

## BENJAMIN, George (con't)

foundation for journalistic longevity. In an era during which newspapers lived and died with the regularity of passing seasons, The Intelligencer has survived and is now Ontario's longest-publishing newspaper.

Beyond his journalistic achievements, Benjamin was a potent political force. Before his colorful career had ended, he had achieved virtually every office open to him.

The accomplishment for which he is Burn This Gossip's focus was becoming Canada's first Jewish member of parliament, an achievement which the authors correctly identify as being singularly notable during times in which official minority rights didn't exist. Their perception of Benjamin as an individual who balanced his private beliefs with prevailing societal demands — those required to move up the ladder as nimbly as Benjamin did — will almost certainly be criticized as subjective sympathy. That is, academics who demand objectivity will claim its absence in Burn This Gossip, arguing the Godfrey's passed Benjamin through a filter of subjectivity.

The truth is, that in history — as with everything in life — objectivity is a fanciful desire. Quite simply, it doesn't exist, whatever protestations to the contrary. And if the Godfreys seem overly sympathetic to Benjamin, it must be considered in this regard: they've done an admirable job of rooting Benjamin's struggles — political and spiritual — in the context of the times.

George Benjamin's achievements were remarkable, his religion of birth aside. That he did what he did with what in the 19th-century would be an onerous burden simply underscores the man's personal drive and talents. The underlying thrust of Burn This Gossip is central to a personal belief of the Godfreys. They contend Benjamin's achievements were possible because he lived in a relatively tolerant society. In effect, they argue, 19th-century religious and minority tolerance was a precursor to Canada's contemporary multi-cultural society.

In a sense, Burn This Gossip rights a wrong. It confers upon Benjamin the recognition he has long been due. It comes thanks to two historians with enough perception to see how a puzzling and diverse array of smaller parts fit together in a larger picture.

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