

the Louisiana Purchase

Life in the Louisiana Territory

Third
of a
Four
Part Series

In the Louisiana Purchase of April 1803, the United States bought a huge piece of land west of the Mississippi River, doubling the young country's size. More than just a political deal, the Louisiana Purchase suddenly changed the lives of all sorts of people.

Take a moment to think about what you do on a typical day in your life. What kinds of things do you and your family do? Where do you go to school? What do you do for fun? Now, imagine that you attend school only three months a year. At school, your seat is a wooden block and you eat the same thing for lunch every day. Imagine that your family has a farm, on which you are expected to work every day. Also, imagine that your friends live far away from you. You only see them at school or on special occasions. Is this life different from yours? Most children living in the Louisiana Territory lived lives such as this.



Before the Louisiana Purchase, there weren't many schools in the Territory. Only **wealthy** families could afford education for their children. Many people did not know how to read, and owning a book was a big deal to many families. If families did own a book, it was usually a Bible.

After the Purchase, people began to build more schools. Schools were usually one-room log cabins with dirt floors. Students sat on uncomfortable log benches. Also, teachers were very young. Sometimes they were only a few months older than their students! Classes only met for a few months because children were needed to work in the home. Children had a lot of **responsibilities** during this time. Many helped their families farm. They would

help **harvest** crops, such as corn. They also helped care for **livestock**, like cows and pigs.

Men and women living in the Territory had different responsibilities. Some men worked in lead or silver mines. Some worked on farms or were fur trappers. Often these jobs were dangerous. Miners had to go deep underground to find metals. There was always a danger the mine might collapse. Trapping included journeys into great **wilderness**. Men were in danger of attacks from wild animals, or even from other men.

Women in the Territory usually were responsible for the home and the children. Cooking at the time of the Purchase was a very long process over a fire. People usually ate the same simple foods every day. Spices such as pepper were not very common and were very expensive. There were no grocery stores. Food came from farms or hunting. Women often used corn to make corn meal or porridge. Meat had to be taken directly from the animal and **prepared** for meals. This included skinning and cutting up the animal. Women had other responsibilities, too. Most men were away from home a lot. Women would take care of business matters and protect their homes while men were gone.

When families wanted to have fun, they would not do the things you might do today. There were no shopping malls or TV. Kids did not have video games or parks to play in. Neighbors often lived many miles apart and bad roads made travel difficult. Neighbors did get together sometimes to work on farms or to build **log cabins**. Coming together to work was a common reason for neighbors to plan a dance or party for the evening.

Your life is probably very different from the life of a child living at the time of the Louisiana Purchase. Now that you've read about some of the differences, try thinking about how your lives might be similar. Do you think you could have been happy living at the time of the Purchase?

Toys were scarce

Children in the Territory didn't have many toys. In fact, children in general didn't have many toys until the late 1800s. There weren't many picture books, pencils, paper or paints, either. When they weren't helping their parents, children mostly made up games or played together. Girls may have learned how to sew while making homemade dolls.



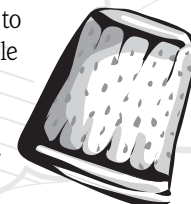
Popular Games

'Anthony-I-Over'

For this popular game, you need two teams, a ball, and some kind of barrier, like a log or a table. Teams stand on either side of the barrier. The team with the ball is 'it.' They yell 'Anthony!' and throw the ball to a member of the opposing team. If the child doesn't catch the ball, then that team is 'it.' If he or she catches the ball, the teams have to change sides fast! While the teams are running to change sides, the one who caught the ball tries to hit an opponent with the ball. If he or she succeeds, the child who was hit changes teams. The goal is to eliminate the other team.

'Hide the Thimble'

This was a popular game in the winter, when kids couldn't play outside much. You need a sewing thimble and at least two people. One hides the thimble while other players close their eyes and count to 10. Then everyone searches for the thimble as the 'hider' counts to 50. Whoever finds the thimble hides it next. If no one finds it, the same person gets to hide the thimble again.



This Newspaper In Education series is underwritten by a contribution from Brown & Associates, St. Louis, Missouri.

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Louisiana Purchase
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