

Passport Office

Canada. In order to qualify for an Old Age Security Pension, applicants from abroad had to provide proof of residence in Canada, which inspired many requests for assistance by elderly Canadians, particularly in the United States.

In expectation of the follow-up meetings to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which opened in Belgrade in October to review implementation of the Final Act of the CSCE, public interest in such questions as the reunification of families, family visits and the freer movement of people continued to grow during 1977. As a result, the Department was involved in representations on behalf of Canadian residents to governments of many countries rigidly controlling emigration. The volume of such representations increased considerably over previous years.

The Department continued its co-ordinating role in the processing of visa applications by non-immigrants from certain designated countries. The number of applications showed a steady increase over past years, mainly as a result of Canada's expanding trade relations, though the volume was not as high as in 1976, when the Olympic Games and the *Habitat* conference were held in Canada.

The Department was represented on the Refugee Status Advisory Committee, which reviewed 522 claims for refugee status during 1977.

Awareness program

The Consular Awareness Program continued through the year, with a special emphasis on travel-industry relations, and the Department participated in meetings of the Alliance of Canadian Travel Associations. A modest advertising campaign, intended to alert young travellers to the most common pitfalls of international travel, was undertaken in the spring of 1977. Departmental officials and regional passport-office directors participated in television and radio programs and press interviews dealing with consular matters. A feature of the Consular Awareness Program during 1977 was the production of a completely-revised booklet for Canadian travellers entitled "Bon Voyage, but . . .", which is issued free with all Canadian passports. At the year's end, a special program was under way to familiarize approximately 2,200 travel agents across Canada with the booklet and to provide them with stocks for the use of Canadian travellers.

The Passport Office provides passport services to Canadian citizens and issues certificates of identity and UN refugee-convention travel documents to legally-landed aliens now living in Canada. There are regional passport offices in Edmonton, Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver, the major departure-points for Canadians going abroad.

In 1977, the number of passports issued increased by 13.1 per cent over the figure for 1976, to an estimated 738,612. Of the total, an estimated 40,430 passports were issued at posts abroad. The balance between regional offices and headquarters, which had levelled off after the postal strike in November 1975, was maintained, the regions showing a 1.9 percent increase.

The number of certificates of identity and refugee travel documents issued was 3,277, 17.6 percent below that for the previous year. The shorter residence period for Canadian citizenship may have been partly responsible for the decrease, though no large groups of refugees were admitted to Canada during the year.

The number of valid passports in current use in December 1977 was estimated at about 3,072,000. At that time there were 13,637 valid certificates of identity and refugee travel documents in circulation.

Regional offices, including the public counter in the Lester B. Pearson Building in Ottawa, accounted for about 58 per cent of the total number of passports issued in Canada during the year; the remainder were issued by the central processing unit at headquarters, following application by mail. The regional offices promoted public-information programs concerning passports, and assisted with the Consular Awareness Program by means of talks to interested groups and radio and television messages. In addition, they provided Canadians with information on conditions in troubled parts of the world and helped them to determine the whereabouts and well-being of relatives travelling abroad and to make arrangements for sending funds to them if they were in distress.

On October 3, the Federal Government announced that the mail business of the Passport Office would be moved from the National Capital Region to Sydney, Nova Scotia. The relocation plan provides for the mail business to begin operating in Sydney late in 1979.