

Montevallo

Historical Society SM

Opening the Portals of Our Heritage

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“GO DOWN (SOUTH) MOSES”

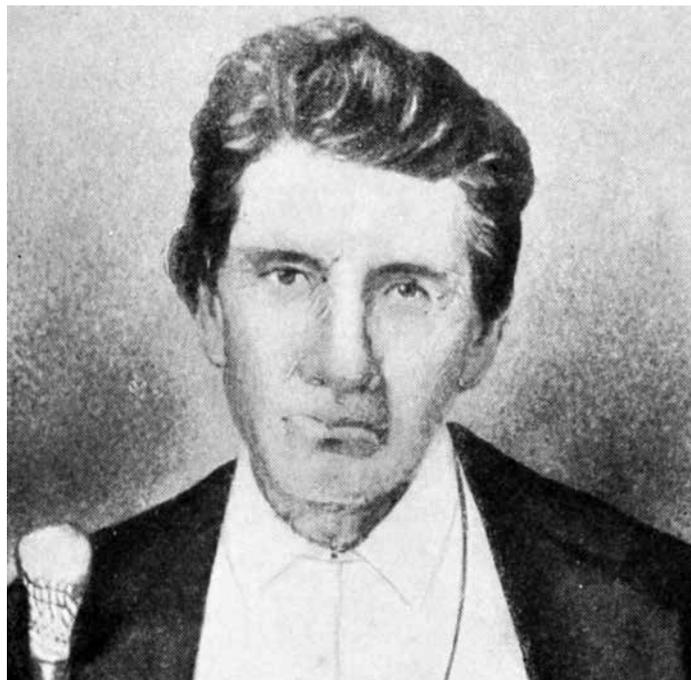
Submitted by Martin Everse

If there ever was such a thing as an Alabama Ironmaster Hall of Fame, Moses Stroup would have been one of the first inductees and Montevallo could have basked a bit in his fame. He has rested for the last 142 years in what is today the town's police jurisdiction.

How Moses came to slumber on a knoll overlooking Spring Creek rivals the story of his Biblical namesake and though he did not wander for 40 years across the Sinai, he hopscotched across the southern United States for over six decades. How he became known as an ironmaster, the manager or owner of a blast furnace or forge, is easy to answer. It was in his blood. His grandfather was a gunsmith, who after moving to Lincoln County, North Carolina about the time of the Revolution, established a forge. Moses' father, Jacob, learned the iron trade from his father there. Following the War of 1812, Jacob, seeking his own fortune, slid on down to South Carolina and constructed a small blast furnace and forge at the mouth of King's Creek on the Broad River. It was here a teenaged Moses was initiated into the mysteries of iron making. For the next 20 years, Jacob and Moses do-si-doed across the states of South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama. Jacob would often enter a new area, build an ironworks, and Moses would stay behind and operate it. From near Spartanburg, South Carolina to Cartersville, Georgia and over to near Anniston, the father-son team kept up the dance until Jacob died in 1846.

Now on his own, Moses began prospecting for new iron ore land in Cherokee County, Alabama. About 1849 near Cedar Bluff, he began the construction of the Round Mountain Furnace, operating it until 1855 when financial difficulties forced him to sell. Like his father before him, Moses was a rolling stone, wherever he laid his hat he built a furnace or forge or at least tried to buy one. Wandering down to central Alabama, Stroup attempted to purchase the Shelby Iron Works near Columbiana from Horace Ware but that deal fell through. Then, sometime in the late 1850s Stroup partnered with John Alexander, someone he knew in South Carolina who had become a wealthy land owner and grist mill builder near Montevallo. Together, they purchased the Roupes Valley Forge from Ninian Tannehill in 1857 and commenced a major expansion of the works.

With the use of slave labor, huge sandstone blocks were quarried from a nearby hillside and used to construct the imposing blast furnaces seen today at Tannehill Park. A road was built from the furnaces toward the Cahaba River in the direction of Montevallo so the iron produced could be



MOSES STROUP

transported to the railroad there. In 1860, a Tuscaloosa paper boasted, "Messrs. Stroup & Alexander have in successful operation a Blast Furnace which promises to turn out a very superior article of Pig Iron. This is but the beginning of that prosperity which is to make Tuscaloosa the Pittsburg of Alabama." A year later, the Montgomery papers announced, "Mr. Stroup, proprietor of the Iron Furnace in Bibb County, has gone to Montgomery with proposals to cast cannon for the State of Alabama." In 1863, the furnaces were sold to William Sanders of Marion and Stroup moved to Jefferson County to assist in the construction of the Oxmoor Furnaces. By the spring of 1865, however, Moses found himself unemployed. The Union Army had paid a brief but destructive visit to the area and gutted every ironworks in central Alabama.

Now 70 years old, with his life's work in shambles, Moses retired to his daughter's home near Montevallo. She had married John Alexander's younger brother Marshall. Stroup died on March 31, 1878, 13 years to the day Yankee soldiers destroyed the Tannehill Furnaces and was buried in the Spring Creek Cemetery just across the stream from the Spring Creek Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The famous Alabama poet and author, Mary Gordon Duffee, wrote that Stroup died "near the town of Montevallo, surrounded by all the tearful regrets of his family and friends . . . No more heroic spirit, earth-worn and weary, stainless and redeemed, ever ascended to the mansions of eternal rest than that of Moses Stroup, the old pioneer of iron-making in the southern land."