CANADIANS VISIT CITY - Two students of the University of Montreal, Gaston Menard, left, and Bernard Lapointe, arrived in Lafayette this week to get a glimpse of Acadian culture firsthand, and to have the thrill of speaking their native language while about 2,000 miles from home. They said they are in the first wave of students traveling here on their semester breaks, and they expect more to follow. (Advertiser Photo). FROM CANADA P.2 c.7

Student Invasion Expected Locally

By JOAN TREADWAY Staff Reporter

Two French Canadian students visiting Acadian Louisiana on their college semester holiday say they are the avant garde (in the literal sense) of a whole invasion of students traveling down to observe Southwest Louisiana French culture firsthand.

The two are Bernard Lapointe of Montreal and Gaston Menard of Longueuil, a suburb to the east of Montreal, according to an agreement between the respective mayors made last year. "We studied this culture in history," Gaston remarked, "but we didn't know it was still living!"

The youth's first clue to current Acadian life was in a Canadian newspaper article; they decided to follow through on this lead in person.

"We don't have the feeling that we're lost, but that everybody knows us," Bernard said. "It's magnificent to find so many people speaking French," Gaston said. He added that he even found his last name on a restaurant and stopped to eat there.

Stop For French

The students saw St. Martinville, Evangeline Park and the cypress swamps before arriving in Lafayette. "We've been stopping at every French sign," Gaston said, "and we think the other students touring this area, about 50 carloads of them, are doing the same thing; sometimes we meet." Bernard said, "The first thing we did when we got to Lafayette was to tour the university. We thought possibly that they taught in French. We did find several people there to speak to us in French - including an English professor."

Though both students understand and speak English, they find it a thrill to hear their own language spoken about 2,000 miles from Canada, among a nation of English-speaking people. Their only complaint is that there are not more people willing to speak to them in French. Bagel said they were trying to organize student exchange programs between USL and Montreal University students. They hope to see Mayor J. Rayburn Bertrand about this while they are here. Just a brief trip is helping both youths with their studies, they said. Bernard is studying physical geography and Gaston marketing psychology. Semester breaks are one of the few opportunities Canadian students have to travel here, as long as no exchange programs exist. During their summer vacation, they regularly go home. Another phase of living in Lafayette they praised was the weather. Though it is one of the coldest times of the year to local residents, the students find it wonderful. "It was 20 degrees below zero when we left Canada," Gaston said. "It was one of the reasons we left."

Bernard added, "It was one of the reasons we left."