

Object E: War Ration

One of the objects that we looked at this week was a United States war ration, issued to Joseph J McFarland in Oneida, New York. It was created and issued during WWII, when necessities like food were more scarce due to investment in the war effort. The booklet itself is a folded paper with stamps inside that could be exchanged for rations. The front features two federal logos, including two of the US Seal, and a stamp from the office of price administration. This administration was a temporary organization created by Franklin D Roosevelt in 1941, at the start of the war. Its function was to enact price controls, and they had the power to place price ceilings on everything except agricultural commodities and ration scarce resources. The organization's power diminished at the end of WWII and was dissolved in 1947.

An ID number is printed on the left, likely used to identify the booklet. Interestingly, none of the *Issued By* information is filled out apart from the country of the board that issued it. Other books found online have this information filled out, but this could still mean that the information left out wasn't absolutely necessary and that the information that was filled out was necessary for use. On the bottom of the front is a list of warnings, stating that this book is property of the US government, must be returned in the case of enlistment or leaving the country for over 30 days, and a 10,000 dollar fine for violation of these rules.

The back side includes five-part instructions and additional information. The steps are straightforward, and below is a statement about rations themselves: "Rationing is a vital part of your country's war effort... If you don't need it, DON'T BUY IT. I'm curious how strictly this rule was enforced, if some federal employee was monitoring the income and expenditures of food-stamp buyers or if it was more of a trust-based system. This side, and the material and condition of the booklet, tells us a few things. First: this booklet was important and not made to be disposed of by the people who bought it, second: the stamps were the only way that somebody could get rations from the government, and third: these were made to be cheap (to produce) and easy to use.

The context in which this was created and used is important for understanding why this was needed. The government had to make sure that the soldiers fighting overseas were able to get the food that they needed, so a limit was placed on how much of valuable goods people could buy. If somebody wanted to go to the store and purchase eggs, milk, canned goods, or other food items in-demand by the war front, you needed to give a ration stamp to the grocer alongside the money you were paying for it.

There is no system like this today, but the government continues to have programs in place to make sure people get fed. The SNAP program is the primary example of this, providing food-purchasing assistance to Americans who need it. SNAP is a large topic of conversation in Washington; as of yesterday, all SNAP recipients are required to reapply in a crackdown on fraud in the SNAP program. Approximately 1 in 8 Americans use SNAP, and last year \$187 was spent per participant. Rather than using rations, the government simply collects money for the program through taxes.