

Postal History of Some Aspects of the Department of Munitions and Supply

1940-1945

One could argue that the two most significant events in Canada's history are the completion of the transcontinental railway in November 1885 and World War II. This exhibit looks at some of the postal history associated with the latter. The depression of the 1930's was devastating for Canada. With an economy dependent on exporting raw materials and with minimal industrial activity, unemployment was rampant and by 1939 it was still over 12%. One on five Canadians relied on government relief for support. The outbreak of World War II changed all of this; everyone who wanted to work could find employment.

Canada officially declared war on Germany on September 10th, 1939, some 7 days after Great Britain. As a legislative democracy the Government required Parliament's approval, through legislation, for any and all the actions it wished to take, at war or not. The Liberal Government in power in 1939 relied on the War Measures Act of 1914 to give its declaration of war full force and effect. This Act allowed the Government to initiate both action and controls by Orders-in-Council (OIC's). OIC's require Cabinet approval but not legislative approval. The WWII OIC's were the foundation of a "planned" wartime economy directed through the Department of Munitions and Supply (DMS). Canada was the only allied nation to centralize its war effort in such away that DMS was made responsible for everything from supplying food for all the armed forces to contracting for Lancaster bombers. Through the DMS and its legislative power the Government could compel manufacturers into wartime production of the needed munitions and other finished goods on the terms, conditions, and prices it determined "reasonable." As well through DMS the Government could expropriate private companies and create Crown Corporations.

This exhibit displays the postal history associated with some of these activities and is organized around the Administrative, Control and Production Branches of the Department. **Some covers are explicit – clearly representing an aspect of the Department or identify a particular crown corporation. Some are representative as the covers shown did not come with their contents and there is the potential for it to be relevant to an area of control or production other than the one chosen by the Exhibitor. As an example, a DMS cover addressed to Canadian Pacific Airways could have contents related to Aircraft Production or Aircraft Control and DMS cover with a CPR perfin could have originated from General Purchasing or the Naval Gun and Equipment branch. Research does have its limits.**

EXHIBIT OUTLINE

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