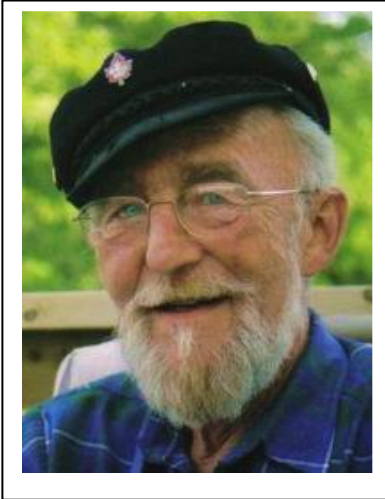


National Service Registration Records



Reader Sandra MacDonald contacted me recently about a 'Canada Registration Board Certificate', dated June 22, 1918, that she had found among her grandmother's papers. These wallet-sized cards are fairly rare but they are witnesses to an interesting little slice of our history.

The First World War was a severe political test for Canada. At the outset, there was considerable enthusiasm and recruitment of soldiers went very well. As the war dragged on and our losses grew (2,759 at Saint-Eloi; 8,490 at Sanctuary Wood; etc.) the ardor cooled and it was getting more difficult to meet the increasing demand for fighting men.

This was when war factories began to employ women in order to free up men for military service. By 1917, the rate of recruitment had fallen to less than the losses we were sustaining on the battlefield. The situation was acute and, in a move that almost destroyed Canada, 'conscription' was introduced.

The first conscripts were ordered to report in January 1818 and, in the end, 47,509 conscripts were sent overseas. In order to support conscription, a National Service Registration scheme was adopted. It was to provide an inventory of manpower available for military service and essential industries. Everyone (with a few exceptions) over the age of 16 had to register on June 22 1918.

The information they gathered was: name, age, date of birth, country of birth, citizenship, year of immigration, marital status, state of health, and occupation. All registrants received a 'Canada Registration Board Certificate' in the form of a wallet-sized card. Failure to carry the card could result in charges being laid against you.

I know of some cases where people lied about ages in order to avoid military call up.

The records generated by this Registration would be a valuable resource for Family Historians but they have not been retained.

A similar scheme was enacted on June 21, 1940 as part of the National Resources Mobilization Act for WW II. Again, it applied to everyone over the age of sixteen with the exception of cloistered nuns, prisoners in penal institutions, inmates of lunatic asylums, and those on active military service. The date of actual registration was August 19, 1940.

A significant difference with the second registration was the range of information collected. In addition to name address, age, date of birth, and marital status, they wanted to know the number and relationship of any dependants, the country of birth, name of parents, citizenship, racial origin, year of immigration, and year of naturalization.

They also collected information on languages spoken, education, general health, disabilities, occupation, work experience by type, mechanical and other aptitudes, wartime circumstances, and previous military experience. This is even more information than was usually collected in the censuses.

Wouldn't you love to get all that information on some of your relatives? Well, those records still exist and are in our National Archives. Because of their recency they are restricted and considered confidential but access is available if you can prove that the individual has been dead for over twenty years. It helps if you provide the full name and their age and residence in 1940. There is also a search fee of \$48.15 (inc. GST). It is refunded if the search fails.

There is an online ordering form for the Canadian Genealogy Centre at: <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/genealogy/022-300.001-e.html>. I would ignore it however and contact someone at the archives by phone (996-7458). My experience with e-mailing archives staff is not great. I sent a simple query six weeks ago and have had no answer. On the other hand, they have been very helpful on the telephone.

If you find one of these Registration cards, you have a piece of Canadian History in your hands.