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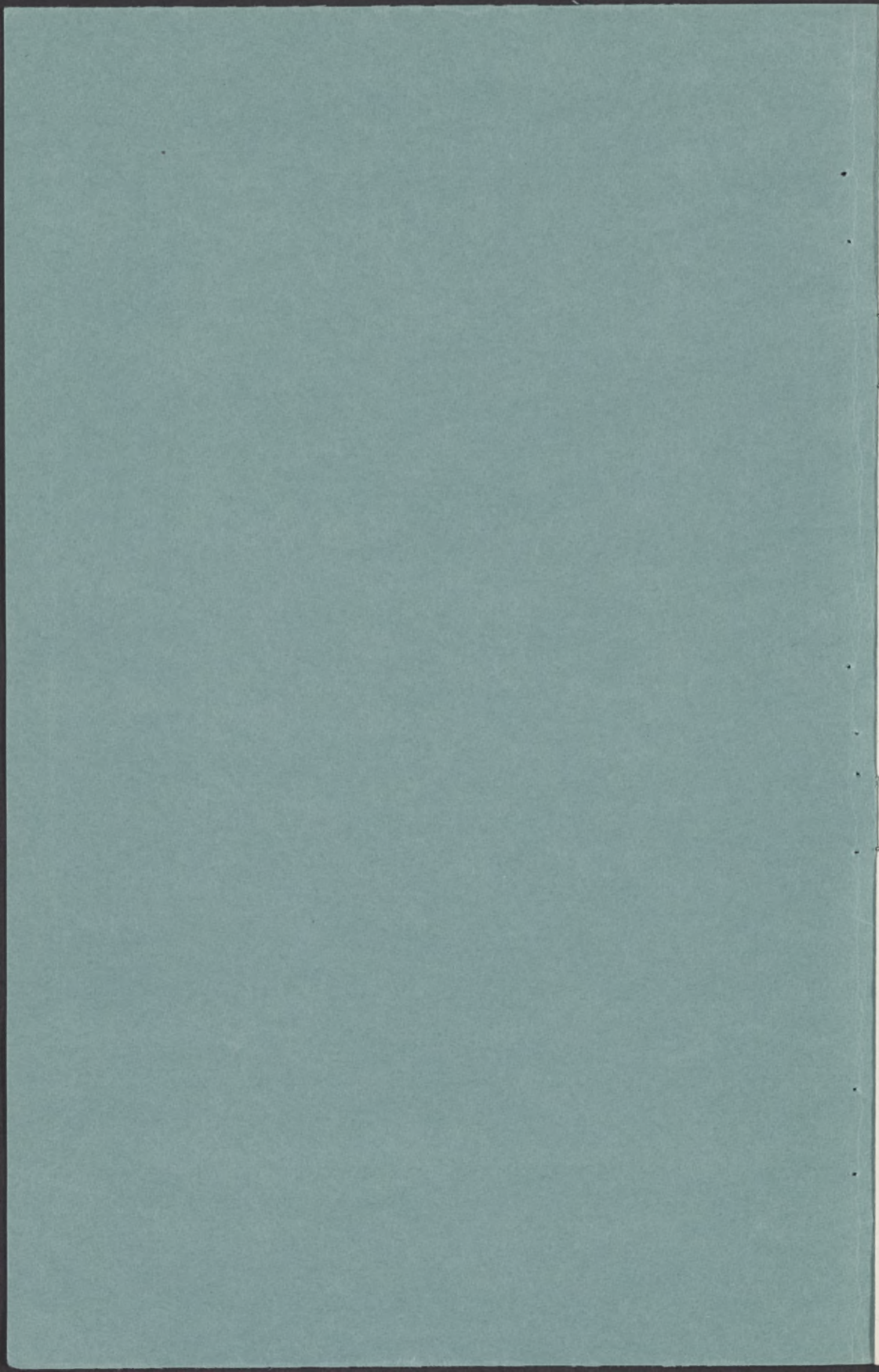
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1946

U. S. OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION

Rationing in World War II



WASHINGTON, D. C., NOVEMBER 1946



OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION
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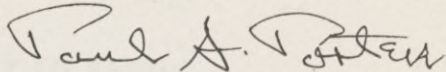
To Libraries and Historical Societies:

The Library of Congress has designated you to receive one of the limited number of historical sets of OPA ration currency which we have assembled in response to requests from libraries, historical societies and similar institutions.

Each historical set contains selected forms and stamps which are representative of the ration currency used in our program.

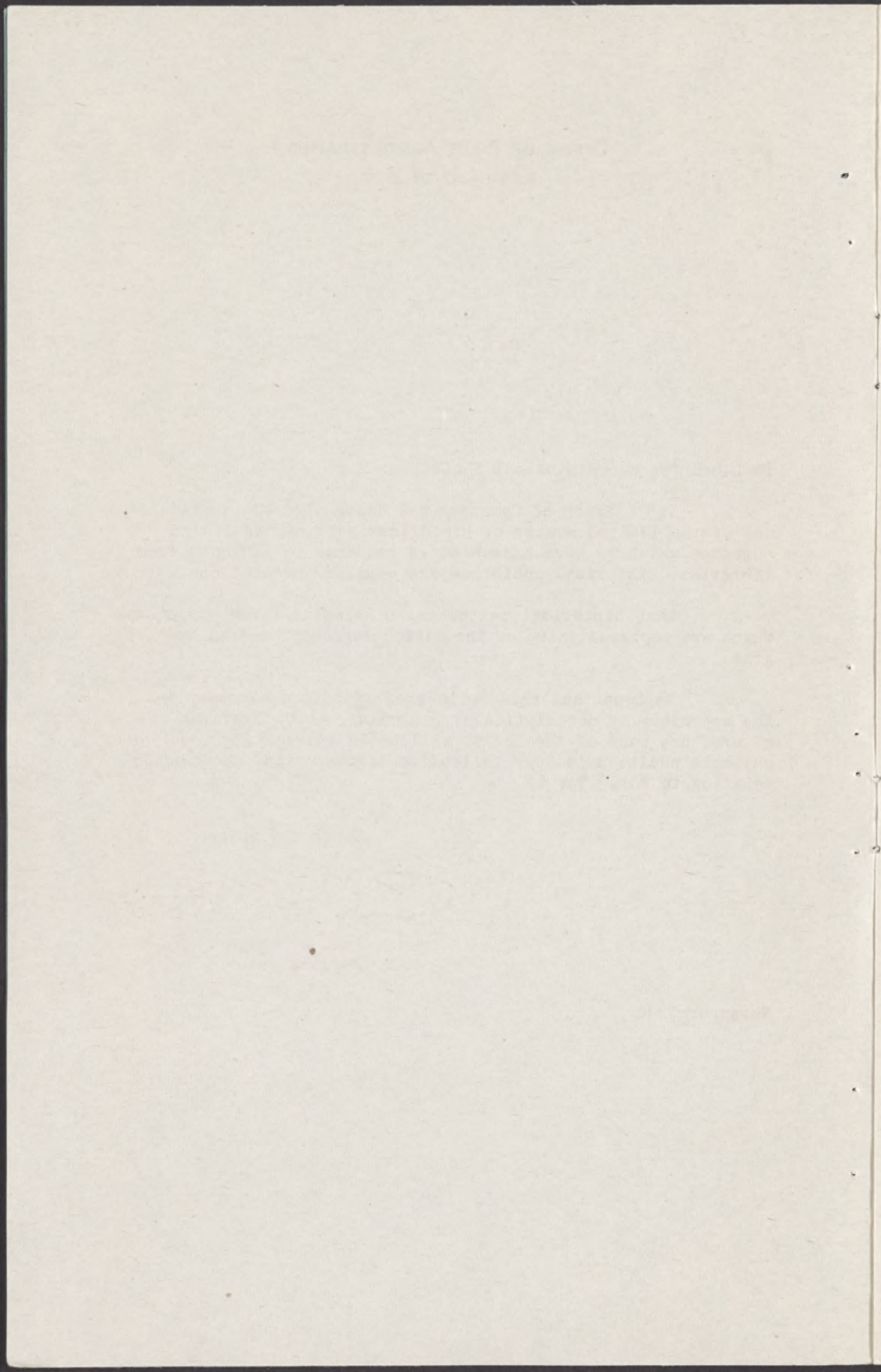
We hope that this collection of ration currency and the accompanying description of rationing, which explains the general use made of the forms, will be an interesting and valuable addition to your collection of historical documents relating to World War II.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Paul A. Porter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paul" being the most prominent.

Paul A. Porter
Administrator

November 1946



Rationing in World War II

The outbreak of war confronted the American people with an experience new to most of them—widespread shortages of goods they had money to buy. Imports were reduced or cut off as in the case of rubber from the Far East; factories were converted to wartime production, as in the case of passenger automobiles; transportation difficulties arose as in the case of gasoline; and large amounts of essential commodities, such as shoes, food, and gasoline, went to supply our armed forces. At the same time employment and civilian buying power increased. The national income rose from approximately \$71 billion in 1939 to almost \$161 billion in 1944.

NEED FOR RATIONING

Supplies on the market did not begin to meet combined public and private demands. Rationing permitted the necessary earmarking of scarce and essential resources for military purposes and the needs of our allies. It then distributed civilian supplies where they were most needed. Without it, they would have tended to stay near the centers of production and to go to consumers with most money and most time to shop. By restricting demand, it reinforced price controls. Rationing made it unnecessary for the Government to bid up prices in order to get supplies necessary for the war effort, and prevented unrestricted bidding up of prices by civilians.

AUTHORITY TO RATION

The Congress empowered the President to allocate scarce commodities by the Priorities and Allocation Act (1940), and enlarged this power by the Second War Powers Act (1942). It was extensively delegated to the Office of Price Administration through other Government agencies charged with regulation of the production and distribution of commodities—the War Production Board, the Department of Agriculture (or War Food Administration), and the Petroleum Administration for War. Claims for commodities were presented to certain allocation authorities on behalf of the armed services and our allies. Their claims ranked first. When civilian allocations were determined these agencies certified the amounts available for rationing to civilians.

COMMODITIES RATIONED

OPA's task was to distribute the civilian allocations equitably. It devised and administered the mechanics of the various rationing programs. Under directives issued by these agencies, the following programs were put into effect by OPA during the periods stated:

Transportation Commodities:

Tires.....	January 1942–December 1945.
Automobiles.....	February 1942–October 1945.
Gasoline.....	May 1942–August 1945.
Bicycles.....	July 1942–September 1944.

Fuels and Stoves:

Fuel oil and kerosene.....	October 1942–August 1945.
Stoves.....	December 1942–August 1945.
Solid fuels (Pacific Northwest only).....	September 1943–August 1945.

Food:

Sugar.....	May 1942; still rationed.
Coffee.....	November 1942–July 1943.
Processed foods.....	March 1943–August 1945.
Meats, fats, canned fish, cheese, and canned milk.....	March 1943–November 1945.

Footwear:

Rubber footwear.....	October 1942–September 1945.
Shoes.....	February 1943–October 1945.

Typewriters..... March 1942–April 1944.

These entries are in broad terms. For instance, at first gasoline was rationed only on the eastern seaboard. The rubber footwear program applied only to six heavy-duty types.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROGRAM

As this list suggests, rationing reached into virtually every home and business in America. Except for the draft, it probably had a greater impact on civilian consciousness than any other measure during the war. This far-reaching program was administered on four levels. These were the National Office in Washington where policy was formulated, and regulations written and amended; eight regional offices for the United States and one for the Territories which supervised

administration of policies and procedures within the regions; approximately 93 District Offices each responsible to its Regional Office and with jurisdiction over local boards within its limits; and more than 5,600 War Price and Rationing Boards, usually called local boards, located throughout the country to serve as a link between OPA and the consumer.

WAR PRICE AND RATIONING BOARDS

The War Price and Rationing Boards, "committees of neighbors," were one of the remarkable improvisations of the war, a striking example of the national capacity to get things done by private citizens who took on a new job and had to make themselves expert as they went along. The boards, originally created almost overnight to ration tires, assumed responsibility for serving their communities in one program after another. The chairmen were volunteers and were assisted by other men and women of every occupation, race, creed, and color—all doing a wartime job for their country. On June 30, 1945, more than 100,000 rationing volunteers served their communities in this capacity, with assistance by only about 27,000 paid rationing employees.

METHODS OF RATIONING

The methods used in carrying out the rationing program were determined by the kinds of goods to be rationed. From the standpoint of individual consumers the main programs may be classified into four types:

1. *Uniform coupon rationing.*—Provided equal shares of a single commodity, evidenced by coupons good for a stated quantity and issued to all consumers alike. Sugar, coffee (except for children), shoes.
2. *Point rationing.*—Provided equivalent shares of a group of commodities, evidenced by ration coupons good for "points" which the consumer was free to spend for any combination of items in the group. Processed foods; meats, fats, canned fish, cheese, and canned milk.
3. *Differential coupon rationing.*—Provided variable shares of a single commodity to different consumers according to their varying needs; evidenced by coupons issued only on application. Gasoline, fuel oil.

4. *Certificate rationing*.—Allotment of single items to individual buyers only after application and demonstration of need. Tires, automobiles, typewriters, bicycles, rubber footwear, stoves.

The ration program had to provide not only for the individual consumer but also for institutional and manufacturing users. Hospitals and restaurants had to be supplied with meat and butter, bakers had to have sugar, and trucking companies gasoline. These consumers were rationed as well as individual consumers, and were required to present ration currency in exchange for rationed commodities.

Rationing had to be supported by adequate control over the movement of supplies through distributive channels. It is not enough to require the consumer to give a coupon or certificate to the retailer if the retailer himself can buy without ration currency. In that case some retailers would get too much, others too little, to serve their customers. Ration currency was therefore transferred from consumers to retailers, from retailers to wholesalers, from wholesalers to manufacturers or other producers. At the point where rationed goods originated ration currency had to be surrendered to OPA. This process was called "flowback."

RATION CURRENCY

To ration effectively it is necessary to have various evidences which serve like supplementary money. Ration currency included ration books, separate stamps and coupons, tokens, certificates, and ration checks.

RATION BOOKS

Books of stamps were distributed to consumers directly. One of each ration book had to be distributed to every civilian man, woman, and child in the country, and to some military personnel—about 130,000,000 people. The distribution of each book was one of the biggest distribution jobs ever undertaken. Heavy reliance was placed on the nation's school teachers who on several occasions acted as registrars and distributed books. Stamps in the books were used for the point programs in food, the sugar, coffee, and shoe programs. Stamps served also for certain temporary needs.

SEPARATE STAMPS AND COUPONS

Separate stamps and coupons were used when only a part of the public was eligible for a commodity and it was necessary for the ration

boards to issue different amounts to consumers depending on need. These coupons and stamps were used for gasoline and fuel oil where recurring purchases had to be made. A secondary use was for supplementary rations under the shoe and food programs.

TOKENS

Tokens were introduced in the point programs for food in 1944. They were not distributed to the public directly by OPA but through the retail trade as change for stamps. Originally food stamps had different values as marked. After tokens were introduced each stamp was worth ten points and tokens were used for change. They were fibre discs slightly smaller than a dime. Red tokens were used for meats and related products and blue for processed foods. Blue tokens were withdrawn after several months when the number of items in the processed food program was reduced sharply. Red tokens were used until the end of meat rationing.

CERTIFICATES

Certificates were usually used for programs in which only a limited number of persons were eligible and single purchases were made, such as stoves, tires, automobiles, and rubber footwear.

RATION BANKING

Dealers in rationed commodities frequently received huge numbers of ration stamps and coupons from consumers. It became impossible to use these very small pieces of paper to carry out ration procedures. Ration banking was introduced at an early stage for dealers and large consumers, with ration accounts in the banks serving just like dollar checking accounts. Checks were written for points or pounds or pairs of the commodities concerned and were accepted like dollar checks.

VERIFICATION CENTERS

Originally, stamps, coupons, and certificates were destroyed by the banks. In certain programs, counterfeiting of ration stamps and coupons grew to the point where it was necessary to examine them after they had been deposited in banks. Verification centers were set up in the eight Regional Offices in the continental United States and banks shipped their deposited stamps, coupons, and certificates. They were inspected for counterfeiting, stolen ration currency, and other irregularities.

SAFETY PAPER

Safety paper was used for stamps, coupons, and certificates to make counterfeiting as difficult as possible. All OPA evidences of these types were printed on special Government safety paper containing phosphorescent ink visible only under violet-ray lamps. Counterfeitors were unable to duplicate this paper.

RATION CURRENCY COLLECTION

The set of ration documents which accompanies this sketch of the ration program contains selected evidences and other forms. They are mementoes of one of the great economic measures of the war. These bits of paper recall those perilous days when to east and to west the horizons flashed with hostile bayonets.

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