

# The Farmers & Merchants National Bank of Huntsville, Alabama, 1892-1905

By David Hollander

## HUNTSVILLE'S NATIONAL BANKS.<sup>1</sup>

Like the great majority of national banks throughout the country, the story of those in Huntsville (Table 1<sup>2</sup>) is one of extended families or long-term business relationships. In the case of The Farmers & Merchants National Bank of

Huntsville, Alabama, it was built solely upon business associations among men who migrated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to Huntsville, Madison County, Alabama, from Pierre, South Dakota.

**Table 1: Huntsville Was Home to Four National Banks During the Note Issuing Period.**

<b>Charter No.</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Chartered</b>	<b>Fate</b>
1560	The National Bank of Huntsville	September 15, 1865	Liquidated, July 3, 1889
4067	The First National Bank of Huntsville	June 22, 1889 <sup>3</sup>	March 23, 1985, Changed to a Domestic Branch of a Domestic Bank <sup>4</sup>
<b>4689</b>	<b><i>The Farmers &amp; Merchants National Bank of Huntsville</i></b>	<b><i>January 25, 1892</i></b>	<b><i>Liquidated, March 16, 1905</i></b>
8765	The Henderson National Bank of Huntsville	June 1, 1907	August 31, 1985, Changed to a Domestic Branch of a Domestic Bank <sup>5</sup>

## CHARTER 4689: THE FARMERS & MERCHANTS NATIONAL BANK OF HUNTSVILLE WAS HUNTSVILLE'S SHORTEST-LIVED BANK.

Several businessmen...COL<sup>6</sup> Willard Irvine Wellman, COL Tracy Wilder Pratt<sup>7</sup>, and William Sherley Wells<sup>8</sup>...doing business in Pierre, South Dakota...heard about opportunities in Huntsville, Alabama, and moved south in 1891-1892 to exploit them.<sup>9</sup>

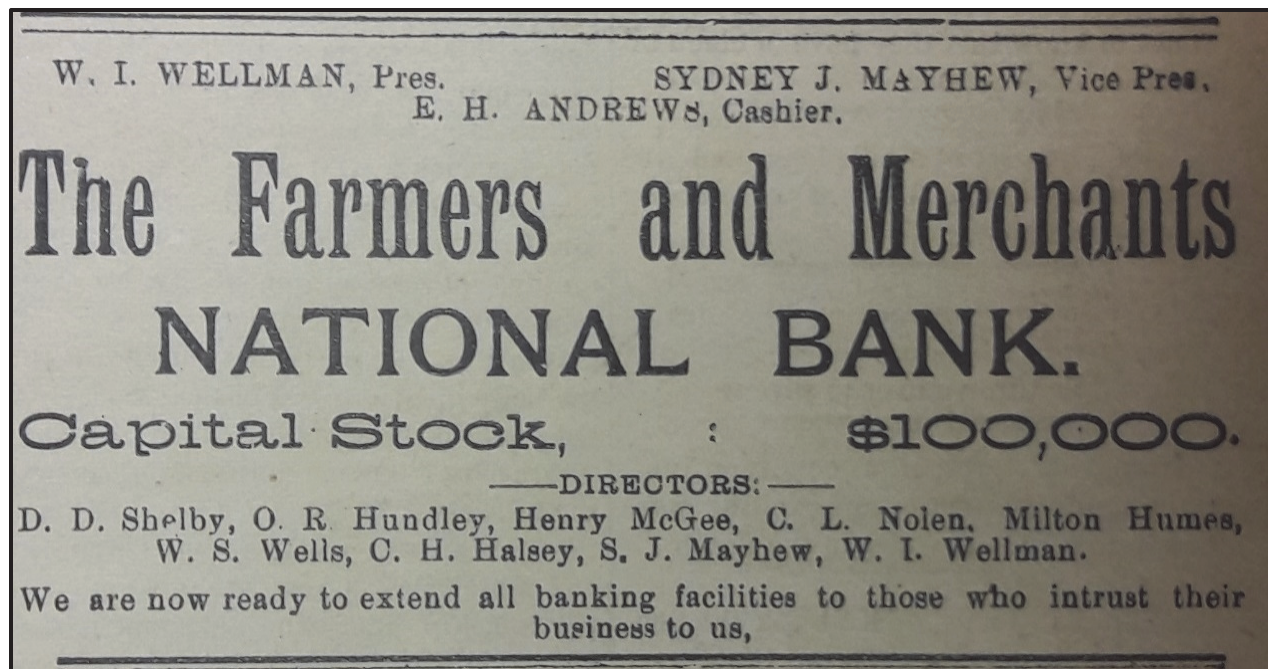
Among their many ventures, they<sup>10</sup> founded The Farmers & Merchants National Bank. Because of its short, 13-year, existence, the bank made no lasting impact on the Huntsville community. In fact, today its existence appears to be lost in history. However, the bank officers and their colleagues did make significant contributions to the city, to Madison County, and to the northern part of the state.

**THE BANK.** The Farmers & Merchants National Bank was organized January 20, 1892, with \$100,000 in capital stock. (See Figure 1<sup>11</sup>.) COL Wellman was elected President and Mr. Sidney Jonathan Mayhew, a northerner living in Huntsville since the Civil War, Vice President. The Board of Directors consisted of Mr. Milton Humes, a lawyer from Virginia and president of the Board of Trade<sup>12</sup>; Mr. Charles Henry Halsey; Mr. Mayhew; Mr. Oscar Richard Hundley, a financier and politician; Mr. Henry McGee, who came from Philadelphia in 1866 and operated the McGee Hotel starting in 1869; Mr. C. L. Nolen, a northerner living Huntsville since Reconstruction; Judge David Davie Shelby; Mr.

William Sherley Wells of Pierre, South Dakota, where he was a Railroad President; and COL Wellman. The Cashier was Edward Hotchkiss Andrews. (See Tables 2 and 3.<sup>13</sup>) The bank was located in the Halsey Building opposite the Huntsville Hotel on Jefferson Street.<sup>14</sup>

The bank seemed to have operated normally during its first years. However, the first clear evidence of financial problems was the receipt of the July 30, 1901, "Notice of Impairment" from the United States Treasury

ostensibly a fraternal benefit society. However, in reality, it was a front company, headquartered in Philadelphia, that allowed the Heralds of Liberty to evade state insurance regulations. The parent company's officers adopted a variety of schemes to embezzle funds from the fraternity by selling worthless bonds, borrowing money with insufficient collateral, and having the Heralds make "payments" to the parent. It took 20 years of illegal practices, resulting in an excess of unpaid claims, before the Alabama Insurance



**Figure 1: The Bank Opened for Business in 1892.**

Department in the not-inconsequential amount of \$30,000 (Figure 2<sup>15</sup>). One may assume the bank satisfied the Treasury Department because it remained in business for almost four more years.

Another compelling indication of potential financial issues with the bank occurred as a result of Act 374 (February 12, 1901) of the Alabama General Assembly incorporating the "Heralds of Liberty" in Huntsville, Alabama. The trustees were Tracy Wilder Pratt, Willard Irvine Wellman, and James Richardson Boyd. This was

Department took over the fraternity in June 1921.<sup>16</sup> Prior to 1921 and even after the ruse exploded, the general public was unaware of the issues involving the Heralds of Liberty and the reputations of the key figures were not sullied.

Whether the Huntsville trustees' involvement was merely innocent or part of a larger conspiracy is unknown, but the latter case seems quite likely. These financial shenanigans may have contributed to the sale of the bank.

On March 16, 1905, the bank was sold to the Huntsville Bank & Trust Company.<sup>17</sup>

*E.A.S.*  
A.M.S.

COMPTROLLER OF THE CURRENCY.  
Form 482.—Ed. 11 9 1900 300.

S- 4689

NOTICE OF IMPAIRMENT OF CAPITAL.

Treasury Department,  
OFFICE OF  
COMPTROLLER OF THE CURRENCY.

Washington, D. C., July 30, 1901

Whereas, It appears to the satisfaction of the Comptroller of the Currency that the capital stock of The Farmers and Merchants National Bank, Huntsville, Alabama, has become impaired to the extent of Thirty Thousand dollars (\$30,000.00), and

Whereas, Section 5205 of the Revised Statutes of the United States provides that every association whose capital stock shall have become impaired by losses or otherwise, shall, within three months after receiving notice thereof from the Comptroller of the Currency, pay the deficiency in the capital stock by assessment upon the shareholders pro rata for the amount of capital stock held by each;

Now, therefore, Notice is hereby given said association to pay the said deficiency in its capital stock in the manner provided by said section of the Revised Statutes; and if such deficiency shall not be paid, and said bank shall refuse to go into liquidation, as provided by law, for three months after this notice shall have been received by it, a receiver will be appointed to close up the business of the association, according to the provisions of Section 5234 of the Revised Statutes of the United States.

In testimony whereof, I have hereto subscribed my name and caused my seal of office to be affixed to these presents, at the Treasury Department, in the City of Washington, and District of Columbia, this 30th day of July, A. D. 1901.

*Chas. G. Dawes*  
Comptroller of the Currency.

To the Farmers and Merchants National Bank,  
Huntsville, Alabama.

Figure 2: By 1901 There Were Obvious Financial Issues at the Bank



**Table 2: The Farmers & Merchants National Bank of Huntsville Had a Single President.**

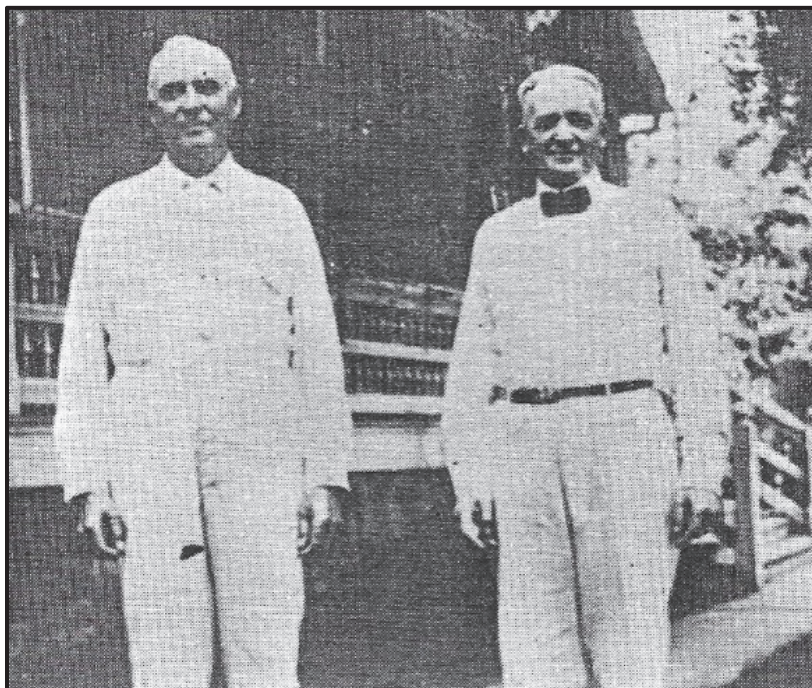
<i>Year</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Born</i>	<i>Died</i>	<i>Spouse</i>
1892-1905	Willard Irvine Wellman	11/2/1858	3/23/1922	Helen L. Leet

**Table 3: There Were Two Cashiers During the Bank's Existence.**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Cashier</i>	<i>Born</i>	<i>Died</i>	<i>Spouse</i>
1892	Edward Hotchkiss Andrews	2/22/1863	4/9/1932	Emma Yaste
1898	James Richardson Boyd	4/14/1860	11/4/1907	Elizabeth "Bettie" Watkins Mathews

**WILLARD IRVINE WELLMAN (Figure 3<sup>18</sup>)** was born in Farmington, Minnesota,<sup>19</sup> November 2, 1858.<sup>20</sup> On March 6, 1884, he married Helen L.

Leet (January 27, 1865-September 12, 1934) in Rochester, Minnesota.



**Figure 3: Willard Irvine Wellman (left) and Tracy Wilder Pratt (right) Were Longtime Business Partners.**

COL Wellman moved to Pierre, South Dakota, where he teamed with COL Pratt and Mr. Wells in several businesses, including the Northwestern Land Association (Figures 4<sup>21</sup> and 5<sup>22</sup>), a South Dakota corporation<sup>23</sup>. In 1892 the three of them moved to Huntsville.

In Huntsville COL Wellman's activities included realty, insurance, banking (Figure 7<sup>24</sup>), textile mills<sup>25 and 26</sup>, and civic involvement<sup>27 and 28</sup>. He died March 23, 1922, and is buried in Huntsville's Maple Hill Cemetery.<sup>29</sup>

**Wellman Willard I** (Pratt & Wellman) sec and treas  
 Northwestern Land Association, res Decatur n e cor 7th.  
 Wells Miss Emma I, bds W S Wells.  
 Wells Glenn W, flour and feed, Central ave s e cor 9th, bds W  
 S Wells.  
**Wells' House**, Chas R Kelsey supt. W S Wells mngr, Central  
 ave s w cor 10th. (See back fly leaf.)  
**Wells Wm S** (Ward & Wells) mngr Wells' House and pres  
 N W Land Association, res 7th s w cor Franklin.

**Figure 4: The Pierre, South Dakota, 1890-1891 Directory Confirms that COL Wellman, COL Pratt, and Mr. Wells Were Business Partners in South Dakota.<sup>30</sup>**



**Figure 5: COL Wellman Was the Secretary of the Northwestern Land Association.**





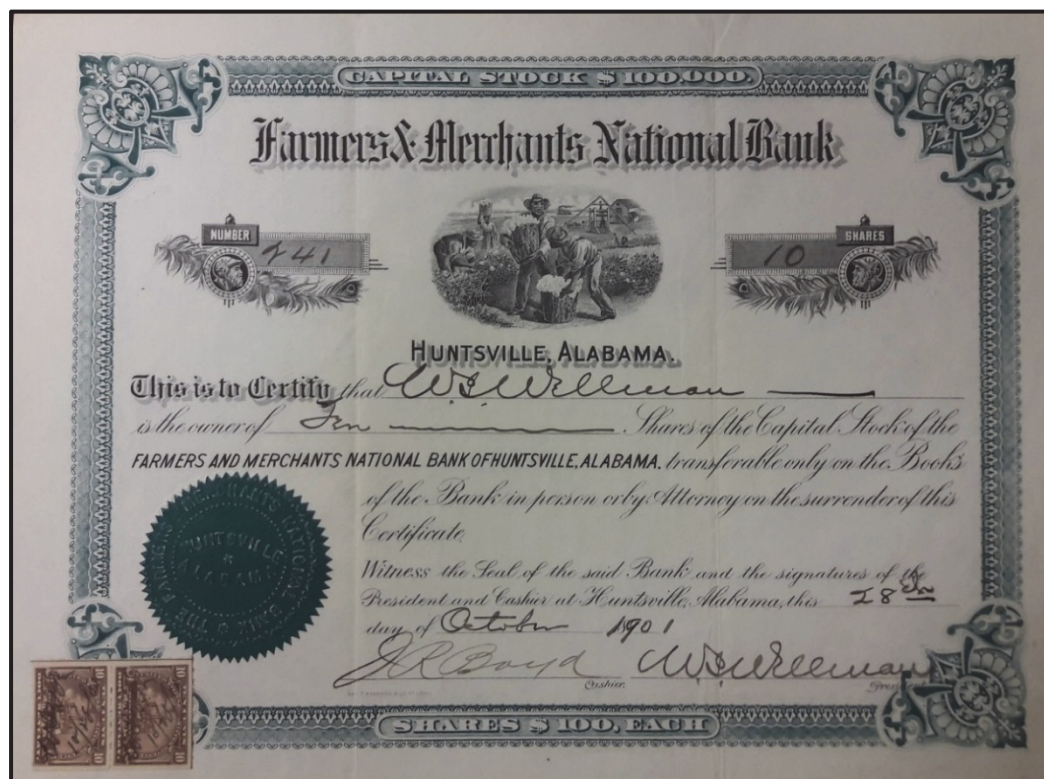
**EDWARD HOTCHKISS ANDREWS** (Figure 6<sup>31</sup>) was born February 22, 1863, in Cazenovia, New York. His father was a well-known Methodist minister and was assigned to many different pastorates. It was in the various towns where his father was a minister that Mr. Andrews secured his education in

the public schools. He completed his instruction at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut. Then followed several years of varied experience while he was trying to find the particular calling to which he was best fitted. He became an Assistant Geologist for the US Geological Survey during 1884-1886.

On October 5, 1886, he married Miss Emma Amelia Yaste (January 26, 1864-March 30, 1947) in Washington, DC.

For five years, 1886-1891, he was a banker in Pierre, South Dakota (where he probably met COL Wellman, COL Pratt, and Mr. Wells). For climatic reasons he came to Alabama in 1891 and spent five years in the banking business in Huntsville as the Cashier of the Farmers & Merchants National Bank.

**Figure 6: Mr. Andrews Was the Cashier Until 1898.**



**Figure 7: As the President of the Farmers & Merchants Bank, COL Wellman Was Authorized to Issue Stock to Himself.**

In 1898 Mr. Andrews resigned as the Huntsville bank Cashier and started his insurance career in Mobile as manager of the Central Life Insurance Company of Cincinnati. He was forced to leave Mobile during an epidemic of yellow fever and became a permanent resident of Birmingham. In 1896 he was the State of Alabama Manager of the Union Central Life Insurance Company, Cincinnati, Ohio, and developed 27 subordinate agencies, comprising one of the largest general insurance agencies in the South.

For two years Mr. Andrews was president of the Birmingham Council of the Boy Scouts of America. He was a Mason and in 1918 was President of the Rotary Club, a member of the board of governors of the Country Club, and a member of the Southern and Roebuck clubs. During World War I he became a member of Headquarters Company of the Fifty First Infantry. He was one of the men who saw active service at the front in France.<sup>32</sup>

Mr. Andrews died April 9, 1932, and is buried in Birmingham, Alabama's Elmwood Cemetery.

**JAMES RICHARDSON BOYD (Figure 8<sup>33</sup>)** was born in Jackson, Mississippi, April 14, 1860.

He came to Huntsville in the late 1890's to work as a clerk in the First National Bank of Huntsville, where his uncle, MAJ James Richardson<sup>34</sup> Stevens, Sr., was President.<sup>35</sup>

After Mr. Andrews' resignation in 1898, Mr. Boyd was elected to be Cashier of the Farmers & Merchants National Bank.

He married Elizabeth "Bettie" Watkins Mathews (March 29, 1876-November 8, 1951) April 29, 1901, in Huntsville. They had one child, James Richardson Boyd, Jr. (September 1, 1902-March 16, 1981).

When the Farmers & Merchants National Bank was sold to the Huntsville Bank & Trust Company in 1905, Mr. Boyd continued his career as the Cashier at the new bank.

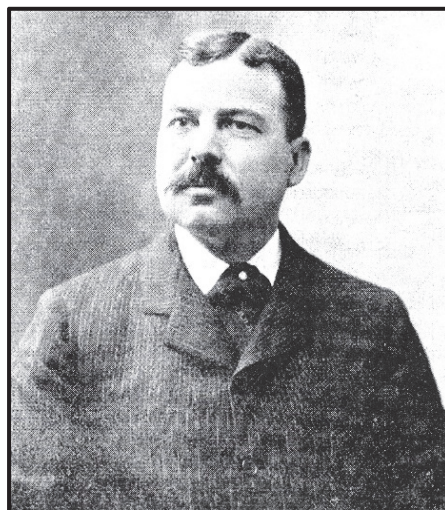
He was an esteemed and trusted member of the Huntsville community. For instance, the Madison Spinning Mill was placed in his hands as receiver through bankruptcy proceedings in the United States District Court. Further, he was a

member of the Huntsville City Council for eight years, his last term expiring in April 1907. In September 1907 he was elected as President of the Huntsville City Council even though he had not been a candidate.<sup>36</sup>

However, during his last year of life, Mr. Boyd borrowed extremely heavily (thousands of dollars) from the Huntsville Bank & Trust Company; the Hamilton National Bank, Chattanooga, Tennessee; and the Peoples National Bank of Shelbyville, Tennessee. Some of his loans were co-signed by COL Wellman.

He committed suicide on November 4, 1907.<sup>37</sup> At the time it was assumed the strain of his work was the reason for him killing himself; however, during probate<sup>38</sup> it became obvious that he must have been very depressed and despondent about his enormous debts. He died intestate. His estate was deemed insolvent and his creditors, including his widow, his son, and COL Wellman, were reimbursed by Probate Court order at the rate of \$0.21 per \$1.00.<sup>39</sup>

Mr. Boyd is buried in Huntsville's Maple Hill Cemetery.



***Figure 8: Mr. Boyd Was Cashier from 1898 Until the Bank Was Sold in 1905.***



**THE BANKNOTES.** Records indicate that at least \$22,500.00 of the \$95,600.00 printed were on the balance sheet as liabilities, which one may assume entered circulation. (See Figure 9.<sup>40</sup>)

There are no known surviving notes from the Farmers & Merchants National Bank. Only the approved proofs of the notes are known. (See Table 4<sup>41</sup> and Figure 10<sup>42</sup>.)

**Table 4: No Surviving Notes Are Known from the Farmers & Merchants National Bank.**

Series	Denomination	Serial Numbers	Notes Printed	Total Value	Known
1882 Brown Back	\$10 and \$20, printed in sheets of three \$10's and one \$20	1-1912	\$10=5,736 \$20=1912	\$10=\$57,360.00 \$20=\$38,240.00	0
<b>Totals:</b>			7,648	\$95,600.00	0
<b>Total Unredeemed Notes in 1910:</b>					\$2,850.00

8 REPORT OF THE COMPTROLLER OF THE CURRENCY.			
ALABAMA.			
Farmers and Merchants' National Bank, Huntsville.			
W. I. WELLMAN, President.		No. 4089.	E. H. ANDREWS, Cashier.
Resources.		Liabilities.	
Loans and discounts.....	\$179,198.85	Capital stock paid in .....	\$100,000.00
Overdrafts.....	3,735.63	Surplus fund .....	4,000.00
U. S. bonds to secure circulation...	25,000.00	Undivided profits, less current expenses and taxes paid.....	279.65
U. S. bonds to secure deposits.....		National bank notes outstanding.....	22,500.00
U. S. bonds on hand .....		State bank notes outstanding.....	
Premiums on U. S. bonds .....	3,125.00	Due to other national banks .....	
Stocks, securities, etc .....	8,450.88	Due to State banks and bankers..	293.85
Bank's house, furniture, and fixtures .....	4,516.27	Dividends unpaid.....	
Other real estate and mortg's owned .....		Individual deposits.....	86,737.47
Due from other national banks .....	5,025.12	United States deposits.....	
Due from State banks and bankers .....		Deposits of U. S. disbursing officers.....	
Due from approved reserve agents.....	11,261.25	Notes and bills rediscounted.....	35,252.28
Checks and other cash items.....	1,393.86	Bills payable.....	5,000.00
Exchanges for clearing house.....		Liabilities other than those above stated.....	
Bills of other national banks .....	1,203.00	Total .....	254,063.25
Fractional currency, nickels, cents.....	57.39		
Specie .....	6,971.00		
Legal-tender notes .....	3,000.00		
U. S. certificates of deposit .....			
Redemption fund with Treas. U. S. ....	1,125.00		
Due from Treasurer U. S. ....			
Total .....	254,063.25		

**Figure 9: In 1895 \$22,500 of the National Bank Notes Were Listed as Liabilities.**





Figure 10: Banknote Proofs of The Farmers & Merchants National Bank of Huntsville, Alabama, Are in the Smithsonian Institute.

<sup>1</sup> Hollander, David, "The National and First National Banks of Huntsville, Alabama, 1865-1935," *Paper Money*, 2017, Volume 56, Number 312, Page 426. This was the first article in the series "Huntsville's National Banks."

<sup>2</sup> Kelly, Don C., NATIONAL BANK NOTES, SIXTH EDITION, Oxford, Ohio: The Paper Money Institute, Inc., Copyright 2008, Page 33.

<sup>3</sup> Floyd, W. Warner, Form 10-300, Revision 6-72, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, signed July 19, 1974, Certified October 25, 1974.

<sup>4</sup> Federal Reserve System, National Information Center,

[http://www.ffiec.gov/nicpubweb/nicweb/InstitutionHistory.aspx?parID\\_RSSD=72632&parDT\\_END=20100129](http://www.ffiec.gov/nicpubweb/nicweb/InstitutionHistory.aspx?parID_RSSD=72632&parDT_END=20100129)

<sup>5</sup> Federal Reserve System, National Information Center,

[http://www.ffiec.gov/nicpubweb/nicweb/InstitutionHistory.aspx?parID\\_RSSD=140830&parDT\\_END=19851130](http://www.ffiec.gov/nicpubweb/nicweb/InstitutionHistory.aspx?parID_RSSD=140830&parDT_END=19851130)

<sup>6</sup> *The Huntsville Daily Times*, Thursday, March 23, 1922, Page 1. This news report about COL Wellman's death is the only reference seen showing his title as "COL" rather than "Mr.". It is assumed that the titles for both COL Wellman and COL Pratt were honorary, neither could be confirmed.

<sup>7</sup> *The Community Builder*, Huntsville, Alabama, October 31, 1928, Page 1. COL Tracy Wilder Pratt (September 1, 1861-October 29, 1928) died suddenly of "heart failure" while sitting in his home and listening to the radio.

<sup>8</sup> *The Daily Mercury*, Huntsville, Alabama, March 1, 1900. Mr. William Sherley Wells (1839-February 28, 1900) suffered from Pneumonia for six days and unexpectedly died. He was a native of Elmira, New York, and moved to Forrest, City, Minnesota. In 1892 he moved to Huntsville, Alabama.

<sup>9</sup> [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) and [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com). The three men were probably well-acquainted prior to moving to South Dakota because they had roots in the same area of Minnesota.

<sup>10</sup> COL Wellman, COL Pratt, and Mr. Wells were involved together in a variety of businesses, sometimes overtly and sometimes as silent partners. One assumes that COL Pratt was involved with the bank's founding, but there is no tangible evidence.

<sup>11</sup> *The Weekly Mercury*, Huntsville, Alabama, February 3, 1892, Page 5.

<sup>12</sup> Record, James, A DREAM COME TRUE, THE STORY OF MADISON COUNTY AND INCIDENTALLY OF ALABAMA AND THE UNITED STATES, VOLUME II, John Hicklin Printing Company, Huntsville, Alabama, copyright 1978, page 80.

<sup>13</sup> [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org), [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), and [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com).

<sup>14</sup> Op. Cit., Record, Page 82.

<sup>15</sup> Huntsville Madison County Public Library, Archives.

<sup>16</sup> ACTS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF ALABAMA PASSED AT THE SESSION OF 1900-1901, HELD IN THE CITY OF MONTGOMERY, COMMENCING TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1900. A. Roemer, Printer for the State of Alabama, Montgomery, Ala., 1901, Pages 990-1994.

<sup>17</sup> The Huntsville Bank & Trust Company was formed in the late 1890's with Sidney Jonathan Mayhew (May 28, 1829-May 17, 1912) as the President. The bank was housed in the old Huntsville Hotel Corner (13 North Side, Public Square) until it burned in 1908 at which time it moved into the Herstein Building until February 1930. Its then President, Richard Holland Gilliam, Sr. (October 7, 1897-January 24, 1976), sold the bank to the Henderson National Bank of Huntsville (as reported by the Huntsville Daily Times on February 26, 1930).

<sup>18</sup> Huntsville Madison County Public Library, Photograph Collection.

<sup>19</sup> The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Pedigree Resource File," database, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/2:2:37K6-77Y> : accessed 2016-05-22), entry for Willard I. /Wellman/.

<sup>20</sup> There is some ambivalence in certain references about COL Wellman. For instance, in the United States Census of 1900, his middle name is noted as "Quinn" and his year of birth as "1857." In the same census and in the 1910 Census his wife's name is recorded as "Hellen."

<sup>21</sup> Huntsville Madison County Public Library, Archives.

<sup>22</sup> Huntsville Madison County Public Library, Archives.

<sup>23</sup> Ryan, Patricia H., THE HUNTSVILLE HISTORICAL REVIEW, Volume, 15, Spring-Fall 1985, Numbers 1 and 2, Published by The Madison County Historical Society, "Tracy Pratt," Page 28.

<sup>24</sup> Huntsville Madison County Public Library, Archives.

<sup>25</sup> Op. Cit., *The Daily Mercury*, July 21, 1900. THE LOWE MILL PLANS: COL Wellman received a letter from Mr. Arthur Lowe stating that plans and specifications of the Lowe Mill would be at the Farmers & Merchants National Bank and any contractor wanting to see them could do so at the bank. Mr. Lowe stated in his letter that he would remain in the city until the mill was operational.



<sup>26</sup> The News Scimitar, Tennessee, November 4, 1918. COL Wellman was the treasurer of the Abingdon Mills and was appointed receiver for the bankrupt company.

<sup>27</sup> Op. Cit., *The Daily Mercury*, December 20, 1894. COL Wellman was a candidate for Mayor of Huntsville.

<sup>28</sup> *The Journal*, Huntsville, Alabama, August 1, 1907. COL Wellman was elected to Huntsville's first Board of Education.

<sup>29</sup> Op. Cit., *The Huntsville Daily Times*. At the time of his death COL Wellman was, among other positions, the President of the Huntsville Bank & Trust Company, Treasurer and General Manager of Lincoln Mills, and Head of the Huntsville Knitting Mills.

<sup>30</sup> City Directory, 1890-91, Pierre, South Dakota.

<sup>31</sup> Birmingham Public Library, Digital Collections,  
<http://bplonline.cdmhost.com/digital/collection/p4017coll6/id/206/rec/1>

<sup>32</sup> Cruikshank, George M., A HISTORY OF BIRMINGHAM AND ITS ENVIRONS, Volume II, The Lewis Publishing Company, Chicago and New York, c. 1920, Pages 215-216.

<sup>33</sup> Huntsville Madison County Public Library, Photograph Collection.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.Ancestry.com>. His maternal grandmother's maiden name was "Richardson."

<sup>35</sup> *The Weekly Mercury*, Huntsville, Alabama, November 6, 1907, Page 3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Madison County Records Center, Huntsville Madison County Public Library, "James Richardson Boyd" probate records. Mr. Boyd left no last will and testament.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> *Annual Report of the Controller of the Currency*, 1895.

<sup>41</sup> Op. Cit., Kelly, Page 33.

<sup>42</sup> The American History Museum of the Smithsonian Institute,  
[americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_1453283](http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1453283).

I very much appreciate the advice and assistance from the Huntsville Madison County Public Library, the Madison County Records Center, and William David Gunther.

## *SPMC Speaker Series*

### **F.U.N. 2019**

Come join us as we present multiple speaker sessions on Friday, January 11 2019 at F.U.N.

8a—Bob Moon--"A Beginner's Guide to Collecting National Currency"

9:30a—Wendell Wolka--"Enemy at the Gates: The Fall of New Orleans and its Numismatic Consequences"

11a--Robert Calderman, "Introduction to Small Size Currency Collecting"

1230p--Pierre Fricke, "Counterfeit Confederate money made in the Union"

**And join us for the SPMC membership meeting on Saturday January 12 at 0830.  
Speaker TBA**