



To the Archives

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Memorable First Meetings at School Boards

The Blue Elephant

Apart from my medical upon being hired in 1967, my first visit to the head office of the MCSC/CECM, sometimes referred to as the ‘Blue Elephant’ (given its blue-tiled façade at the time) was as a teacher representative on a consultative committee. This was in the mid-70’s. Ray Fitzsimons, the assistant director of Pedagogical Services, had scheduled the meeting in the Salle des Commissaires. After being directed to the elevators, I was confronted by two immaculately polished brass elevator doors. I was followed into the elevator by a neatly uniformed attendant who dutifully carried a single round receptacle filled with sharpened pencils. I was appropriately impressed, but the pencils were not for us.

The Salle des Commissaires was a relatively modern large room, a bit short of a hall, because while the school commissioners seating occupied most of the space, there were only two or three rows for the public and other attendees.

For our meeting we sat in commissioner seats. Each was a fixed high-backed leather upholstered chair which could swivel about. The chairs surrounded a large u-shaped impressive desk/table with a flexible microphone at each place.

A short time into the meeting, I very comfortably leaned back, inhaled deeply, rocked a bit, swiveled lightly, and thought: “Wow! It’s easy to make decisions this way.”

Coffee and Tea

Five or six years later I made my first visit to the PSBGM head office. I was then an interim social studies consultant and was attending a meeting with social studies consultants from English school boards in the Montreal region.

Once again there were big brass doors, but these were front doors and in need of a deep polish. As with my first meeting at the MCSC, it was only the best of meeting rooms: this time the private meeting room of the PSBM school commissioners - panelled, upholstered chairs around a large oak table, a beautiful full wall mural of an explorer’s landing at Tadoussac, and ... and ... with a rich sky-blue wall to wall carpet.

Our meeting had not yet started when our host consultant wheeled in a medium-size coffee percolator. Fortunately, he had not yet started the brewing because the trolley hit something and the percolator and its contents splashed onto that beautiful blue carpet. As social studies consultants we were versed in dealing with crises, whether natural or man-made, but nevertheless and in a panic, we set about to clean the crime scene and hopefully hide the evidence.

We kept the door closest to the spill closed, and we used a second door at the other end of the room as we rounded up every paper towel and clean rag we could find on that floor of the building. Luckily again it mainly housed commissioners' offices, and no one was around. We had access to the washrooms and a small kitchen which in the end sufficed. I cannot remember if we found a fan, but the morning was all carpet focused.

I assume we continued our meeting into the afternoon as I remember having a tea with my lunch in the PSBGM cafeteria – but that's another story. I never heard of any carpet follow-up, and years later when I then worked in that same building, now the EMSB, I could find no trace of the mishap.

At any rate it was a memorable introduction to another head office.

Jerry Dunn