Reclaiming Heritage Is Aim
La-Canada Project in Full Swing
By EDGAR POE and JARED STOUT
JONQUIERE, Canada

Here in the rugged northern reaches of Quebec province, a band of Louisiana students is working to reclaim their heritage. It is a cultural drive that may make French a proud second language for their native state.

The drive also is an experiment in ethnic pride that has federal experts watching with interest. Hopefully it will yield new clues to the importance of the past as an aid to future progress of American minority groups.

Here at Jonquiere College, 145 miles north of Quebec City, the work involves 60 students, French-speaking descendants of 18,000 Acadians exiled from English Canada in 1755. They are learning the hidden history behind their forebears brought from France.

The group came here because, since the United States Civil War, the cultural legacy of French makes such visitors Pie.

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But Dyess stressed employment opportunities in the state's oil and fishing industries, two of which are Acadian, and the increasing use of French throughout the state can mean further increases in members think a culture will be lost unless the council acts.

The focus of this effort is former member of the House in Washington and inventor of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana. He, a nearly third of the state's population, can speak, but not read or write French.

It was Demengeaux who marshaled legislative support for the formation of the council. It is a state-supported agency with a budget of nearly $250,000 for the school year.

The program at Jonquiere follows, but one of the council's undertakings. It is also sponsoring travel of 66 other families this summer, and has sent more than 70 teachers of French throughout the Island of Louisiana for study in French culture.

Courses Planned

This fall with the help of federal funds, the council and the state education department will undertake French courses in two of 21 parishes of Acadia.

The aim is to make education bilingual, beginning in kindergarten and grades one and two. In the long term, Demengeaux has said, the aim is bilingualism throughout the Acadian areas and, perhaps across the rest of the state into the northern areas, where the traditions are more English-Saxon, again building on the idea that "A people noted historically for their generosity and intelligence, Demengeaux and his friends believe it is time to restore their culture to its rightful place, eliminating discrimination against Acadians and restoring their pride.

Education specialist Dyess said the effort may have come just in time. Already, in many children in Acadian homes have begun to lose touch with the language of spoken French, most of which was learned from bilingual parents.

He and council members acknowledge that such practices as writing, "I will not speak French in school" on the blackboard 30 times, had become all too common, until the council began its work. Council staff member France Lamy said, "We have not installed these things, but they persist.

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Although the cultural effort is only two years old, there are signs it is paying off with pride. Shame felt by many French-speaking Louisianians, who over the years have been called " Cajuns," " Boulangers," and other nicknames too foul to print, is fading.

New Bywords

More and more, the bywords are "Be proud. Be civic. Speak French." In increasing numbers, "Cajuns" are warming to the signboard slogan near the

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JANUS DEMENGEAUX LEADER OF MOVEMENT

A l'Hôtel de ville, Américains et Belges
bourgeois du ministère des Affaires Etrangères

A photo by The Times-Picayune

Lafayette, La., headquarters of second language is an advantage instead of a mark of inferiority.

Calling it a language specialist at the education department in Baton Rouge, shares Demengeaux's optimism about the long-term results of the bilingual effort. In a telephone interview recently, he said he was pleasantly surprised and very encouraged about the future.

Good Response

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For the development of French in Louisiana, descendents of Acadians are made aware of their ties to France and French-speaking Canada.

A photo by The Times-Picayune

Le COURRIER DE L'EST

Angers
28 juillet 1971