

Something for Nothing

Cheque passing has become "big business" in Canada and one section of the Identification Branch at RCMP Headquarters, Ottawa, specializes in combatting this menace.

By CST. W. J. T. RANKIN

IN Canada, prior to 1944, bogus cheque artists were having a field day. Law enforcement agencies were having their headaches. Investigations were confined to the local scene, and once the passer had left the area, little hope of apprehension could be entertained. The occurrence of worthless cheques increased, unsolved cases were many, the man in the field needed assistance and needed it badly.

This situation precipitated the organization of a National Police Service to which all peace officers throughout Canada could submit bogus cheques and other documents, the authors of which remained unidentified after preliminary field investigation. The service came into being on a national basis in 1944 when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Identification Branch, Headquarters, Ottawa, began a system—patterned to some extent after that of the Federal Bureau of Investigation—of carding and filing identified and unidentified handwriting found on known and unknown cheques submitted from across Canada. Not until 1950, however, did the Cheque Section begin to gather momentum.

Handwriting comparisons were made from a meagre quantity of specimen material previously submitted by Mounted Police detachments and a few outside police forces from 1943 to 1949 when no further field investigation proved fruitful. At Ottawa, too, was located the National Fingerprint Bureau containing all the records, dating from 1910, of persons charged or convicted for indictable offences and these records contained fingerprint impressions and other perti-

nent data. The location then was ideal insofar as the document examiners were concerned as descriptive material could be compared with information forwarded from the field. It was ideal from the investigators standpoint too, for now the handwriting of former known cheque passers, who were under suspicion of having been responsible for passing additional cheques, could be compared with all other material held on file in a central pooling depot.

Since its inception the Fraudulent Cheque Section has of necessity been married to the Fingerprint and Crime Index Sections. The latter formed in October 1937, has since carded, according to type of offence and *modus operandi*, 32,560 expert criminals. Criminals are prone to form habitual methods of committing crimes and this section has long since proved its value not only to the document examiner but primarily to the man in the field.

Over the past seven years 12,640 fraudulent cheque cases have been received by the Identification Branch involving 26,993 documents and representing \$2,708,759.

The financial loss amounting to nearly \$3,000,000 over a seven-year period is, you might say, not really too great, but it has been estimated that the Fraudulent Cheque Section receives only 20 per cent of all the bad cheques passed in Canada, with the annual loss actually approaching four or five million dollars. It seems that the old adage respecting the gullibility of those persons born every minute is as applicable today as it has been in the past.

The volume of case work is increasing