

Montevallo Historical Society

Opening the Portals of Our Heritage

540 Shelby Street
Montevallo, AL 35115
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A MOST WONDERFUL ESCAPE

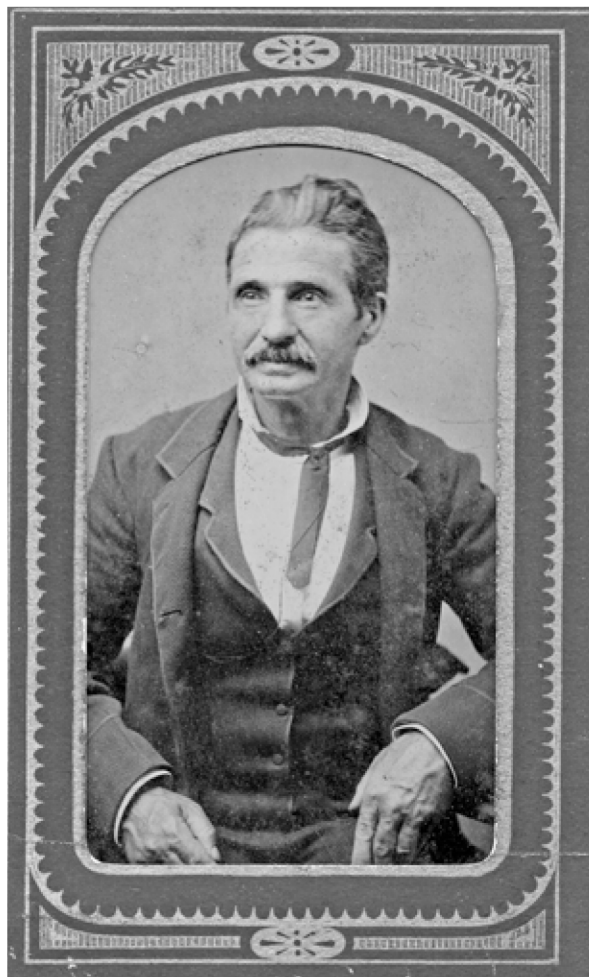
Submitted by Marty Everse

English mining engineer Joseph Squire revolutionized coal-mining operations in Alabama upon his arrival in Montevallo in 1859. Dr. Jim Day considers Squire the ultimate authority on the Cahaba coalfield and his 1890 report on that subject "a timeless work" though a vindictive "she wretch" and bushwhacking almost cut his life and time in the area short. In a letter to his sister in England, Squire wrote about his troubles in those wild and woolly times around Montevallo a few months after the end of the Civil War.

Yours dated July 16th (1865) arrived here a few days ago, the first I have received since the commencement of the war, you wrote it in answer to my letter of December 19th/64. There is a post office established in Montevallo now. Send your next letters there. I am very happy to learn that you are all alive. I have seen great trouble and suffered much uneasiness since I last wrote to you. Perhaps you will remember my telling you of a friend at the mines near Montevallo named Alexander Anderson, a Scotchman. I stayed awhile at his house until I engaged with the Coal Mining Co. Anderson and me continued the best of friends, and I shall always respect his memory, God bless him, but about 13 months ago he died but strange to say from the day he died his widow has been vilifying and slandering me secretly to all her and my acquaintances. My friends knew my character too well and did not believe her, but the vindictive wretch has kept my life in jeopardy this last six months and more. She has been threatening to put my life away, for almost a year, and constantly threatening to put a gang of men on me, and I have been told by reliable authority that she whores and truckles with the worst ruffians that was in the Federal or Confederate army. So about 6 weeks ago she came to me and threatened me again saying she would put three Yankees on me, when, lo, about a month ago while I was riding on horseback from the mines to Montevallo (a distance of 3 miles) three ruffians lying in ambush fired their rifles at me. I had a most wonderful escape, the bullets passed me very close. They tried to shoot me in the back. I turned around to see who they was but could not see them. I know there was at least three of them from the quick succession of three bullets that passed me. I rode on to Montevallo as fast as I could and next morning reported the matter to the Federal authorities at Montevallo. They offered to give me every assistance if I could find a clue to the parties that did it. I am now staying in Selma for a week or two to be out of danger more, but the diabolical she devil, Mrs. Anderson, has scented me out and is again threatening me. She this time threatens to put the Yankee General on me (as she calls him) and threatens to sue me for debts I

never thought or dreamt of. She knows I am aware that she will tell lies of the worst description and I do not think she will hesitate at perjury in any form.

I want you to inquire into this woman's antecedents and show the people of her native place the diabolical acts she is guilty of. She was born and bred near Elgin in Morayshire in Scotland. Her maiden name was Jennie Ross. She has a brother-in-law named Peter Smith at Dean's Hough, Elgin, Morayshire. Leave not a stone unturned but find out all about what she left there for & c. If I can get money enough to take me out west I shall go there, perhaps in a few days or perhaps in a few weeks until the old she wretch moves away from here, or the county has more law and order maintained than at present.



During his lifetime, no one knew more about Alabama's coalfields than Joseph Squire though he is little remembered today.