

2. The Present Passport Office

In order to address appropriate future directions for the Passport Office (PPO), it is necessary to present some details on the history and traditional roles of the organization, along with a description of its current "profile" or operating characteristics as perceived by the study team. These serve as a useful tool in explaining the strategic directions discussed and the evolutionary path for planning the changes recommended.

2.1 History

The issuance of passports to Canadian citizens has been a service of the Government of Canada since its inception, and followed in the tradition of the British practice in this area after Confederation. Originally possessed almost as an honour, their use was limited only to those more senior or wealthy individuals who travelled internationally. For many years no pictures or other identification were included, and the mere possession of the passport documentation was sufficient to prove citizenship and identification.

This mode of operation underwent many changes in the twentieth century, due to a number of factors such as wars and the displacement of large numbers of people, and the ready availability of travel, particularly air travel, by most individuals. The passport remained as a fundamental means of identity, but became much more commonly used and requested.

Inevitably the advantages of fraudulent possession and use became apparent to many. In 1968, James Earle Ray, the assassin of Martin Luther King, was found to have 3 falsified Canadian passports in his possession at the time of his arrest. This and other concerns led to the formation of the MacKenzie Royal Commission, whose recommendations resulted in the relocation of the Canadian passport function into the Department of External Affairs, and the establishment of the present security function and a distribution of offices across the country. Other recommendations of the Commission for increased security, such as the use of fingerprints and use of RCMP for issuance of passports in remote locations were rejected by cabinet at the time.