

Mr. Tuck's File of Letters

from Jennifer M. Allocca's research; additional notes by Dan Rothman

The "Bulletin of the Essex Institute" (Volume XX. 1888. Salem, Mass. Printed 1889.) describes a September 1887 presentation to the Institute by Mr. J. D. Tuck, which provides additional information about the New Boston counterfeiters.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=BKQUAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA28&lpg=PA28>

Joseph Dane Tuck (1817-1900) was a tailor who was born in Beverly, MA and died in that town.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essex_Institute tells us that the Essex Institute (1848–1992) in Salem, Massachusetts, was "a literary, historical and scientific society." It maintained a museum, library, historic houses; arranged educational programs; and issued numerous scholarly publications. In 1992 the institute merged with the Peabody Museum of Salem to form the Peabody Essex Museum.

The correspondence in Mr. Tuck's file gives us an interesting picture of how Boston-area bankers struggled with the expensive problem of counterfeit bills.

Representatives of the banks whose notes had been counterfeited met to discuss what should be done. They feared that Mr. Peasley (or Peaslee) who had engraved the plates would flee when he learned of the arrest of the New Boston counterfeiters.

The bankers knew that Stephen Burroughs, the most famous counterfeiter of his day, was busy producing paper currency in Stanstead, Quebec (in the Eastern Townships of Lower Canada), just a few miles north of the Vermont border. How could they apprehend him and place him "in the way to the Gallows"?

They worried that at least one of the bailiffs they might send to Stanstead to collect evidence and arrest the counterfeiters was himself a member of the gang. And, being bankers, they worried about the expense of capturing the counterfeiters – they hoped it would be less than the losses they had already incurred in Hillsborough County, N.H.

Here are the relevant excerpts from Mr. Tuck's File of Letters:

Mr. Tuck also showed admirably-done counterfeit notes on the Beverly Bank, printed at New Boston, New Hampshire, in 1804, on very thin, strong, linen paper made in Danvers. The ornamentation of the bills, at that early day, was unique. The \$30 denomination bore both a hand loom and a power loom, symbolic of the high expectations then entertained of Beverly's pioneer venture in the spinning and weaving of linen, wool and cotton. Other issues were decorated with figures of "Rectitude" and of "Plenty," twin patronesses of finance,—with the elephant and the cod, types of Asiatic and of New World opulence, while commerce and the fisheries were still further symbolized by a schooner and a barque, both under full sail. It will not be amiss to print a portion of the correspondence touching this interesting case of early fraud, if only to show that

dealing with detectives and informers was as ticklish a business then as now, and that Canada was within as easy reach of the successful swindler, and extradition as great a desideratum, at the beginning as at the end of the nineteenth century.

Letter addressed "To Israel Thorndike, Esq., Beverly, with 4 Counterfeit Notes enclosed," [postage marked 24 cents.]

April 11, 1804.

SIR. *Wednesday.*

You probably know that the Net has been sprung & caught 4 prisoners with 5 plates of which your 30\$ is one. I have 50 of the 30\$ bills & they appear to me so well done that if any of them get abroad they will pass. I will if possible, ascertain whether any were struck by this plate before. I *trust* that all are secured which were struck now. It appears that our Agents with the exception of K . . . have managed the business extremely well & I cannot but natter myself that the Community will be saved from great present abuse & the Banks from much inconvenience. I enclose *i* of your 30\$ counterfeits for your inspection and remain Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

GEORGE CABOT.

the Plates taken are Beverly \$30. Essex 8. Portsmouth 4. N. Hamp. 10. & Union 10.

Newburyport, 12 April, 1804.

Dr. SIR.

I have recd yours of ye 10th, and to-day have one from Mr. Fletcher at Amherst inclosing specimens of the Counterfeit Bills among which is a 30 Dollar Bill of your Bank which Peaslee engraved at New Boston. As there is the utmost Hazard that Peaslee will take himself off the moment he hears of the arrest of his comrades, I have directed Bayley, our Sheriff, to secure him and I will hold him for examination untill you have Time to send on the necessary Process which ought to issue in New Hampshire. You will perceive the necessity of an immediate attention to this Business.

It is of the utmost consequence that Peaslee's Progress should be arrested.

With much Respect yours
DUDLEY A. TYNG.

I. THORNDIKE, Esq.

I hope you will be able to furnish Evidence also against P. Wingate who is a bold, bad man.

Addressed to Israel Thorndike, Esq: Beverly.

Newburyport, 17 April, 1804.

DEAR SIR.

Mr. P . . . will inform you of our Proceedings here. I congratulate you on our success thus far.

Every credit is due to ____ for his energy and Perseverance. But as Money is his sole object, and as he must quit the Country immediately after the Conviction of these offenders, it behoves the Public to be liberal in their acknowledgements to him. And indeed, without some positive, previous stipulations, I am yet afraid we may fail of Convictions where he is the only witness. Mr. P... has given him assurances of 2000 Dollars. I have reason to believe that this will be the lowest sum that will effect the Purpose.

With Esteem & Respect

Yours, etc.
DUDLEY A. TYNG.

Letter addressed to
"William Gray, jr Esq
& Israel Thorndike Esq."

Boston, April 18, 1804.

GENTLEMEN:

I have read your several letters from Messrs. Fletcher & Atherton & from Mr. Tyng, & having conversed with Mr. P ... on the proposition of subjecting the Banks to an eventual payment of \$2000 in addition to the other expences incurred by the pursuit of Counterfeiters, I feel authorized to say, in behalf of the Bank of the U. S., Union, & Boston, that they will contribute their parts of such payment in an equitable ratio to be hereafter agreed on, & have no doubt the Massachusetts will concur. You will therefore please to recommend such a course of proceeding as will be likely to give complete effect to the measure contemplated, *so that on the one hand the testimony of the witness may not be vitiated nor on the other the money paid without having it:* prudence requires extreme caution in this case which I have no doubt will be practised. I am, Gen'l, very respectfully,

Your mo. ob. servant,

GEORGE CABOT.

A Memorandum was inclosed in another handwriting, in these words:

"1, To give such evidence, *consistent with truth*, as in the opinion of the Solicitor General will convict the offenders: 2d, to conduct in such a manner in the whole affair as that no objection shall be made on the trial to his testimony (competency) on account of any agreement or proposition whatever of his relative to cause or causes: 3d, anything allowed him must be for Journies, labour, services & expences in finding out the offenders."

At a meeting of the several Committees from the Boston Banks held at the Hall of the Union Bank on Wednesday, 25 April, 1804.

Boston

Massachusetts

Branch

Union

Beverly

Essex

Present from the Branch Bank,—George Cabot,

Present from the Massach'ts Bank,—

Aaron Dexter.

E. G. Amory &

John Phillips

Present from the Union Bank,—

John Welles &

Samuel Cobb

Present from the Boston Bank

Wm. Sullivan

The Essex Bank & Beverly Bank represented by George Cabot, Esq.
Hon^{ble} Mr. Cabot was chosen Chairman of the meeting.

Wm. Sullivan was chosen Secretary.

Voted 1st. That the expences of prosecutions now pending or which may hereafter be pending, for detecting & punishing counterfeiters of the bills of the Banks which now are or which may hereafter become parties to this agreement be assessed on such Banks in this ratio; viz: one third part of such expences on the bodies corporate; and two third parts thereof on the amount of their Capitals respectively.

Voted 2d. That a Committee of seven be appointed, four of whom shall be Bank Directors in the Town of Boston, appointed one from each Bank therein and three of whom shall be Bank Directors in the County of Essex, under the Direction of which committee such sums of money shall be appropriated exclusively as they may think necessary to carry into effect the objects of this association.

Voted 3d. That a copy of the proceedings of this committee, signed by the Chairman, be laid before the several boards of Directors in this town at their next meetings respectively, that the Committee mentioned in the 2nd Vote may be appointed.

Voted 4th. That the Chairman of this committee be requested to communicate these proceedings to the Boards of Directors of the Banks In Essex, with such observations as he may think pertinent.

GEORGE CABOT, *Chairman.*

Addressed to
"Rufus G. Amory, Esq.,
or William Sullivan, Esq.,
Boston."

Amherst, March 29, 1805.

GENTLEMEN:

I have this day received from Geo. Woodward Esq of Haverhill, N. H. (an agent of ye N. H. Bank whom I have occasionally mentioned to you) a letter, enclosing the correspondence of Lewis Lyman of Montreal to him on the subject of counterfeit bills. He writes,— " In consequence of my representation the Governor of this Province called a privy council: present ye Atty General & Chief Justice — the latter Gentleman gave it his opinion that the criminal laws of the Realm would effectually take cognizance of any person having counterfeit bills in possession or materials and implements for their manufacture, & the Atty Genl, Mr Sewall, was directed to make every inquiry into the business & prosecute every offender in this province."

He observes that "from the frequency of counterfeit bills offered from Stanstead"¹ (the residence of ye celebrated Stephen Burroughs & colleagues) it is more than probable that "a search warrant will be granted to that place"—and adds—"If you are in possession of any information on the subject you will be doing a service by communicating the same. *Bailiffs* in this county are some of the lower class of people, & the apprehension of these fellows might be a little dangerous & it would be necessary, to ensure the faithful performance of their duty, to give them a *douceur*; it will be also attended with a good deal of trouble & expence, to prove ye Bills to be counterfeit, which no individual is willing to pay.—A few weeks since a man from Stanstead offered me several Bills, one of \$20, U. S. Bank, payable in Philadelphia; one of \$5 D^o N. Y. Branch Bank, and one d^o d^o d^o, Boston Branch Bank, & I have one now in possession of the latter description which he passed in this city; the counterfeiters, believing themselves secure,

are off their guard, & now is the time to make a general sweep with them. You will see I am still warm in the cause of detection, altho' I have been treated with such neglect by those who are more interested than myself; Yours &c. Lewis Lyman."

Mr Woodward writes that not less than 20 counterfeit bills have been offered at their (Coos) Bank within 60 days past. He is Cashier of that Bank, & adds his persuasion that the principal part of the Banks (meaning, I presume, in this State) will contribute their proportion of the expence. Mr Woodward has been vigilant in his agency in

[Footnote 1 Stanstead = A little Canadian village, near Rock Island, just over the Vermont border.]

his quarter, collected much information & brought in a number of counterfeit Bills that can be traced to ye rogues in & about Stanstead. I have formerly solicited his particular attention to that quarter, at the same time informing him that I could not guarantee any compensation but presumed he would be indemnified for incidental expences of this nature, & Mr Peabody assured me last summer that, if anything effectual could be done at Canada, I might inform the prosecutors at Boston. Mr Woodward's agency should be continued & compensated by ye N. H. Banks. From Mr Ws situation, interest & assiduity in the cause, this was supposed of considerable consequence. Since the disclosures of the extent of the combination of y8 counterfeiters & the full proof that their principal seat & great mint was at and about Stanstead, I have been decidedly of your opinion that nothing effectual had or would be done towards a radical cure, till they were broken up in that quarter by the concurrent aid of the Government of Canada. You will perceive what is & judge what may & ought to be done in that quarter. If any thing, I will suggest some observations which can in no event be worse than idle. They will however be delivered with much confidence in their utility & practicability. I propose—That some person be furnished with Letters from the Governor of Massachusetts & such other persons of distinction as may be deemed necessary, & vested with as much discretionary power as may be judged proper. That he repair to Montreal as soon as may be, to advise with & aid the Government of that place in the prosecution. That he endeavor to procure a Law in that province for the apprehension of Criminals who may have fled from any of the United States.

If arrests are made at Stanstead or elsewhere in Canada, that He be present, & be instructed, should any important disclosures be made, to communicate immediately to the Atty Genl of any state, or first to Boston, if that's best, every thing that may require attention in N. Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, N. York or elsewhere. I mention these states because they have evidently there connexions with ye Stanstead rogues.

That he have the liberty and the means, particularly, of sending on a friend into the garrison itself, before ye attack, to watch movements, collect evidence & communicate particulars before the onset; and to select men of spirit & vigilance in the vicinity to assist in the arrest,— common means & ordinary Bailiffs will not answer. One near Stanstead (by the name of R...) is evidently of the Gang.

The apprehension of Stephen Burroughs with a few of the Ringleaders (several of whom there is evidence against in this state) I apprehend would fully answer the purpose. If, from this prosecution, there should transpire nothing which would, without much expence, lead to the conviction of some leading offenders in the states I have innumrated, I should be decidedly for following up the Blow In Canada, by the publication of such facts & circumstances as would convict, In public opinion, some notorious offenders in ye U. S., particularly in N. York. This is

a cheap course and places them either in the way to the Gallows or beyond the power of pursuing their heretofore successful career in villainy.

The whole expence of such prosecution, if conducted with unity of plot, I am convinced would not exceed what was pd for ours in the county of Hillsborough, or for ye conviction of Wingate & Peasley.

Should you judge ye subject worthy of attention, & cannot, without difficulty, employ a more suitable agent or agents, & should see fit to furnish me, any time in May, with the above mentioned credentials, I will, for \$2000 outfit, engage to undertake the business, procure the necessary evidence & aid, and within 60 days from the time of leaving Amherst secure Burroughs & a sufficient number of his colleagues in Montreal, or such of the States as they can be punished in & defray every expence connected with the arrest & procuring the evidence, till time of trial. If the business should not be done to your satisfaction, I will return, at thirty days notice, such part as any three men you may choose shall say, & if to your approbation & by your concurrence, will engage to refund the above sum in one year from its receipt, & rely on such compensation as may be given by Banks in the other States.

If this communication is entitled to your consideration, I shall be ready to receive any communication and attend to it after the first week in May. Yours with esteem,

(signed) D. E . . .

P. S. I have written to Mr Woodward advising him to request Mr Lyman to enjoyn secrecy on arrest, & in the mean time to collect evidence, promising as requested to correspond & consult with you on the subject.

(signed) D. E . . .

These papers were commented on and discussed in an interesting manner by the Hon. John I. Baker, who was introduced as the best informed of living men, in the history of Beverly.

Postscript by Dan R.:

We have been unable to find more information about the life of Mr. Peaslee, the engraver associated with the New Boston counterfeiters.

However, we do know that Stephen Burroughs (1765-1840) eventually retired from a long and successful career as a counterfeiter. In his 1894 "Genealogy of the Burroughs family", Lewis Amos Burroughs writes about Stephen:

"In the latter part of his life he thoroughly changed his conduct, entered the communion of the Roman Catholic church, and passed his last years in receiving at his residence and educating the sons of wealthy Canadian gentlemen. He was beloved by his pupils, had an extensive and valuable library of choice books and was noted for his happy faculty of communicating his stores of useful knowledge. Few men have possessed equal capacity for teaching the young."

Lewis was not specific about what Stephen taught his pupils, whether it was philosophy and the arts or something more practical, perhaps related to paper, ink, and engraving.