

Sign

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Payphone advertising sign in English.

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Materials metal

Measurements 28 x 30,4 x 4 cm

Historical context

The metal sign reads: “PUBLIC TELEPHONE / LOCAL AND LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE”.

Alexander Graham Bell obtained his telephone patent in 1876. 4 years later, the first telephone directory for the city of Montreal was published, with 244 entries. In its early days, telephone service was very unevenly distributed. It was mainly offered to the privileged (business circles, professionals and affluent neighborhoods) and to English speakers. As a result, switchboard operators were very often unilingual English speakers.

Until the 1940s, public telephones were located inside businesses, for example in a pharmacy, so that you could call your doctor in an emergency. By the late 1890s, shopkeepers were becoming impatient. Customers would call without even making a purchase in the store. Indeed, fixed tariffs ensured that the telephone subscriber did not pay more for overuse. Operators also point to the system’s cumbersome nature. Bell introduces public payphones (5 cents for a 3-minute local call). This proved to be very lucrative. Phone booths are soundproofed, comfortable and very well maintained. They were found in railway stations, hotels, department stores, etc. It wasn’t until after the Second World War that the first outdoor phone booth appeared, in front of a pharmacy in the Côte-des-Neiges district.

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