Henry Longfellow’s first epic poem *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* is a tale well known all throughout Louisiana. Longfellow starts his poem with the imagery of the small farming village of Grand Prè, a small village in Nova Scotia, or modernly known as Canada. During the time period of the beginning of the poem the French and British were at war with each other. French colonies, especially small villages such as Grand Prè that were near the ocean or a port, were overtaken by the British troops. In American History, this war came to be known as the French and Indian war or also known as the Seven Years war. During the war, British troops were able to seize French land in Acadia, and this is where Longfellow’s poem commences.

In Grand Prè, the richest farmer's daughter is Evangeline. “Fair was she to behold, that maiden of seventeen summers. Black were her eyes as the berry that grows on the thorn by the way-side, Black, yet how softly they gleamed beneath the brown shade of her tresses!”(Longfellow). She was so devout in her Catholic faith that it seemed God had graced her with the greatest of all blessings one human could have. Every available young man in the village wanted to be her suitor. “But, among all who came, young Gabriel only was welcome,” for he was Evangeline’s childhood friend and the boy whom she gave her heart (Longfellow). Their betrothal was the union between the farmer’s daughter and the blacksmith’s son. However, after they were engaged the British troops who occupied the waters of the harbor nearby finally made landfall and proclaimed the colonist of Grand Prè “prisoners” (Longfellow). Soon to follow is the relocation of the Acadians as British troops force France’s colonists out of Acadia. Evangeline and Gabriel become separated as they do what they are told and flee from Acadia. Evangeline travels throughout America in search of her beloved Gabriel. There were times when they never knew just how close they were to one another, but in the end Evangeline found her Gabriel. Written in Longfellow’s poem, Gabriel was sick and died in Evangeline’s arms. But in another retelling of the story of the real Evangeline and Gabriel the true ending was in Louisiana under the Evangeline Oak in St. Martinville (“Legend”).

Longfellow gained this tale of Evangeline and her Gabriel from his friend, Nathanial Hawthorne, and Hawthorne’s guest Reverend Horace Conolly over a dinner conversation (“HENRY”). “After Evangeline's publication, Connolly identified his parishioner as Mrs. George Mordaunt Haliburton, a French-Canadian woman who told the tale from Acadian oral tradition,” (“Stories”). The epic poem of Evangeline is based on historical fiction. Events in the poem come from historical events; however the characters of the poem are fictional. There are some traces that say otherwise about Evangeline and Gabriel being fictional though. In one story that has circulated around southern Louisiana, Evangeline (or Emmeline) and Gabriel (or Louis) were real and did find each other in St. Martinville (“Legend”). Though, the ending to the so called real story is not what most would expect. Judge Felix Voorhies wrote in his story, called *Acadian Reminiscences: The True Story of Evangeline*, that once the couple found each other under the oak, Gabriel told Evangeline that he moved on and married someone else because he never knew what had happen to her. Evangeline became overwhelmed with sorrow that she died after losing her mind (“HENRY”). Another alternate ending is that Evangeline would wait under her oak for Gabriel every day from dawn until dusk, but died waiting, never seeing him after leaving Grand Prè.

Whether Longfellow knew if his characters were real or fictional, he ended up making Evangeline an icon in Louisiana. . “[Longfellow’s poem] has been made into two films, one in 1922 and the second, starring popular silent film actress Dolores Del Rio, in 1929,”(“HENERY”). Even Voorhies, who made the most of his story off of Longfellow, made Evangeline a large part of Louisiana culture and history also (“HENRY”). There is a statue in St. Martinville, Louisiana, of Evangeline that was donated by Rio and said to be the resting place for Emmeline. Evangeline’s oak still stands where people can pass by or walk underneath its shady branches. It is said in lore that sometimes the spirit of Evangeline is by the oak and heard crying when the wind blows. This statue and the legend of her oak are due to Voorhies alternate ending and a little to the passed down changes to Voorhies’s ending. A parish was even named after the girl who waited and searched for her love. William S. Hays wrote a song about Evangeline and a musical play was performed in 2000 for public television honoring both Longfellow’s poem and Voorhies ending.

Remaining in Canada, Grand Prè resurrected after the war and created a memorial for Evangeline. A statue of her stands in front of the Grand Prè church. It is a reminder of the Great Upheaval, relocation of the Acadian people, and all that Acadians went through. Whoever Evangeline was, she became a historic symbol of what happened to the Acadians when they were forced out of their homes and chose to continue life in Louisiana and essentially America.



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Picture was taken from Wikipedia with given permission to public domain. And there are Youtube videos of the Evangeline The Musical. I was given permission to use those by the director and creator of the musical. Here are the links:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMIcpSLixN4&feature=relmfu>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIZiIvuzexQ&feature=relmfu>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHi7Y1t83Pk&feature=related>