
Book Review

Gosselin: Canadian Patriot, Revolutionary

by Pierre Beaudry

George Washington's French-Canadian Spy

by Henri Gosselin

Brunswick, Maine: J.H. French Printing, 1988

216 pages, paperback

This book is not just another history book about the American Revolution. Its great value is that it reveals the little known truth of the Canadian participation and contribution to the liberation of the American colonies. This is an historical novel about the author's ancestral cousin, Maj. Clément Gosselin (1747-1816), originally from the Isle of Orleans near Québec City, and how he became the Canadian spy of George Washington during the American War of Independence.

The story is fictional, but, entirely based on truthful historical accounts of this man of courage who, in the face of powerful political and religious adversity, starting with the implementation of the Québec Act of 1774, fought for the principle of justice for all mankind. Gosselin recruited hundreds of French-Canadians to the American War of Independence, and provided essential strategic intelligence to George Washington that prevented the British-Canadian troops from attacking the American colonies for the entire duration of the war. Gosselin ultimately united his French-Canadian Congress's Own Regiment (Moses Hazen's 2nd Canadian Regiment of the Continental Army) with the American forces of General Washington and the French forces of General Lafayette, and saw the success of his efforts crowned by his participation in the last victory of Yorktown, when the British troops of Cornwallis surrendered on Oct. 19, 1781. From the standpoint of history, just these few facts make this book a unique and necessary historical singularity. There is more.

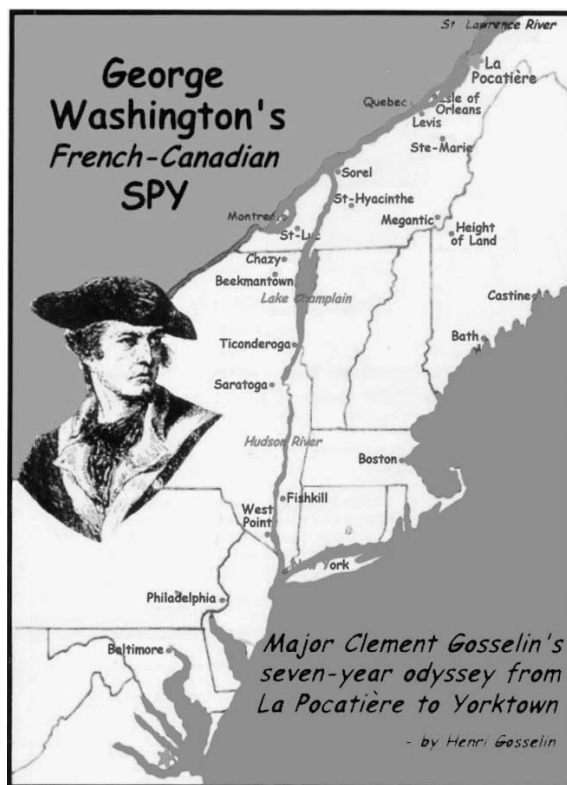
The author, Henri Gosselin, a descendant of the Major, brings to life all of the events of this period by weaving them in a very natural way around the character of his ancestor and those brave French-Canadians he recruited to the Revolutionary cause. I particularly appreciated the fact that Major Gosselin was not presented as a Romantic hero,

or some exalted rebel reacting against political or religious authority, but rather, as a truthful individual, a simple self-made man, with strong religious convictions, who decided to put his life on the line to defend the principles of justice and *agapē*, for the sake of his fellow man. This is the story, simple and beautiful, of a revolutionary struggle between a man's quest to free his people, and a monstrous religious and political cabal that kept the minds of French-Canadians in shackles, like cattle in a paddock, during the American Revolutionary War. This is the Canadian side of the story of what Benjamin Franklin had identified as the central anomaly of the American Revolution itself, and that every American colonist also had to resolve for himself or herself, that is: "Those who would sacrifice liberty for security deserve neither."

The 'Intolerable' Acts

The author identifies the two main sophistries that Major Gosselin and his recruits had to fight during the entire duration of the war: the public excommunication of Gosselin by the Bishop of Québec City, Olivier Briand; and the fallacy of the Québec Act of 1774, concocted by the Governor of Canada, Gen. Guy Carleton, and known by the American Revolutionaries as one of the "Intolerable Acts" imposed by the British Crown against the colonies. Henri Gosselin also writes about the most important document of the period for the French-Canadians, the letter from the American Continental Congress, "To the Inhabitants of the Province of Québec" (1774), an official invitation to join the Americans in establishing self-government, and to make Canada the 14th American state. The imperialist nature of the British and their efforts to stop that movement in America is clearly established.

The book is thoroughly researched and very well documented. The historical details are made to blend in remarkably well with a constant attention to the simplicity of the *habitant* (farmer) character of the French-Canadian. The text is well dramatized. Most importantly, the author conveys an excellent sense of how Clément Gosselin was targeted by British intelligence through religious and political manipulations. Ultimately, the author shows how these exceptional French-Canadians burnt their bridges with the



British regime, abandoned all of their properties, broke ranks with the consensus of public opinion represented by their relatives, parish priests, and bishops, and even defied excommunication pronouncements against them, in order to liberate themselves and others from the bestial conditions the British rulers had imposed on Canada and America during the 18th Century.

I found that the greatest contribution of the book was to bring to the light of day, after more than two centuries of silence, the most crucial and ignored aspects of the Canadian participation in the American War of Independence. Following a vivid testimony of the historical events going back to the British conquest of Canada (1759), the author introduces historical events through very

realistic, though imaginary, dialogues between Major Gosselin and various known historical personalities of the Revolutionary period.

Most importantly, the author identifies previously little-noted historical events that reveal some of the most significant consequences of the French surrender of Canada at the Treaty of Paris (1763): For example, the fact that the Bishop of Québec City forced the population to submit to British rule using the threat of excommunication (1775); and the remarkable fact, ignored by all of the history books on the American invasion of Canada, that Major Gosselin recruited over 450 French-Canadian troops to fill the ranks of two American Revolutionary War regiments.

I would make only one criticism. The book could have been more explicit about describing the means by which Major Gosselin resolved the Franklin paradox of *security and liberty*, and how he was able to break the mental chains of a self-imposed need to secure one's life based on the consensus of mass public opinion. However, the author left sufficient room for an astute reader to be able to discover some of these axiom-breaking thoughts between the lines. I would conclude by emphasizing that the passionate way in which Henri Gosselin wrote his book was the added quality that made me appreciate the book the most. I know readers of *EIR* will really love this big little book.

(For further information, and to order the book, which is otherwise out of print, contact the author at: <http://home.gwi.net/~hgosseli/english.html>)