

**Story of 'Evangeline' lives on
With local author's help
by Juliana L'Heureux**

Françoise Paradis of Buxton called several months ago to talk about her passion for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic story "Evangeline." Now she's published her own book with Evangeline as the central story.

We can softly say, "Hurray," for her fresh-off-the-press book, complete with historical information titled "Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie."

Paradis took her dedication to her family's French-Acadian heritage, exemplified by Evangeline's myth, added her own experiences growing up in Maine's St. John Valley, and put them together with Longfellow's story including historic text. She dressed up Longfellow's book, but without missing one poetic phrase or comma.

In her special commemorative edition, Paradis enriches Longfellow's prose with an historic introduction and a historical sketch about the life and times of the Acadians. Furthermore, there's a pronunciation guide and glossary in the text. Layne Longfellow, a distant living cousin of the famous author, writes a foreword and biographical sketch.

Paradis was determined to have her newly published book ready for the St. Croix 2004 celebration in Calais-St. Stephen and for similar events being held in Nova Scotia.

I caught up with Paradis in New Brunswick. She was sitting inside a damp but cozy tent at her exhibit, on a very rainy day in Bayside, New Brunswick, signing copies of "Evangeline" for people who braved the miserable weather to find out what a 400-year historical tribute was all about. Despite the heavy rain, a nice-sized crowd of several hundred roamed through the tent.

Longfellow's heroine seems to walk out of the front cover pictured in a lovely fully body romantic sketch. She's a modest maiden dressed in traditional French-Brittany attire.

Many illustrations in this edition of "Evangeline" are taken from "The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," published in 1886 and copyrighted by Ernest W. Longfellow, Henry's son.

St. John Valley artist Don Cyr, a professor, historian and curator of the Centre Culturel du Mont St. Carmel, provided prints of paintings for the book as well.

Now, my growing “Evangeline” collection has a beautiful focal point, thanks to Paradis’ artistic re-print. It is a privilege to have this edition of “Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie” in my collection of dozens of older and newly published editions of Longfellow’s epic poem.

While reading this newest version of “Evangeline,” I contemplated the suffering of those French settlers whose ancestors arrived 400 years ago to start a new world order in North America. Although half of the settlers died during their winter on St. Croix Island, their survivors went on to Port Royal, Nova Scotia, where they became the ancestors of Longfellow’s mythical Evangeline. We realize, of course, how little of this sad saga would be recalled today without Longfellow and his poem.

So, Paradis’ re-issue of “Evangeline” deserves a quiet celebration in memory of those who died in this 1755 “Le Grand Dérangement.”

It certainly isn’t necessary to have French ancestry or a literary degree to appreciate this volume of “Evangeline.” But, readers will no doubt be moved to understand the importance of quietly celebrating the survival of the French-Acadians, despite their tragic and violent history.

This book is available at the Maine Historical Society and by contacting the author at feparadis@hiddensprings.info.

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