

**‘Evangeline’ retelling is a keepsake
by Juliana L’Heureux**

A new publication of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s famous epic “Evangeline” will be out just in time to celebrate the St. Croix 2004 anniversary marking 400 years of French history in North America.

Françoise Paradis of Buxton relied on her lifelong affection for Longfellow’s classic story to research the original work first published in 1847. Her updated edition of “Evangeline” will help commemorate the June 25 anniversary celebration of the founding of the St. Croix Island settlement located in eastern Maine off the coast of Calais by French explorers.

Paradis includes a foreword by Layne Longfellow, a living ancestor of the poem’s author, as well as a glossary to help readers better understand some of Longfellow’s artistic prose. Most important, Paradis provides a noteworthy historical sketch in a chapter preceding the printing of the events described by Longfellow.

Longfellow’s first edition of the long verse poem “Evangeline” was published 92 years after the horrible incident in French colonial history known as “Le Grand Dérangement,” or the 1755 brutal deportation of the Acadians out of Nova Scotia. British soldiers used the deportation to seize productive Acadian farmland on the west coast of Nova Scotia during a series of colonial wars between the French and the English for control of Canada.

Evangeline is a symbol of Acadian culture. Her character immortalizes the yearning experienced by descendants of the Acadians for their vanquished homeland. Like most children who grew up in Maine’s St. John Valley, Paradis developed an affection for “Evangeline” when she was taught the poem in junior high school. In fact, “Evangeline” is routinely recommended reading in “The Valley” where the poem and story are part of the oral tradition and even transcend fiction. Although she is fiction, Evangeline’s loss of her love Gabriel during the deportation is deeply rooted in Acadian myths and legends.

Twenty-five years ago, Paradis visited Evangeline Park in Grand Pré, Nova Scotia, where she felt “transported to another time.”

“I experienced a sense of loss, grief, emptiness and yearning for my own Franco-American and Acadian history when I visited Grand Pré and stood at the foot of the statue of Evangeline,” says Paradis. Paradis writes a moving introduction to “Evangeline,” where she explains the many emotions the poems stirs up for her. She

searched for funding from the Maine Humanities Council and the Maine Commission for the Arts to bring the story of Evangeline and the history of the Acadians back into conscious awareness.

Her publication of “Evangeline” is a work of love. It’s a far more compelling book than any simple reprint. There are several prints of old lithographs in the book. Also, two wonderful reprints of paintings by Acadian artist, Donald Cyr, are included.

Paradis even researched the link between the only real character in Longfellow’s poem to the St. John Valley. In fact, the amazing Acadian lady known in the St. John Valley as “Tante Blanche” was the granddaughter of Rene LeBlanc, a character in “Evangeline.” Tante Blanche was a saintly lady who helped the Acadians during years of famine in the late 18th century.

Most important, Longfellow’s prose is printed in a highly readable font with lots of double spacing between stanzas.

Paradis created a perfectly beautiful gift in this edition of “Evangeline,” a publication worthy of keeping for several generations to come.

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