

Venable's Hotel, Huntsville, Alabama, 1862

by David Hollander

ONLY TWO "ISSUED" EXAMPLES OF VENABLE'S HOTEL SCRIP ARE KNOWN.

Each of the two known issued and verified Huntsville, Alabama, Venable's Hotel 50 cent notes, Rosene 136-1¹, is in terrible condition. (See Figures 1 and 5.) The first is from the Walter B. Jones sale²; the second found in a mixed lot in September 2003. They are owned by a Huntsville collector.

Both notes are dated July 22, 1862, with the "July 22" being hand-written and the "1862" printed. Rosene indicates that the date on the issue is "18__, part ink."³ It is possible that he had seen neither of the issued pieces and only had a printer's proof to study.

The signature on both notes is that of "J. M. Venable."

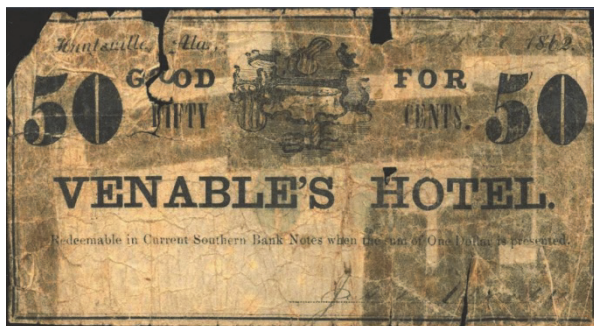


Figure 1: The front of the Walter B. Jones Venable's Hotel note is fairly complete.

The note's vignette (Figure 2) is unusual: it depicts a settee and chairs, but two of the chairs and one foot-stool are turned over and the entire vignette is printed upside-down! Probably the upside-down picture was merely an error on the part of the printer. When the note is rotated by 180 degrees, the scene becomes clear, but still there still appears to be a perspective problem with one of the chairs. The vignette is not unique to the Venable's Hotel scrip. Rather, at least several other Alabama notes (by what appears to be the same printer, who remains unknown⁴) have this unusual scene. These include the Huntsville Johnson House 5 cent, Rosene 130-2⁵, and Princeton, Alabama⁶, Rosene 282-4 through 282-7⁷. It is plausible that the printer inadvertently produced a large amount of paper having only this error and, rather than destroy the paper that was quite valuable because of wartime shortages, continued to use it until his stocks were exhausted.



Figure 3: The left vignette shows a settee and accessories when rotated by 180 degrees. (For clarity, the vignette on the right is from a Princeton, Alabama note.)

The back of the note (Figure 3) is quite interesting: of course the printed “50” value is very obvious and clear. But, less discernable is the fact that the scrip was printed on paper used for Bank of Alabama \$100 bonds. (See Figure 4 for an enlargement of the area.) The bond paper has a printed serration guide for separation.



Figure 2: The back of the Venable's Hotel scrip is revealing.

The 20 Princeton, Alabama, and the 5 Huntsville Johnson House notes that were examined had no value, no Alabama bond printing, nor any printed serrations on the back. As a cost saving measure, it is entirely possible that Mr. Venable had agreed to use the printer's cheapest stock, which was the paper printed on the State Bank of Alabama blank \$100 bonds.



Figure 3: The Venable's Hotel scrip are printed on unissued Bank of Alabama \$100 bonds.



Figure 4: The other Venable's Hotel note has a date identical to the first notes, July 22, 1862.

The second known Venable's Hotel note (Figure 5) has been backed with paper to preclude further deterioration. When held to light, it has the same reverse as the first note's, including the Bank of Alabama bond printing. (See Figure 6.)

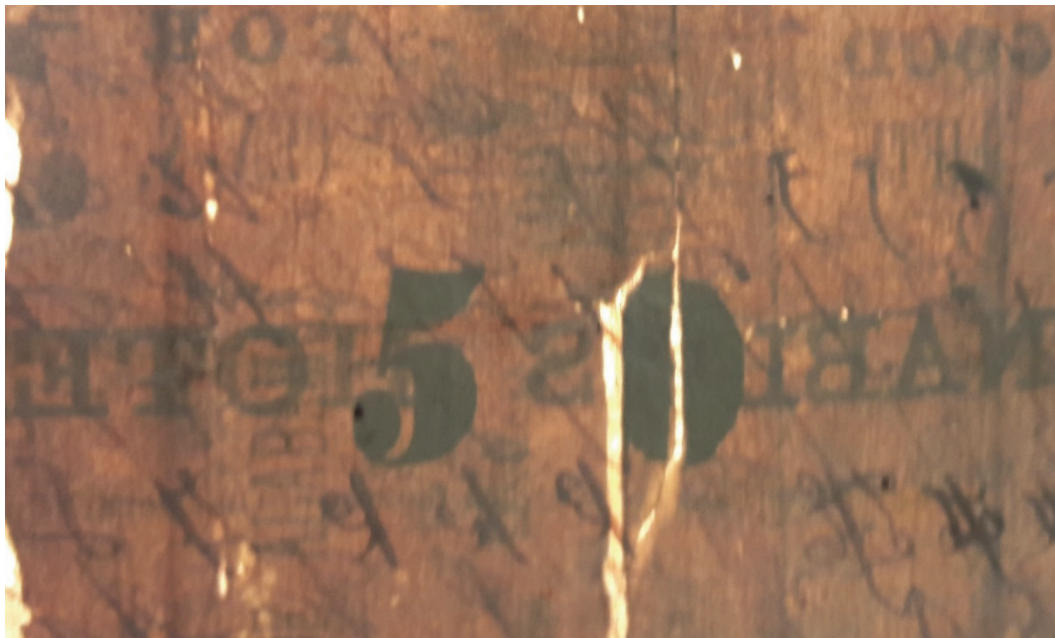


Figure 5: Held to light, both notes show the same back, including the Alabama bond indications.

Facts about Mr. Venable and the hotel.

Mr. James Monroe Venable was born in Farmville, Prince Edward County, Virginia, on April 10, 1810. His father was Abraham (August 26, 1780-?); his mother, Elizabeth Taylor (1782-July 25, 1855).

On December 20, 1831, Mr. Venable married Matilda W. Hoffman in Rockbridge County, Virginia.⁸

During the years 1834-1837 the James Monroe Venable family probably lived in Tennessee since his two oldest girls were born there. Sometime before 1840 the Venable's moved south since the younger James was born in Alabama, and the family is recorded in the 1840 United States Census for Madison County.⁹ It lists the Venable home as 11 persons, including 5 Free White Males, 3 Free White Females, 1 Male Slave, and 2 Female Slaves.

The 1850 United States Census, enumerated on December 14, 1850,¹⁰ indicates that the Venable household, probably a boarding house, consisted of James and Matilda, their four children (Sarah Elizabeth, May 9, 1834-July 23, 1922; Esterline H., August 10, 1837-February 24, 1915; James Joseph, June 21, 1841-August 1897; and Victor A., 1842-June 19, 1861¹¹), Matilda's mother (Elizabeth Hoffman) and two sisters (Esterline and Chartten), and ten others. He owned one slave in Virginia.¹² Mr. Venable's occupation was noted to be a "Tinner." Two of the other occupants were also Tanners.

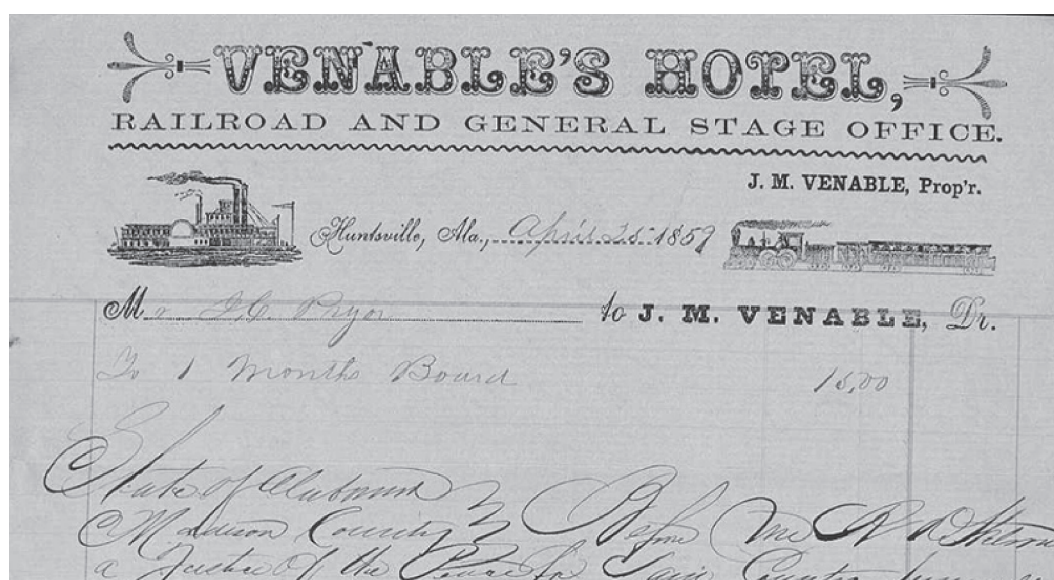


Figure 6: Mr. Venable was the proprietor of Venable's Hotel that was also a boarding house.¹³

In 1856 the Railroad Hotel was built for \$2,376 by the Memphis & Charleston Railroad Company. It was located on the north end of Church Street across from the railroad passenger depot. Additions were made to enlarge the facility in 1857¹⁴. Most likely the railroad leased the building to Mr. Venable. He was the proprietor and his business became known as Venable's Hotel. (See Figure 7.) Not only was the establishment a hotel, but also it served as a boarding house with a number of local citizens living there on a semi-permanent basis.¹⁵

The 1860 Census¹⁶ shows a much smaller household: James and Matilda, three of the children (Esterline H, who later married a minister, Joseph Pitts; Victor A., who died of typhoid fever when he was 21 while training with the Madison Rifles in Pensacola¹⁷ on June 19, 1861¹⁸; and James Joseph, who worked with his father), and Henry and Mattie Thornburg. (His elder daughter, Sarah Elizabeth¹⁹, had married John Hunn Swift in Huntsville on June 13, 1855.) Mr. Venable's occupation was recorded as "Landlord." He still owned a slave, this one in Huntsville.²⁰

On April 11, 1862, the Union Forces occupied Huntsville. Sometime during the occupation, after September 1864, Venable's Hotel closed.

Prior to 1866 Mr. Venable went into the grocery business. (See Figure 8.) The hotel was renovated and reopened in 1866 as the Donegan²¹ Hotel.

In July of the same year the Internal Revenue Service assessed Mr. Venable a tax of \$20.92 on his income of \$418.54 and \$1.00 on his gold watch valued at \$100.00.²²

The 1870 United States Census lists both Mr. Venable and his son, James, as "Hotel Keeper." The family seems to have been living in the hotel (presumably the Donegan Hotel) because, along with the family, at least 40 names are included in the census listing. The names include a Corn Merchant, Lawyer, Druggist, Coal Dealer, and other professionals boarding at the hotel.²³

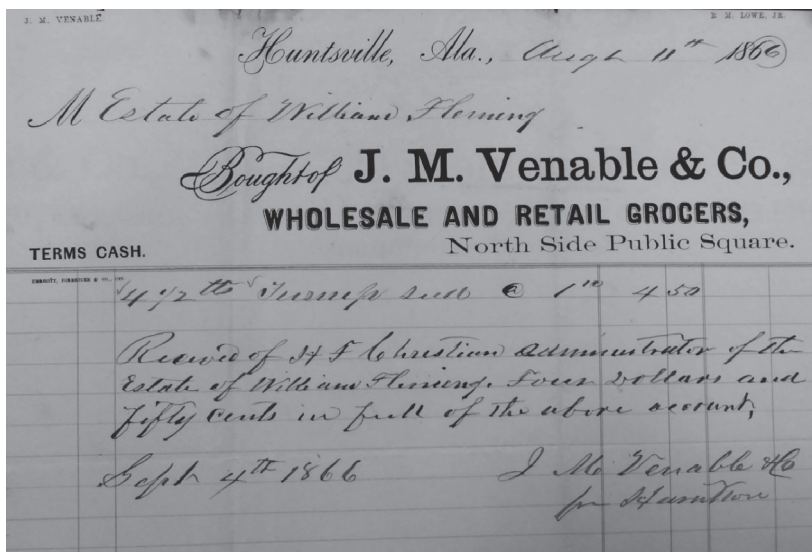


Figure 7: After Venable's Hotel closed, Mr. Venable became a grocer.

In 1873 the Memphis & Charleston Railroad Company sold all of its property along the railroad tracks, including "...that valuable property in Huntsville known as the Donegan Hotel..."²⁴

Mr. James Monroe Venable died June 22, 1873; his wife, Matilda, had died of "Consumption"²⁵ March 1, 1872. Both are buried in Huntsville's Maple Hill Cemetery. (See Figure 9.)

The hotel was razed in the late 1890's and made way for the Dilworth Lumber Company, a lumber yard.²⁶

Figure 8: James and Matilda Venable are buried in Maple Hill Cemetery in Huntsville, Alabama.¹



- ¹ Rosene, Walter, Jr., ALABAMA OBSOLETE NOTES AND SCRIP, Society of Paper Money Collectors, Inc., c. 1984, Page 56.
- ² Heritage Auctions, Walter B. Jones Collection, September 21, 2001, Auction Number 269, Lot 5683. Price realized, including Buyer's Premium, was \$165.00.
- ³ Ibid, Page 56.
- ⁴ There are other Alabama obsolete notes that are clearly the work of the same printer. These include The Easley Hotel 50 cent note of 1862 (Huntsville, Alabama, unlisted in Rosene), the Huntsville James Hickman issue of 1862 (Rosene 127-1 and others), and the Huntsville J. M & T. I Humphrey issue of 1862 (Rosene 128-1 and others). However, the furniture vignette is not known on any of the surviving specimen.
- ⁵ Op. Cit., Rosene, Page 52.
- ⁶ Princeton, Alabama, is circa 25 miles east-north-east of Huntsville in Jackson County, Alabama.
- ⁷ Op. Cit., Rosene, Page 109.
- ⁸ Ancestry.com. *Virginia, Marriages, 1740-1850* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 1999. Original Data: Dodd, Jordan R., et. al., *Early American Marriages: Virginia to 1850*. Bountiful, UT, USA: Precision Indexing Publishers.
- ⁹ "United States Census, 1840, Madison County, Microfilm: #M704-13, AL, <http://ftp.us-census.org/pub/usgenweb/census/al/madison/1840/> (File 5 of 5), Copyright 2006 by Linda Doty, <Transcriber@us-Census.org>
- ¹⁰ "United States Census, 1850," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MH53-YXZ> : accessed 26 March 2016), James M Venable, Huntsville, Madison, Alabama, United States; citing family 546, NARA microfilm publication M432 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).
- ¹¹ Rice, Charles, Hard Times, *The Civil War in Huntsville and North Alabama, 1861-1865*, Boaz, Alabama: Boaz Printing Company, Copyright 1994, Page 28.
- ¹² 1850 Slave Schedule, Prince Edward County, Virginia.
- ¹³ From the James C. Pryor Estate of Huntsville, Alabama.
- ¹⁴ *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture & Preservation*, Spring 1981, Page 16.
- ¹⁵ The Huntsville City Directory, 1859-1860.
- ¹⁶ "United States Census, 1860", database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHD2-778> : accessed 26 March 2016), James M Venable, 1860.
- ¹⁷ Chadick, Mary Jane Cook and Nancy M. Rohr, *Incidents of the War: The Civil War Journal of Mary Jane Chadick*, SilverThreads Publishing, Copyright November 1, 2005, Page 196.
- ¹⁸ Record, James, *A Dream Come True, The Story of Madison County and Incidentally of Alabama and the United States*, Huntsville, Alabama, 1970, Page 128.
- ¹⁹ www.findagrave.com, Sarah Elizabeth Venable Swift, May 9, 1834-July 23, 1922. Her tombstone indicates she is buried in Madura, South India. Her husband, John is buried in Maple Hill Cemetery. He died on June 30, 1873, sometime after which, apparently, Sarah Elizabeth became a missionary in India.
- ²⁰ 1860 Slave Schedule, Huntsville, Alabama.
- ²¹ This was James J. Donegan, the president of the Northern Bank of Alabama until it was closed during the Federal occupation in 1862. He was also president of D. Patton & Company and one of the owners of Bell Factory, a textile mill. The 1860 United States Census indicated that his real estate was valued at \$138,000 and his personal property at \$275,000.
- ²² 1866 IRS Schedule for Division Number Two, Collection District Number Three of the State of Alabama, Page 22.
- ²³ United States Census, 1870", database with images, *FamilySearch*
- ²⁴ *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture & Preservation*, Winter 1998, Page 31.
- ²⁵ U.S. Federal Census Mortality Schedules, 1850-1885.
- ²⁶ Op. Cit., *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*, Spring 1981, Page 16.