

The founding houses

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Several of today's great Genevan private banking houses were founded in the period surrounding the French annexation and the Restoration. Their history, often recounted by the institutions themselves, shows the continuity between the trading world of the eighteenth century and the wealth management of the nineteenth.

The oldest of the houses still in business traces its origin to the firm created by Henri Hentsch. According to the account given by the association of bicentenary family businesses of which the group is a member, Henri Hentsch founded a silk and commission business on 11 January 1796, before entering into partnership with his cousin Jean Gédéon Lombard on 19 June 1798.¹ The Hentsch family had arrived in Geneva around the middle of the eighteenth century, when Benjamin-Gottlob Hentsch, a pastor from Lower Lusatia, came to settle in Switzerland as a private tutor; his son Henri Hentsch lived from 1761 to 1835.² The present Lombard Odier group arose, according to the same source, from the merger in 2002 between the bank Lombard, Odier & Cie and the bank Darier, Hentsch & Cie.³

This origin is instructive. The house founded in 1796 was first of all a silk trading and commission business, in keeping with the eighteenth-century practices described in Part C. The transition to banking, and then to wealth management, took place gradually, as financial activities came to outweigh the trade in goods. The link between commodity trading and finance, which still characterises the Geneva financial centre today, thus lies at the cradle of its oldest house.

The house of Pictet was founded in 1805, during the French period.⁴ Its history, tied to several Genevan families whose names appeared successively in the firm's name, illustrates how private banking houses were handed down over the generations through the admission of new partners drawn from the founding or allied families.⁵ Two centuries later, Pictet and Lombard Odier rank among the oldest banks in Switzerland.⁶

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The house of Mirabaud was founded in 1819, in the first years of Swiss Geneva.⁷ Other houses appeared in the course of the nineteenth century, sometimes through the transformation of trading houses or the separation of partners, and several of them survive today in various forms.⁸

House	Founded	Main development
Hentsch, later Lombard Odier	1796	silk and commission business, partnership with Jean Gédéon Lombard in 1798, merger with Darier, Hentsch & Cie in 2002
Pictet	1805	family house passed between several partner families, now one of the leading wealth managers in Switzerland
Mirabaud	1819	house founded in the first years of Swiss Geneva

Caution. The founding dates claimed by the banks often refer to the establishment of a house whose original business differed from that of the present-day bank, and whose firm name changed several times. The continuity claimed is that of a line of partners and a clientele; the legal entity has often changed.

1 Notes

1. Les Hénokiens, “Banque Lombard Odier & Cie SA (1796)”, henokiens.com (accessed September 2026). ↩
2. Article “Banque Lombard Odier”, Wikimonde (accessed September 2026). ↩
3. Article “Banque Lombard Odier”, Wikimonde, cited above. ↩
4. “Deux banquiers privés genevois font leur mue”, Tribune de Genève, 6 February 2013, which mentions the founding of Pictet & Cie in 1805 and of Lombard Odier & Cie in 1796. ↩
5. Pictet Group, “History of Pictet” (pictet.com): partnership deed signed in Geneva on 23 July 1805 by Jacob-Michel-François de Candolle and Jacques-Henry Mallet with three limited partners (capital of 125,000 Geneva livres); successive firm names: de Candolle, Mallet & Cie (1805–1807), de Candolle, Turrettini & Cie (1807–1812 and 1819–1841), J. de Candolle & Cie (1812–1819), Turrettini, Pictet & Cie (1841–1848), Edouard Pictet & Cie (1856–1878), Ernest Pictet & Cie (1878–1909), G. Pictet & Cie (1909–1926), Pictet & Cie (since 1926); the name Pictet

entered the firm name with the admission of Edouard Pictet-Prevost as a partner in 1841. ↩

6. Tribune de Genève, 6 February 2013, cited above. ↩
7. “Banques privées à Genève : la liste complète 2026”, placersonargentensuisse.com (accessed September 2026), which gives the founding dates of Lombard Odier (1796), Pictet (1805) and Mirabaud (1819). ↩
8. Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse (DHS), art. “Bordier”: “Bordier & Cie, founded in 1844 under the name of Jaques Reverdin, stockbroker”, father-in-law of Ami Bordier; DHS, art. “Ferrier”: trading and commission business created in 1783 by Abraham-Étienne Ferrier, “replaced in 1795 by Ferrier, Darier & Cie, the origin of the private bank Ferrier, Lullin & Cie”, taken over in 1979 by the Swiss Bank Corporation. ↩

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