

Introduction to Dr. Henry Roper, Guest Speaker at the Heritage Banquet February 20th, 2010

Windsor, of course, is not the home of Sam Slick, road signs notwithstanding, anymore than the Valley is the Land of Evangeline. Sam Slick and Evangeline are the fictional creations of two authors, Thomas Chandler Haliburton (1796-1865) and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), both writing in the middle of the 19th century, albeit with different sensibilities and interests. Windsor, however, is the home of Haliburton.

Longfellow's romantic and imaginative telling of the story of the expulsion of the Acadians from these lands, which he never visited, may or may not be to our modern tastes and liking, but it is part of our legacy. His poem, *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (1847), has left an indelible mark upon the sense of our history and our sense of the landscape, however awkward the descendants of the displacers, whether they were Planters or Loyalists, might feel about those whom they displaced. But, then, the Maritime and Canadian story is the story of displaced peoples.

It is, perhaps, nice to think of this area as once being "the forest primeval" with "murmuring pines and hemlocks" as well as recalling the remarkable enterprises of the Acadian settlers whose "hands ... had raised with labour incessant", the "dikes" that continue to define the land, "the happy valley" that Blomidon overlooks, as Longfellow imagined. The land he evokes is a kind of Arcadia, an ancient image of the harmony of man and nature imaginatively realised in the idyllic Acadian culture he describes but which, after the "grand dérangement", remains only as a memory, a story told "by the evening fire" by the remnants of the Acadians, and by Longfellow for us in his poem.

Longfellow got his story from another American author, Nathaniel Hawthorne, but he drew on Haliburton's remarkable 1829 *History of Nova Scotia, An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia*, for a sense of the land and for some of the political background.

There may be features of the personality and perspective of Thomas Chandler Haliburton that are not to our liking and that even disquiet and disturb us greatly. A lawyer, judge and statesman who played an important role in the establishment of responsible government in Nova Scotia, an historian and a novelist of popular note, especially in England, he was not without his faults. Not altogether unlike Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), perhaps. Jefferson was the third President of the United States of America, and the main architect of the American Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. A strong proponent of the rights of man against all forms of tyranny, he yet had slaves and fathered children through them, namely, the Hemingses of Monticello. There are the contradictions of character in Haliburton, too,

with respect to the black people, free and slave, who were part of the post-Acadian settlements in these parts. It is simply part of the story.

The West Hants Historical Society is committed to the preservation, presentation and promotion of the rich heritage of our area in all of its moments and in connection with the larger features of Maritime and Canadian history. It is very much a work in progress.

It is my great pleasure to introduce and welcome to Windsor our guest speaker, Dr. Henry Roper. A graduate of Dalhousie University, Duke University and Cambridge University, he has taught for many years at the University of King's College where I had the privilege of working with him and learning from him. He is a retired professor of humanities at the University of King's College, Halifax, where he also served as vice-president, registrar and director of the King's Foundation Year Programme. In 2009 King's awarded him an honorary doctorate of canon law.

Dr. Roper has written numerous articles on the intellectual and religious history of Nova Scotia and is the co-editor of *The Collected Works of George Grant*, Vols. 3 and 4 (University of Toronto Press, 2005 and 2009). A scholar and a friend, he is also the President of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society. He has spoken on another occasion in Windsor, at Christ Church, about the Tory Colonialism of Thomas Chandler Haliburton. Tonight he will speak on *Haliburton: Complexities and Contradictions*.

(Rev'd) David Curry
President of the West Hants Historical Society