

GREETINGS TO MISA 2006

Dennis Steen, CGA – Life Member (ex-Municipal affairs)

At the outset, congratulations and best wishes for the future of MISA CANADA. A large vote of thanks goes to the interim group who spent so much time and effort in their commitment to proceed to a mutually satisfactory conclusion.

It has been a long road, and on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves, I want to inform those who do not know, and remind those who do know, of some of the steps along the way.

Over 40 years ago there was an abortive attempt to form a national organization in the 1960's, called CAMRIM (which I believe stood for Canadian Association of Municipal Records and Information Managers), and this group even held a conference. MISA founders **Ben Cramer** (City of Toronto) and **Bob McKean** (City of Mississauga) were among those who organized it. But the logistics were insurmountable.

In Ontario, an informal group met from time to time, but really got organized to respond to a threat by the Province of Ontario, which had taken over assessment from the municipalities in 1967, and proposed to develop a standard assessment system, ignoring all existing systems and the thousands of programs involved in the municipalities. A large group met with provincial representatives and were successful in holding on to the existing input format.

Many municipal people recognized that they needed to keep meeting, both to monitor what the province was doing, but also to exchange ideas and discuss mutual problems. The most frequent attendees were from the so-called "Golden Horseshoe" extending from Niagara to Oshawa, but Sudbury, Windsor, Sault Ste Marie, Ottawa, Kitchener and Thunder Bay came as often as they could.

Frank Thickett from Etobicoke created the first applications inventory using forms created by Bob McKean. As was the case with others in those early days, the time Frank spent with pre-MISA work was not recognized by his boss as being valuable to their own municipality, and Frank used his own time or took leave from the municipality.

The first conference was organized by **John Cushing** (yes, the award was created in his honour, posthumously) in Ottawa, although not on such posh premises. It was held at a golf facility jointly owned and operated by the City of Ottawa and the Township of Gloucester. Many delegates, including me, stayed at the Butler Motel nearby, and discovered that the showers delivered only cold water in the mornings. But the conference went well, with several days of seminars and discussions. Ben Cramer, who passed away some years ago, was instrumental in getting some top notch presenters.

The following year's conference was organized by **Regena Lerke** of Peterborough (another who is sadly missed), at Trent University. It was done on a tight budget, with Regena even making sandwiches by hand.

The creation of the newsletter was a major step forward. Initially Regena produced it almost single-handedly, and a contest was held to find a name.

MISA Ontario was not incorporated at its inception. However, with growth, with conferences, with the regional organization, it was recognized that this was essential. A formal organization had a more positive image, it had continuity, and both the members and also the executive had limited liability. What many of you do not know was when incorporation was discussed, there was considerable debate as to whether MISA should incorporate provincially or nationally. A majority wanted a national organization, but the reality of the process (as advised by our counsel, **Lou Milrad**), was that it needed to be Provincial if it was to happen before the next conference.

Over the years, MISA Ontario gained a reputation and a powerful voice. **Tom Becke** (Hamilton-Wentworth) was the first chair to meet with a provincial minister. Tom was very modest and had some trepidation about a lowly analyst/programmer meeting with a major minister, but I reminded him it was not the programmer/analyst but the chair of an important organization who met with the minister. It was a surprisingly long meeting and the minister actually stayed all the time. It also meant that my dealings with MISA were actually sanctioned.

Several publications about municipal systems by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, working closely with MISA (**Ben Cramer** assigned **Paul LeClerc** to work on the Applications Directory, and MISA was mentioned prominently in the publications) helped MISA to become more widely known, as these publications were pioneering work at the time. Many municipalities and organizations in Canada and elsewhere used them as reference. It also helped systems people in Ontario municipalities to get approval to attend MISA meetings and conferences.

MISA Ontario's conferences attracted top flight speakers, and delegates from across Canada. Supported by my confrere in Quebec, an affiliation was formed with L'Association Informatique de Municipalites de Quebec (AIMQ), and **Jacques Lascelle** from Cornwall was for some years our liaison with AIMQ.

When it was difficult to find a host city, MISA itself ran a conference at Fern Resort. **Keith Hall, Regena Lerke, Jack Marsman** (Brampton) and **Dennis Steen** were the organizers, meeting at then-retired **Bob McKean's** house (he also ran the bar at the conference). The conference used a workshop approach that I found worked very well in an international workshop, in a format that got people who did not know each other to work together in teams. For the first time (I deliberately created the teams to do this), people from different sizes of municipalities, different ministries, and vendors worked together on issues and

presented joint findings, plus got to know each other. What is more, there were special fun events that brought people together in a spirit of camaraderie.

MISA Ontario's reputation led to the Ministry of Natural Resources contacting me to arrange meetings to discuss GIS matters with MISA representatives. As a result, **Keith Hall** (Burlington) organized the Inter Municipal GIS Committee and I organized the Inter Ministry GIS Committee, with Keith and me as liaison between the two.

MISA created a major project, the Municipal Model, which was financed by municipalities and governments across Canada. This project led to the expansion of the Engineering Data Base under the auspices of **Tom Galley** of Scarborough (who unfortunately passed away during the project), into a major GIS-related project whereby MISA Ontario worked with the Tri Committee of Ontario, engineering and public works people. MISA's stature and reputation grew. One of the outcomes of all of this was that **Dave Johnston** (Ottawa) and I were invited to sit on a senior Steering Committee that developed terms of reference and selection criteria for a major Interministry project to consolidate work being done on GIS. (This ultimately led to the creation of Teranet)

These major projects continued to make MISA recognized nationally and federally.

MISA also grew in other respects. The newsletter became the work of a committee and was produced in a more glossy format, complete with advertising. Administration requirements grew, and MISA acquired space and services from AMCTO (the Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario). MISA Ontario formed relationships with other municipal organizations in Ontario. MISA Ontario had its own Applications Committee that updated the Applications Directory.

MISA Ontario encouraged the creation of affiliates in other provinces. After an abortive attempt in the Maritimes, MISA-BC was formed and grew. Bob McKean told me that Paul Pequenat, one of the founders, was also one of the founders of COMRIM many years ago.

At last it was time to reconsider the question – should a MISA Canada be formed? You have the answer.

We have come a long way. It has not been an easy road. I have noted only a few of the people and events along the way. MISA Canada owes much to the efforts of many people over the last thirty years.

I know that I speak for those friends and associates no longer with us, when I wish MISA Canada a bright and successful future.