

The Canadian Government's Successful WWII "Undercover Mail Scheme" handled by Thomas Cook & Son in Toronto

The arrangement to allow people in Canada to be able to exchange letters with friends and family in Germany or German occupied places was a significant piece of Great Britain's effort to try to have such a service not only for the United Kingdom, but for all its Colonies and Dominions. Such a unilateral Government arranged scheme had already been used in WWI on a smaller scale by both Great Britain AND Canada, and Thomas Cook & Son handled both! (A humanitarian aspect was always a major consideration for creating such a service.) The British Service operated from London, and usages are known using Dutch or Swiss neutral country addresses. The Canadian Service was handled by Thomas Cook in Montreal, and apparently used New York before the U.S. entered the war. However, unfortunately no surviving Canadian usages are known or recognized by philatelists.

The WWII service out of London was widely announced as available in January 1940 in the United Kingdom and various British official "Gazettes". Likewise, but in a much lower profile way, the Canadian service, official records show, was also announced and started out of Toronto in January 1940.

This exhibit traces these Canadian usages from its 1940 beginnings, thereby confirming much of its workings in practice, in lieu of much in the way of official records which apparently no longer exist. (In fact there are official Canadian directives from late 1945 ordering the destruction of all such records relating to censorship, and even the destruction of undelivered and held mail between Canada and enemy countries. What has survived in paper form and on microfilm records both in the Canadian and the United States Archives has certainly been helpful, including the surviving Canadian *Report on Censorship* "published" in 1946, which was classified as "Top Secret" and only declassified in 1984 – only then giving philatelists a look at how the scheme, along with Thomas Cook, worked. This gave us both helpful and interesting information about the mail handling and the various censorship aspects. Interesting, too, is the range of users of the service that provided an effective way for not only Canadians to have a more timely way for mail communications, but also available to be used by non-Canadian merchant seamen, who at their own risk, helped the Canadian war effort with their own ships as well. Also this mail even involves refugees from Nazi-controlled areas who were sent by the U.K. to be interned in Canada, and which continued for a time even when reclassified as refugees.



(Photo of front & back)

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A Box 252, NYC cover from Vienna, 5 August 1941 from Rudolfine S ("Sara") Schwarz (to her son).

Another timely research handicap was that philatelists or postal historians apparently didn't save or record information or usages involving the Canadian service until years after WWII. The first articles of note publicizing the apparent existence and usage of a "forwarding agent" scheme in WWII Canada were authored by Kenneth Rowe in the late 1960's to early 1970's era in a number of the major Canadian philatelic magazines – where he asked for further information. (He authored a major study in the book "The Postal History of the Forwarding Agents", published in 1966, which is still a good reference book today. The Thomas Cook and Canadian Government scheme story was not included and not recognized at the time.)