

A HAND DELIVERED PIECE OF HISTORY

By James Wardell

The recent acquisition of an 1811 letter from a Toronto antiques dealer has sent me down a rabbit hole of research, trying to uncover historical ties to this 207-year-old piece of paper. Initially the usual Google searches uncovered very little, but a connection to the New Jersey Postal History Society has proven very fruitful.

Strictly speaking, since this letter was sent by favor and did not travel through the postal system, this article cannot be called a work of postal history. But it is certainly an example of social history, and a link to a past long gone, with connections to the present day.

A LETTER TO LOVED ONES

The letter itself was written on a 15.625 inch by 13 inch sheet of fine laid paper. The main text is written on two sides, while the rest is folded to create the address front shown in *Figure 1*. This section, however has long since been separated from the main part of the sheet, leaving two ‘flaps’ extending from the side of the correspondence. This condition at first led me to believe that it was in fact a two-sheet letter. The paper has degraded over the last two centuries and is quite delicate, and in danger of falling apart further.¹

Sent from New York City and dated July 18th, 1811, the correspondent, signing himself as Horatio, writes to his sisters, Mrs. Hannah Duyckinck and Miss Emma Holden in Lomerton, New Jersey. From this we can conclude that the writer himself is named Horatio Holden.



Fig. 1: Address portion of a letter to Mrs. Hannah Duyckinck, at Lomerton, New Jersey, datelined July 18, 1811. There are no postal markings, so it appears the letter was sent by a private carrier or personal friend. No Lomerton post office is known to have existed in New Jersey, so locating just where this letter was sent was problematic.

Horatio has just returned to his home in New York, which he calls ‘this great City of Gotham,’ after a visit with his sisters. Though I was unable to find Lomerton on a map, landmarks mentioned by Horatio indicate that this community was probably in the north central region of the State, due west of New York City. He writes of Schooley’s Mountain and its curative waters, as well as passing over Long Hill toward Newark. In Newark he visits Mother, who was ‘much better than we expected,’ however ‘not well.’ Other visits include a trip to Elizabeth Town, just south of Newark, before pressing on the following day to New York City. A contemporary map of New Jersey² created by Capt. William Giberson in 1812 shows Long Hill and Schulys Hill, as

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Schooley's is spelled here, quite clearly located in Morris County. The challenge for me would be to pin down the location to which this letter was sent.



Fig. 2: Giberson's 1812 Map of New Jersey. Sites mentioned in the letter led to the conclusion that the area described was in northern New Jersey. Those sites are shown here with stars.

AN AMERICAN FAMILY

Searching genealogy web sites helped find members of the Holden family, matching names and dates which would correspond with the time of the letter. All records found reference the letter writer, Horatio, as Horace Holden. This can be explained as the names Horatio and Horace seemed to be inter-changeable at the time, both being variations of the Latin Horatius. As an example, we can look at Horace Walpole, 4th Earl of Orford (September 24, 1717 - March 2, 1797),³ author and politician, who was originally named Horatio. It is also a possibility that Horatio was seen as a family name, more intimate with his sisters, whereas Horace would be seen as being more professional, better for young man beginning his career.

Horatio Holden (November 5, 1793 - March 25, 1862)⁴ would have been seventeen years of age at the time he wrote this letter. He and his sisters Hannah Duyckinck (January 30, 1790 - July 10, 1867)⁵ and Emma Holden (August 31, 1791 - March 21, 1863)⁶ were members of a family who all hailed from Sudbury, Massachusetts.

Their father Levi Holden (June 12, 1754 - April 19, 1823)⁷ and mother Hannah Plympton (July 27, 1754 - September 28, 1828)⁸ were the parents of 11 children. Levi, who spent his youth living just outside of Boston, was influenced early by the revolutionary spirit, and enrolled in 1775 to fight the invading British forces. Joining the Massachusetts Infantry Regiment as a private, he rose quickly in the ranks. He was assigned to the 4th Continental Infantry in 1776 as a Sergeant Major. In January 1777 he served with the 6th Massachusetts, elevated to 1st Lieutenant by March of 1779.

Fighting in every major battle except Bunker Hill, Levi was selected to George Washington's Life Guards in 1780 and given the permanent rank of Captain. He was assigned as commander of the General's escorts in 1780. Levi, a favorite of General Washington, retired from Federal service in 1783, and for a time before the end of the war, was a Captain in the Essex County N.J. Militia.

Following his service under Washington, Levi was still a young man of twenty-nine and retired to his hometown of Sudbury. The Holden family grew and Levi spent the next fifteen years farming and storekeeping. Despite success and a rise in social stature, an unfortunate turn of financial fortunes left the family in dire straits. Levi, looking for a new beginning, was persuaded by friends in New Jersey that Newark offered opportunities for a man of his character.

He moved his family there in 1799, but after renting a house, he found himself virtually penniless. However, opportunity presented itself when, while visiting the local market, he noticed only a single butcher serving the community. With the help of friends, Levi Holden himself opened a meat business and challenged the monopoly. From those beginnings, he created and ran a successful business with his sons George and Henry. His home and family grew and prospered, and he earned a position of prominence in the city. His home and office was eventually located at the corner of Center and Mulberry Streets, where he lived until his death in 1823.⁹

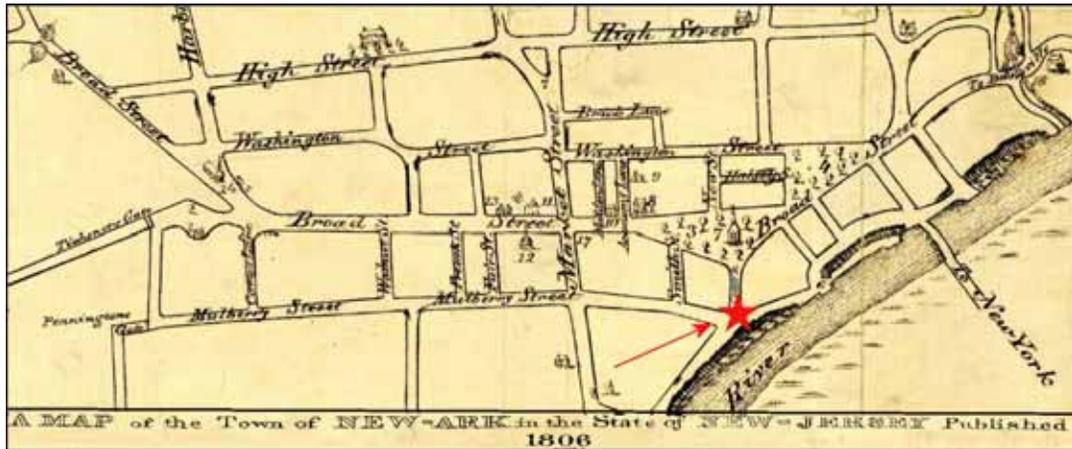
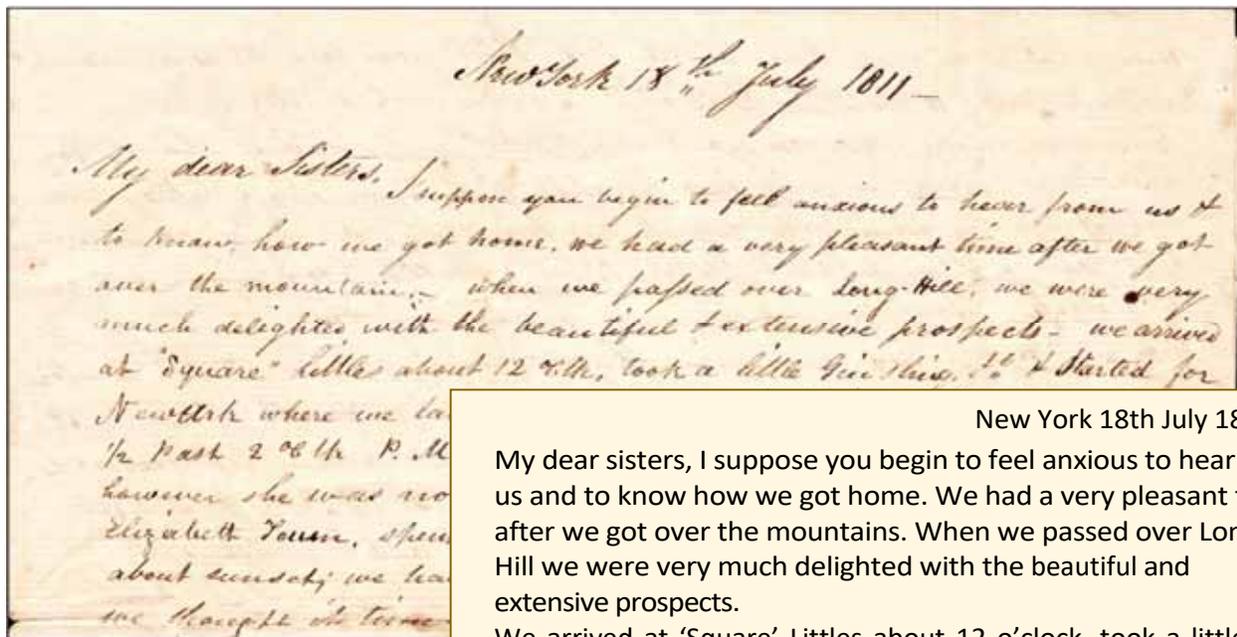


Fig. 3: A section of an 1806 map of Newark, showing the location of the Holden homestead. Today, McCarter Highway runs between this location and the Passaic River.¹⁰

The letter in question follows, with a transcription:



New York 18th July 1811

My dear sisters, I suppose you begin to feel anxious to hear from us and to know how we got home. We had a very pleasant time after we got over the mountains. When we passed over Long-Hill we were very much delighted with the beautiful and extensive prospects. We arrived at 'Square' Littles about 12 o'clock, took a little gin sling, and started for Newark where we landed safe and sound in wind, limb and eye sight, at half past 2 o'clock p.m. We found mother much better than we expected, however she was not well. Sunday afternoon we rode down to Elizabeth Town, spent the afternoon there, very pleasantly. I returned about sunset; we had a delightful time indeed. When we got home we thought it time to begin to prepare for N. York,...

we thought it best to prepare for it, and we fitted ourselves out for a trip, which I guess was nicely done to

.. [and] we fitted ourselves out for a trip, which, "I guess was nicely done to it" and took our departure on Monday morning. We arrived safe at half past ten o'clock in this great City of Gotham, where we were heartily wellcomed (sic), and our return greeted with hard shaking of the hands and smacking kisses - well; now you see we are safely home

– but, to return to Lomerton – Lord bless you, girls how do ye do? Is Emma's stomach any better? Does our friend Betsey Parker remain in good health? I should like to have a frolick (sic) with you all this evening - but alas!

Richmond says he will write to Emma and prescribe some remedy for her sickly body.

I hope the Lomerton air will have as good an effect upon her consumptive habits as it did upon us. - Oh! my/with a sigh/we wish for another jaunt. We were so well pleased with the last. But I don't know when we shall come again. Perhaps we shall be able to come next winter, when you all will be at leisure. – When we reflect upon the pleasant time we enjoyed at your house, going and returning from Schooley's Mountain and we really feel ourselves much indebted to you and heartily wish for a return of so happy a time –

arrived safe at 1/2
we were heartily
shaking of the
we see how we are safely
and bless you, Girls
the? does our Friend
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again: perhaps we

shall we able to come next winter, when you all will be at leisure. – – When we reflect upon the pleasant time we enjoyed at your house, going & returning from Schooley's mountain, we really feel ourselves much indebted to you & heartily wish for a return of so happy a time –

– We now see the difference between the city & country & we are firmly persuaded, if you could realise half the blessings, which Providence has profusely lavished upon you, & enjoy the comforts within your reach – you must be happy – if you are contented; a contented mind is a continual feast, – but as the fellow said, "there's the rub" – however I hope you can philosophise enough, (with the numberless enjoyments which continually surround you), to be perfectly contented, & as far as this world affords,

We now see the difference between the city and country and we are firmly persuaded, if you could realise (sic) half the blessings which Providence has profusely lavished upon you, and enjoy the comforts within your reach – you must be happy – if you are contented. A contented mind is a continual feast – but as the fellow said, "there's the rub" – However I hope you can philosophise (sic) enough (with the numberless enjoyments which continually surround you) to be perfectly contented and (as far as this world affords) perfectly happy –

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Well what more shall I say – tell Em, “I feel queer all the way down” and I should like to wet her head with a little cool water –

Give my sincere love to your “husband” with many thanks for his kind attention. It is uncertain when we shall repay him, but if we are unable to requite his kindness, we will come again and increase the debt and some time or other, pay you all a lump, for we have no notion of doing business on a small scale. The Schooley’s Mountain has almost cured Sarah, and I have no doubt but that the jaunt and water together will have an admirable and good and great effect upon Mrs. B and if “I had only time enough I’d tell you all about it” – strike up the music, Yankee Doodle.

Give our sincere respects to the old Gentleman, with thanks for his politeness and kindness. I hope his horse will arrive safe home, we are much indebted to him for the use of it. I gave directions at home to have him well taken care of. – remember us to Wm. (William) – tell him we shall not forget him as long as a twig grows on the Lomerton Farm.

I believe I have written almost enough and I will leave the rest for my worthy friend, Madam B.

Emma must not forget to bring that book home with her and send it to me. I never thought of it when we started – Upon the receipt of this, we shall certainly expect a long answer from each of you.

I hope you will have a prosperous time in gathering your harvests and I trust Heaven has in store for you and your beloved husband, many returning “Harvests” of prosperity and rational pleasure, and many feasts to come of joy and mutual love.

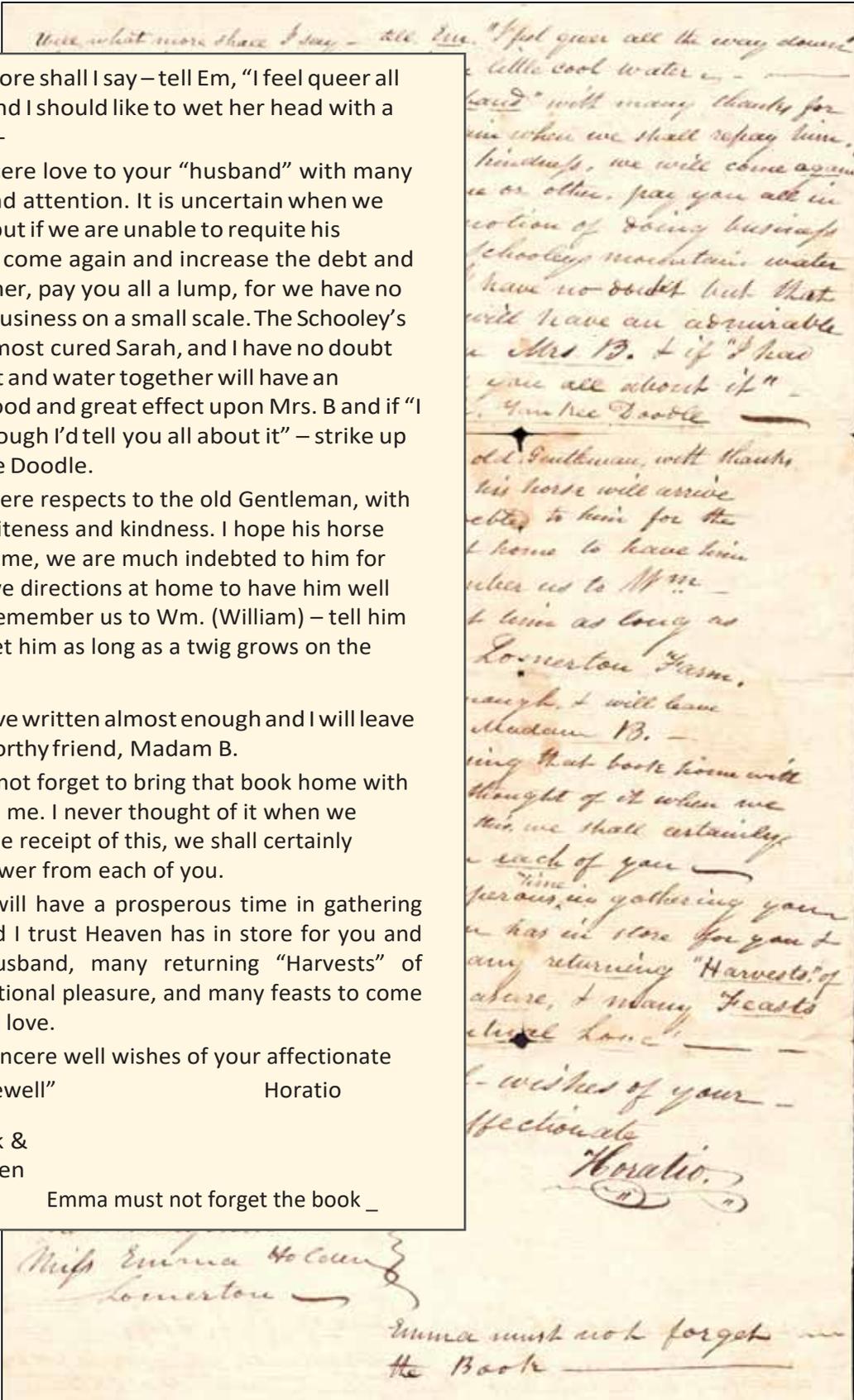
Accept the sincere well wishes of your affectionate

“Farewell”

Horatio

Mrs H. Duyckinck &
Miss Emma Holden
Lomerton

Emma must not forget the book _



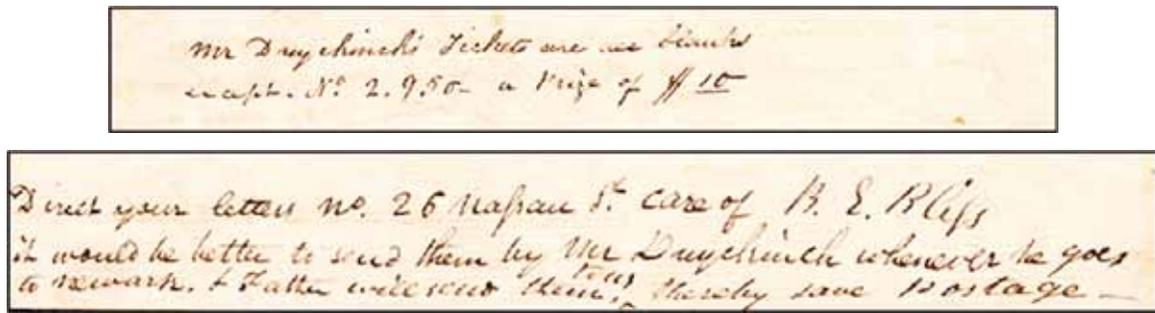


Fig. 4: Two notes are written on the flaps attached to the letter, the first apparently regarding some lottery tickets, and the second regarding the sending of further mail. Postage saved would have amounted to 10¢.¹¹

HORATIO OR HORACE

When young Horatio, or Horace as we shall now call him, returned to New York, he was returning to a career that was just beginning. He had moved to the city in 1809 to study the law under a Mr. Bezan Ezra Bliss.

It is worth mentioning a notation written on one of the flaps of this letter, ‘Direct your letters no. 26 Nassau St. care B.E. Bliss. It would be better to send them by Mr. Duyckinck whenever he goes to Newark, and Father will send them to us, thereby save postage.’ Mr. Bliss, attorney, is indeed listed in the *Elliot & Crissy New York Directory* of 1811, at 26 Nassau St.¹³

This address, north of Wall St. in the heart of New York’s Financial District, is now part of the location of One Chase Manhattan Plaza. At the time this letter was written the block of Nassau, between Liberty St. to the north and Cedar St. was the site of the Middle Dutch Church. The church, which had stood fronting Liberty St. since 1731¹⁴, was itself a site of historical interest, a foundation of the Dutch Reformed community. It was also used as a British prison during the occupation years from 1776 to 1783, after which it reopened as a church and remained in service until 1844. The building was later converted to a Post Office which stood until 1882, when it was torn down to make way for the new Mutual Life Insurance Building. This ornate structure was itself eventually demolished, along with that block of Cedar St. to make way for One Chase Manhattan, in 1961. The address of 26 Nassau which Horace Holden noted for his mail delivery was located at the south east corner of Nassau and Cedar St.¹⁵

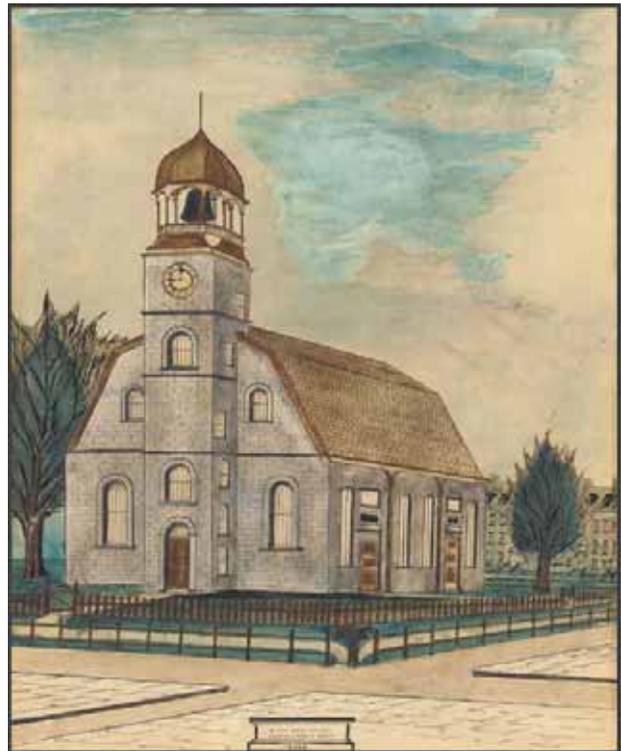


Fig. 5: The Middle Dutch Church¹², which stood facing Liberty Street near Nassau. The buildings seen behind it were on the now gone section of Cedar Street

It was here that Horace apprenticed. Though called to the bar in that year of 1811, the War of 1812 would intervene and Horace joined the fray. He would be stationed at Sandy Hook, with the Second Division of Infantry, Bergen Brigade, where he was aide-de-camp to Brigadier-General William Colfax¹⁶, his father's comrade-in-arms from the Life Guards¹⁷, from September 1 to December 5 1814, holding the rank of Major. He would eventually rise to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

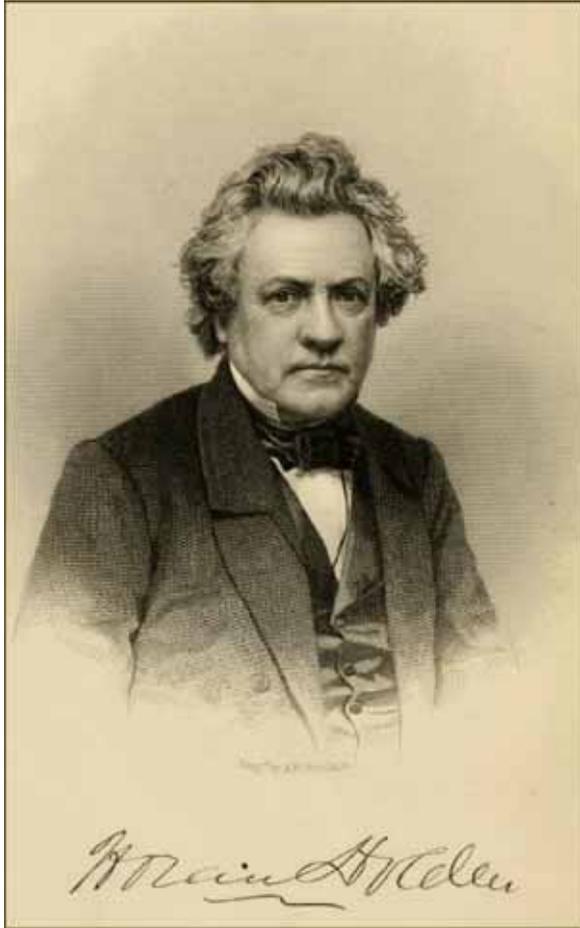


Fig. 6: Horace Holden, a picture included with the funeral oration by Gardiner Spring in 1862¹⁸

Once Horace returned home to New York and resumed his law practice, his social standing rose. He would marry three times during his life, fathering at least 11 children.

A very religious man, he was ordained in 1823 as a Ruling Elder of the Brick Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, and would be buried there forty years later. In his funeral oration, given by his old friend Pastor Gardiner Spring, Horace was described as “frank, cheerful, unforbidding, (he) had a great kindness of heart, and was unsuspecting to such a degree that he sometimes too readily gave his confidence to those who did not deserve it. Gentlemen of the legal profession see so much of the dark side of human nature, that they are apt to be suspicious. It was not

so with Mr. Holden; he was a stranger to evil surmisings.”¹⁹ Pastor Spring continues, “He was ‘rooted and grounded’ in faith and love. His piety was habitual, long-tried, useful and happy.”²⁰

Horace's letter to his sisters displays these traits early on. It is both loving and familiar. He seems very much a 17-year-old boy, quoting popular literature, particularly the afore-mentioned ‘great City of Gotham’ which is no doubt a reference to Washington Irving's book *The Salmagundi Papers*, published just four years previously in 1807. It belies the maturity of a young man who just that year is admitted to the bar.

His sisters, both older, are dear to him. He fears for Emma, who is sickly. Emma would become an old maid, however, dying almost exactly a year after Horace, in 1863 at age 72. She was buried in Brooklyn N.Y. Little else seems to be known about her, and in fact she does not even appear on some of the family genealogical sites.

THE DUTCH IN-LAWS

Sister Hannah, almost four years Horace’s senior, had married into a Dutch family of long standing in the New York/New Jersey area on December 31, 1808.²¹ Her husband, Richard Banker Duyckinck (August 26, 1781 - July 1, 1849)²² was descended from settlers in New Amsterdam dating back several generations to the mid 17th century. An ancestor, Evert Duyckinck, along with his son Gerrit, was a well-known painter and glazer in New Amsterdam, responsible for coloring stained glass windows in Dutch Reformed Churches in New York and Albany²³, no doubt including the previously mentioned Middle Dutch Church.

Though the family had emigrated from Germany (Gerhard Duyckinck of Borcken stating in his petition of August 12, 1620, that he was a native of Westfalia), the original home of the family was in Dordrecht, Holland. Variations of the family name included Duckinck and Duycking.²⁴

The Duyckinck family would eventually settle in the Lamington New Jersey area. Horace’s letter mentions the name Lomerton and Lomerton Farms. Period newspapers - pre 1775 - do mention a Lomarton Farm, “containing 376 acres of very good land... and a very good orchard, containing 200 Apple trees.”²⁵ The owners also raised cattle and sheep.²⁶ It is not surprising that I had difficulty finding the name Lomerton, as Horace had written it, on any maps. According to Wikipedia, the name Lamington is a corruption of the Native American word for the nearby stream, the “Allemetunck” or the “Loamatong.” Its name means “the place within the hills” or “the place of paint clay.” It also notes that there are 113 recorded variations on the spelling of Lamington, including “Alamatunk,” “Lametunk” and “Lamberton.”²⁷ So I think we can assume that the community that Horace visited in 1811 was in fact Lamington, in Somerset County.

The farm itself appears to lie just south of the town, in Bedminster Township. In fact, Richard Duyckinck, Hannah’s husband, is buried in the Lamington Burial Ground.

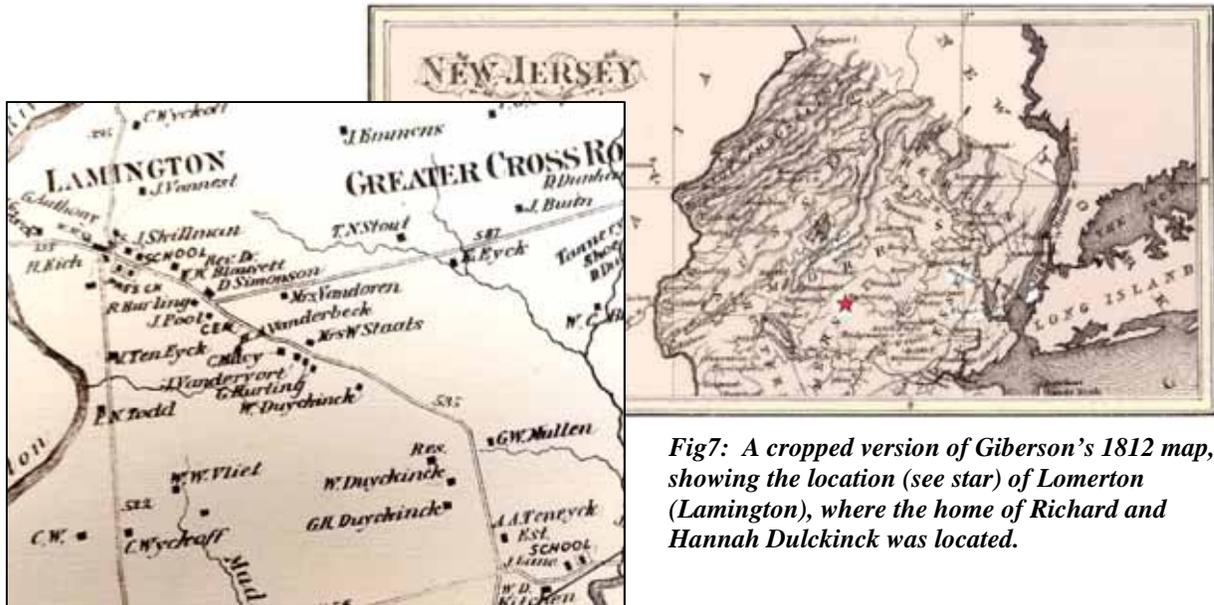


Fig7: A cropped version of Giberson’s 1812 map, showing the location (see star) of Lomerton (Lamington), where the home of Richard and Hannah Dulckinck was located.

Fig. 8: The overlaid map is the area south of Lamington N.J., showing the names of W. (William) and G.H. (George Holden) Duyckinck.²⁸ Though the source of this map dates it as 1921, the Duyckinck family sold the property to the Morgan Cowperthwaite family in 1917, suggesting this map is actually earlier than indicated. Later maps of the same area replaced the Duyckinck name with Cowperthwaite.²⁹

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A story is told locally of a John Duyckinck, probably Richard's father, who was possibly a British sympathizer during the Revolutionary War. John was confined to the property after being jailed and exiled by General Washington.³⁰ How ironic that Richard's father should be sentenced to house arrest by Washington, whom Hannah's father Levi had served with such loyalty!

Richard and Hannah would raise six children on the farm. A later map indeed shows the names of two of their children, W. (William) Duyckinck (August 14, 1815 - January 10, 1904) and G.H. (George Holden) Duyckinck (June 18, 1824 - November 17, 1874)³¹ continuing to live on the property.

THE FAMILY HOMESTEAD

The Duyckinck family remained there until the property was sold to the Morgan Cowperthwaite family in 1917. Cowperthwaite was an executive in a New York insurance company. The Duyckinck farmhouse was replaced by a new structure designed by New York architect James Cameron McKenzie, and the working farm became an equestrian estate. In 1939 a new house was constructed on the site, designed by Mott B. Schmidt of New York. A later map of the same area indeed shows the names of William and George Duyckinck replaced with the name Cowperthwaite.

In 1981 the Cowperthwaite family sold property to automobile executive John DeLorean, who lived there for 19 years. Legal problems plagued DeLorean throughout the 1980s. Though eventually acquitted of criminal charges, DeLorean's continuing financial problems and poor investments sent his auto company into a tailspin, and bankruptcy caused him to put the property up for sale in 1999.

The property was eventually purchased in 2000 by a New York real estate developer named Donald J. Trump. In 2001 the Bedminster Township approved the property for use as a golf course and country club. The original red brick house, built by the Cowperthwaite family, became the club house. The golf course opened in 2004.



Fig. 9: Satellite image of the Trump National Golf Course, located between I-78 to the south and Route 523, in Bedminster Township, Somerset County NJ, and now known as home to "The Summer White House."³² This is the same property as owned by the Duyckincks in the 1811 letter.

Of course Mr. Trump’s history and reputation are well known, and don’t require retelling here. A recent career change has put him in the news more frequently these days, and the Lamington House, as it had been known locally for years, has become known as the “Summer White House.”

CONCLUSION

It would be presumptuous to use this letter to try to draw a line between the first U.S. President and the current Chief Executive. That line would most certainly be opportunistic, and no doubt tenuous. But there is a line that we can draw, and that connects family.

Seventeen-year-old Horace demonstrates the same kind and loving characteristics toward his sisters that he is later praised for after death, many years later. And through his written words we see a loving family that reaches out through time, and affirms their place in American history.

That is the beauty of this hobby we enjoy. The research we do on these pieces of paper brings these people back to life. This is history in our hands, and resources are available for us to reach back in time and reconnect with those whose lives and loves, though of a different time, were not so different from our own.

I should take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank The New Jersey Postal History Society, and specifically its Secretary, Jean R. Walton. Without Jean and her detective work, this research would never have come together. Certainly, it is societies like the NJPHS that help keep postal history alive, and help to uncover treasures, such as this 207-year-old paper.

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Fig. 10: Showing both sides of this 207-year-old letter, unfolded. This is how the sheet would have looked in its original state. Some stains, such as those of the wax seal, are mirrored on opposite sides of folds, proving the original position of the wayward ‘cover sheet.’

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ This letter, laid out flat with the loose piece inserted, can be seen at the end of this article (*Figure 10*).
- ² Old-maps.com, http://www.old-maps.com/nj/nj-state/nj_1812_Giberson_1878_rsy_10x8.jpg.
- ³ Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Horace-Walpole-4th-earl-of-Orford>.
- ⁴ Genealogical Society of Bergen County N.J., Family Files, <https://www.njgsbc.org/files/familyfiles/g0/p418.htm#i33854>, July 2017 pg 418.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Find A Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/44863361/levi-holden> .
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Google Books, [The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record, Volumes 29-30](#), A 2-part history of Levi Holden, beginning of pps. 109 and 141. (Feb. 9, 2019).
- ¹⁰ 1806 map, reprinted 60 years later, available in New Jersey Institute of Technology's map collections at <https://archlib.njit.edu/collections/dana/collections/maps/mapsinlittmanlibrary/>. This map made available by the Newark Public Library to NJIT. This is a cropped version of the whole map.
- ¹¹ Domestic postal rate from May 1, 1799 to February 1, 1815 was 10¢ for a 'single letter' travelling a distance of over 40 miles but not exceeding 90 miles. The distance from present day Lamington New Jersey to New York City is approximately 43 miles. The route was no doubt longer in 1811. <https://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/domestic-letter-rates-1792-1863.pdf>.
- ¹² Watercolor of the Middle Dutch Church, Corner of Liberty and Nassau streets, 1729, New York City, North East Auctions, <http://northeastauctions.com/product/watercolor-of-the-middle-dutch-church-corner-of-liberty-and-nassau-streets-1729-new-york-city/>.
- ¹³ New York Public Library Digital Collection, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/e33d80d0-740d-0136-560f-7b7dc1942e19/book#page/125/mode/2up>, Elliot & Crissy's New York Directory for the year 1811, pg 119.
- ¹⁴ The Bowery Boys New York City History, <http://www.boweryboyshistory.com/2012/02/from-prison-to-post-office-odd-fate-of.html>.
- ¹⁵ Old grids of New York maps at http://maps.nypl.org/warper/maps/20599#Export_tab (Feb. 9, 2019).
- ¹⁶ Genealogical Society of Bergen County N.J., Family Files, op cit., pg 418.
- ¹⁷ Google Books, [The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record, Volumes 29-30](#), A 2-part history of Levi Holden, pg. 113. (Feb. 9, 2019).
- ¹⁸ Princeton Theological Seminary Library, <https://archive.org/details/funeralsermonocc00spri/page/12>, A funeral sermon, occasioned by the death of the late Horace Holden, by Gardiner Spring, 1862, frontispiece.
- ¹⁹ Ibid, pps. 15 – 21.
- ²⁰ Ibid, pg 23.
- ²¹ New Jersey Marriage Records, 1670-1965, Essex County 1795-1849, on Ancestry.com.
- ²² Genealogical Society of Bergen County N.J., Family Files July 2017, op cit., pg 418.
- ²³ Genealogical Society of Bergen County N.J., Family Files January 2017, <https://www.njgsbc.org/files/familyfiles/p369.htm>, pg.369
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Extracts from American Newspapers: Relating to New Jersey. 1704-1775 by William Nelson, Daily Advertiser Printing House, 1904, pg 401, https://books.google.ca/books?id=mrd4AAAAMAAJ&pg=PA622&dq=lomarton&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=lomarton&f=false
- ²⁶ Inside the Brick Academy article on The Bedminster Summer White House, Sept. 2017, by Brooks Betz: http://www.historicalsocietyofsomerset hills.org/Documents/Newsletters/2017_09_Sept_THSSH_Newsletter.pdf (Feb, 9. 2019).
- ²⁷ Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamington,_New_Jersey .
- ²⁸ Historical Society of Somerset Hills, http://www.historicalsocietyofsomerset hills.org/Profile_summer_whitehouse.php
- ²⁹ Brooks Betz (MrLocalHistory), on the Summer White House at <http://www.mrlocalhistory.com/trumpsummerwhitehouse/>.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Genealogical Society of Bergen County N.J., Family Files, <https://www.njgsbc.org/files/familyfiles/g0/p418.htm#i33854>, July 2017 pg 418.
- ³² Google maps.