French Exchange Teachers Find New Home In Louisiana

Can a young man from France come to Louisiana and find true happiness? Even North Louisiana?

He most certainly can, and has. In fact, many of them have. They’re among the 30 teachers who came from France last September to teach French in elementary and high schools. They fanned out all over the state, from the southernmost areas of Vermilion to the farthest reaches of Union Parish. And judging from their own reports, they never had it so good.

Les professeurs de la langue Francaise have been taken into the hearts and homes of all Louisianans, both Cajun and redneck. They wax enthusiastic over the hospitality accorded them, the eager beaver attitude of their students, the overall cooperation of the entire community in which they work, the townsmen, the school officials, their fellow teachers. In Evangeline Parish, the superintendent says that the children actually look forward to their daily French lessons! Mais dit donc! If such an eager approach to school could be extended to all classes, our educational problems would be practically over.

Of course, the sponsoring agencies were optimistic all along that the teacher exchange program would work. The swap was arranged by the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, the government of France, the State Department of Education and the various parish school boards. CODOFIL particularly has striven mightily to rejuvenate the French language in Louisiana, to reestablish that pride of heritage that familiarity with the mother tongue brings, to cause a bilingual renascence that could conceivably spread throughout the nation with Acadiana as the springboard.

The teachers will be here only two years, the length of time required to fulfill their national services program (an exchange for serving in the French armed forces). After that, they will be replaced by others. Many school boards, in addition to the ones now participating, are requesting teachers for their system next year. It is paradoxical that Lafayette Parish, the heart of Acadiana, the headquarters of CODOFIL, is without French exchange teachers. A school board committee this week recommended that French school teachers be hired and hopefully there will be a follow-through, with classes instituted at the earliest possible date.

The teachers themselves feel they are making a worthwhile contribution not only in teaching the language but in the exchange of cultural ideas. Meanwhile, back at the schoolhouse in France, our Louisiana teachers are imparting the rudiments of the English language to their little Frenchmen. What better way to bring to pass true international cooperation and at the same time keep alive what always has been the truest and best of Louisiana culture?