

Military Veterans Remembered With Holiday Wreaths at Montevallo Cemetery



Veterans buried in the Montevallo City Cemetery were honored and remembered during the recent holiday season in one of 1,100 similar events taking place on the same date and at the same time all across the United States of America.

The Montevallo Historical Society sponsored this *Wreaths Across America* affiliated effort that brought veterans' families, friends, and MHS members together on December 17, 2022 to lay wreaths on more than 300 individual graves. They also participated in a ceremony honoring and recognizing the sacrifices made by Montevallo veterans from all branches of U.S. military service.

The idea to do this came from Montevallo Historical Society board member Marilyn Winslett Donoho. She was already familiar with a well established *Wreaths Across America* program at Montevallo's Alabama National Cemetery held each year at the holidays (nearly 11,000 wreaths laid in 2022).

Veterans from Marilyn's family are buried at Montevallo City Cemetery and she knew that many more vets had been buried there prior to the opening of the National Cemetery in 2009. It made perfect sense to her to start a more modest effort to also remember these vets in the same way.

Marilynn enlisted the help of her friend and fellow MHS member, Judy Lien Duda, along with MHS vice-president Clay Nordan, to form a committee

(sanctioned by the MHS board of directors) that coordinated the event.

Wreaths Across America is a national organization that makes it possible for organizations across the nation to sponsor similar wreath laying programs at both national and civilian cemeteries in every state.

The wreaths for the Montevallo event were "sponsored" by veterans' family members and interested individuals who went online to www.historicmontevallo.org and followed a link that took them to a special website set up by *Wreaths*

preliminary information about vet burials at Montevallo Cemetery came from the website www.findagrave.com. This research confirmed that at least 100 vets are buried there, so a goal of selling 100 wreaths was set initially.

It was not until a visual grave-by-grave census of the entire cemetery was completed that a total of 334 veterans graves was established.

Once the committee realized that there were far more veterans graves than initially thought, the goal of selling at least 100 wreaths was scrapped and replaced with the more ambitious number of at least 300.

The committee's thinking was that it would be a shame to honor only a fraction of the vets in the cemetery now that a larger and more accurate total population number was known.

As a result, the committee made a presentation to the MHS board of directors at its meeting in mid-November and asked for financial support to help achieve the new goal of 300 wreaths.

The committee explained that *Wreaths Across America* had set a deadline of November 28 as the last day that

wreaths could be ordered for the year. They then asked the board for approval to cover (at \$15 per wreath) any shortfall that might develop between the goal of 300 and the actual number of wreaths sold by the deadline. They were reminded that \$5 for each wreath already sold would be coming back to MHS and every new wreath purchased by MHS would also return \$5.

Without reservation, the board unanimously approved the committee's recommendation to support the purchase of supplemental wreaths if necessary.



Sisters Cathy Winslett Hyer and Marilyn Winslett Donoho, together with Cathy's young grandson, Lucas Hyer, honored their father, Sgt. Henry Winslett, US Army, with a holiday wreath.

Across America where they could easily order holiday wreaths with a credit card for \$15 each.

As an incentive for MHS to serve as a sponsoring organization, \$5 out of every \$15 wreath payment received by *Wreaths Across America* was returned to MHS to offset any costs incurred.

Until a complete on-site survey of the cemetery was completed by the organizing committee, it was not known how many veterans are buried at Montevallo Cemetery.

A very helpful method for collecting

President's Letter

Welcome and Happy New Year 2023!

Our January meeting will kick off the sixth full year of the Montevallo Historical Society, and we're excited about upcoming programs designed to celebrate the history and heritage of Montevallo. We invite you to offer suggestions and actively participate in any of our activities you find interesting.

In these pages you will find detailed descriptions of our community outreach collaboration with *Wreaths Across America* and a wonderful photo essay of the many volunteers who supported the laying of wreaths in the Montevallo City Cemetery in December to honor the men and women who valiantly served in America's armed services. Our thanks to society members Marilyn Winslett Donoho, Judy Lien Duda, and Clay Nordan for promoting and coordinating this important project. You will also read of the tour by Kroell family members of Montevallo and Aldrich, and a personal tribute to Staff Sergeant Robert Farrington, Jr. in whose memory the Main Street bridge over Shoal Creek is named.

January 2023 marks the conclusion of my tenure as president of the Montevallo Historical Society. I want to thank the Board of Directors for allowing me to serve as President and to be a part of an organization that not only gives knowledge back but allows friendships to be created within the society. I am humbled, honored and privileged to have been given the opportunity to serve you in that capacity. It has been a pleasure to work for and with you.

I am following in the footsteps of some legendary leaders in our organization. I am deeply grateful to my prede-

cessor, Jim Day, for his leadership and outstanding contributions to MHS since its inception, and to the members of the Executive Committee and Board of Directors 2017 - 2022. I am inspired by their commitment to MHS and all their achievements. Indeed, the growth of our society has been propelled collectively by the individual members and

past officers of MHS. I especially would like to thank one of our Founding Directors and current Vice-President, Clay Nordan, for his invaluable partnership in guiding and promoting the ideals and goals of the Montevallo Historical Society. As we move ahead, I look forward to helping in other ways to continue this important work in the Montevallo community and towards fulfilling the mission of MHS.

I urge you to come back often to the extraordinary offerings you will find on our website, www.historicmontevallo.org. You can dive into the newsletter archives, Chamber Chatter contributions, program videos, slide shows, Carmichael Library digital archives, "Throwback Thursday" recollections of Main Street businesses through the years, commemorative banners, and the multitude of events that enlivened our community. It's all going to be there for you. Come back whenever you can.

I look forward to seeing you at our next general membership meeting January 29th, 2:00 pm at the Parnell Library. A social hour with refreshments will follow the program. Together with my colleagues on the Board of Directors of the Montevallo Historical Society, I wish you a very happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year!

Susan

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www.historicmontevallo.org website Home Page.



Montevallo Historical Society

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Rebecca Beaty
Wayne Beaty
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Tad Cairns
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Julia Youngblood
Gary Youngblood



Representatives of the Alabama National Cemetery and the Montevallo Historical Society were on hand for the delivery of a truck load of wreaths on December 14. A strong contingent of volunteers was on hand to make quick work of the unloading.



Montevallo Historical Society members welcomed Michael “Big Mike” Morris, the driver of the truck for Big M Transportation out of Blue Mountain, MS. (L-R) Clay Nordan, Loren McAnally, Chris Duda, Big Mike, Judy Duda, Jim Donaho, Marilynn Donaho.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

When November 28 rolled around, the total number of wreaths sold to date had reached 183 or possibly a few more, so the decision was made to make a final purchase on behalf of the Montevallo Historical Society for 117 additional wreaths.

On a rainy Wednesday, December 14, a large tractor-trailer rig, which had been travelling for days, arrived at the loading dock of the Alabama National Cemetery in Montevallo packed to the gills with boxes of freshly made live balsam wreaths from *Wreaths Across America's* manufacturing plant in the state of Maine. Most of these wreaths were intended for use by the National Cemetery, but 35 boxes (315 total or 9 wreaths per box) were cordoned off in the trailer reserved for the veterans of Montevallo City Cemetery.

December 17 dawned cold and overcast, but the weather did nothing to dissuade at least 50 MHS members, volunteers, and family members of veterans from coming to the cemetery for Montevallo Cemetery's participation in the nation-wide veterans remembrance and wreath laying orchestrated by *Wreaths Across America*.

In the ceremonial text provided to MHS for the event by *Wreaths Across America* the following was read to start the solemn program: “At this hour, across the country at more than 1,100 memorial sites like this one, we are gathered as one nation to Remember, Honor, and Teach.” In 2022 Montevallo Cemetery successfully joined those 1,100 sites and hopefully will be a participant next year.



These are just a few of the boxes of wreaths that were unloaded. 315 wreaths in 35 boxes intended for Montevallo Cemetery were hauled away by Montevallo Historical Society Volunteers.



Veterans shown here each dedicated a memorial wreath to honor a particular branch of the U.S. Military. (L-R) Major Loren McAnally, U.S. Army, retired; Corporal Wendy Urbancic Wright, U.S. Marine Corps; Chief Petty Officer, Alan Broadhead, U.S. Navy; Sergeant David Thomas, U.S. Air Force; Petty Officer, 1st Class, Leon Turner, retired, U.S. Navy; Master Sergeant Joseph Elliott, U.S. Air Force, retired; Colonel Tommy Baker, U.S. Army, retired; Senior Airman, Tiwynn Dove, U.S. Air Force.

A video recording of the December 17 wreath laying ceremonies is available for viewing at www.historicmontevallo.org



REMEMBER HONOR TEACH

WREATHS
— across —
AMERICA

A central graphic featuring three green wreaths with red bows, each positioned under the words "REMEMBER", "HONOR", and "TEACH". Below the wreaths, the text "WREATHS across AMERICA" is displayed in a serif font.

Photography by Art Meripol



Fourteen Cottingham family members and friends gathered at their plot in Montevallo Cemetery to honor with a holiday wreath the memory of family patriarch, Walter C. Cottingham, Jr., (Airman Third Class, U.S. Air Force) who served his country during the Korean Conflict (1950-1953). (Left to Right) Kobe Cottingham, Larry Cottingham, Ann Cottingham, Debbie Cottingham, Kyle Cottingham, LaToya Cottingham Chappell, Tikisha Kirkland, Tim Cottingham, Sharon Kirkland, Marcus Lilly, James Kirkland, Terry Cottingham, Willie C. Cottingham, Antion Tolbert.

Kroell Descendants Welcomed to Montevallo



It all started when the Winter 2022 issue of the *Montevallo Historical Times* devoted 13 pages to a stunning collection of color photographs that Dr. Mike Mahan had shot of Montevallo's historic Kroell house, known locally as Owl's Cove, just before it was dismantled and hauled away in 1967. The house had been a Main Street landmark since it was first occupied by George Kroell and his family in 1900.

Some time before the photos were published, MHS director Marty Everse, who had located and digitized Dr. Mahan's photos, happened to be contacted randomly by old George Kroell's great-great-granddaughter, Yvonne Kroell Graham, from Twining, Michigan, who was looking for photos and information about Mary Jennett Kroell, George Kroell's wife.

Yvonne's father, Charles Kaiden Kroell (89), is George Kroell's great-grandson who also lives in Michigan. Marty's interaction with Yvonne soon led him to learn about Patty DeBardeleben, George Kroell's great-granddaughter who lives with her husband in Selma.

Once Marty had made contact with Patty, he learned that she was the daughter of Dionetta Kroell who was one of the eleven children that George Kroell's son, Pat, had brought into the world and raised with his wife in Montevallo.

Patty grew up in Demopolis, where her mother and father had settled when they married, but when she reached college age, she was encouraged by her mother to enroll at Alabama College in Montevallo. Patty developed some familiarity with Montevallo during her college days, and had even gotten to know Mike Mahan, who was working as a photographer for the college's news bureau at the time.

Two Kroell sisters, Mary and Kate, (old George's daughters) who were Patty's great-aunts, were still living in the family mansion when she was in college in the late 1950's and she would occasionally walk the two blocks from campus to call on them when she could break away from her studies and activities. She has pleasant memories of her colorful and talkative aunts as well as the ornate decorations and furnishings that still made George Kroell's showplace, Owl's Cove, so distinctive.

The publication of the Kroell photos sparked a renewed interest in their family history for both Patty and Yvonne, and they were soon contacting MHS vice-president and newsletter editor, Clay Nordan, who had put together Dr. Mahan's

photos that were seen in the newsletter. They shared a considerable amount of information about the Kroell family with Clay and often sought additional photographs, clippings, and details that pertained to George Kroell's businesses and offspring.

These conversations soon prompted both Yvonne and Patty to start talking about making a kind of Pilgrimage to Montevallo so as to get a clearer idea about the locations of George Kroell's house, his store, his livery stable, and the St. George Hotel. And they were also very interested in exploring and collecting information from family gravestones in the old plot at Montevallo City Cemetery where both sides of the family are buried.

As these Kroell descendants became more energized about their family history as well as the attention and interest expressed by the Montevallo

Historical Society, in May of 2022, Charlie Kroell, surprised the organization when he expressed his intention to donate a copy of a detailed written family history to MHS along with a handsome gold pocket watch that his great-grandfather, George Kroell, had carried and used each day.

These items were readily accepted by the MHS board of directors and were soon shipped to Montevallo. They are now secured in the society's archives along with other items of historical value and importance that have been donated to date.

When planning time for the 2022 MHS Gala II rolled around in August, a major decision to be made was the selection of a worthy "Honoree" to acknowledge and feature at the October 1 event. Because of their recent generosity and consideration for MHS, Montevallo's Kroell Family was an obvious choice.

A custom poster was then designed and prominently displayed for every Gala II

patron to see and appreciate as they entered the Fox & Pheasant Inn, which hosted the event. To everyone's delight and as a result of the Kroells being named Honoree, Patty and her husband Caldwell drove up from Selma to attend the Gala and stay the night at the Inn even though she and Yvonne had decided to make their long-awaited trip to Montevallo at the end of the month.

They thoroughly enjoyed the evening and were happy to meet so many people who appreciated the Kroell family's prominent place in the history of the town.

At the beginning of 2022, the Montevallo Historical Society had scheduled its Fall General Membership Meeting for



(L-R) Yvonne Kroell Graham from Twining, Michigan, Missy Ketchum of Jacksonville, FL, and Patty DeBardleben from Selma, AL at Owl's Cove Park on Main Street.



At the corner of Kroell and Givhan streets in Montevallo Cemetery.



Inspecting the large cemetery plot where members of both sides of the family, Kroell and Jennett, are buried in close proximity.

October 23. A speaker scheduled for the meeting had to withdraw from the commitment but gave plenty of notice about the change. As a consequence, MHS Vice-president, Clay Nordan, saw this as a perfect year and opportunity for him to put together and present an extensive program on the legendary Kroell family. He suggested to Patty and Yvonne that they schedule their trip for the same weekend as the meeting so that they could do their planned explorations on Saturday and then be guests of honor at the meeting on Sunday. That's exactly what transpired.

Yvonne flew into Montgomery from Michigan on Friday, October 21 and was met there by Patty's daughter, Missy Ketchum, who drove up from her home in Jacksonville, FL. After picking up Yvonne, they continued on to Selma where they spent the night at the home of Patty and Caldwell.

Bright and early on Saturday morning, the three adventurers hit the road to Montevallo, an hour's drive north of Selma, and rendezvoused with Clay at the Parnell Library. He had readily agreed to serve as their tour guide as well as chauffeur.

Soon after arrival, they were exploring the streets of Montevallo where Clay showed them that Kroell's Livery Stable had been where McDonalds is today; Kroell's Mercantile Store was in a large two-story building where the Subway is today, and George Kroell's St. George Hotel was just across Main Street on the same lot where Trustmark Bank is today.

Moving west on Main Street, they then came to the most notable Kroell location in town, the former site of Owl's Cove

where the University of Montevallo's Fallin Hall stands today. While it was disappointing that the spectacular Kroell house is no longer with us on the site, there was some consolation to the visitors that the City of Montevallo had in recent years recognized the family and the legendary residence by naming the grassy plaza area between the building and the street, "Owl's Cove Park."

Leaving Main Street, the tour continued on for a pretty thorough exploration of today's UM campus, where Patty recognized quite a lot from her days as a student and was impressed by the school's obvious growth and improvements, such as the new Center for the Arts.

Before stopping for lunch, Clay suggested that they make a quick swing through nearby Aldrich, just two miles to the west of the UM campus.

George Kroell had come to the area as an immigrant from Austria in the late 1860's to find work in the Montevallo coal pits. Mary Jennett, who became George's wife, was the daughter of Irish coal miners who had also immigrated to the settlement (later named after coal baron William Aldrich) to find work. Our visitors later said that the stop near the Aldrich Coal Mining Museum and Farrington Hall was a highlight of their trip because this tiny village was instrumental to the beginning of the family's legacy in America.

One of the most anticipated stops for the Kroell visitors concluded their day of exploration. They had been eager to see the venerable Kroell family plot in the Montevallo City Cem-



Clay Nordan points out old George Kroell's gold pocket watch that was donated to MHS by Charlie Kroell. Also on display at Parnell Library were three histories of the family written by Frances Kroell Haile, one of Pat Kroell's daughters and Charlie's aunt. These were also donated to the Montevallo Historical Society by Charlie for posterity.

etry and they were not disappointed with what they found. George (d. 1925) and Mary (d. 1916) rest side-by-side in the 200+ year-old graveyard. Joining them there are children, and grandchildren. Some died young and some lived to a ripe old-age. A number from Mary's family, the Jennetts, are also buried in this same substantial plot, surrounded by an ornate but rickety knee-high wrought-iron fence.

The elegant stone markers in the plot revealed interesting carved inscriptions and confirmed family birth and death dates. Often, a marker served as a reminder of children in the prime of life cut down by disease, neglect, or inadequate medical care.

Many photos were taken during the cemetery visit and from that a sense of accomplishment was apparent among the visitors as their day in Montevallo came to a close and they began their trek back to Selma. Tomorrow would be another day.

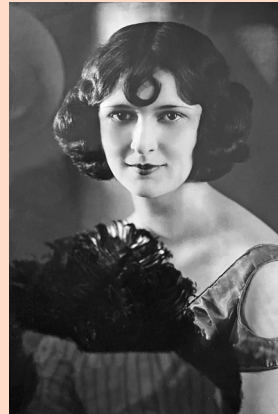
Less than 24 hours later, Yvonne, Patty, and Missy were back in town to attend the Montevallo Historical Society's general membership meeting scheduled for 2:00 pm. that would feature a special program on "The Kroells of Montevallo." The program was prepared and presented by Clay Nordan and he began by introducing the out-of-town guests to the assembled audience of MHS members at Parnell Library.

He also drew attention to the display near the podium of the Kroell family items that had been donated to MHS in the spring of 2022.

Clay explained that the story of the Kroell family is both deep and complex and not one that can be easily or adequately told in a short-program format. As a result, he had decided to focus on two children of Pat Kroell (who was one of old George's three sons). Dionetta Kroell was Patty's mother, and George Kroell, her brother, was Yvonne's grandfather.

Both had compelling personal stories that Clay offered in considerable detail that shed light on the lives and legacy of George and Mary Kroell and their offspring.

Dionetta Kroell

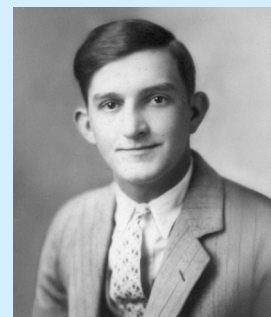


"Absolutely, the beauty of the family, with black hair and dark eyes. She was tall and graceful, a beautiful dancer. She had a distinct flair for dressing differently, but tastefully, and was constantly changing her hair style, always to the envy of her contemporaries."

-Frances Kroell Haile



Charles Kaiden Kroell



George Kroell

George Kroell (1906 - 1940), Charlie Kroell's father, was named for his grandfather, George Kroell, Montevallo businessman and builder of Owl's Cove and the St. George Hotel. George inherited his grandfather's gold pocket watch shortly after he died in 1925 and then bequeathed it to Charlie just a few days before his own untimely death at age 34.

A video recording was made of this memorable program and is available for viewing at www.historicmontevallo.org. Visitors to the MHS website will also find the histories of the remarkable Kroell family (written by Frances Kroell Haile) in pdf format that can be read online or downloaded.



After several years of effort to locate a photograph of Sgt. Farrington in his Air Force uniform, a Montevallo Main Street Veterans Banner was printed and installed in time for Veterans Day 2022. Appropriately, Farrington's banner was positioned at the foot of Main Street just below City Hall near the bridge over Shoal Creek that bears his name. The inset is a photo of Sgt. Farrington's marker in Montevallo City Cemetery where he is buried in the family plot.

A Banner for Staff Sergeant Farrington

By Clay Nordan

Robert Farrington Jr., who was born in 1962, grew up in Brierfield, a few miles south of Montevallo, just across the Shelby / Bibb County line.

My father, Clayton O. Nordan, owned about 50 wooded acres that adjoined a small family compound consisting of some small houses where several generations of the Farringtons lived at the time.

In 1967, my dad built a 1 acre farm pond on his property and stocked it with bass and bream for fishing. Within a little more than a year we were catching nice strings of fish and began having regular fish fries.

Robert's grandfather, George, and father, Robert Lee Farrington, Sr., were good neighbors and helped watch over the pond and property for my dad in our absence.

I clearly remember Robert and his brother, Kelvin, as young boys very interested in catching fish. My dad gave them and the rest of the family blanket permission to come down the hill from where they lived and wet a hook whenever the fish might be biting.

I also clearly remember learning about the crash of an Air Force CT-43A transport jet in April of 1996 that killed Ron Brown, Secretary of Commerce under President Bill Clinton, along with 34 other passengers.

The plane was attempting an instrument landing at the Dubrovnik, Croatia

airport in a driving rainstorm when it slammed into a mountainside, two miles off course, on the rocky Balkan coast.

In the list of the deceased crash victims was Staff Sergeant Robert Farrington Jr., of Montevallo, AL.

At the time, he was stationed at Ramstein Air Base, Germany and was assigned to the 76th Airlift Squadron of the 86th Airlift Wing, U.S. Air Force.

The 76th operated more than a dozen executive transport aircraft for distinguished visitor travel and Sgt. Farrington was in charge of coordinating in-flight amenities for dignitaries flying all over the world. He was in his 13th year of service in the Air Force.

In the aftermath of Farrington's death, a number of concerned local citizens (led by Dr. Mike Mahan) and supported by city and county officials, sought to honor his service and memory by naming the bridge over Shoal Creek at the foot of Main Street the Sgt. Robert L. Farrington Jr. Memorial Bridge. Thanks to the efforts of these individuals and groups, state approval for the request was soon to come.

For more than 20 years, I have been a director and officer in the Alabama chapter of a national antique tractor club. In 2018, the club held one of its meetings at Montevallo High School in conjunction with the school's annual FFA Farm Day.

Attending this meeting was one of

our members, Darwin Prewitt, from the Montgomery area. Darwin and I were talking casually when he happened to mention that during the mid-1990s he had been an officer in an Air Force transport squadron with a young sergeant he called "Rob" Farrington from Montevallo. He said that Rob had died in a tragic plane crash in Croatia along with a number of American VIPs and fellow members of the squadron.

Darwin said that Rob was always quick with a laugh and had been an up-and-coming enlisted leader and an integral part of the squadron at the time of his death.

When the Montevallo Main Street Veterans Banner program got going in 2019, it seemed to me that if anyone should have a banner, it would be Sgt. Farrington. Since I had a personal connection to the Farringtons, as did Darwin, I approached him about splitting the \$300 cost of a banner with me so that Sgt. Farrington's service and sacrifice, along with that of more than 130 other local vets, could be appreciated by passersby on Montevallo's streets.

We are happy to report that, with the help of Vets Banner coordinator, Kirk Lightfoot, a good photograph of Robert was located and by Veterans Day 2022, a new banner dedicated to Robert Farrington was in place so as to compliment the bridge already dedicated in his name.

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Next MHS General Membership Meeting

Sunday Jan. 29, 2023 • Parnell Library • 2:00 pm

Program Topic: Montevallo Artist, Virginia Barnes (1895 -1984)

Speaker: Catherine Walsh • UM Assistant Professor of Art

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