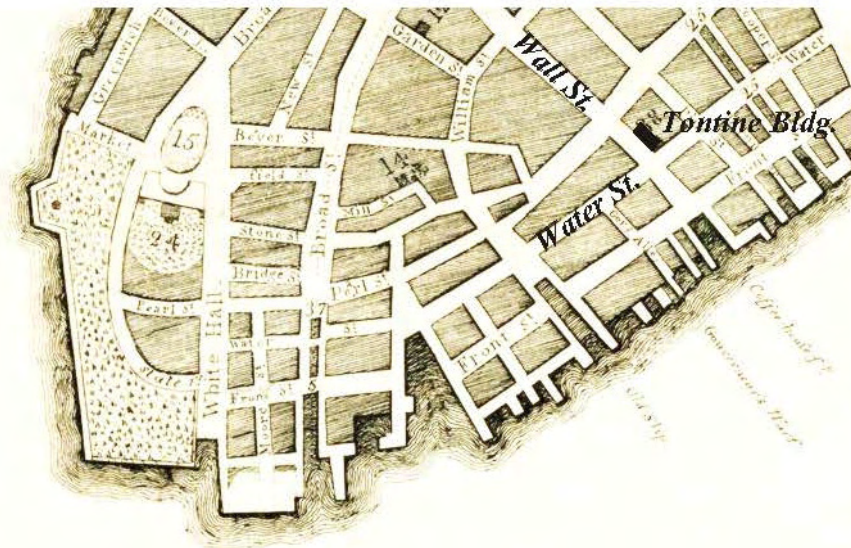


Philatelic Legacy of the New York Tontine Coffee House



The Tontine Coffee House was established in New York City in 1793. Situated on the north-west corner of Wall Street and Water Streets (see map), it was built to serve as a meeting place for merchants. It was funded on a "tontine" scheme by the sale of 203 shares at £200 each. The building (shown in 1797 painting above at left) survived the fire of 1835 that devastated much of the city below Wall Street. The original building was demolished in 1855 when William Aspinwall leased the ground and erected a new structure. During the 62 year history of the original building several of its occupants were involved in handling letter mail.



This presentation focuses on the occupants of the building who handled letter mail. Located at the very heart of American commerce, it housed several of the most influential innovators in the private mail sector. Because of this, it serves well as a microcosm for the birth of the various private mail systems in the United States and which directly resulted in improved government postal systems and practices as well as cheaper postage.

The first philatelically noteworthy occupant was James Bryden who opened his "Tontine Coffee House and Hotel" on May 21, 1808. During the four years he leased the premises, Bryden advertised his letter boxes for the reception of letters to be sent on all vessels sailing from the port. Such letters received his handstamped marking. After a philatelic lull in activity things began to accelerate in 1835 when the Hudson brother moved their "Merchants News Room" to the building. In 1836, in addition to the foreign ship letter mail receptacles, they advertised their "Sub Post Office" through which "merchants and others can receive from, and forward their letters to the City Post Office every hour during the day." In effect, a very early local post. In May 1837, while employed at Hudson's, James W. Hale attempted to introduce an intra-city postal system operating between New York and Boston. Although it apparently never went into operation, it served as the precursor to the 1844 Independent mails and the entire Cheap Postage movement. He also advertised a city package delivery scheme that failed. One of Hale's ideas greatly benefitted his close friend William Harnden. Hale is credited with convincing Harnden to try as hard as an express man and when the express began, he included Hale's News Room at the Tontine building as one of his two office addresses in New York City. Hale also operated his "Foreign Letter Office" handling mail to for Halifax and Europe at reduced postage rates on the new steamship departing from both New York and Boston. In 1844 Hale became the largest and most important of the Independent Mail companies.

Surviving philatelic evidence of other occupants of the Tontine building is known from: George Nesbitt (listed in 1839 Directory as a "machinery-cut, wood type manufacturer"), Thomas Minturn (forwarding agent), Pardon Kenyon (Kenyon Foreign Letter Office), and William T. Coleman (Agent, California Packets).

Tontine Coffee House

People



Name	Dates at Tontine	Reference	Notes
James Bryden (1761-1820)	1808 - 1812 sub lease of John Ferrers		1797 Operated Phila & Alexandria Stage Line, daughter married Frederick Cooke (actor) opens Coffee-House May 21, 1808, rent \$2,800 / yr
Robert E. Hudson William H. Hudson		first notice of move to Tontine bldg is 22 Oct 1835	Bothers who operated Hudson's Merchants' News Room and Foreign Ship Letter Office as well as a box "Sub Post Office" [ad 5 Jan 1836] box (with 9 others) for people in First Ward run by George Whitney on William St.
James W. Hale (b - 1801)	Mar 9, 1838 (1st mention)	#2 in 1839 Directory	(ad 30 Apr 1838 for Sirius bag)(Mar 30, 1840 "Br. Queen" bag) Hale's News Room (ad 5 May 1838)
William Harnden (1812-1845)	Jan 9, 1840		2 offices in NYC, 2 Wall St & Hales News Room
George Nesbitt (1809-1869)		#7 in 1839 Directory	"machinery cut wood type manufacturer, Stationer, etc
Pardon Kenyon	1851		Kenyon Foreign Letter Office (Caldwell & Kenyon 1836?)
Thomas Minturn	2/17/45		"auctioneer" Grinnell, Minturn forwarder 1841-45
William T. Coleman	1859		"office of California Packets"
William H. Aspinwall	1855		old building demolished, ground leased to Aspinwall

Tontine Coffee House

Timeline



1793	building completed and the Merchants Exchanges moved there
	Jun 12 1793 French Minister Genet visits NYC, anti-Federalists (pro France) hoist liberty cap @ Tontine
1808	Apr 26 Bryden takes possession, opens May 21, rent \$2,800 /yr - sub lease from John Ferrers
	(Jun 10) paper says Embargo over for England
1811	Board of directors changed after deaths, 5 new (Varick, Clarkson, Winthrop, Coles, Ludlow)
?	Merchants Exchanged moved out
1812	(April) - Bryden leaves
1817	NY Stock & Exchange Board @ Tontine
1820s	Canal Stocks trading @ the exchange
1826-27	Tontine Coffee House run by John Morse who turned it into a tavern before quitting
1832	A hotel run by Lovejoy & Belcher
1834	1834 Court of Chancery removed restrictions by which the Association was required to maintain the bldg as a Coffee-House and it was leased form general business
1835	(Oct 21) Hudson's Merchants' New Room move News Room from Wall & Pearl to Tontine (Wall & Water)
	(Dec 16) The Great Fire - Tontine bldg spared
	(Dec 29) ad for Hudson's "letters to PO rec'd" (corner Wall & Pearl for sub post office)
1836	(Jan 5) Hudson's ad now states "to and from the Post Office letters" (from letters upon application to PO) Whitney and Hudsons in separate ads on Jan 18th as separate "posts" ???
1836	Hudson Brothers gave up news room and Peter McCarthy (lessee) engaged Hale to occupy the lower floor as a news-room. Caldwell & Kenyon kept a restaurant in basement - 1837 ads as "Hudson's Merchants News Room"
1839	(Apr 6) Shipping & Commercial List published W. Burritt & Clayon, #6 Tontine bldg
1843	Legislature changed the name to the "Tontine Building"
1855	(May) building demolished and the ground leased to Aspinwall for \$5,500 per year, he built new building
1870	(Nov) John De Wint died (last link in the Tontine), lease terminated and property reverted to the owners of the shares represented by 7 nominees (De Peyseter, Horn attorneys for the 7: Robert Benson, Wm Bayard, Gouveneur Kemble, Horatio Gates Stevens, Daniel Hoffman, Mrs Wm Campbell and John King

Tontine Coffee House

James Bryden, Tontine Coffee House Forwarder



TONTINE COFFEE HOUSE & HOTEL:

The subscriber begs leave to inform ... that he has rented the Tontine Coffee House of the Committee. ...

The Coffee House shall be conducted on the European plan. A regular daily list of all vessels, entrances and clearances; and a book will be kept for marine intelligence - boxes will be erected for the reception of letters, and due notice given eight or ten days, of all vessels sailing from the port, by whom owned, where bound, and what captain. ... Also, all the commercial papers ... **JAMES BRYDEN**



TONTINE COFFEE HOUSE & HOTEL:
THE subscriber begs leave to inform the Merchants, Traders, and Citizens in general, that he has rented the Tontine Coffee House of the Committee in possession to be given on the first of May next.
The Coffee House shall be conducted on the European plan. A regular daily list of all vessels, entrances and clearances; and a book will be kept for marine intelligence—boxes will be erected for the reception of letters, and due notice given eight or ten days, of all vessels sailing from the port, by whom owned, where bound, and what captain. Also, all the commercial papers in the Union will be taken and regularly filed; Lloyd's List, Bell's Weekly Messenger, Cobbett's Monthly Register is wrote for, exclusive of all the London papers, which he expects by the different packets for this port. In a short time he expects to form a correspondence with the different seaports for marine intelligence—that neither pains nor expence shall be spared to make it one of the first houses for intelligence in the Union, by the public's most obedient humble servant,
JAMES BRYDEN.



5 September 1808 New York City to France, "J. BRYDEN'S TONTINE COFFEE HOUSE NEW-YORK" handstamp carried on US dispatch vessel *Union* via Philadelphia and Penzance to France with messenger Lt. Gibbon

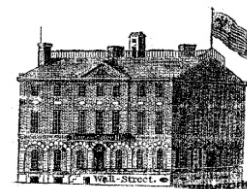
6 November 1808 docket of receipt, sent during the brief period the Embargo Act was in full effect

The New York City Tontine Coffee House - was a coffee house established in 1793. Situated on the north-west corner of Wall Street and Water Street, it was built to serve as a meeting place for trade and correspondence and funded by the sale of 203 shares of £200 each. James Bryden rented the space between 1808 and 1812. He advertised in April 1808 as shown and partially transcribed above.

Trading at the Tontine Coffee House continued until 1817. The growth of the Tontine's trade proceedings had effected the creation of the New York Stock and Exchange Board, the precursor to the current New York Stock Exchange

Embargo Act of 1807 - was a general embargo enacted by the United States against Great Britain and France. As a reaction to the impressment of American sailors, it prohibited the import and export of goods to Britain and France who were then at war. All trans-Atlantic mail sent during the 15 months following enactment in December 1807 is rare.

Tontine Coffee House
Hudson's News Room Forwarder



LETTER BAGS		
At the Merchants' Exchange, and Hudson's Reading Room.		
Amsterdam.....	Louisa.....	1st Jan.
Antwerp.....	Josephine.....	—
Eremen.....	New-York.....	24th Dec.
Buenos Ayres.....	Rowena.....	24th Dec.
Gibraltar.....	Hortensia.....	25th Dec.
Hamburg.....	Alwina.....	—
Havana.....	India.....	22d Dec.
Havre.....	Poland.....	24th Dec.
Kingston, Jam.....	Orbit.....	25th Dec.
Leghorn.....	Wm. & Francis.....	—
Liverpool.....	Virginian.....	24th Dec.
London.....	St. James.....	1st Jan.
Marseilles.....	Ottoman.....	—
Montevideo.....	Leonidas.....	21st Dec.
New-Orleans.....	Vicksburg.....	26th Dec.
Port-au-Prince.....	Cecilia.....	—
Rio Grande.....	Brilliant.....	—
Rotterdam.....	Hoop.....	—
St. Croix.....	Orbit.....	25th Dec.
St. Thomas.....	Henry.....	21st Dec.
Valparaiso.....	Treuton.....	—
Vera Cruz.....	Louisa.....	25th Dec.

Pr Virginian
24th Dec



21 December 1836 Boston to London, endorsed "Pr *Virginian* 24th Dec" Liverpool packet on front forwarded under cover by Whitwell, Bond Co. to their New York sister firm Bond, Whitwell Co.

"FORWARDED BY BOND, WHITWELL NEW-YORK" handstamp and given to Hudson's New Room

"HUDSON'S NEWS ROOM & FOREIGN SHIP LETTER OFFICE" handstamp

24 December 1836 by packet ship *Virginian* to Liverpool, their ship letter handstamp and 3/2d due rate

Hudson's Merchants' News Room and Foreign Ship Letter Office - Brothers Robert and William Hudson announced a move of their news room into the Tontine building on 21 October 1835. They posted letter bag notices in local newspapers as shown above. The served as letter forwarders with bags for each departing ship. On 1 January 1836 they advertised a local mail service as a "Sub Post Office" with a box for depositing letters for timely delivery to the New York post office. George Whitney on William Street is listed as the carrier. An employee in 1837, James W. Hale, took over their operation on 9 March 1838.

Tontine Coffee House

Hale's Foreign Letter Office Forwarder



LETTER BAGS		
AT GILPIN'S READING ROOM, <i>Merchant's Exchange; and</i>		
HALE'S NEWS ROOM, 2 TONTINE.		
Amsterdam.....	Mason Barney.....	— —
Antwerp.....	Paoli.....	— —
Bermuda.....	Example.....	— —
Bremen.....	Isabella.....	1st Feb.
Calcutta.....	Champlain.....	— —
Hamburg.....	Washington.....	1st Feb.
Havana.....	J. Leggett.....	30th Jan.
Havre.....	Chas. Carroll.....	1st Feb.
Liverpool.....	Columbus.....	1st Feb.
London.....	Mediator.....	1st Feb.
Madeira.....	Odessa.....	— —
Madras.....	Champlain.....	— —
Marseilles.....	Yankee.....	2d Feb.
New-Orleans.....	Ocmulgee.....	1st Feb.
Texas.....	Charleston.....	2d Feb.
Vera Cruz.....	Ann Eliza.....	— —

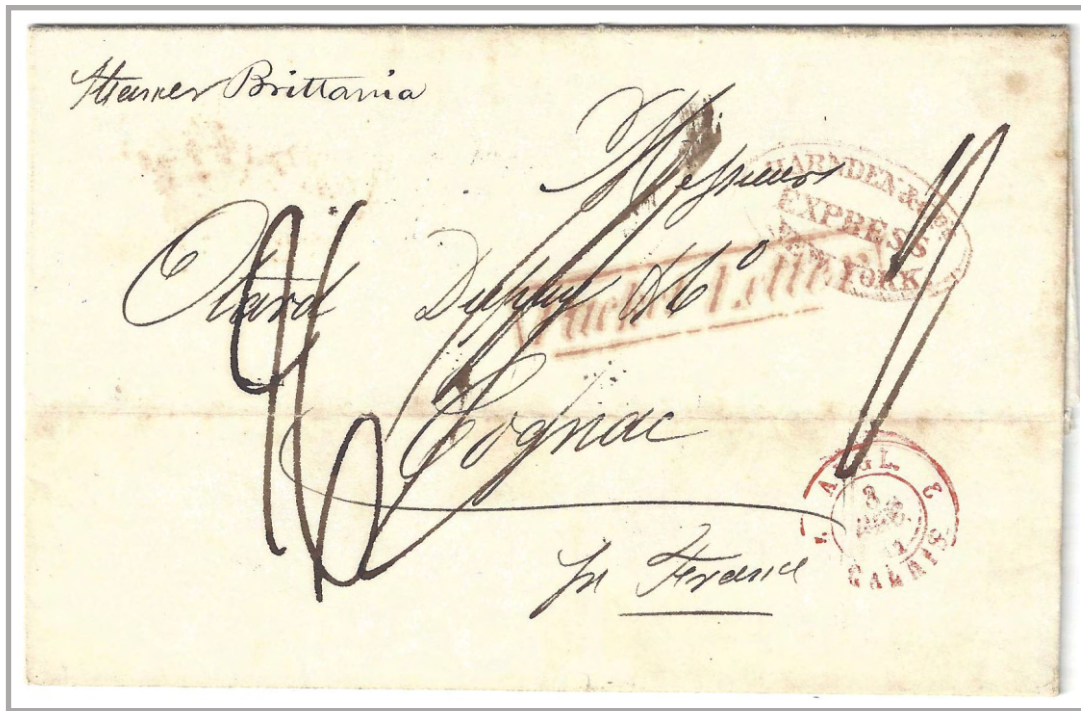
FORWARDED FROM
HALE'S FOR. LET. OFFICE.
Corner of Wall and Water-Streets,
NEW-YORK.



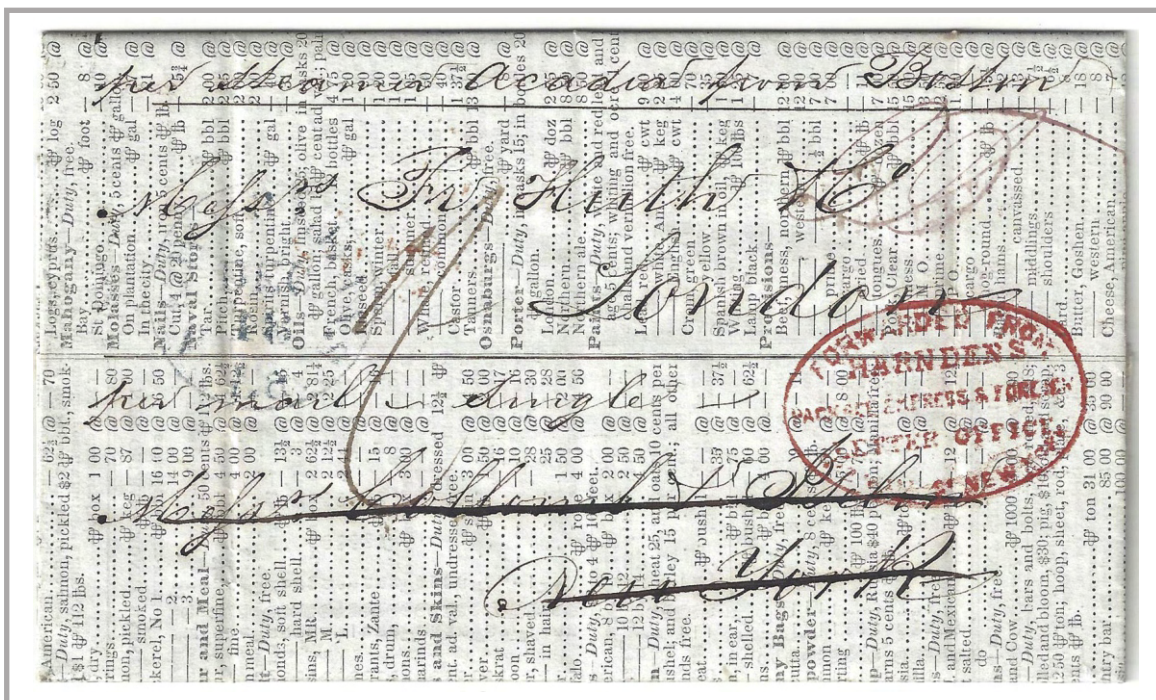
1 February 1839 New York to London, endorsed "Pr Columbus" on front
"FORWARDED FROM HALE'S FOR. LET. OFFICE, Corner of Wall and Water Streets, NEW YORK" handstamp
by Liverpool packet *Columbus* to Liverpool (arrive 22 Feb 1839), their ship letter handstamp and 4/9d due

Hale's Foreign Letter Office - James W. Hale, after serving as an employee for the Hudson Brothers at the Tontine building began advertising the "News Room" under his own name in March 1838. This handstamp is reported used between 14 August 1838 and 1 February 1839 (this cover). Additional handstamp styles, without specific location of office, were used at later dates. At this date the office was located at #2 Tontine Building and George Nesbitt was in the same building at office #7. The 1839 directory lists Nesbitt as a stationer and as a "machinery-cut, wood type manufacturer" and he may have provided the type for the Hale handstamp. Hale moved from the Tontine building across the street to 58 Wall St. in early March 1842.

Tontine Coffee House
Harnden's Express



15 November 1841 New York to Cognac, France, endorsed "Steamer Britannia" on front
"HARNDEN & C^{OS} EXPRESS NEW YORK" handstamp
by Cunard steamer to Liverpool, "Packet Letter" handstamp, Calais entry and 26 decimes due



12 December 1840 New Orleans prices current to Collomb & Iselin, New York by mail
forwarded to London with "FORWARDED FROM HARNDEN'S NEW YORK" handstamp

