outside temperature was 93° F.

Top row (left to right, 7 persons): Art Duffy, Don McClellan, Ralph Anderson, Romeo Richard (technician), Paul Dennison, Doug Page, Bob Dodds.

Third row (7 persons): female technician, Beth ? a female technician, Barney Boville, Mike Kwizak, a male technician, Charlie James, a male technician.

Second row (6 persons): Madam Arbuckle (secretary), Agnes (Aggie) Smith, Jim Leaver, Celia Primeau (teletype), ?.

Front row (4 persons): all unknown technicians.

Photograph taken from the *Canadian Meteorological Historical Photos Archive* found at : <http://www.cmos.ca/Metphotos/photoindex.html> and supplied, with thanks, by Bob Jones, CMOS Webmaster.

This photograph was recently discovered by Morley Thomas, CMOS and MSC Archivist. During the process of trying to identify people, we discovered that the photo was taken not long after the CAO had moved from Ottawa (Rockcliffe Air Base) to Montréal, where it remains to this day. We are hopeful that readers of the *CMOS Bulletin SCMO* might be able to complete the identifications. Please send any findings to the Editor of the Bulletin (bulletin@cmos.ca) or to the CMOS Webmaster (webmaster@cmos.ca).