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**LOUISIANA PURCHASE HONORED WITH POSTAGE STAMP ON
BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION**

NEW ORLEANS – Often referred to as the greatest real estate deal in history, the 1803 Louisiana Purchase created one of the largest nations in the world. The United States Postal Service today commemorated the bicentennial of this event by issuing a new commemorative postage stamp. The dedication ceremony took place at the Cabildo of the Louisiana State Museum in New Orleans.

The Louisiana Purchase stamp is available today in post offices in the New Orleans area and in post offices nationwide beginning tomorrow.

“The Louisiana Purchase was a critical milestone in our nation’s history, allowing our young nation to double in size with the stroke of a pen. We join the people of Louisiana—and the twelve other states that today include parts of that famous purchase—in celebrating this bicentennial anniversary with the issuance of the Louisiana Purchase stamp,” said Richard J. Strasser, Jr., chief financial officer and executive vice president for the U.S. Postal Service and the stamp dedicating official.

Kicking off the event was the presentation of colors by the 1803 U.S. Militia, Louisiana Office of State Parks; followed by postal employee Freddie Narcisse who sang the National Anthem.

Joining Strasser were Jim Sefcik, director, Louisiana State Museums, who welcomed the enthusiastic and overflow crowd to the dedication ceremony; Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, Lieutenant Governor, State of Louisiana, who gave remarks and presented a proclamation; and Norman Robinson, NBC anchor, who served as master of ceremonies.

France had originally claimed Louisiana, a vast tract of unchartered wilderness west of the Mississippi, but ceded it to Spain in 1762, prior to the 1763 Treaty of Paris. On Oct. 1, 1800, Spain secretly transferred the land back to France.



President Thomas Jefferson learned of the transfer in 1801. Jefferson dispatched James Monroe to France with an appropriation from Congress to buy New Orleans, as well as eastern and western Florida, if possible.

When U.S. Minister to France, Robert R. Livingston, learned Napoleon was willing to sell the entire territory of Louisiana to the U.S. he and Monroe quickly began formal negotiations with Françoise Barbé-Marbois, France's minister of finance. They agreed upon a price of \$15 million, and in early May they signed a treaty to seal the transaction. The treaty was dated April 30, 1803.

On Dec. 20, 1803, the United States took possession of its new territory at a ceremony in New Orleans. Dutch and British bankers financed the purchase at six percent interest for 20 years. When final payment was made, the total cost for doubling the size of the country came to \$23.5 million—about four cents an acre.

Background of the composite stamp art consists of a map of the United States overlaid with a facsimile of the first page of the English translation of the treaty. In the foreground is a painting by Garin Baker that depicts the signing of the treaty.

Stamp artist Garin Baker, is a native of New York City, a freelance artist, muralist and illustrator. His art—from New York cityscapes to rural landscapes reminiscent of the Hudson River School—has been exhibited widely and honored by the Society of Illustrators and the Art Directors Club.

To see the new Louisiana Purchase stamp, visit the Postal Service Web site at www.usps.com/communications/news/stamps/welcome.htm, and open the press release announcing the stamp.

Current U.S. stamps, as well as a free comprehensive catalog, are available toll free by calling 1 800 STAMP-24. In addition, a selection of stamps and other philatelic items are available at the Postal Store at www.usps.com/shop.

Since 1775, the U.S. Postal Service has connected friends, families, neighbors and businesses by mail. It is an independent federal agency that visits 140 million homes and businesses every day and is the only service provider to deliver to every address in the nation. The Postal Service receives no taxpayer dollars for routine operations, but derives its operating revenues solely from the sale of postage, products and services. With annual revenues of more than \$66 billion, it is the world's leading provider of mail and delivery services, offering some of the most affordable postage rates in the world. The Postal Service delivers more than 43 percent of the world's mail volume—some 203 billion letters, advertisements, periodicals and packages a year—and serves 7 million customers each day at its 38,000 retail locations nationwide.

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