

WAR WORK

Canada discovered how to recycle in a big way during the Second World War.



NOT LONG INTO THE WAR, THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT REALIZED THERE WAS A DANGER IT WOULD RUN OUT OF THE MATERIALS IT NEEDED TO MAKE SUPPLIES. THAT WAS PARTLY BECAUSE THERE WEREN'T ENOUGH PEOPLE TO PRODUCE THINGS LIKE METAL, CARDBOARD AND MORE. IN 1941, THE GOVERNMENT SET UP THE NATIONAL SALVAGE CAMPAIGN TO ENCOURAGE CANADIANS TO SAVE, SCROUNGE AND DONATE ALL KINDS OF THINGS. LATER THAT YEAR, WHEN JAPAN ATTACKED THE UNITED STATES, THAT MEANT FURTHER SHORTAGES OF RUBBER, VEGETABLE OIL AND OTHER ESSENTIAL PRODUCTS.



Salvage (SAL-vej): saving something valuable from being thrown away



Ordinary Canadians all over the country volunteered for the salvage effort right away. Girl Guides and Boy Scouts, like the Halifax group at left, religious groups, clubs, women's groups, the Canadian Legion and many others also took part. By March 1942, there were 1,750 volunteer salvage groups in Canada. The Department of National War Services told them what to gather and ran ads encouraging people to get involved. The volunteers divided cities into sections, each with a leader. Items for salvage were picked up the way our recycling is picked up today. In smaller communities, people brought their salvage items to a depot.

WOMEN WHO USED TO WEAR STOCKINGS MADE FROM SILK OR NYLON HAD TO GO WITHOUT BECAUSE THE MATERIAL WAS NEEDED FOR PARACHUTES AND OTHER WAR SUPPLIES. SOME WOMEN FAKED THE LOOK BY DRAWING A BLACK LINE UP THE BACK OF THEIR LEGS TO LOOK LIKE THE SEAM ON STOCKINGS.





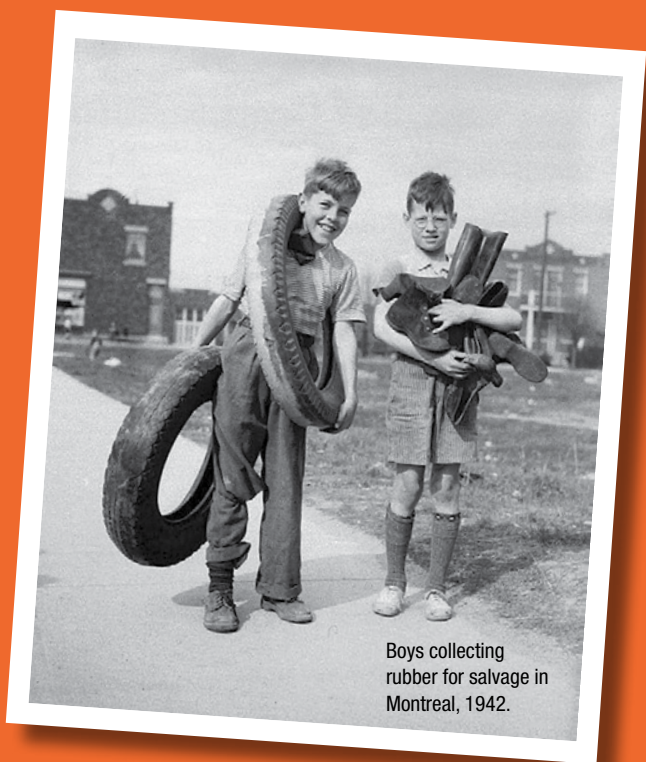
It took a LOT of metal to build all those airplanes, tanks and ships. By 1942, the government had made it illegal for a business to have more than about 225 kilograms of iron or steel — the rest had to go to the war effort. Farmers in western Canada were asked to donate old equipment. Kids scoured the streets for scraps of metal, and their mothers gave up some of their cookware. Even old cannons sitting in cenotaphs and public parks were hauled away and melted down.

FOR A TIME, CHILDREN COULD GET INTO A MATINEE MOVIE FREE IF THEY BROUGHT SOME ALUMINUM FOR SALVAGE. ONE THEATRE IN SYDNEY MINES, N.S., COLLECTED ABOUT 1,500 OLD POTS AND PANS FROM KIDS KEEN TO SEE A MOVIE.

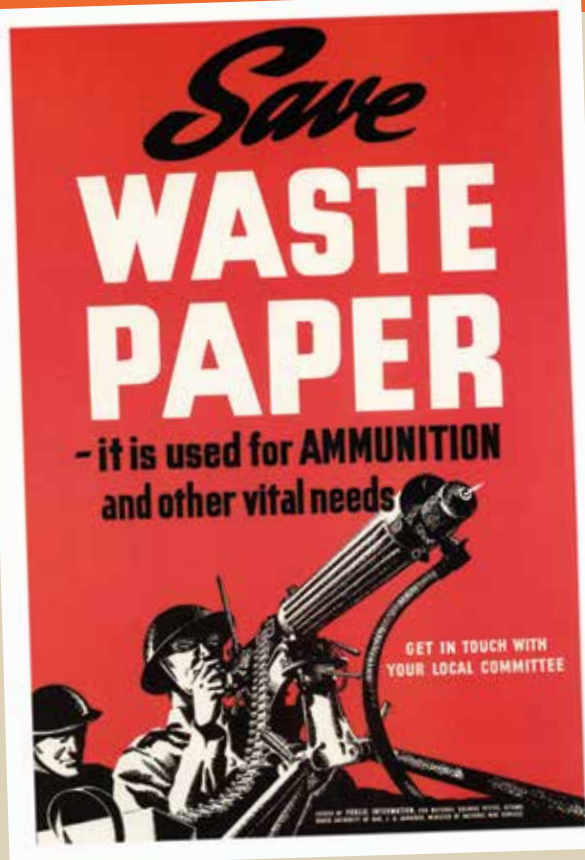
THE WAR ALSO BROUGHT A SUDDEN NEED FOR THOUSANDS OF UNIFORMS. TO SAVE FABRIC, COMPANIES THAT MADE CLOTHING COULDN'T PUT CUFFS ON PANTS OR FLAPS ON POCKETS. AND A DRESS WAS ONLY ALLOWED TO HAVE NINE BUTTONS.



IMAGINE THE NUMBER OF TIRES THE MILITARY NEEDED TO KEEP ITS VEHICLES ROLLING. THE GOVERNMENT USED THE BEST RUBBER FOR THOSE AND STRICTLY LIMITED HOW MANY TIRES PEOPLE COULD HAVE BACK HOME. CANADIANS DONATED WORN-OUT TIRES AS WELL AS OLD HOSES AND EVEN BATHING CAPS. THAT SCRAP RUBBER WAS USED TO HELP MAKE TIRES FOR CARS, TRACTORS AND OTHER VEHICLES HERE. SOME KIDS IN ONTARIO APPARENTLY GOT A BIT CARRIED AWAY AND RIPPED RUBBER BUMPERS OFF COTTAGE DOCKS TO DONATE.



Boys collecting rubber for salvage in Montreal, 1942.



With so many lumberjacks off at war, there weren't enough people to cut down trees or work in pulp and paper mills. Canadian kids and others got to work salvaging paper. By December 1943, National War Services was asking for more than 17,000 tonnes of waste paper every month. The military used it for things like boxes, containers and paper parachutes.

Japanese blockades meant oil was in short supply by 1942. So the government pushed Canadians to save bacon grease and other fats to be used in soaps and even explosives. It also asked for donations of bones from cooking to make glue. As you can imagine, collecting grease was a lot messier than bundling newspapers together, so these efforts weren't as successful.

After peace was declared in 1945, the government's wartime salvage office closed for good.