

Longfellow Makes *Evangeline* Live

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FORT KENT - There is nothing of the stuffy academic in Dr. Layne Longfellow. Instead, the scholar uses music, photos and personal anecdotes to bring to life the works of his famous ancestor. About 200 Fort Kent Community High School students and teachers attended his interactive presentation Thursday morning at the University of Maine. "Here in the St. John Valley is the heart of contemporary Acadian culture in the United States," Longfellow said.

In 2005, Acadians around the globe will mark the 250th anniversary of the deportation of the Acadians by the British. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow is perhaps best known for his epic poem *Evangeline*, a massive work chronicling the 1755 British eviction of the Acadians from Nova Scotia.

The poem tells of two lovers separated by the deportation who, after spending a lifetime searching for one another, reunite when close to death. Few people would know the story of the Acadians, Longfellow said, if not for the poet. "If he simply had written a history, few would have noticed," Longfellow said. "He knew he could win the hearts of people if he wrote about two young lovers."

The epic was an immediate success. Within six weeks, it was

in its ninth printing. Longfellow readily admits that his ancestor took liberties in writing the poem. Five of the most famous words in American literature, "This is the forest primeval", are perfect examples. "There was no forest in Grand Pre [Nova Scotia]," Longfellow said. "But he knew that 'This is the marshland primeval' would not live in memory."

"I really thought he was great," said Misty O'Leary, a senior. "He really showed poetry is relevant today," classmate Kayleigh Cyr agreed. Their teacher, Richard Fortin, said Longfellow did a super job in making a long-dead poet come to life for the students. "What he said today was not only culturally important, it was educationally sound," he said.



Bangor Daily News Photo By Julia Bayly

Further information is at www.longfellowpoetry.com