American Acadian in France Discovers What It Is To Be Acadian

Jennings, La. — An American Acadian in France discovers what it is to be an Acadian and writes home about it.

David Marcantel, son of District Attorney and Mrs. David N. Marcantel, Jennings, a May, 1971 honor graduate in biology of the University of Southwestern Louisiana, now living in Sete, France and teaching English conversation and American culture to students in a junior and senior high school, says, "To all us who have lived in southwest Louisiana, Acadiana, the words 'Acadian' and 'Evangeline' are very familiar. They are so familiar, in fact, that we tend to give little thought to what it means to be Acadian.

Young Marcantel is in France on a French government assistantship taking part in an exchange program in which French students come to the United States to teach in American schools and Americans teach in French schools.

This is Marcantel's second opportunity to live and work in France. In July and August of 1969 he worked at the world-famed Jacques Cousteau Institute of Oceangothique in Monaco doing microbiological research on coastline pollution in the Mediterranean Sea and at the same time improving his French. Winner of a Graduate Fellowship from the Rotary Foundation of Rotary International for the 1972-73 academic year, he will seek admission to Laval University in Quebec, Canada University in the Fall. In March of this year he plans to enroll at the University of Montpellier in France.

Marcantel's further comments about Acadians whom, he points out, are found all over the world follows: "It is only when one travels that one realizes that Acadians are found not only in Louisiana but in Canada, France, South America, Africa, indeed all over the world. I had visited the Acadian regions of Canada so I had some idea of the existence of the international Acadian world. But it was when I met Acadians here in Sete in southern France on the Mediterranean Sea that I realized that the Acadians are truly a people, a people with a common origin who have remained Acadian throughout the centuries though separated by thousands of miles.

"These Acadians whom I met here in France are descendants of the Acadians who returned to France after the expulsion of the French from Nova Scotia (Acadia) by the English in 1756. For these hundreds of years they have kept their identity much as the Louisiana Acadians have kept theirs. Several whom I met have traveled to Louisiana and Canada to visit the Acadians who remained in America.

"The common link among all the Acadians is the French language. If the language is lost, all is lost. That is why the Louisiana Acadians have maintained their language against terrific odds since they arrived in New Orleans over 200 years ago.

"But today this precious bilingual culture can no longer be maintained without the help of the schools. Recognizing this fact the state passed laws several years ago authorizing the institution of French instruction in Louisiana primary schools. The French government has made available highly qualified French teachers at very low cost to the school boards so that there is no shortage of available teachers. Many parishes have already begun French in the elementary schools with excellent results. It seems tragic that some parishes with large Acadian populations are still offering no French instruction below the high school level. There are even some high schools in south Louisiana with no French programs. This means that the children of these parishes are being denied the educational benefits enjoyed by the children in neighboring parishes. And since most Acadians are Catholic, it seems strange that the Catholic schools have been so slow to implement French elementary school programs.

"The advantages of bilingualism-biculturalism are obvious and legion. French is the language of over thirty nations, and a bilingual person enjoys cultural links with the entire English and French world. We who enjoy this precious bilingual heritage must never let it die."

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