

Decoding the Past

Louisiana Purchase Exhibit (History & Activity)

We are excited for your visit to Louisiana's Old State Capitol! The following activity can be printed out and completed in preparation for your school's field trip to our museum.

It can be carried out as an individual or group/classroom activity to complement our *Bought for A Song: A Young Nation Expands* exhibition.

Questions for students to keep in mind while reading:

1. What is a primary source, what is mentioned in this activity that is a primary source?
2. Who was Thomas Jefferson, why is he important to national and state history?
3. What is a cypher and what is a cypher answer key?
4. Why might someone use a cypher when writing a message?
5. What was an unexpected surprise about the Louisiana Purchase?



Social Studies Standards focused on in this handout:

3.6. Identify and describe national historical figures, celebrations, and symbols.

a. Describe the achievements of Thomas Jefferson.

3.7 Describe the significance of major events in the history of the United States, including the Louisiana Purchase.

7.7 Construct and express claims that are supported with relevant evidence from primary and/or secondary sources, social studies content knowledge, and clear reasoning and explanations to:

a. Demonstrate an understanding of social studies content.

7.8 Analyze the influence of key events, ideas, and people on the economic, political, and social development of the United States from 1791–1850s.

h. Analyze the major events of Thomas Jefferson's presidency, including the Louisiana Purchase.

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Thomas Jefferson was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence; he was also the third president of the newly formed United States of America. While in office as president, Jefferson recognized the importance of the Port of New Orleans to the young nation as a strategic trade and defense location. He authorized two men, Robert Livingston and James Monroe, to sail to France and purchase the Port of New Orleans from The First Consul of France, Napoleon Bonaparte.

Much to the surprise of Livingston and Monroe, Bonaparte offered to sell not just the Port of New Orleans but the entire Louisiana Territory in order to finance France's military action against Saint-Domingue (present day, Haiti) and Britain. With the completion of the Louisiana Purchase Treaty, the land comprising the contiguous United States was roughly doubled in size.

Today, historians and archivist enjoy access to primary sources in the form of original documents from the time period. For a limited time, at the Old State Capitol Museum, you can see one of these original artifacts on display.

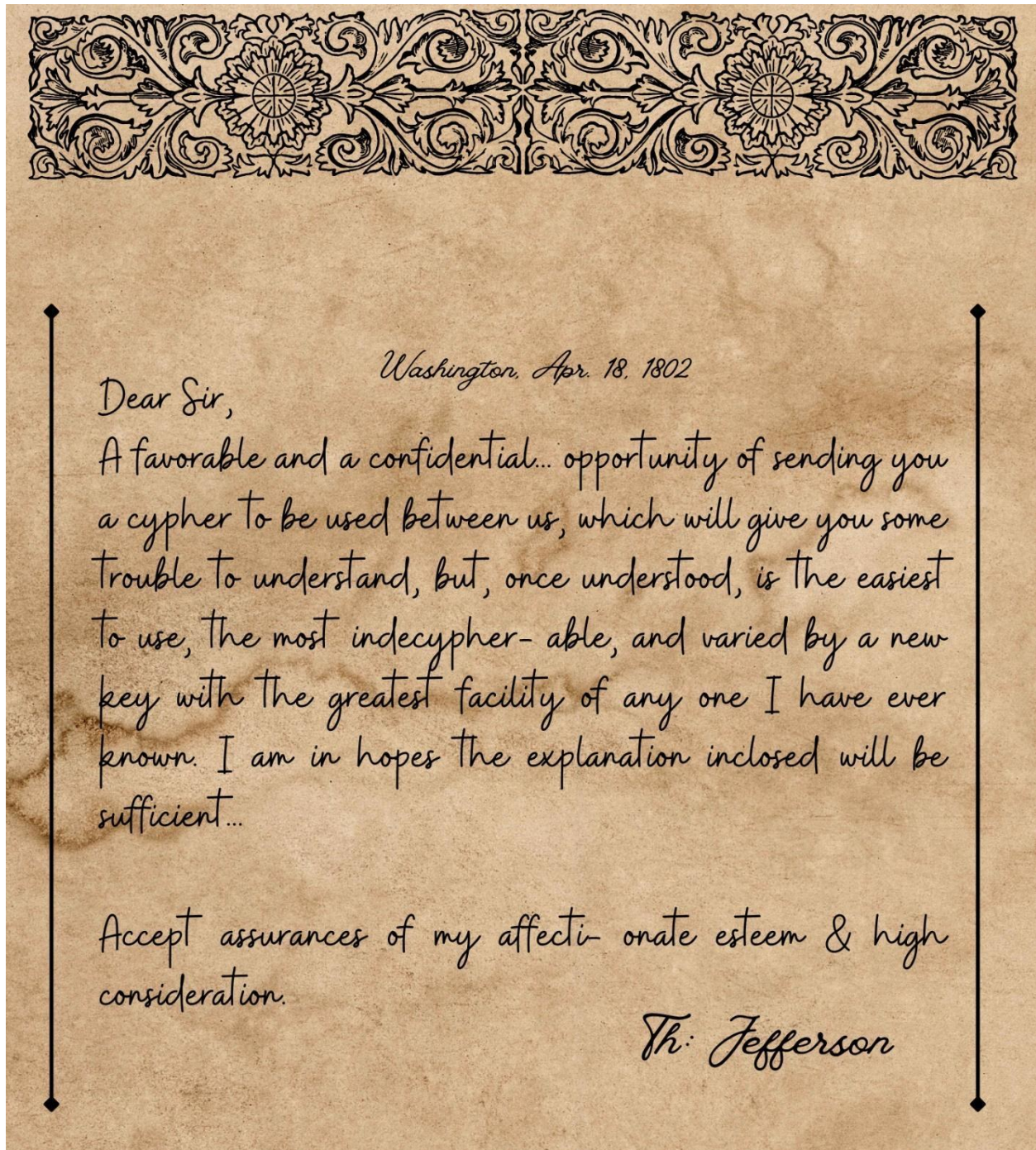


Photo by National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

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Often times important messages were encoded so if they fell into the wrong hands their content would not be known to the reader. Thomas Jefferson often used cyphers in his correspondence. He is credited with coming up with the Jefferson Wheel Cypher. Below is an excerpt from a letter he sent to Robert Livingston explaining the importance and use of a cypher to decipher his message.



Old State Capitol educational rendition, not an image of the actual original artifact

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There have been many types of cyphers (commonly spelled “cipher”) used throughout history. Though Jefferson is credited with creating the Jefferson Wheel Cypher, he most commonly used a mix between the classic substitution Caesar Cypher, which shifts letters in the alphabet by a fixed number (e.g., 3 would change A=C, and B=D) and Monoalphabetic Cyphers, where each letter of the alphabet is replaced with a consistent yet random substitute.

Activity: Try your hand at decoding the cypher!

**SEE IF YOU CAN DECIPHER
THE HIDDEN MESSAGE:**

3sy 1mpp oii er svmkmrep evxmjegp jvsq adcb,
xli Jvirgl gst3 sj xli Psymwmere Tyvglewi Xvilx3!

CYPHER KEY

A=1	B=3	C=0	D=8	E=A	F=B	G=C	H=D	I=E	J=F
K=G	L=H	M=I	N=J	O=K	P=L	Q=M	R=N	S=O	T=P
U=Q	V=R	W=S	X=T	Y=U	Z=V	1=W	8=X	3=Y	0=Z

DECIPHERED MESSAGE:

If you enjoyed this activity, please also check out the Historic New Orleans Collection’s (HNOC) lesson plan:

<https://hnoc.org/lesson-plans/louisiana-purchase>