

## Evangeline in Louisiana: The Acadian-Cajun Connection

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Article abstract

For the French-speaking Acadians of the Canadian Maritimes and the Cajuns of Louisiana, the heroine of Longfellow's long narrative poem *Evangeline* (1847) lives on. An important symbol of ethnic history and survival, she represents as well the ties between Acadians and Cajuns. She has become a legendary figure — in Louisiana she even has a different name. This paper explores similarities and differences between the two traditions and the rôle of *Evangeline* in the Acadian-Cajun connection.

# EVANGELINE IN LOUISIANA: THE ACADIAN-CAJUN CONNECTION

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Any consideration of Evangeline would be incomplete without at least a brief look at the Cajuns, the Louisiana cousins of the Acadians.<sup>1</sup> Her name is almost as common in the Cajun country of southwest Louisiana as it is in the Maritimes: there is an Evangeline Parish, Evangeline Highway, Evangeline Museum, and Evangeline Boutique—even Evangeline Hot Sauce! Nova Scotia and Louisiana have both been called “The Land of Evangeline” in countless books and tourist brochures, and both have statues of her in well-attended parks. My purpose here is to explore the role of Evangeline among the Cajuns, and to suggest that in some ways she may represent a link between Louisiana Cajuns and Canadian Acadians.<sup>2</sup>

## The Cajuns

It would be impossible in this short space to do justice to the depth and richness of Cajun culture, one of the most fascinating in the United States. For an introduction to scholarly Cajun studies, see the collected articles by Del Sesto & Gibson<sup>3</sup> and Conrad<sup>4</sup>, as well as Dormon’s *The People Called Cajuns: An*

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1. I have been conducting research for the last several years on Evangeline for my dissertation (in progress), *Evangeline: Cultural, Literary, and Folkloric Aspects of an Acadian Heroine*. Though I lived in Moncton, New Brunswick for a time while working on this study, I regret that I have not yet seen the Louisiana home of Evangeline for myself, nor had the opportunity to talk to people there. I am indebted to all those who have previously studied the Louisiana Evangeline tradition. I would also like to thank the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D. C. for supporting much of my Canadian research.
  2. “Acadian” is a term used in Louisiana as well as in Canada. To avoid confusion and extra words, I will for the most part restrict “Acadian” to people now living in the Canadian Maritimes (as well as others in Canada and the northeastern United States). I will use “Cajun” for the residents of southwestern Louisiana of Acadian heritage. (For discussion of the term “Cajun” see, among others, Reed, 1976, p. 15-23, and Dormon, 1983). Another north/south terminological distinction is sometimes made between “Acadia” referring to Canada, and “Acadiana” referring to Louisiana and eastern Texas. (Del Sesto & Gibson 1975).
  3. Steven L. Del Sesto and Jon L. Gibson (editors), *The Culture of Acadiana: Tradition and Change in South Louisiana*, Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1975.
  4. Glenn R. Conrad (editor), *The Cajuns: Essays on their History and Culture*, Lafayette, Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 2nd edition, 1978.

Introduction to an Ethnohistory.<sup>5</sup> Reed's more casual *Lâche pas la patate: portrait des Acadiens de la Louisiane* is also valuable.<sup>6</sup> *The Journal of Popular Culture* has recently devoted a section to Cajun studies.<sup>7</sup> For folklore scholarship, Richard Dorson's chapter on the Cajuns in *Buying the Wind*<sup>8</sup> provides an early overview; more recent articles by Patricia K. Rickels<sup>9</sup> are comprehensive overviews of Cajun folklore, while Ancelet<sup>10</sup> is an examination of Cajun identity through jokes and other oral traditions. Reed<sup>11</sup>, mentioned above, contains much folklore, as do numerous other non-academic sources; see the *Inventaire des sources en folklore acadien*<sup>12</sup> for a good bibliography of sources to that date. The historian Carl A. Brasseaux has produced many works on his people the Cajuns; most pertinent to this study is his *In Search of Evangeline: Birth and Evolution of the Evangeline Myth*.<sup>13</sup> Other important sources on the cultural impact of Evangeline are Martin<sup>14</sup>, Griffiths<sup>15</sup>, and Ancelet.<sup>16</sup>

The origin of the Cajuns, of course, lies in the forced dispersion of the Acadians in 1755 known as "le grand dérangement". This cataclysmic event (the background of Longfellow's fictional *Evangeline*) represents a turning point in Acadian history and consciousness.<sup>17</sup> After harsh experiences in several

5. James H. Dormon, *The People Called Cajuns: An Introduction to an Ethnohistory*, Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1983.
6. Revon Reed, *Lâche pas la patate. Portrait des Acadiens de la Louisiane*, Montréal, Editions Parti pris, 1976.
7. For an indepth study on Cajun life and culture, see Judy Barrett Litoff and David S. Smith (editors), *Journal of Popular Culture*, 23 (1989), p. 1-116.
8. Richard M. Dorson, "Louisiana Cajuns", Chapter IV in *Buying the Wind: Regional Folklore in the United States*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1964, p. 229-288.
9. Patricia K. Rickels, "The Folklore of Acadiana" in Steven L. Del Sesto and Jon L. Gibson (editors), *The Culture of Acadiana: Tradition and Change in South Louisiana*, Lafayette, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1975, p. 143-174. Recent articles include "The Folklore of the Acadians" in Glenn R. Conrad (editor), *The Cajuns: Essays on their History and Culture*, Lafayette, Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 2nd edition, 1978, p. 240-253, and "Le folklore des Acadiens" in *Revue de Louisiane/Louisiana Review*, 7 (1978), p. 101-115.
10. Barry Jean Ancelet, "Elements of folklore, history and literature in Longfellow's *Evangeline*", *Revue de Louisiane/Louisiana Review*, 11 (1982), p. 118-125.
11. See Revon Reed, 1976.
12. Centre d'Études acadiennes. Ronald Labelle (editor), *Inventaire des sources en folklore acadien*, Moncton, Université de Moncton, 1984.
13. Carl A. Brasseaux, *In Search of Evangeline: Birth and Evolution of the Evangeline Myth*, Thibodaux, Louisiana, Blue Heron Press, 1988.
14. Ernest Martin, *L'Évangeline de Longfellow et la suite merveilleuse d'un poème*, Paris, Hachette, 1936.
15. Naomi Griffiths, "Longfellow's *Evangeline*: the birth and acceptance of a legend", *Acadiensis*, 7, no. 2 (1982), p. 21-27.
16. See Barry Jean Ancelet, 1982.
17. Naomi Griffiths, *The Acadians: Creation of a People*, Montreal, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1973.

American states, the French West Indies, and even France, many of those deported from Acadia made their way to the French settlements in Louisiana. Their descendants have become known as Cajuns (an Anglophone corruption of 'Cadiens).

A conscious desire to maintain their own way of life, probably combined with outside pressures—unfriendliness from first the Creole French and then the neighboring Protestants<sup>18</sup>—led to the geographic isolation of the Cajuns. This physical separation, combined with linguistic, cultural, religious, and occupational differences, kept them isolated from the rest of Louisiana and later from the rest of the United States until well into the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> The psychological effects of the Deportation cannot be ignored either, as Brasseaux says:

Deeply traumatized by the destruction of their homeland and the long years of exile preceding the founding of New Acadia, the Acadians became an insular society, consciously avoiding contact with rival groups to avoid assimilation. Though the walls of Acadian insularity were occasionally damaged, they were never effectively breached, and the core values of the Acadian immigrants were essentially those of their Acadian descendants.<sup>20</sup>

Happily, in the last few decades the people of Acadiana have experienced an ethnic revival, resulting in both increased identity and pride among Cajuns and greater knowledge and appreciation of Cajuns by outsiders.<sup>21</sup> Thus they may have found a way to escape the twin evils of marginality on the one hand and assimilation on the other.

Given more than two hundred years of separation between the Canadian Acadians and the Louisiana Cajuns, it is not surprising that there are cultural discontinuities as well as continuities between the two groups, as the traditions carried from Acadia were modified by such factors as geography, climate, and the ethnic mix of the people of Louisiana. In this paper I focus on one such example of cultural connection, the figure of Evangeline.

## Evangeline in Louisiana

Part II of Longfellow's *Evangeline*<sup>22</sup> chronicles her wanderings around the United States in search of her fiancé Gabriel. The poem does include a

18. William Faulkner Rushton, *The Cajuns: From Acadia to Louisiana*, New York, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1979.

19. Glenn R. Conrad, "The Acadians: Myths and Realities" in Glenn R. Conrad (editor), *The Cajuns: Essays on their History and Culture*, Lafayette, Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 2nd edition, 1978, p. 1-20.

20. See Brasseaux, p. 5.

21. Mathé Allain, "Twentieth-century Acadians" in Glenn R. Conrad (editor), *The Cajuns: Essays on their History and Culture*, Lafayette, Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 2nd edition, 1978, p. 129-141. See also Brasseaux, 1988.

22. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline. A Tale of Acadie*, Halifax, Nimbus, [1847], 1951.

journey to Louisiana. For Longfellow, no doubt, the episode appealed to him because of the opportunity to describe the exotic bayou swamps and to repeat, for the Acadians of Louisiana, his praise of the simple and devout life he had earlier extolled for the Acadians of Nova Scotia. So he had Evangeline travel by boat down the Mississippi towards Louisiana. The very night before her party reaches its destination, however (in one of the coincidences that is either poignant or maddening, depending on one's literary tastes), she and Gabriel, going in opposite directions, miss each other in the dark. Upon arrival at the Acadian settlement she learns that her fiancé has just left. In Longfellow's poem, then, she spends barely a day in Louisiana before starting out once again on her quest.

Since this brief episode leaves much to be desired from the point of view of the Louisiana Acadians, it is not surprising that another tradition has grown up in which the Louisiana locale plays a bigger part. The development of this tradition begins with a book by Judge Felix Voorhies published in 1907, called *Acadian Reminiscences: with the True Story of Evangeline*.<sup>23</sup> I came across this account several years ago, before I had even decided to study Evangeline, and like many others was impressed by what appears to be a account of family oral history. Here is a bit of the background given by Voorhies:

Our family consisted of my father and mother, of three children, and of my grandmother, a centenarian, whose clear and lucid memory contained a wealthy mine of historical facts that an antiquarian or chronicler would have been proud to possess.

In the cold winter days, the family assembled in the hall, where a goodly fire blazed on the hearth; and while the wind whistled outside, our grandmother, an exile from Acadia, would relate to us the stirring scenes she had witnessed when her people were driven from their homes by the British, their sufferings during their long pilgrimage overland from Maryland to the wilds of Louisiana, the dangers that beset them on their long journey through the endless forests.<sup>24</sup>

and much more in this vein. In this version, supposedly an eyewitness account told by Voorhies' grandmother, the heroine is an orphan named Emmeline Labiche and her fiancé is called Louis Arceneaux. After their separation, recounts the grandmother, Emmeline is overcome with grief:

Thus she lived in our midst, always sweet tempered, but with such sadness depicted in her countenance, and with smiles so sorrowful, that we had come to look upon her as not of this earth, but rather as our guardian angel, and this is why we called her no longer Emmeline, but Evangeline, or God's little angel.<sup>25</sup>

This story ends quite differently from Longfellow's, for Emmeline is not old when her lover returns. He has not been as steadfast as she, however, and

23. Felix Voorhies, *Acadian Reminiscences: The True Story of Evangeline*, Lafayette, University of Southwestern Louisiana, [1907], 1977. According to Brasseaux (1988, p. 26-27), the book was based on earlier newspaper articles written by Voorhies in the 1890s.

24. Voorhies, p. 18-19.

25. Voorhies, pp. 83-84.

during a reunion scene under a large oak tree, she learns that Louis is betrothed to another. She goes mad, dies in her grandmother's arms, and is buried under the oak.

This affecting story can be heard today in the Cajun areas of Louisiana, sometimes with a variation in which Louis has not only another fiancée, but even a wife and children.<sup>26</sup> It is commonly thought that Longfellow "had everything ... a little wrong".<sup>27</sup> A visitor to St. Martinville will be shown the Evangeline Oak (the latest of three, according to Brasseaux<sup>28</sup> and, of course, Evangeline's gravesite and statue. Evangeline (or rather Emmeline) is an important tourist attraction and source of local pride.

Numerous attempts have been made to give a plausible account of how Longfellow might have heard this supposed Acadian legend from a native. The historicity of Emmeline and Louis, however, has been clearly disproved by Brasseaux, who has painstakingly gone over all the data on the Louisiana Evangeline tradition.<sup>29</sup> It seems that there is no shred of evidence that Emmeline and Louis ever lived. In fact, even the historical facts of Voorhies' grandmother's life contradict his story; at one point Brasseaux refers to her as "the mythical grandmother".<sup>30</sup>

### Evangeline and Fakelore

Although Voorhies undoubtedly had noble intentions, his creation of the Emmeline Labiche story is a clear example of fakelore, to use Richard Dorson's term.<sup>31</sup> The question is not one of mistaken or unreliable oral tradition, for such problems are well known to folklorists, but the claiming of oral tradition to lend legitimacy to some other end. Voorhies' framing of his Emmeline Labiche story as one he remembered being told by his grandmother around the fireside plainly invites trust, as does the very subtitle of his book, which promises, you may remember, the "true story of Evangeline". Moreover, Voorhies often publicly proclaimed its truth.<sup>32</sup> His invention was readily accepted in Louisiana, and over the years the distinction between fact and fiction has been almost lost. As recently as 1979, a standard work on the Cajuns by William Faulkner Rushton expresses no doubts about the authenticity of the Voorhies version: "St.

26. Ancelet, p. 124.

27. Bradley Smith, "Acadia country", *American Heritage*, 6, December (1954), p. 61.

28. See Brasseaux, p. 32.

29. Brasseaux, 1988.

30. Brasseaux, note 54.

31. Richard M. Dorson, "Fakelore", *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, 65 (1969), and *Folklore and Fakelore: Essays toward a Discipline of Folk Studies*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976. See also Brasseaux, 1988, for another discussion of Evangeline and fakelore.

32. Brasseaux, p. 26.

Martinville ... lays claim to the most famous Cajun immigrant of them all, Emmeline LaBiche (sic), the model for Longfellow's *Evangeline*''.<sup>33</sup> He annotates the Voorhies book with the comment "the earliest-known work of Cajun oral history".<sup>34</sup>

By fabricating a Louisiana version of *Evangeline*, Voorhies seems to have been consciously promoting pride and a sense of group identity among the Cajuns. This goal was also behind the promotion of Longfellow's version by the Acadian elite during the "Acadian Renaissance" of the nineteenth century in Canada.<sup>35</sup> To be sure, the two projects cannot be equated, for the leaders of the Acadian Renaissance were well aware that *Evangeline* was a literary creation and did not claim otherwise.<sup>36</sup> Voorhies, in contrast, is clearly guilty of "the presentation of spurious and synthetic writings under the claim that they are genuine folklore", which is Dorson's definition of fakelore.<sup>37</sup>

These attempts to foster Acadian identity and pride were largely successful in both Canada and Louisiana, and have led to the creation of enduring cultural images. As such they seem to fit well into the framework proposed by Alan Dundes in his study of fakelore.<sup>38</sup> Looking at such examples as Ossian, the Grimms, the *Kalevala*, and Paul Bunyan, Dundes sees a relationship between the fabrication of fakelore and a national inferiority complex<sup>39</sup> occasioned by foreign cultural or even political dominance. "In Scotland, in Germany, in Finland, and in twentieth-century America, there was indisputably a need to invent tradition. And not just to invent tradition, but to label it tradition!".<sup>40</sup> The Acadians of Canada and Louisiana, I suggest, were in much the same culturally submerged state as the Highland Scots or the Germans. Dundes' conclusions about the origins of fakelore apply strikingly to the Acadian situation, especially in the case of Voorhies:

Fakelore apparently fills a national, psychic need: namely, to assert one's national identity, especially in times of crisis, and to instill pride in that identity.... It may be true that ideally folklore serves the cause of national identity cravings, but where folklore is deemed lacking or insufficient, individual creative writers imbued with nationalistic

33. Rushton, p. 129.

34. Rushton, p. 342.

35. See Martin, 1936, and Griffiths, 1982.

36. Later, the line between history and fiction did become blurred. For example, an article in *L'Évangéline* in 1929 claimed that "l'oeuvre de Longfellow a plus qu'une valeur poétique ou mythique"; on the contrary, it reflects an "exactitude historique". *L'Évangéline*, March 21, 1929, p. 11.

37. Dorson, 1969, p. 60.

38. Alan Dundes, "The fabrication of fakelore" in Alan Dundes (editor), *Folklore Matters*, Knoxville, University of Tennessee, 1989, p. 40-56.

39. Dundes, p. 48.

40. Dundes, p. 47.

zeal have felt free to fill in that void. They do so by creating a national epic or national 'folk' hero *ex nihilo* if necessary.<sup>41</sup>

Voorhies did not actually create a folk hero (or heroine, in Evangeline's case), but he did embellish her story to the point where Louisiana could claim a part in the national Acadian "epic".

### Evangeline and Folklore

The actual current folk status of the Evangeline story in either Canada or Louisiana is difficult to assess. Tracing either tradition back to a literary source, of course, is not enough *per se* to discount its currency in oral tradition—there is a constant interplay between literature and folklore. And, as was often pointed to me in Canada, the spirit of the Evangeline story is true even if the details given by Longfellow or Voorhies are not, for certainly lovers and friends did become separated during the Deportation.<sup>42</sup>

I am convinced that there now exists a folk tradition about Evangeline among the Acadians of Canada that has become separated from its literary origins. I met a number of people in Acadia who know Evangeline's story but don't know it was written by Longfellow. (In fact, given that Longfellow has gone out of literary fashion, his version might be expected to be the least known today.) It has been handed down over the generations in several ways, one of which is certainly the pure oral (or "mother's knee") tradition prized by folklorists. It is also learned in school, however, as well as through popular books and plays, or through exposure to the Evangeline and Gabriel figures who regularly appear at festivals and celebrations. Some think it only a charming story, while others vigorously defend its truthfulness.

Ancelet says that a version like Voorhies' "does have a certain amount of local currency in Louisiana".<sup>43</sup> The story has also been embroidered through the years. André Olivier, who ran the Evangeline Museum (and attached boutique) from the 1920s to the 1950s, was "the self-styled local authority" on "the story of Evangeline and the Acadians" and an accomplished teller of the "true" story of Emmeline Labiche.<sup>44</sup> The former curator of the Acadian House Museum in St. Martinville, Leona "Tootie" Guirard, has also added to the story by changing the ending. She tells tourists that "the sound of the wind in the oaks behind the house is actually the reunited lovers whispering to each other".<sup>45</sup> Ancelet explains,

41. Dundes, p. 50.

42. Eugène Achard, *La touchante Odyssée d'Évangéline*, Tome II: Sur les Routes de l'Exil, Montréal, Librairie générale canadienne, cfno. 1 (1946), p. 108.

43. Ancelet, p. 124.

44. Brasseaux, p. 32-33.

45. Ancelet, p. 125-126.



She proudly admits to having added on to the legend to suit her tastes and needs as a tourist information agent, pointing to Longfellow's own exercise of poetic license in 'changing' the ending and affirms the right of the Acadian people to add a happy ending to their own legend.<sup>46</sup>

She has also helped to transmit the story by writing a pamphlet about it.<sup>47</sup>

Another variant, the oddest I have yet found, is an item from the Folklore Archives of the University of California, Berkeley. It has very little in common with either Longfellow or Voorhies, indicating that Evangeline's story is truly in oral circulation:

Evangeline, a noble lady from France, came to Canada with a group of military officers who were ousted out of France after the French Revolution of 1789. The French were kicked out of Canada by the English and went to Louisiana. There through the leadership of Evangeline a French sub-culture was started and the people set up their own farms and plantations. A person who is from this group of people or whose ancestors are is called a 'Cajun'. (Coll. Elizabeth Rupiper, 1970)

Notwithstanding the reservations of historians and folklorists, the above versions reveal that the Evangeline/Emmeline story is alive and well in Louisiana.

### Cajun Reactions

How do Cajuns react to all this? In my dissertation on Evangeline and the Acadians,<sup>48</sup> I suggest that she is an important symbol of their ethnic history and survival. To be sure, modern attitudes towards the Evangeline image and symbol in Canada are not all favorable. In fact, I have suggested that, while in the nineteenth century Evangeline was seen as a positive factor in the growth of Acadian cultural consciousness, in recent years she has fulfilled almost the opposite function—she now provides a model of what many of the current cultural elite would like to leave behind. Her image seems to be problematic among the Cajuns as well.

Some argue that Evangeline is an image favored by the so-called "genteel—Acadians" of Louisiana,<sup>49</sup> those who have a stake in the promulgation of a particular kind of cultural representation of the Cajuns, "strongly influenced by the image of Golden Age virtue, tranquility and piety".<sup>50</sup>

46. Ancelet, p. 126.

47. Brasseaux, p. 49-50.

48. Rita S. Ross, i.p., *Evangeline: Cultural, Literary and Folkloric Aspects of an Acadian Heroine*, Dissertation in progress, University of California, Berkeley.

49. Rickels, "The folklore of the Acadians" in Glenn R. Conrad (editor), *The Cajuns: Essays on their History and Culture*, Lafayette, Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 2nd edition, 1978, p. 251.

50. Rickels, p. 251. This attitude parallels that of some Canadian Acadians, labeled rather scornfully "évangélinisme" by the renowned Acadian author Antonine Maillet: "mélange del' Assomption, de tricolore étoilé, de loyalisme envers la langue, la religion et la terre des aïeux". See Antonine

Brasseaux says she is also popular among older Cajuns who had negative early encounters with the public school system in the early twentieth century: "many of these people saw Longfellow's heroine as a positive role model, the only Acadian revered by the otherwise ethnically intolerant English-speaking world into which they were seeking acceptance".<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, he says that the large percentage of Cajuns who are blue-collar workers exhibit "a prevailing sense of apathy" about Evangeline, or else see her as "a deserving target of humor and even ridicule".<sup>52</sup>

It is perhaps fairest to say that Evangeline, in Acadiana as well as in Acadia, is a paradoxical figure, inescapably present yet evoking mixed emotions. She has undoubtedly furnished a crucial cultural symbol for Cajuns, but some are uncomfortable with the legacy of Longfellow's idealized vision. The beginning of the following poem by Jean Arceneaux demonstrates both the pervasiveness of the Evangeline story, which is evoked without explanation, and the ambivalence felt towards it:

Laissez les bon temps rouler,  
 "These people really know how to have a good time!"  
 Une race idyllique, sans souci,  
 Des écrivisses, des patates et des culs de chaoui,<sup>53</sup>  
 Comme si on était toujours *in the forest primeval*  
 Après se promener avec Mlle Bellefontaine  
 En Acadie, *home of the happy*.<sup>54</sup>

## The Acadian-Cajun Connection

Thus far I have been examining the Evangeline story in Louisiana. To do so without exploring its connections to the Acadian tradition, however, would be to present an incomplete picture. Just as in Acadia, the development of Louisiana's Evangeline tradition includes political, cultural, and commercial

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Maillet, *Rabelais et les traditions populaires en Acadie*, [Les Archives de Folklore, 13], Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, [1971], 1980, p. 13.

51. Brasseaux, p. 51.

52. Brasseaux, p. 52.

53. "Coonass" ("cul de chaoui"), was formerly an ethnic slur directed against the Cajuns. Lately it has been claimed and transformed by them into a term of ethnic pride. See Dormon, p. 87, and Barry Jean Ancelet, "The Cajun who went to Harvard: Identity in the oral tradition of South Louisiana", *Journal of Popular Culture*, 23(1989), p. 111.

54. Jean Arceneaux, "Combustion Spontanée" in Barry J. Ancelet (editor), *Cris sur le Bayou*, Montréal, Éditions Intermède, 1980, p. 33. As cited in David Barry, "A French literary renaissance in Louisiana" in Judy Barrett Litoff and David S. Smith (editors), *Journal of Popular Culture*, 23 (1989), p. 59-60. Italics were found in the original. "Mlle Bellefontaine" is of course, Evangeline. "This is the forest primeval" is the famous opening line of Longfellow's poem; the final line of the poem's prologue is "List to a tale of Love in Acadie, home of the happy".

factors, often reflecting parallel or joint interests in Canada and Louisiana. The balance of this paper discusses some of the ways that Evangeline links the two.

How the development the Evangeline tourist industry in Grand-Pré (in particular her statue and park) was connected with the commercial interests of the railroad and with Nova Scotia's desire to promote tourism has been discussed elsewhere.<sup>55</sup> Since Louisiana, thanks to Voorhies, had had its "own" version of the Evangeline/Emmeline story since the 1890s, it is not surprising that local sites soon became attached to it there as well. Disregarding that Longfellow had Evangeline die in Philadelphia, the Louisiana version has her dying under an (unspecified) oak tree, as mentioned earlier. By the early 1900's the town of St. Martinville had singled out a particular tree as the "Evangeline oak"; over the years several different and competing trees have held this title.<sup>56</sup> Cultural and religious interests, as well as commercial ones, seem to be involved in the proliferation of Evangeline sites, for Brasseaux says that local *curés* were making a claim for Evangeline's gravesite as early as 1903.<sup>57</sup>

The Evangeline story helped to bring the Cajuns to national attention and to promote travel and tourism to southwest Louisiana. It also served to bring them closer to their Acadian cousins in Canada and New England and to forge bonds between these groups that endure today. Cormier has remarked that prior to 1930 contacts between "les Acadiens du Nord and ceux de la Louisiane ... étaient rares et plutôt sporadiques".<sup>58</sup> But a small Louisiana delegation had participated in the dedication of the chapel at Grand-Pré in 1922,<sup>59</sup> and throughout the 1920s the Cajuns increasingly made themselves known to both their fellow Americans<sup>60</sup> and their fellow Acadians.

The statue, park, and church at Grand-Pré undoubtedly prompted a desire for local monuments in Louisiana. Although Cormier says that the memorial chapel at Grand-Pré was destined to become "pour tous les Français d'Amérique un lieu de pèlerinage national",<sup>61</sup> the Cajuns nevertheless wanted their own place of pilgrimage. Soon local leaders began to lobby for the creation of an Evangeline National Park. In 1926, as part of this effort, a mannequin of

55. See Sharon Ingalls, "Mad about Acadians", *The Beaver: Exploring Canada's History*, 69 (1989) p. 21-27, and Maurice Léger, 'L'importance du caractère épique et mythique d'Evangéline pour le développement du tourisme culturel en Atlantique', Paper presented at FSAC, Moncton, June 1990.

56. Brasseaux, p. 32.

57. Brasseaux, p. 41.

58. Clement Cormier, "Les Acadiens de la Louisiane et nous", *Société historique acadienne*, 17 (1986), p. 11.

59. Achard, p. 126

60. I use the term "American" in its technical sense. As residents of Louisiana, the Cajuns have long been American citizens. In practice however, "Américain" is often used in the sense of 'non-cajun'. See Dormon, 1983, p. 36.

61. Cormier, p. 11.

Evangeline was installed as part of Louisiana's state exhibit at the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial Exhibition.<sup>62</sup> Philadelphia is, of course, the site of Evangeline's death in Longfellow's poem, and the exhibit proved extremely popular. The project's amalgamation of cultural and tourist aims is clearly shown by the placard accompanying the figure of Evangeline, which read, in part,

This dress was my great grand mother's wedding dress and was made by her by thread spun on this old wheel... This old wheel was brought over from Grand-Pré... My people are industrious and live always within their means... Our good roads, bordered with moss-draped trees, bid you come and drive on them. This is the land of Evangeline along the banks of the Bayou Teche. A national association has been formed to build a park on the spot where my people landed and where I am sleeping my last long sleep.<sup>63</sup>

In 1928, both the Republican and Democratic national conventions were visited by delegations of young local women costumed in what was presumed to be traditional garb.<sup>64</sup> These "Evangeline girls" proved a great success and later also visited New Orleans. Though the idea of an Evangeline National Park never came to fruition, these public relations efforts did serve to capture the sympathy of non-Cajun Americans.

Meanwhile the Evangeline story was causing fellow francophones in Canada and even in France to notice the Cajuns and their claim to a piece of Evangeline's legend. The Acadian francophone newspaper *L'Évangéline* understandably followed Evangeline news with interest. When it reported a flood in Louisiana in 1927, it assured its readers that "la tombe d'Évangéline est l'un des rares endroits qui échappent au désastre", and went on to explain that the tomb was the legendary resting-place of Emmeline Labiche and Louis Arceneaux.<sup>65</sup> In 1928 even the French poet Paul Claudel, then Ambassador of France to the United States, "made a nationally publicized pilgrimage to the Evangeline Oak".<sup>66</sup>

Also in 1928, a Louisiana delegation went to an Acadian conclave in Massachusetts and told them the Voorhies version of Evangeline's story, after which they were welcomed as long-lost cousins:

This disclosure revolutionized the northern Acadians' perception of their southern cousins, whom until then they had considered cultural apostates because their ancestors — the largest group of exiles — had abandoned the fatherland and mortgaged their heritage for a new life in an exotic, tropical land.... When Louisianians proved that the remains of Evangeline, already adopted by northern Acadians as the symbol of their national identity, reposed among them, the Maritime and new England Acadians welcomed their prodigal cousins back into the fold.<sup>67</sup>

62. Brasseaux, p. 37.

63. Martin, p. 252.

64. Brasseaux, p. 36-37.

65. *L'Évangéline*, July 28, 1927, p. 6.

66. Brasseaux, p. 35.

67. Brasseaux, p. 45.

In 1930 the Louisiana Acadians were specifically invited to participate in the major celebration to be held in Grand-Pré for the 175th anniversary of the Dispersion.<sup>68</sup> The invitation was taken up by Dudley LeBlanc, a local leader and author of *The True Story of the Acadians*<sup>69</sup> (characterized by Dormon as "part of the "Golden Age" tradition and the Longfellow/Evangeline cult").<sup>70</sup> Accompanied by costumed "Evangeline girls", the Louisiana pilgrims travelled through the United States and into the Maritimes and eventually Quebec on the "first official Louisiana pilgrimage to old Acadia".<sup>71</sup> According to Cormier, "le 'retour d'Evangéline' eut partout un effet sensationnel à la fête de Grand-Pré".<sup>72</sup> *L'Evangéline* proclaimed, "Evangéline est revenue au pays de ses pères".<sup>73</sup> Writes Ernest Martin,

Ainsi, grâce aux 'Evangélines' et à l'arrière-petit fils de René Leblanc, une liaison pleine de promesses venait d'être rétablie, dans l'enthousiasme, entre les deux grands groupes d'origine française de l'Amérique du Nord.<sup>74</sup>

Louisiana finally got its own statue of Evangeline<sup>75</sup> in 1930, but the official dedication was delayed until 1931 to allow participation by a return pilgrimage of Evangeline girls from Canada.<sup>76</sup> Further trips were arranged in 1936, 1946, and 1963. This last was "la dernière expérience du genre. Mais les contacts étaient établis: les voies étaient ouvertes aux rencontres de tous genres".<sup>77</sup> The links forged by these largely symbolic pilgrimages have endured into the present. Acadians and Cajuns continue to travel in both directions to celebrate their mutual ties of history and heritage. One concrete result has been the establishment of exchange scholarships for Acadian and Cajun students,<sup>78</sup> which are still in place today.

## Conclusion

This discussion of the Louisiana Evangeline tradition has attempted to demonstrate the importance of Longfellow's fictional heroine in the development

68. Cormier, p. 11

69. Dudley LeBlanc, *The True Story of the Acadians*, Lafayette, 1932.

70. Dormon, p. 80.

71. LeBlanc, p. 89.

72. Cormier, p. 12.

73. *L'Evangéline*, August 28, 1930, p. 1.

74. Martin, p. 256.

75. Evangeline's likeness was based on actress Dolores Del Rio, who was starring at the time in the second film version of the Longfellow story. See Carl A. Brasseaux, "Four hundred years of Acadian life in North America" in Judy Barrett Litoff and David S. Smith (editors), *Journal of Popular Culture*, 23 (1989), p. 41.

76. Brasseaux, 1988, p. 41.

77. Cormier, p. 12.

78. Cormier, p. 13.

of Cajun self awareness as well as in the forging of ties between Cajuns and Acadians. Others, especially Martin and Brasseaux,<sup>79</sup> have previously discussed how significant the Evangeline tradition has been for the growth of knowledge about the Cajuns, as well as for Cajun self-awareness and pride. This is not to claim, of course, that had Longfellow never written his famous poem, the Cajuns of southwestern Louisiana would have remained forever in obscurity. Certainly, though, just as in the Maritimes, the Louisiana Evangeline has provoked the interest and sympathy of outsiders; she provides a convenient and memorable image to associate with the word "Acadian". Whether or not they like it (and many don't, as was seen above), the Acadians, both north and south, are Evangeline's people.

The ramifications of the tradition on what I have been calling the "Acadian-Cajun connection" may be understood in a similar way. It is true that the Louisiana branch of the Acadians had participated very little in Acadian affairs even well into the twentieth century, but the march of time would probably have brought the two groups closer together eventually. Evangeline did not create the Acadian-Cajun connection, since such a connection was already a cultural and historical fact. What she did provide was a framework for its blossoming and growth. Her story, her name, her two statues, and the costumed Evangeline girls who traveled back and forth between Canada and Louisiana both created and affirmed ties between the two groups. She facilitated a discourse of affinity, and embodied, in engagingly human form, the symbolic unity of the Acadian and Cajun people.

Today the figure of Evangeline is still felt to represent something essentially Acadian or Cajun, and this symbol is used consciously by both groups in presenting their ethnic identity to outsiders. In both areas, for example, an honorary "Evangeline" and "Gabriel" are still chosen from among the local youth to reign over community and tourist celebrations. And Acadians and Cajun groups, when they travel back and forth, still point to Evangeline as one of the ties that binds them together, though they have been separated by tragedy, distance, and years.

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79. See Martin, 1936, and Brasseaux, 1988.