

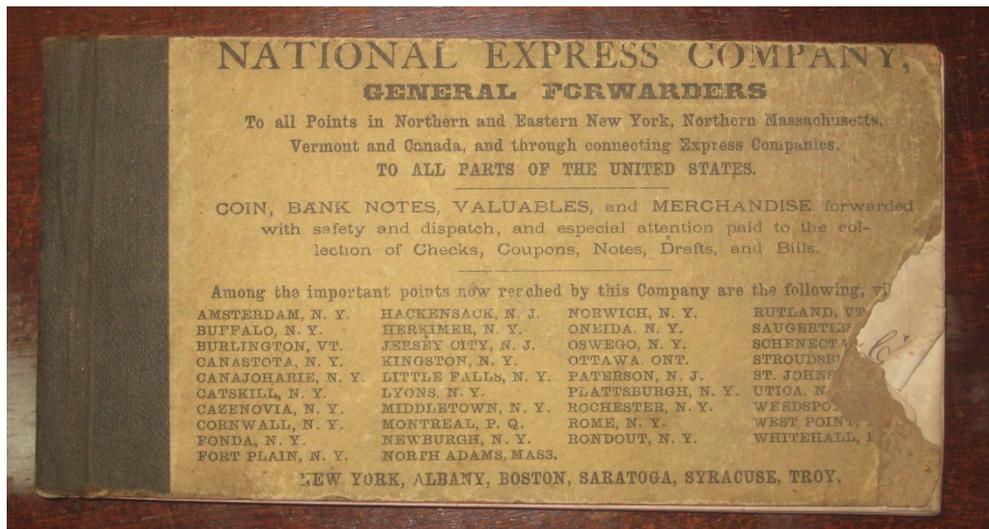


THE SLINGERLAND PRINTING COMPANY REVISITED - A National Express Company Receipt Book

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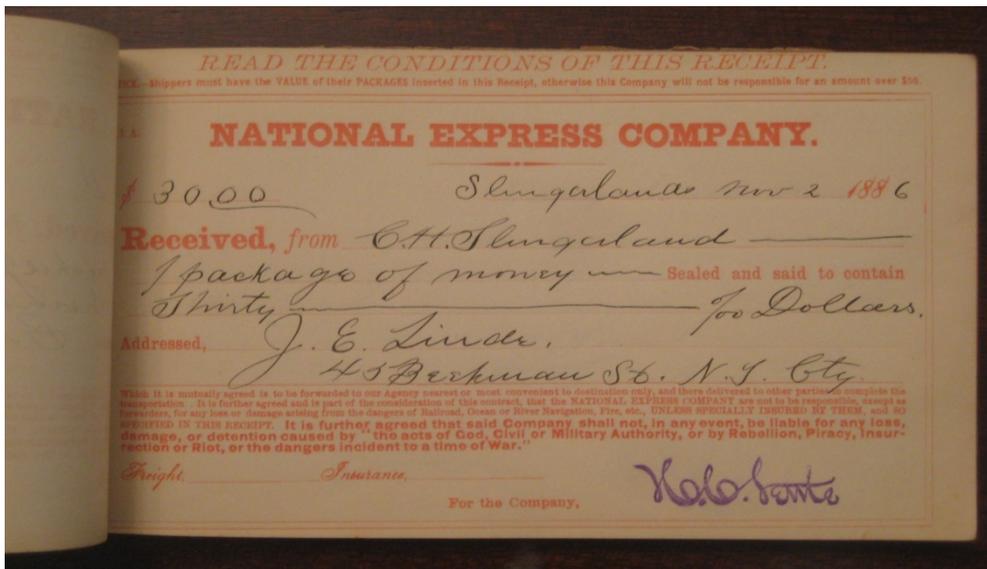
In the fall of 2012, Jane Tollman was kind enough to invite me into her home in search of Slingerland family history. You see, Jane's husband was the great grandson of Cornelius H. Slingerland, founder of the Slingerland Printing Company. I was curious, what would I find that would add to the story of the family and the business whose building remains a prominent landmark at the corner of New Scotland Road and Kenwood Avenue.

With the help of a flashlight, the dusty confines of Jane's Victorian attic yielded a dull and dog eared receipt book from the National Express Company. It was near a moldering pile of William M. Patton's *Paper and Press Magazine*. This little book gave several intriguing insights into life in the hamlet of Slingerlands in the late 1880s.



Cover of the National Express Company receipt book

Each page of the book is a preprinted form filled in by the express agent. For example, one page says that on July 31, 1886, the National Express Company "Received from *C.H. Slingerland* 1 package of money sealed and said to contain *eight dollars*. Addressed *Farmer Little and Co 63 Beekman Street, N.Y. City, NY*" (Italics are handwritten.) So, what can we learn from these pages?



A completed receipt

The majority of the forms are to various suppliers of the printing company. They include the above mentioned Farmer Little, a type foundry, J.E. Linde Paper Company of NYC and Moran & Willcox of Middletown, NY, a provider of imposing and ink stones. Intriguingly there is also a series of large payments (\$35, \$61 & \$64) to the New York Steam Power Co which is a builder of “superior steam engines and boilers.” This description comes from company letter head. It appears that in 1886 Slingerland was making capital improvement to the power supply of his printing plant.

Two other questions arise. Why didn't he simply write a check and why didn't he just put the check in the mail?

Perhaps he could have written a check. Demand deposit accounts were becoming widespread in the 1880s and Albany certainly had its share of banks including the Home Savings Bank of Albany and the Albany Savings Bank. As far as I know, Bethlehem did not have a bank until the Bank of Bethlehem was established in 1927. So, I am left wondering about how the banking system worked in that era – could he write a check drawn on an Albany bank and could it be cashed at a New York City bank? Was it simpler and more direct just to send a package of cash? More research is necessary to answer these questions. What is for sure is that between April 1, 1886 and November 1887 Slingerland sent over 50 individual packages of money via the National Express Company.

While the US Postal Service has been around since 1775 and the first postage stamp was published in 1847, domestic parcel post was not established until 1913. As an aside, you might be curious to know that while city dwellers had free home delivery starting in 1863, rural free delivery (RFD) began in the 1890s. The Slingerlands RFD route made its first deliveries on February 1, 1902. The first postmaster of Slingerlands, back when the hamlet was still called Normanskill, was William Henry Slingerland, Cornelius' great uncle. He was postmaster from 1852 until about 1872.

The express service business grew out of the old stage coach lines with people entrusting their packages and parcels to the stage coach driver. Parcels often moved by private hands. Friends and associates known to be traveling (say from Slingerlands to New York) would be asked to take along and see delivered a letter or package. Steamboats and railroads were soon added to the mix of travel modes.

The National Express Company has its roots in two companies. Pullen, Virgil & Co ran an express service in northern New York and Canada in the early 1840s that included stage, steamship and railroads. The 1854 opening of the Albany

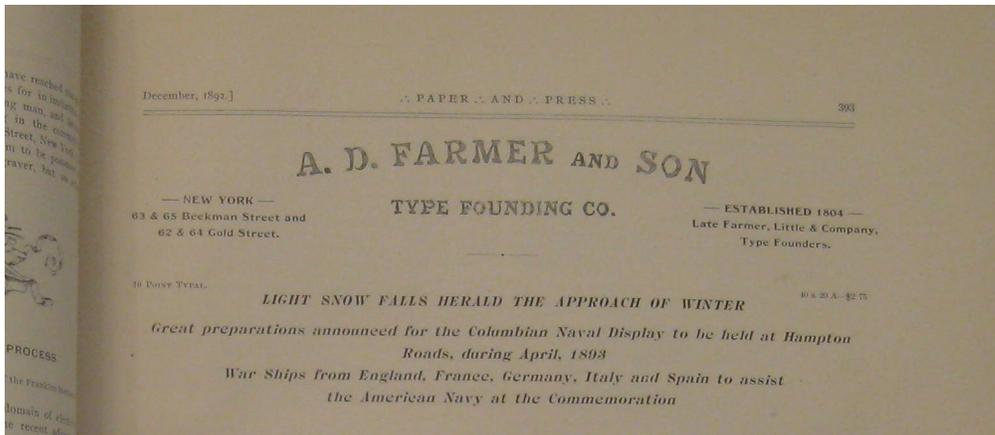
Northern Railroad led to the establishment of Johnson & Co who focused on moving packages from Albany to Rutland VT including Saratoga with plans to expand to Canada. These two companies combined in 1855 to form the National Express Company.

For Slingerland, it probably came down to speed and simplicity. Like senders today deciding between the USPS or Fedex or UPS, Slingerland made the decision to use National Express for his business packages. A walk across the railroad track brought him to the Slingerlands Station and the National Express office with its promise to forward “coin, bank notes, valuables and merchandise with safety and dispatch.” (As quoted from the front cover of the receipt book.)

Alexander Lovett Stimson’s *History of the Express Business: Including the Origin of the Railway System* provides a fascinating history of the express services. The book was published in 1881 and available online through Google Books. It includes this helpful hint about shipping C.O.D. (cash on delivery) “In sending a bill C.O.D, always send the goods with the bill, otherwise the cabalistic letters C.O.D. on a package are more ornamental than useful. Never send fresh fish, lobsters, or ice cream C.O.D., unless you are prepared to receive and pay charges on the unpleasant remains in case they are returned for non-payment of bill.”

So, this simple little book belonging to a Bethlehem family living and working in 1880s Slingerlands led me on to the history of railroads and the post office, banking and check writing. It provides a glimpse into how a local business fit into the wider U.S. economy with its networks of banking, transportation and commerce.

For more about the Slingerlands Printing Company including old photos read my article “Slingerlands Printing Company Then and Now” on this webpage.



A portion of A.D. Farmer’s ad in *Paper and Press* includes an example of a 10 point typeface available for sale