

International stamp honors Champlain

Franco-Americans should be enthusiastic about a commemorative stamp honoring Samuel de Champlain, scheduled for a May 28 release.

Champlain (1567?-1635) is known as the founding father of New France, as the French possessions in North America were once known.

Canada Post will join the U.S. Postal Service in issuing stamps and souvenir sheets honoring the 1606 voyage of Champlain. Both Canadian and U.S. stamps will be sold on the same page.

A commemorative Samuel de Champlain postage stamp is particularly meaningful for York County because the famous French explorer-cartographer mapped the shores of the Saco River and even walked where the University of New England is located today. The Biddeford Historical Society placed an engraved plaque on the UNE campus last year marking the 400th anniversary of Champlain's June 18, 1605, exploration.

"I'm pleased to know our governments in the United States and Canada are recognizing



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what a great discoverer Champlain was," said Norman Beaupre of Biddeford. Beaupre is president of the Biddeford Historical Society. He also spearheads a "Museum in the Street" project to help preserve Biddeford's historic sites.

Although French heritage enthusiasts will applaud the Champlain commemorative stamp, it's nevertheless curious that the release will be held in Washington, D.C., rather than in Maine, where Champlain mapped the coast of Acadia National Park in Penobscot Bay. One can't help but ask whether it's a government oversight to release Champlain's commemorative stamp in Washington.

Wouldn't it make sense for the release to occur in Maine, where the renowned French explorer and founder of Quebec actually mapped and named

many of the magnificent sites visitors relish seeing to this day?

Furthermore, it may be a minor fact, but for the sake of historical accuracy, commemorating Samuel de Champlain's voyage and exploration of 1606 overlooks his other expeditions to New France, which included Maine, between 1604 and 1608. Speaking in hindsight, of course, the Champlain stamp could have included a range of dates like 1604-1608, rather than singling out the 1606 expedition.

"By 1606, Champlain had already been to New France and back home again," says Beaupre. Moreover, from a Quebecois French-Canadian's point of view, Champlain's most significant achievement after his artistic cartography was founding Quebec. In fact, in 2008, Quebec is planning a world-class celebration to mark the 400th anniversary.

A U.S. Postal Service press release about the 2006 commemoratives describes Champlain as a skilled cartographer who "played a key role in French exploration of North

America. In 1606, he served with a coastal expedition that began in what is now Nova Scotia and sailed as far south as modern-day Massachusetts. The sheet will have both U.S. and Canadian postage stamps."

Joint issue stamps are of historical significance with international appeal, according to an Internet site popular with collectors, www.unicover.com.

Franco-Americans and people who simply enjoy attractive stamps will enjoy the beautiful nautical image on the Champlain commemorative, which depicts a painted sailing ship with unfurled sails.

Indeed, my order is already placed, so I'll receive the stamps on the first day of issue. Unfortunately, my special order will be postmarked in Washington, D.C. Nevertheless, I'll buy some 39-cent Champlain stamps to take up to the Calais post office of St. Croix Island, to be hand-canceled.

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