

Tobacco Funds in World War I – A Canadian Perspective

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Goal. This article describes the reach and impact of charitable funds that sent cigarettes and tobacco (“smokes”) to men fighting overseas in World War I (WWI), focusing on Canadian aspects of the funds. Other than Britain, Canada was the only nation in the British Empire to set up newspaper funds dedicated to sending tobacco to troops overseas.

Treatment. Subheadings guide the reader through the article’s main sections. The article starts with an overview of the motivations behind the tobacco funds and concludes with a summary of their impact and unintended legacy in the decades after the war.

The article is richly illustrated throughout with items from the author’s collection, including reply postcards from various funds sent from the Front through the military postal system and relevant picture postcards. In addition, excerpts from newspaper and other online archives have been included to provide context.

Importance / Originality. The article illuminates an important but little-known facet of the Great War. The impact of the tobacco funds was felt not only during the war – the flow of free tobacco created a generation of smokers and led to a boom in the popularity of smoking after the war, ultimately leading to a rise in lung cancer rates and recognition of the health dangers of smoking decades later.

This is the only known article in a major philatelic journal dealing with WWI tobacco funds from a military postal history perspective.

Research / Knowledge. Despite the wide reach of the WWI British and Canadian tobacco funds, very little official documentation exists regarding the operation of these funds. Furthermore, despite the vast amount of tobacco that was sent overseas by the various funds during WWI, reply postcards sent back to donors from the Front are scarce.

The author has been collecting this material (tobacco reply cards and related ephemera) for



nearly a decade and has pieced together the overarching story through careful study of the cartoons, printed text, written messages and military postal aspects of reply cards, combined with research in WWI personnel records and nominal rolls, war diaries, military postal history databases and newspaper archives.

Technical. Figures appear throughout the article, either on the same page as the callout or at most one page away. The figure captions provide detailed descriptions including military postal history aspects of the reply cards, at a level appropriate for the readership of *The Canadian Philatelist*. Sources for images not in the author’s collection are provided. A list of references and citation sources appears at the end.

Significance to Philately. This article demonstrates how the study of postal history can provide insight into past events and the societal responses to these events. The author’s collection of reply cards has been a stepping stone to understanding the reach and impact of WWI tobacco funds, yielding stories that in some cases can only be understood by integrating the philatelic information on the cards with the written messages sent back from the Front.