



HISTORY OF THE B.C. GOVERNMENT RETIRED EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION

(Speech to the Langley Branch Formation Meeting)

BACKGROUND

1947

In 1947, 50 retired civil servants held a meeting in Victoria for the purpose of forming the B.C. Retired Civil Servants Association. An Executive was elected, consisting of

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary
- Treasurer

As well, an Executive Committee was elected and instructed to approach the government with a request for a cost-of-living bonus for superannuates on the same basis as active civil servants.

Another issue of great importance to superannuates at this time was the strong desire to receive free hospitalization and medical care for pensioners between 60 and 70 and to make some provision for the chronically ill. When no headway was made with the Superannuation Branch, the Committee went directly to the Provincial Cabinet.

1949

In 1949 the Vancouver Branch was formed. Its first President was Miss Dewoif. The Vancouver Branch joined forces with the Victoria Branch in forming a Planning Committee.

1950

1950 saw the formation of the New Westminster Branch.

THE 1950 'S

The years from 1951 to 1955 were good ones for the Association. Relationships with key government officials were firmly established. The Association's existence was legitimized by incorporation through the Societies Act. Membership increased to 558. And, the Association succeeded in winning the first concession to improving the pension situation in 1953 with the supplementary bonus system.

During the 1950's, the Association began a rather strong relationship with the B.C. Government Employees' Association and representation was gained on the newly-instituted Superannuation Committee. Communication between all groups was sufficient to compel the government to legislate some very positive force to the existing Superannuation legislation.

Although much was accomplished during the 50's, the pension increases were still lacking relative to the cost-of-living index. The Association devoted much of its time and resources to closing this gap.

A Superannuation Committee made representations to the Provincial Secretary who, in turn, referred the matter to the Superannuation Commission. This resulted in the Association coming away with a pension increase every two years, up to and including 1972.

1956

In 1956, the Association changed its name to *B.C. Government Retired Employees' Association*. Primarily, this was to expand the services of the Association so that it could assist superannuates from government boards and commissions, as well as regular civil servants. The Association even organized a committee for expanded services to facilitate this function. This committee was headed by Miss Lottie Bowron, who later became the Association's first woman President.

1957

For years the Association pressed the government for free medical coverage and, in 1957, with the passing of the Public Service Medical Plan Act, 50% medical coverage was given to all retired employees and their wives or widows.

After 1957, all presentations given to the government were by a Provincial Executive.

Delegates from the three branches - Victoria, Vancouver and New Westminster were sent to the Annual Meeting, at which a President, Vice President, Treasurer and 4 Directors were elected. In addition, a Superannuation Committee consisting of three persons, one from each Branch, was elected. It was this Committee which met with the government on all matters pertaining to the welfare of retired employees.

THEE 1960'S

The Association was successful, in 1960, in gaining representation on the Medical Services Board. In 1965 the Provincial Secretary appointed an Association member to the Government Employee Medical Services Directorate. But, in 1968, before any substantial changes to extended care were made, the Government Employee Medical Services Directorate was taken over by the B.C. Medical Services Plan and the Association lost its representation.

1974

It was in 1974 that the Association finally succeeded in getting the government to provide an escalation clause in the Superannuation legislation which, in effect, tied pension increases to rises in the cost-of-living index. The BCGEU was largely instrumental in this victory.

Perhaps the strongest force which led Provincial Secretary, Ernie Hall, to decide to index pensions was the move to introduce collective bargaining for public sector employees. Efforts to push for Association demands regarding pensions were no doubt more effective once the bargaining process was implemented.

Extended Health Care

Aside from the issue of pensions, another chief concern of the Victoria Branch at this time was to improve extended health care benefits. The Association was again successful in broadening the scope of benefits that would otherwise not have been included in regular medical services, such as

- drugs and medicines
- ambulatory services
- private nurses
- medical examinations at home

Dentalcare

Another big issue fought for during the 1970's was dentalcare. The government finally introduced a broad dentalcare plan which included retired government employees, but it was subsequently scrapped after 16 months with no exception given to Association members.

1994

In May 1994, increased allowances for eyeglasses and hearing aids and an allowance for registered psychologist fees and hair pieces for chemotherapy patients were granted.

Also in 1994, a dental plan was recommended by Treasury Board to

Cabinet. 1995

On January 1, 1995 the Dental Plan became effective - 75% of Plan "A" and 75% of Plan "B".

As well, effective January 1, 1995 the Association won the right to have a representative on the Public Service Pension Advisory Board.

This history provides the background of our Association. It is interesting to note the similarities with our concerns today. It also shows the determination of the few who strove for benefits to improve the welfare of retirees. This remains our purpose.

Progress may have seemed slow to those who struggled so hard, but they are responsible for the benefits we enjoy today.

INCORPORATION OF OUR ORGANIZATION

As mentioned earlier, the Association became legitimized through the Societies Act in the early 1950's. The Constitution and Bylaws of the Association govern our activities.

Each year, within 30 days of the Association's Annual General Meeting, the Provincial Secretary must file a report with the Registrar of Companies. The report includes an audited financial statement (effective August 31st of that year) and a list of the Directors of the Association.

The Constitution of the BCGREA states the objectives of the Association as:

- (a) To promote the welfare of all persons in receipt of a superannuation allowance under the Pension (Public Service) Act of British Columbia.
- (b) To be non-partisan.

The Constitution also states that bylaws governing the operation of the Association will be consistent with the objectives of the Constitution.

The Bylaws are explicit and clearly define the operation of the Association. It has seldom been necessary to amend the Bylaws to any great extent. When amendments are proposed, the procedure is as follows:

1. Moved and seconded by the Branch proposing the amendment and passed by a majority of members present at the meeting.
2. The Branch then forwards the amendment to the Provincial Secretary for distribution to all Branches 30 days prior to the Annual General Meeting, where it will be considered.

The percentage of votes required to pass an amendment is laid down in the Bylaws and may vary in accordance with the type of amendment, the figure being stated in the Bylaws.

Amendments to the Bylaws approved by the Association must be submitted by the Provincial Secretary to the Registrar of Companies for approval before they become effective.

MEMBERSHIP

From 1947 to 1951, attempts were made for recognition of the Association through Cabinet. Even in those years, there was the same realization as there is today - that an increase in membership was essential to make it more influential. As the Superannuation Commissioner refused to publish the names of those receiving superannuation, this was quite a hurdle. However, the Association was successful in increasing membership through an annual bulletin to retired civil servants.

Our Association has persevered in its efforts to increase membership through the formation of more Branches throughout the Province.

Another strategy pursued by the Association during this time, was to communicate its goals on the floor of the House. The '*COLONIST*' newspaper cooperated by publishing articles on the necessity of cost-of-living increases for retired civil servants. Although the Association never won the slightest concession in its demands, it did mature into a strong and cohesive organization. By 1952, the Association had some 270 members and good representation at every monthly meeting.

Our Association has persevered in its efforts to increase membership through the formation of more Branches throughout the Province.

Membership dues were minimal over the years so that earlier retirees on lower pensions would not find the payment of dues a hardship.

Today, membership dues are paid annually, either through direct payment to the Branch Treasurer, or by deduction from the retiree's pension Cheque in January by the Superannuation Branch. This latter form of payment has been available since 1993. It is the method of payment preferred by most retirees. And, it is a great service to the Association by the Superannuation Branch, as it lessens the workload of Branch Treasurers who work as volunteers.

Due to a lack of funds, it has been difficult over the years to establish new branches throughout the province. Following the establishment of the Victoria, Vancouver and New Westminster Branches, no new branches were added until:

1980	Kamloops
1983 -	Nanaimo/Mid-Island
1985 -	Grand Forks
1986 -	Fraser Valley/Abbotsford
1987 -	Kootenays (Nelson)
1989 -	North Okanagan (Vernon)
1989 -	South Okanagan/Similkameen (Penticton)
1989 -	Shuswap/Columbia (Salmon Arm)
1989 -	North Island (Courtenay)
1990 -	Rocky Mountain (Cranbrook)
1991 -	Peace River (Cawson Creek)

Membership dues are payable annually to the Association, with a portion allocated to Provincial, and a portion to the Branch where the retiree resides. A dues increase was authorized at the Annual General Meeting in October 1993. An intensive membership drive was undertaken to increase membership and to provide funds which would assist in establishing further branches throughout the province. Due to increased membership, funds were available and new branches were established as follows:

1994 -	Kelowna
1994 -	Prince George
1995 -	Cariboo (Quesnel, Williams Lake, 100 Mile House)
1995 -	Sunshine Coast
1996 -	Northwest (Terrace, Prince Rupert, Smithers)
1997 -	Cheam View (Chilliwack, Agassiz, Hope)

In August 1992, the Association had 16 branches, with a total membership of 5724. Membership has steadily increased, so that as of August 1998 there are 20 branches, with a total membership of 9500.

This very notable increase in membership has been possible through the diligent efforts of our branches, with annual membership drives and information being provided by the Provincial President to members and non-members on an annual basis, outlining the purposes and benefits of membership in the Association.

There must be a minimum of 25 paid-up members to establish a Branch. While all of the branches have considerably increased membership over the past few years, it is recognized that if a branch membership exceeds 1000 members, it is more beneficial to divide into smaller branches in order to allow members to attend meetings closer to home and, therefore, be able to participate more fully in the Association.

PUBLIC SERVICE PENSION ADVISORY BOARD

We have an excellent liaison with the Superannuation Branch. Since 1993 the Provincial Table Officers have met annually with the Superannuation Commissioner and members of his staff to discuss mutual concerns of our retirees.

A most important factor in this relationship was the establishment in January 1994 of a BCGREA representative on the Public Service Pension Advisory Board. The term of office for this representation is 2 years, the most recent term commencing January 1999.

The Association's representative on the Pension Advisory Board is elected by the Directors and delegates at the Annual General Meeting in October (prior to the effective date) and is confirmed by Order-in-Council.

Ed Bodner, Provincial President, has been the Association's representative on the Pension Advisory Board since its inception.

The Public Service Pension Advisory Board is made up as follows:

- 1 representative from the BCGEU
- 1 representative from the BCGREA
- 1 representative from the Nurses' Union
- 1 representative from the Professional Employees' Assoc.
- 4 representatives from the Provincial Government

The Superannuation Commissioner is the Board Chair.

While attending his first Pension Advisory Board meeting, our representative Ed Bodner introduced a proposal for a dental plan for retirees. The plan agreed upon by the members of the Board provided 75% coverage for routine coverage and 75% coverage for special dental work, with the retiree paying the other 25% directly to the dentist.

There were certain allowances made for those with lesser years of service.

The plan recommended by the Pension Board went to the Treasury Board as submitted, was agreed to, and recommended to the Cabinet for approval. On January 1, 1995, the plan became effective.

The Pension Advisory Board keeps a close watch on the investments made on our behalf. From the funds realized from investments, adequate money is available to provide for the dental plan and the cost-of-living allowance. Annual reports are distributed to the Directors of the Association for the information of their members.

The benefits available through the Extended Health Benefit Plan and the Dental Plan are negotiated and agreed upon by members of the Pension Advisory Board.

As requests are received from our Directors, they are presented to the Pension Advisory Board by our representative.

OTHER BENEFITS

Other recent benefits for our members are the provision of a travel benefit plan, through Medoc, Johnson Inc., and a life insurance plan, through Manulife. The life insurance plan provides additional coverage to the optional death benefit provided by the government at retirement. The cost is \$1.00 per month and the coverage is a maximum of \$1,000 at age 65, reducing to \$500 at age 70.

By using the travel benefit plan and the life insurance plan, the members are helping the Association because it receives 1% of Manulife purchases and 2% of Medoc, Johnson Inc. purchases.

Many retirees have taken advantage of these benefits. Their availability, as well as the Extended Health Benefit Plan and the Dental Plan, have been incentives to join our Association.

The BCGREA is a member of the Council of Senior Citizens (COSCO) of B.C., which allows us to add our voice on federal matters such as CPP, Medicare, MAI, etc.

CONCLUSION

We, as retirees, owe a debt of gratitude to those who, over the years, have dedicated their time and expertise to the well-being of all retirees. We hope that this interest and dedication will continue over the coming years, as it has done since the Association was established on January 31, 1947.



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