

INTRODUCTION

A passport conjures up cinematic images of mystery and intrigue. Pin-striped diplomats and dashing secret agents, steely-eyed border guards and false-bottom suitcases, all lend an aura of mystique to this simple booklet.

There are few more exciting moments when you are getting ready for a trip abroad than picking up your passport. Your travel dreams become a reality when you see your name and face in that small blue booklet.

For the occasional tourist, it is truly a passport to romance and adventure; for the experienced traveller it promises safety and security. There is comfort in the presence of this document carried close to you through an exotic or foreign place. Both kinds of travellers take it for granted that their Canadian passport is their entry to almost every country in the world.

BUT IT WAS NOT ALWAYS LIKE THIS.

EARLY PASSPORTS

One of the earliest mentions of passports dates back to about 450 B.C. Nehemiah, an official serving King Artaxerxes of ancient Persia, asked permission to travel to Judah. The King agreed and gave Nehemiah a letter "to the governors of the province beyond the river," requesting safe passage as he travelled through their lands.

Today's Canadian passports still carry such a letter of request. Inside the front cover is a letter issued in the name of Her Majesty the Queen. Like Nehemiah's letter, this also requests safe passage and protection for the bearer.