Born on March 3, 1900 in Sainte-Madeleine, Québec, he was still a child when his family emigrated to the United States. The family settled in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, where Josaphat Benoit did his elementary schooling at the Saint Francis of Assisi parochial school. After obtaining his bachelor-of-arts degree at the Séminaire de Saint-Hyacinthe in Québec in 1921, he pursued his studies at the Collège des Jésuites in Montréal and later earned a doctorate from the University of Paris in 1935.

Editor-in-chief at *La Liberté* in Fitchburg, Massachusetts from 1931 to 1934, he then became undersecretary of the fraternal society L’Union Saint-Jean-Baptiste d’Amérique (1935-1937), and editor-in-chief of *L’Avenir National* in Manchester, New Hampshire in 1939, the same year the Société Historique Franco-Américaine awarded the newspaper its Grand Prix Medal.

Perfectly bilingual and a natural orator, he was as attracted to politics as to intellectual pursuits. He succeeded at both. Elected mayor of Manchester, New Hampshire in 1943, he was re-elected several times and held the position for more than twenty years. Before becoming mayor, he had already published three works: *Rois ou esclaves de la machine* (1931), a sociological study; *L’âme franco-américaine* (1935), describing the main characteristics of the “petit peuple”; and a *Catéchisme d’histoire franco-américaine* (1939), a pamphlet widely circulated in Franco-American parochial schools.

At one point or another in his career, he received the following accolades and honors: an honorary doctorate from the Université de Montréal (1935); a diploma with silver medal from the Alliance Française (1945); the Richelieu Medal of the Académie Française; the Palmes Académiques award from the French government; and the Guillet-Dubuque-Bédard Prize, offered
jointly by the Société Historique Franco-Américiane and Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts.

In 1944, Josaphat Benoit married Germaine Mathieu. The couple had two children.

Sometime after the demise of L’Avenir Nationale (1949), Josaphat Benoit became the founder and editor-in-chief of L’Action in Manchester. He never stopped defending Franco-American rights even as he continued to make a reputation for himself as a great journalist, recognized as such in France, Canada, and the United States.

Josaphat Benoit died May 9, 1976.

L’âme franco-américaine is about survivance. Survivance is the preservation and maintenance of cultural heritage – the Catholic faith, the French language, and the customs and traditions of French-Canadians and Franco-Americans – with the goal of passing it down intact for future generations. The author goes back to the origins of the French presence on the continent. He provides an overview of the evolution of survivance in order to examine its causes and the obstacles that might hinder it. L’âme franco-américaine is therefore a psychological study and a social history. As a description of the different manifestations of collective identity as perceived by an insightful observer at a precise moment, the 1930s, it is a valuable historical text.

Despite its scholarly nature, the publication is not just a simple exposé. The author endlessly interprets, judges, and advises; he is ever-present, either to denounce the bad or to offer solutions. Very conscious of history – French, Canadian, and American – Josaphat Benoit constantly refers to it. In fact, the entire book is animated by a desire to share this historic consciousness, this appreciation of our common past. The following paragraph summarizes the authors thoughts on this matter:
The veneration of memory must be learned, like all other subjects. We cannot admire, like, or imitate that which we do not know. The ethnic consciousness should somehow be molded into our national history lessons. Without historical understanding, how can we develop and maintain national pride, how can we inspire and invigorate Franco-American identity? The viability of national collective identities depends largely on the poetry of remembrance, the zeal inspired by the great deeds of our ancestors, the noble thoughts deriving from great sacrifices, the sense of duty extending from the unforgettable past into the present. Those will be the foundation of survivance in the future.

Armand CHARTIER

WORKS


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