Louisianians attend Acadian fest in France

Lafayette Mayor Kenneth Bowen, who heads the statewide International Municipal Bilingualism Commission (IMBC), and St. Landry Parish State Representative Steve Dupuis, representing Governor Edwin Edwards lead a large delegation of Louisiana which left Thursday, June 28 for a worldwide Acadian observance in Poitou province, France.

Accompanying the mission will be a band from Rayne and a group of Louisiana Acadian musicians scheduled to go on national television in France on arrival in Paris.

The occasion is the 200th anniversary of the arrival in Poitou of Acadians expelled from Nova Scotia who were exiled in England where many were imprisoned for about ten years. Other victims of the expulsion landed in Louisiana and other areas of the world and the bicentennial in the Loire Valley will be a sentimental reunion of Cajun cousins from throughout the globe.

A week in Poitou and a week in Paris and other points of interest are on the schedule with the bicentennial celebration rivaling Louisiana's observance of the festival season. A reception for the Louisianians was held Sunday, July 1, followed by a tour of the city of Poitiers.

Monday, July 2 witnessed the opening of the Acadian Exposition of ChateUerault followed by an official reception.

A tour of ChateUerault took place after lunch, and on Tuesday, morning, July 2 a series of round table discussions was held on cultural affairs in Louisiana. Dupuis, Vermilion State representative Warren Simon and Lennie Savoy, longtime assessor of St. Landry Parish who retired after 36 years took part in the French language seminars.

Dupuis made 25 of the Frenchmen honorary colonels on the staff of Governor Edwards and presented souvenirs from the Louisiana executive. Ancestors of Dupuis and Savoy came to Louisiana on the same ship from France and while in the area the two men will do some research.

Tours of the area where the Acadians settled upon their return to Poitou are also on the July 3 schedule, and that evening there was a reception for the Acadian delegation attending from Canada.

After a reception on Wednesday, July 4 in Poitiers there were opening ceremonies of the ‘Ligne Acadienne’, the route along which are situated the lands given the Acadians by King Louis XV. A commemoration was set at Archigny-La Puye. Other activities include a provincial buffet and folkloric program.

A university conference on the state of the French language, a visit to the university and an economic conference organized by the Jeune Chambre Economic of Poitiers were slated Thursday, July 5. The final session will be held Friday, July 6 with a university conference, a tour and reception at the cultural center of Chuvigny and a closing banquet in the salon of the hotel Relais de Poitiers.

France's King Louis XV negotiated the release of the Acadians from England and helped settle some of them in their native country, although others joined relatives in Louisiana.

Over 40 Louisiana public officials, civic leaders and their families will be on the mission as well as 68 members of the Rayne High band. The Acadian musical group is made up of fiddlers, accordionist and guitarist and one vocalist including Rufus Thibodoux, Isaac Miller, Jr., Bessy Duhon and Austin Broussard.

Among some of the other participants in the mission will be Mayor Ralph Stutes of Rayne and Charles Roemer, the Louisiana commissioner of administration. Former state senator Sam Broussard of New Iberia will be in the delegation.

Governor Edwards set up the statewide IMBC in order to involve municipalities in the French movement and named Bowen as chairman.