

# Francophiles Find No Contentment

## House Poem Upsets Group

By MEG DENNISON  
The Associated Press

**MONTPELIER** — A poem written in dialect and read on the House floor has upset a group because it portrays the Franco-American in Vermont as a "dumb Frog."

Solange Beaucage, president of La Societe des Deux Mondes, said the poem is a slur on the 37 percent of Vermonters of French descent.

In the poem, former Rep. Keith Wallace says goodbye to legislators through the voice of Batiste, a character created by Danial Trombly of Isle La Motte in the early part of the century.

Batiste is a caricature of an uneducated French-speaker who can't spell well or speak proper English.

Wallace, who was a lawmaker for 10 years before being defeated in the last election, meant his poem "Contentment" to be a comical farewell to the Legislature.

But to Beaucage and members of her society, it touched a sore spot.

"The character of 'Batiste' is, sadly enough, not new to New England literature or humor. He symbolizes the all-too-easily-accepted stereotype of the Franco-American as an uneducated bumpkin — a 'dumb Frog,'" Beaucage said in a letter asking legislators to remove the entry from the House Journal.

Legislators entered the letter in the journal last week, but did not remove Wallace's poem, which was delivered last month.

Beaucage said negative images of Franco-Americans thwart the efforts of groups, such as La Societe des Deux Mondes, to promote knowledge of French culture and history in Vermont.

"This type of Batiste may have existed in the 1920s, but it's been long gone from our society. Nobody talks that way anymore," she said.

This is the first time La Societe has formally objected to the dialect poems, she said, adding that the Legislature is not the place for affronts to Vermonters.

"I should think that intelligent people like they are should find something else to entertain themselves with," Beaucage said.

Wallace picked up the style of Trombly's work several years ago, writing his own verses and recording readings of the originals for friends.

In the poem in question, Wallace addresses the Legislature's current issues and his ostensible happiness at not being there.

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**Solange Beaucage**  
president, La Societe  
des Deux Mondes

"Batiste, he set inside, feet atop the fire.

Crossover, she come an go, nice to be retire ...

No wury bout heducachun aid nor foundation plan.

Don never shed a tear wen surplus tax money hit the fan ..."

Wallace, a Waterbury Republican who claims French blood "a ways back," said most people enjoy the poems. "Most of them take it in the spirit that it's given — in good fun."

Rep. Paul Poirier, D-Barre, said his parents — French Canadians — were visiting the Legislature when Wallace read the poem. They were not offended, and neither was he, Poirier said.

"I'm French Canadian," he said. "I'm proud of it. But I never took it personally."

However, Poirier said he entered Beaucage's letter in the journal because "I think members should be aware that some people were very upset about it."

Trombly's original pieces, which he sold in pamphlets to ferry passengers crossing Lake Champlain, detail the adventures of Batiste and poke fun at the Legislature.

"It's just fun," Wallace said. "A number of writers have taken it up, and it's always been enjoyed by French people themselves."

Barney Bloom, assistant librarian at the Vermont Historical Society library, said dialect writings are common, but invariably raise questions of bigotry.

Bloom contends that words and jokes poking fun at an ethnic group are acceptable as long as only the group uses them.

# French-canadiens mocked in VT legislature

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