

Acadian Legacy

From “Evangeline” to Cajun Culture

Course #	20SAC
Format:	Seminar
Moderator(s):	David and Miriam Whitney
Date and Time:	Wednesday, 9:30-11:30 9 weeks, starting Feb. 26, 2020
Location:	UMass/ 5 College Credit Union, Hadley
Maximum number of participants:	17
Auditors accepted:	Yes, up to 2

Purpose: This seminar will explore the tragic English expulsion of French-speaking Acadians from Nova Scotia in 1755 and their resettlement 30 years later in the swamps and plains of Louisiana, where this agrarian people carved out a rich, enduring ethnic heritage.

Description: We will begin by reading and discussing Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1847 epic poem "Evangeline," which romanticized the brutality of the Acadians' plight but also brought it to the world's attention. On the eve of their marriage, Gabriel and Evangeline are separated as they were forced onto different ships during what some have described as an early instance of ethnic cleansing. After a lifetime of searching for each other, they finally are reunited at Gabriel's deathbed. Heartbreaking. . . but is this what happened?

We will explore this question through a multidisciplinary study of the culture that has become known as "Cajun." We will look more closely at the history of the people and how they eventually came to Louisiana, settling into a largely unforgiving land and firmly establishing a unique way of life rich in oral and folk traditions, family, music, and, of course, food. At our final session, we will learn about and enjoy sampling flavorful Cajun cuisine.

Role of participants: Everyone reads the epic poem, novel, and 3 short stories. Then each participant either (1) leads a literature discussion, OR (2) presents information and leads discussion on a moderator-identified topic (e.g., history, economy, architecture, language, oral traditions, music, art, folk medicine, food).

Resources: Required reading:

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline* (epic poem).

Ernest Gaines, *A Gathering of Old Men* (novel).

Kate Chopin, *A Very Fine Fiddle* and *A Gentleman from Bayou Teche* (short stories).

Tim Gautreaux, *Welding with Children* (short story).

Books available from the library (few copies) and local and on-line booksellers; all short stories also on-line. Other resources available from moderators.

About the Moderators: Our interest in Cajun culture was piqued initially by fictional Dave Robicheaux of Jame Lee Burke's Louisiana crime novel fame, and Robicheaux's hometown of New Iberia, Louisiana. We explored this Cajun country on several trips, developing an appreciation of its people's unique background, culture and environment, including music and food. We each have enjoyed a number of LIR seminars over the last 8 years, with Miriam co-moderating one.