**‘To be ordered upon Corvées’: French Canadian Laborers in Lieutenant General John Burgoyne’s Army and the Early Modern British Fiscal Military State, 1774-1778**

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Military Labor between XV and XX Century

This study examines the approximately 800 French Canadian *corvée* laborers that accompanied British Lieutenant General John Burgoyne on the 1777 Northern Campaign during the American War for Independence. Utilizing English and French official government documents, personal correspondence, soldiers’ diaries, and newspapers, this study reconstructs the English trans-Atlantic imperial institutions of labor in French Canada. Throughout the eighteenth century, the early modern English state centralized authority through the supervision and dictation of cultural forms. The early modern state, however did not develop in isolation. Domestic political and commercial interests largely played out in the Atlantic. Moreover, the Atlantic emerged as a site of imperial collaboration and contestation. As a result, the English state developed in response to inter-imperial trade, diplomatic alliances, and armed conflict. In an effort to govern Canada, Parliament and the Crown appropriated the political infrastructure of New France and generated new labor relationships between the state and French Canadian habitants.

Initially, in New France, a corvee consisted of mandatory labor performed by the tenant of a seigneur’s property. *Censitaires* performed agricultural labor in direct relation to the season, such as planting, harvesting, or storing the crop. A second form of labor, the “King’s corvees”, consisted of mandatory work on public infrastructure within the jurisdictional boundaries of the province. The corvees primarily repaired or constructed buildings, roads, and bridges. Regardless of the service provided by the censitaires, the corvees stemmed from the privilege of the seigneur as an autonomous landholder. Following the Treaty of Paris in 1763, Parliament and the Crown abolished the seigniorial system and instituted authority under the English Constitution. The Crown, however, failed to garner loyalty from the newly acquired subjects.

The Quebec Act of 1774 drastically reorganized the power structure of seigniorial obligation. In the resurrected seigniorial system, the power to exercise “all Customs and usages” derived not from noble privilege, but from the consent of the Crown and Parliament. Sir Guy Carleton’s Acts of Militia in 1777 further solidified the relationship between the corvee laborer, the seigneur, and the State. These Acts generated a new form of the King’s corvees, one in which the censitaires provided service directly to the fiscal military state. Mostly consisting of *habitants* from the rural seigneuries around Montreal and Quebec, these laborers embarked with Burgoyne’s supply train and mobile economy, moving goods across portages, acting as stevedores, and guarding Continental prisoners captured at Fort Ticonderoga.

Although historians rarely incorporate the French Canadian corvees into narratives of the American War for Independence, the laborers’ experience shed light on the intersection of a multitude of eighteenth century socio-cultural movements: the centralization of early modern state bureaucracies, the imperial appropriation of cultural forms of labor, antiquated semi-feudal hierarchies struggling to impose traditional relationships of duty and obligation, and most importantly, state sanctioned labor in the military. This study provides the opportunity for the European Network of Labor Historians’ Workshop to dissect the eighteenth century fiscal military state’s translation of the use-value of labor into imperialist expansion.