Greatest Contribution of French to Nation

NEW ORLEANS (UPI) — The United States, which paid less than three pence per acre for the Louisiana Territory, utilized an incredible billions in land and other resources.

For the Louisiana Purchase, negotiated when Thomas Jefferson was secretary of state, the United States and Napoleon Bonaparte was ruler of France, added up to the greatest single contribution of the French to this nation.

The nation doubled its territory when the purchase went through in 1803.

What it got for the $15 million invested eventually ran the bill to $27,267 million, Peter Minuit's $64 purchase of Manhattan Island from the Indians, the price of tea to Classville.

The French contributions from colonial times to the twentieth century are immeasurable. But their ways of doing it differed from almost any other national group, say the English-Scottish-Irish, Germans, Italians and Scandinavians.

What it boiled down to in the case of the French was a matter of either of Americans going to France to study, to absorb their culture, from bringing it home, or the French came here for specific reasons.

When the French came here for specific reasons, they were not driven from their home, the Indians, the tour of exploration, and the greatest degree of misery to each of the population II.

Of the eight national groups, or as with other groups who came to stay, the French - with few exceptions - did not. Unlike other ethnic and national groups, they were not driven from their homeland by religious or political persecution, or both. Two exceptions were the Acadians and the Huguenots, a small portion of all migration - and more about them later.

Theirs was not intended melding of what made America. To this day, the French or those of French ancestry make up a small portion of the U.S. population.

As George Gudefin, an International businessman, put it, "There has been no special reason to leave France... no famine, no persecution."

Gudefin, a Frenchman living in New York, holder of the Legion of Honor, is president of Guerlain Perfumes and is active in the French-American Chamber of Commerce.

The U. S. Census Bureau estimates population of eight national groups in the United States today, based on 1972 sampling.

The French are way down on the list. The sampling showed 5.4 million French ancestry, or about 2.8 per cent of our total population of nearly 220 million.

Unlike the Polish and Russian groups, the French are the lowest. In fact, the French-speaking population is lower - 2.5 and 1.1 per cent respectively.

In contrast, there an estimated 20.5 million of English-Southern-Welsh descent, the highest number at 14.4 per cent. They are followed by the Germans with 25.5 million or 12.5 per cent.

But small numbers don't diminish the contributions to America's society, whether the United States went to France or the French came to America.

The French have helped shape every facet of our way of life. They've influenced our literature, the arts, architecture, food, language, fashion, law - the Napoleonic code, a liberalization of civil law, entertainment from opera and symphony to the can-can and Folies Bergere.

"It is in the fields of manners, fashions and cooking that the French have exercised their greatest influence on American culture," writes Carl Wittke, historian, in "We Who Built America; the Saga of the Immigrant."

This influence was apparent as early as 1800, as a part of the progressive French Revolution," Wittke continues.

"French dancing, language and fencing schools, dishes, customs, dress, books and music immediately became fashionable. Inns and taverns were renamed hotels and ordinary American cooks and bakers became restaurateurs who ran French ads in American newspapers.

"Philadelphia had a circulating library of 1,260 volumes in French and French newspapers appeared in leading cities. But it was not culture so much as the great real estate bargain this country got with the purchase of Louisiana that's the issue."

Out of this original $15 million empire, ultimately the nation carved in its entire states of Louisiana named for Louis XIV, Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. In addition, the area included most of the land in Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana and Minnesota.