

Easter 2009

From: Jacques Bossière

Dear members and friends of the W3R association

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I have not kept in touch with most of you the last two years for personal (health) reasons. On March 30th, 2009, President Obama signed the bill making of W3R a National Historic Trail. It took ten years, a long time, but it was something I expected all along without losing confidence ever. Yes, ten years, which brings the following question: How was W3R founded ten years ago, and by whom? The answer is my legacy, which I want to share with you.

1. W3R, as an association, would not have existed without events which took place in the State of Connecticut between 1991 and 1996.

Back from an assignment in Paris I settled in Southbury CT. Soon after I discovered that Connecticut was the only state with a Governor's Commission for cultural and francophone affairs. It was originally created to accommodate thousands French Canadians looking for jobs in New England. I was offered the task to revive the Commission. Canadians had melted in the big American melting pot. There was no point in keeping the commission alive.

Dr. Yolande Bosman -- then the official commissioner and a Canadian herself -- accepted my suggestion to replace Canadians by the French Expeditionary Corps sent by Louis XVI to help Washington win American independence. The governor approved. The Commission kept meeting every month in the Governor's Chambers, at the Hartford Capitol.

To my amazement the attendance doubled, tripled... The memories of the past, stimulated by the patriotic fervor of many associations; local historical societies, re-enactors, brought us many volunteers from various parts of the state to check the condition of the famous route.

In 1996, Col. Gabriel replaced me and kept the momentum. He did a splendid job. We both knew that, one day or another, we would have to take care of the whole Route through nine states, but how and when?

2. I moved with my wife to Bronxville NY. Soon after I made a decision which led to the creation of our W3R Association. It was in 1999. My wife, Carrie-Lee, Regent of the D.A.R. Chapter invited for a lecture a distinguished West-Point officer, who was head of the Academy's department of military history.

A week later, Jim and I had a truly historic lunch at the Bronxville Field Club. Jim accepted my suggestion to help organizing an association of the nine states concerned with the route. He did a superb job, inviting on December 16, 1999, about fifty people to the former headquarters of George Washington, overlooking the Hudson River in Newburgh NY -- now a museum. I became the founding president and Jim the CEO. The very same day an enthusiastic collaboration began with National Park Service officers: a key to the success of our enterprise.

3. No less important. I had learned a long time ago, while teaching at Yale University, and also as an Episcopal minister, that Americans, indeed, have a genuine sense of history. I kept telling my compatriots that they did not need to remind Americans of the role played by France in the eighteenth century to get their independence. **So, in my first address in Newburgh, I insisted that the W3R Association become an essentially American Association.** Ever since it has worked beautifully on that basis, for the great satisfaction of French chancelleries in the States.

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Actually one can say that there are many co-founders of our association! Until 2006, the National Park Service did the lion's share of work and prepared the ground for many individuals in our association to apply the needed pressure at a political level. My gratitude goes to all those of you who contacted Congressmen and Senators, and can legitimately claim they were part of the process which led to our victory.

--- Jacques Bossière

PS: It should be added for the record.

- 1) The acronym "W3R" for "Washington Rochambeau Revolutionary Route" was suggested first by Christian Bickert, at the Newburgh meeting in 1999.
- 2) Our association became truly operative after our national meeting in Wilmington, Delaware, in 2003, when it was given a legal status, thanks to the efforts of Kim Burdick, my successor, and the University of Delaware Law School.