

JOHN DOUGLAS – NEW ORLEANS ENGRAVER

Introduction

John Douglas may not be known to those who collect Confederate Treasury notes, but his name might ring a bell with scripophiliasts who are collectors of Confederate Treasury bonds. Douglas, who ran a small engraving business in New Orleans, Louisiana, produced some of the first ever Treasury bonds to be issued by the newly-formed Confederate States Treasury department. Secession, and the outbreak of War in April 1861, had created a sudden business opportunity for Douglas, but the good times would be short-lived - in late April 1862, New Orleans was captured by Federal forces after a surprise and daring naval attack. So, who was John Douglas, and how did he go from being a simple high street engraver, making a living from selling wedding invitations and visiting cards, to someone who manufactured important Treasury bonds for the Confederate Government, and later, Treasury notes for several Southern States?

Ireland

John Douglas was born and baptised on February 10th, 1822, in Rathfarnham, County Dublin, Ireland; he was the fifth of six children, born to George Douglas and Rose Kilbride. Rathfarnham, some five miles to the south of Dublin city, was at that time an area of beautiful countryside, large Georgian homes, and a small castle. The area had been settled since Norman times by wealthy landowners from across the Irish Sea, and indeed, the Douglas family was of Scottish descent. Unfortunately, few vital records from the nineteenth century have survived in Ireland - most being destroyed in 1922 during the Irish Civil War; only limited church records are now available, making research into Douglas' early life difficult. Dublin boasted a small, but well-respected engraving community, and after leaving school, this is most likely where John Douglas undertook an apprenticeship (typically lasting seven years), and later began work.

The Great Famine of (1845-1852) was Ireland's darkest time, with more than one million poor souls dying from starvation and disease due to repeated failures of the potato crop due to the blight (fungus). The British Government was heavily criticised for its ineffective response to the disaster, leading to increased calls for Irish independence, a collapse of the Irish economy, and mass emigration. Almost one million Irish men, women, and children fled Ireland during this tragedy, mainly emigrating to the United States; John Douglas was amongst them.

America

Douglas arrived in the United States during the summer of 1848, aged twenty-seven, and settled in New Orleans, Louisiana; the city was predominantly Catholic, and was quickly becoming one of the largest and wealthiest in the country. By 1851 Douglas had established his own engraving business, located at 17 Charles Street, in the commercial area of the city, and built up an appreciative clientele.

The first concrete reference to his business activities appeared in the *New Orleans Crescent* newspaper, dated June 19th, 1852. The newspaper included the minutes from a meeting of the "Board of Aldermen" wherein a payment of \$16 to John Douglas was approved for "engraving die and printing" services. Douglas had engraved a new seal for the city of New Orleans to commemorate the reunion of the three municipalities; this was a prestigious assignment and indicates that he was well respected for the quality of his engraving work. Advertisements for Douglas' business appeared regularly from the mid-1850s, indicating that he was focused on providing general engraving and printing services.

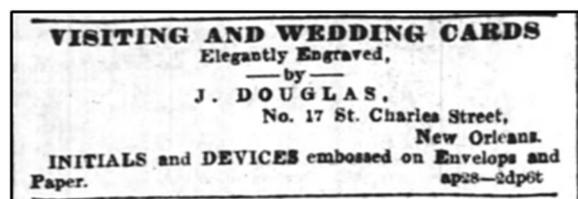


Figure 1. April 28th, 1857 - *Times Picayune*.

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In 1859, approaching forty years old, Douglas married Mary Agnes Purcell, aged twenty-four; Mary had emigrated from County Offaly in Ireland with her family in 1849. The 1860 U.S. census recorded that Douglas and his wife had recently been blessed with their first child, John Jr.; it also revealed that Douglas was relatively affluent, with real estate valued at \$20,000 and other assets worth some \$3,000. Douglas had acquired several properties in the city as investments, and this would suggest that he was already a man of means – with capital - when he had arrived in America.

Secession and War

Between December 20th, 1860, and February 1st, 1861, seven Southern states seceded from the Union, and this quickly led to the formation of the Confederate States of America, with Jefferson Davis being inaugurated as President on February 18th, 1861. Within days Davis had formed his cabinet, and the difficult business of running the new country began in earnest. The most important challenge was to establish the military capabilities necessary to protect the South's new independence, but this required money. Thus, the newly-formed Confederate States Treasury department, led by Christopher G. Memminger, immediately found itself under intense pressure.

The Confederate Congress, which at that time was based in Montgomery, Alabama, approved the Act of February 28th, 1861, providing for a loan of \$15 million to finance the immediate priorities of the government. The loan would be effected through the issue of Confederate Treasury bonds. Unfortunately for Secretary Memminger, this was easier said than done, the problem being that the agricultural Southern states had always relied on engraving and printing establishments located in the more industrialised North for this specialised service. Not surprisingly, the United States Government, and the citizens of the Northern states in general, felt considerable frustration and resentment towards the secessionist Confederate States, and this impacted trade.

Consequently, Secretary Memminger did not believe it would be feasible to have his Treasury bonds produced anywhere in the North. Instead, in a state of near panic, Secretary Memminger sent agents to scour the South's major cities in search of solutions; the city of New Orleans soon came to his attention, given its position as the South's most important financial centre.

On March 1st, 1861, Secretary Memminger received a response from one of his agents in New Orleans – Richard Jones, a partner in a Cotton trading company – stating that he had attached bids from two local companies for the engraving and printing of the required Treasury bonds. One of these bids was from the New Orleans branch of the American Bank Note Company, which was headquartered in New York, and was one of the largest and most respected such companies in the world.

in his cover letter, Jones specifically cautioned that under this bid, the required Treasury bonds would be manufactured in New York City; however, the attached proposal and quotation provided by the branch manager – Solomon Schmidt – certainly implied that the work would be executed locally in New Orleans. This undoubtedly misled Secretary Memminger who duly awarded the American Bank Note Company with a contract to produce a quantity of Registered Bonds (also known as Stock Certificates). The work was undertaken in New York.

The second bid was provided by John Douglas, who ran a small engraving concern in New Orleans. Whilst Jones had been somewhat dismissive of the American Bank Note Company's bid, he was openly complimentary about Douglas' capability and his patriotism, clearly recommending him:

"There have gone forward to you, by Adams Express, specimens of the engravings of Mr. Douglass, who is a southern institution and has a high reputation for ability and faithfulness and executes nearly all the orders for engraving for the city of New Orleans."

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Jones went on to stress the advantage that Douglas was located in the South, and also insinuated that, given New Orleans importance to the Confederacy, it would be appropriate if he was awarded a contract.

“From inquiries made, Mr. Douglass may be relied on, and as we have him, identified with the South, on the spot, and as New Orleans deserves well of the Confederation, we hope that he will get the order.”

It is quite likely that Jones did not appreciate the complexities of engraving bank notes and bonds in relation to other more general forms of engraving, and as such, was perhaps guilty of over-stating the capabilities of Douglas’ small business. The Gardener’s New Orleans business directory for that year (1861) provided a helpful overview of the type of engraving services offered by Douglas, and it can be seen that these did not seem to include engraving bank notes or bonds:

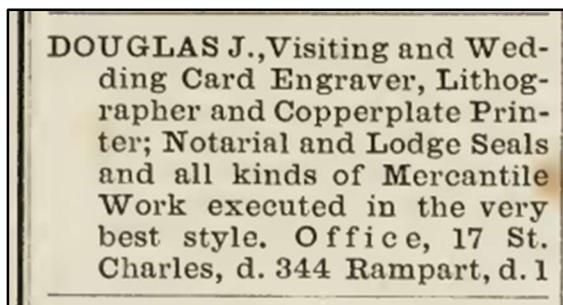


Figure 2. Gardener’s New Orleans Directory of 1861.

Regardless of whether he had any concerns or not, Secretary Memminger proceeded to award Douglas a contract to produce some 10-year bearer bonds (known as coupon bonds) which offered 8% interest, maturing on September 1st, 1871. These \$50 and \$100 bonds – classified as Type 1 and Type 2 respectively in Ball and Simmons 2nd Edition Catalog of Confederate Bonds – were initially issued from Montgomery, Alabama, but later from Richmond, Virginia, after this had become the seat of the Confederate Government on May 8th, 1861. The reference to Montgomery on the bonds produced by Douglas was simply crossed out and overwritten with “Richmond” by Treasury clerks.



Figure 3. 1861 \$50 8% Coupon bond. Image courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

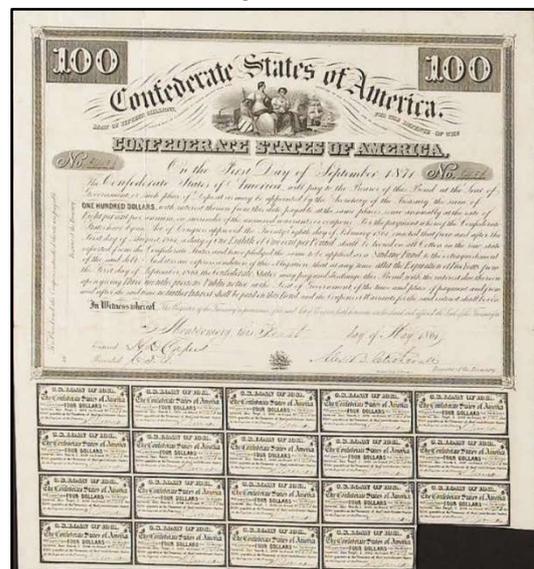


Figure 4. 1861 \$100 8% Coupon bond. Image courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

Douglas produced these bonds in the typical format of the day, featuring a single vignette, a central body of text defining the terms of the bond, and rows of interest coupons which enabled the holder to collect the interest due at six-monthly intervals until maturity. A letter from Secretary Memminger, dated July 24th, 1861, confirmed that Douglas had successfully completed the order, delivering a total of 8,346 of the \$50 bonds, and 8,016 of the \$100 bonds. Between April and October of 1861, a total of 7,835 of the \$50 bonds and 7,950 of the \$100 bonds were issued by Treasury officials across the South. These bonds proudly bore the imprint: “Douglas. Engr. N. Orleans”.

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Keep the bonds coming!

Secretary Memminger was clearly satisfied with the quality of bonds being produced by Douglas, and before work had even been completed on the initial contract, a second order was placed with him. The Confederate Congress approved the Act of May 16th, 1861, which authorised a more substantial amount of \$50 million in 8% Treasury bonds, with a twenty-year maturity date of November 1st, 1881. Treasury records confirm that Douglas had been instructed to produce the first \$10 million-worth of bonds under this Act, in denominations of \$1000, \$500, and \$100. In a letter, dated July 21st, 1861, Secretary Memminger specified the quantities of each denomination required:

"... let the quantities be 6,000 of \$1,000 each, 6,000 of \$500 each, and 10,000 of \$100 each."

This in itself represented a lot of work for Douglas, but in the same letter Secretary Memminger enquired whether Douglas would have the capability to undertake the full order - \$50 million worth of bonds. The Treasury's only other suppliers at that time were already swamped with other urgent orders, namely the New Orleans branch of the American Bank Note Company (which had been renamed as the Southern Bank Note Company), and the Richmond-based Hoyer & Ludwig company.

Douglas had begun work on the order, but we will never know if he would have been able to complete it successfully. A letter dated August 15th, 1861, from Secretary Memminger to his contact in New Orleans - the esteemed James D. Denègre, President of the Citizens Bank of Louisiana – advised that Congress wanted to change the terms of the proposed bonds, and that Douglas should cease all work on them.

Douglas was paid for his work to date on the new bonds, but unfortunately would not be awarded the contract to resume work after Congress had agreed the changes. The contract was handed over to Hoyer & Ludwig in Richmond, Virginia.

Secretary Memminger had a wariness of the engraving and printing community, who were known to be a rowdy bunch, and liked to keep a close eye on things, especially given the desperate need for the said Treasury notes and bonds. Thus, he felt uncomfortable about the great distance between the engravers in New Orleans and his office at the Treasury department in Richmond; this anxiety was compounded by operational delays with the orders placed with the Southern Bank Note Company run by Schmidt, and with the amateurism of another minor New Orleans engraver, Jules Manouvrier, when a delivery of his notes failed to reach Richmond securely.

Douglas lands on his feet

Douglas must have been disappointed with the sudden end to his brief relationship with the Confederate States Treasury, and the fact that he had only produced two bonds in their name. Perhaps, as an act of sympathy and support, he was soon awarded some work for the City of New Orleans; this involved engraving four change notes in denominations of 50 cts, \$1, \$2, and \$3 dollars.



Figure 5. 1861 \$2 City of New Orleans. Image courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

Douglas also produced a set of change notes (dated November 1st, 1861) for the New Orleans, Jackson & Great Northern Railroad Co.



Figure 6. 1861 \$3 New Orleans, Jackson & Great Northern Railroad Company. Image courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

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The State of Louisiana

As the War rolled into its second year, the demand for more Treasury notes and bonds continued to increase. This demand was not just from the Confederate States Treasury, but also the Treasury departments of many Southern States, which were permitted to issue limited amounts of their own paper money to supplement that issued by the Confederate States Government. In early 1862, Douglas was awarded contracts by the State Treasuries of Louisiana and Georgia.

The Act of January 23rd, 1862, approved by the Louisiana State Legislature, authorised the issuance of change notes in the denomination of \$1, \$2, and \$3; these notes were dated February 24th, 1862. Douglas is known to have produced the first series of these notes, which bore his imprint – “Douglas, N. Orleans”.



Figure 7. 1862 \$1 The State of Louisiana (face). Image courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

These notes were of reasonable quality, similar to those that he had produced for the City of New Orleans. Paper was in short supply in the Confederacy at that time, and Douglas' notes were printed on the backs of unused sheets - manufactured in the 1850s by Draper, Toppan, Longacre & Company of Philadelphia, and New York - for the Commercial and Agricultural Bank of Texas, based in Galveston.



Figure 8. 1862 \$1 The State of Louisiana (back). Image courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

A second series of change notes – in the same denominations, but with much simpler designs – were issued by the Louisiana State Treasury at this same time. These notes did not feature an engraver's imprint and did not resemble any of Douglas' prior notes. If he was involved with them at all, it was probably only to subcontract the work to another local engraver.

The state of Georgia

Whilst the notes that Douglas had produced for the City of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana were low denomination and of average quality, his work for the State of Georgia was much more impressive. The Act of December 5th, 1861, approved by the Georgia State Legislature in Milledgeville, authorized the production of \$2,500,000 in Treasury Notes, which were dated January 15th, 1862. Douglas was contracted to produce the \$10, \$20, \$50, and \$100 denominations, which involved a total of some 80,000 notes. This was clearly the most prestigious, but also the most challenging engraving work that Douglas had ever undertaken. The resulting notes were of admirable quality as illustrated by the two examples below.



Figure 9. 1862 \$10 The State of Georgia. Image courtesy of Heritage Auctions.



Figure 10. 1862 \$50 The State of Georgia. Image courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

These notes were issued across Georgia between mid-1862 and mid-1863. Douglas placed his imprint along the lower right edge of the note: “Douglas Engr. N. Orleans”.

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The fall of New Orleans

In 1861, New Orleans was undoubtedly the largest, wealthiest, and most important city in the Confederate States of America, with a population of almost 170,000. Its location at the mouth of the Mississippi River on the Gulf of Mexico, made it a powerful commercial hub; the port of New Orleans handled half of the South's cotton exports, a value of more than \$500 million. The city's importance made it a prime target for Federal forces, and it was not long before the U.S. Naval blockade began to hamper maritime trade activities.

Worse was to come for the city, when on April 17th, 1862, U.S. Flag Officer David G. Farragut led a daring naval attack on the city from the Gulf of Mexico, disabling several heavily-armed forts which defended the mouth of the Mississippi river, and then sailing upriver where his fleet of seventeen warships and nineteen gunboats destroyed the smaller Confederate fleet after a ferocious naval battle.

The Confederate defenders, lulled into a false sense of security, had been caught completely by surprise; it was assumed that any naval attack would be launched via the Mississippi river from the North, almost 800 miles away. The beleaguered city surrendered on April 28th, 1862, and was duly occupied by Federal forces from May 1st until the end of the War. Not surprisingly, these dramatic events brought an abrupt end to the bank note manufacturing activities of John Douglas and New Orleans' other engravers.

The War-time economy had undoubtedly presented John Douglas with a significant business opportunity, one which he gratefully exploited during the fourteen months that it lasted. After occupation, his business returned to normal – wedding invitations and visiting cards – as an 1863 newspaper advertisement showed. Federal authorities had quickly declared all Confederate paper money illegal, and New Orleans banks were forced to reissue stocks of their own pre-War notes as a temporary measure.

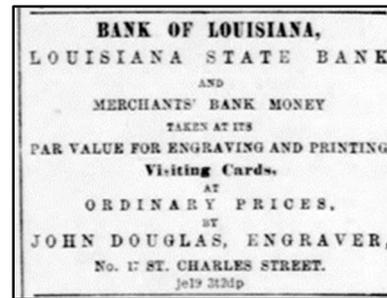


Figure 11. June 19th, 1863 – *The Daily True Delta*.

Understandably, the citizens of New Orleans were wary of the creditworthiness of these old notes, but Douglas' advertisement bravely showed that he had no such reservations.

Douglas' second child, a girl named Mary, was born in September 1862, and a third child, another daughter named Alice, was born in December 1864. Tragically, his wife Mary would die within days from complications following the birth of their third child; the infant, Alice, would also die four months later.

Post-War life and activities

The widowed Douglas and his two children were surrounded with support from his deceased wife's family; in 1866, he married his wife's younger sister, Margaret Purcell, then aged twenty. The couple went on to have six children of their own.

After the War's end and the subsequent period of Reconstruction, Douglas continued to operate his engraving business, relocating in 1866 to new premises at 10 Camp Street.

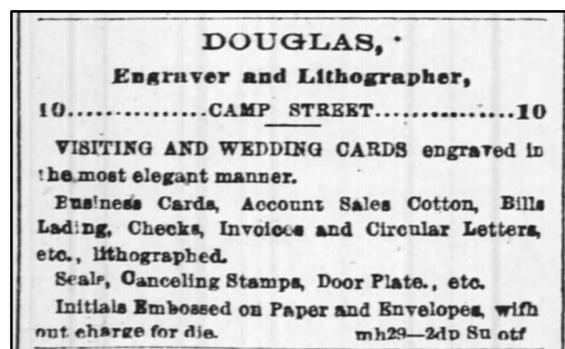


Figure 12. January 10th, 1869 – *The Times Picayune*.

By 1878 Douglas' son,, John Jr., had begun working alongside him, and the father and son team remained together for the next twenty years.

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John Douglas Sr. died on August 30th, 1900, aged seventy-eight; he was buried in the family plot at the Metairie cemetery, at the northern end of Canal Street. Several local newspapers printed obituaries of Douglas, all of which were warm and praising of the stout and genial Irishman from Dublin, who had lived and worked in the city for more than half a century.

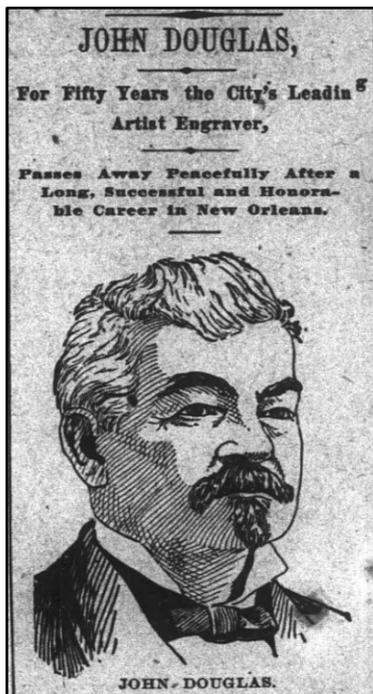


Figure 13. August 31st, 1900 – *The Times Picayune*.

Douglas was survived by his second-wife, Margaret, who lived in New Orleans until 1921, and eight children. His eldest son John Jr., continued the family business until around 1930, living until 1936. John Douglas's last surviving child, Laura, died in 1963, more than a century after her father had issued some of the first ever Confederate States Treasury bonds; she was buried alongside her father.

The legacy of John Douglas

There can be no doubt that John Douglas stepped up to the opportunities that secession and War had briefly presented him with between February 1861 until April 1862. Had New Orleans not been captured so early in the War, his activities in producing Treasury notes and bonds for the Confederate Government and for individual Southern States, may well have been more extensive.

However, the question arises as to whether the bonds and notes bearing the imprint of John Douglas were all his own work? It would seem to require quite a jump in skills from engraving simple wedding invitations to producing tens of thousands of Treasury notes and bonds. It is conceivable that Douglas was obliged to engage other specialised engravers to assist him in completing such sophisticated work, especially given the extreme urgency involved; piecework and subcontracting, were common practices in the engraving industry.

New Orleans was home to several engravers who were skilled in the production of bank notes and could have assisted Douglas. These included John V. Childs (1813-1870), originally from New York, who produced various pre-War mercantile notes, and engraved various State of Arkansas Treasury Warrants during 1861; Childs also produced the famous New Orleans Postmaster provisional postage stamps prior to the availability of Confederate States stamps.

Perhaps Solomon Schmidt at the former American Bank Note Company branch on Royal Street might also have helped? He is known to have supplied Douglas with paper and quantities of ink, and almost certainly loaned many of the pre-engraved vignettes which appeared on his notes and bonds. From mid-1861 Schmidt was totally consumed with his own work for the Confederate Treasury, but he may well have assisted Douglas with the Treasury bonds produced earlier in 1861.

Douglas also may have used Schmidt's facilities for printing; there would certainly have been periods when these presses were idle whilst Schmidt was busy engraving new Treasury notes. But perhaps this is being unfair on Douglas, and he was able to raise his game. His obituary claimed that he "*.. enjoyed a wide reputation for the finish and perfection of his steel and copper-plate engraving, which could not be surpassed by the best foreign talent.*"

With such praise, perhaps we should give the benefit of the doubt to Mr. Douglas. What happens in N'Awlins stays in N'Awlins.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

This short article has been abridged from the Author’s remarkable new 535-page book on “*Engravers and Printers of Confederate Paper Money*”. Available now in paperback format at \$55.00 through www.amazon.com.

