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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 24, 2009

ATF Transfers Alexander Hamilton Document to National Archives

WASHINGTON - In a ceremony today, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) transferred an original 18th century Alexander Hamilton document to the National Archives. The document will become part of the permanent holdings of the National Archives and will be preserved in a locked, temperature and humidity-controlled stack area in its College Park, Md., facility.

The document, dated Dec. 18, 1790, and signed by the nation's first Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, is a circular letter distributed to the customs agents of the United States. Secretary Hamilton's letter describes the method for measuring the proof of distilled spirits for taxation.

"The National Archives is pleased to accept this important record. Treasury Secretary Hamilton's letter is one of the foundation documents of ATF. It is also an important piece of American history because the policies laid out in the circular contributed to one of the earliest challenges to the new government," said Acting Archivist of the United States Adrienne Thomas in accepting the document.

"The men and women of ATF have a long and distinguished history of serving the citizens of this country and pursuing the nation's most violent criminals," said ATF Acting Director Kenneth Melson. "But it all started back in 1790, with Alexander Hamilton and this circular letter. While this priceless document was certainly in good hands for the last 35 years in the protection of ATF, it is time we return this rare item to its rightful owners, the National Archives and the American people."

The early history of this circular remains a mystery, but it was discovered in the mid 1970's by ATF Public Information Officer Howard Criswell Jr. Criswell collected autographs as a hobby and came across the letter in a catalogue from an autograph dealer in New York City. He purchased it for about \$100, intending to use the letter for an ATF bicentennial exhibit. It remained in a safe until Sept. 27, 1979, when another ATF employee discovered it and suggested it be placed on display. Because of concerns that prolonged exposure to light would fade the document, the circular was placed back in safekeeping, where it remained until it was rediscovered by ATF employees during a relocation of its headquarters building in 2005.

At the end of the American Revolution, the national government owed \$37 million dollars in debt, a figure dwarfed by the \$114 million owed by the states. At Hamilton's urging, the federal government assumed responsibility for the debt of the states. One of the first attempts by Congress to reduce the national debt was the Tariff of 1789, which placed duties on the import of distilled spirits among other items. Quickly realizing that these duties were not generating enough revenue, a higher tariff was passed by Congress in 1790. The letter ATF transferred to the National Archives describes how duties

from the Tariff of 1790 would be determined.

Inventive Americans reacted to the duties on imported spirits by increasing the production of domestic alcoholic beverages. Hamilton successfully petitioned Congress for passage of another act in 1791, providing for a tax on spirits produced in the United States. The 1791 act prompted widespread hostility and noncompliance, and became known as “The Whiskey Rebellion.” Enraged citizens demonstrated in several cities, and a number of federal agents were harassed and threatened. The rebellion ended in 1794, when a large federal force convinced the protesters to return to their homes. This revolt was the first test of power of the new federal government, establishing its authority in disputes with individual states.

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