

Genevan bankers in Napoleonic France

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

While Geneva's economy declined, the bankers of Genevan and Swiss origin established in Paris regained an important position under the Consulate and the Empire. The Banque de France, founded in 1800, counted among its first directors several bankers drawn from the Protestant and Swiss networks.¹ These bankers, who had come through the Revolution, took part in the reconstruction of the French financial system and in the financing of the Napoleonic state.

Their presence illustrates the resilience of the networks of Protestant banking. Despite crises, bankruptcies and persecution, these networks rebuilt themselves and were able to adapt to the new regime. Their ties with Geneva, maintained through family alliances and business relationships, would prepare the revival of the Geneva financial centre after 1815.

The foundation of the Banque de France also marks a stage in the history of public finance. For the first time France acquired a sound bank of issue, capable of managing the currency and supporting credit, on the model, suitably adapted, of the Bank of England. Half a century on, this reform answered the weaknesses that the Genevan bankers of the eighteenth century had observed in the financial system of the monarchy.

1 Notes

1. Musée protestant (museeprotestant.org), “La banque Mallet” (the Mallets took part in founding the Banque de France, Guillaume Mallet régent), “La banque Hottinguer” (Jean-Conrad Hottinguer, co-founder, régent from 1803 to 1828) and “La famille Delessert” (Étienne Delessert co-founder in 1800, Benjamin Delessert régent from 1802). ↩

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/geneva-genevan-bankers-in-napoleonic-france