

Montevallo Historical Society

Opening the Portals of Our Heritage

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WAKED UP DEAD

Submitted by Martin Everse

You could not buy liquor in Brierfield in the 1880s and 90s, legally. Bibb was a dry county but a quirk in the law allowed you to mail order whiskey and have it shipped to the depot there. Thomas Fancher, a local farmer and devout Baptist ruminated on the situation one Christmas. "At Brierfield jugs was carried away by the dozen. Prohibition does not prohibit in some places." He believed times would be overly lively around town and put the blame for the situation on the iron works there declaring that the free flow of liquor could not be prevented, "rolling mill men and nailery men are composed of a low class of men, especially puddlers, being from every quarter of the globe."

Times were lively and tragic. A fellow by the name of Bessie, an ironworker, payday flush went on a month-long drinking spree in the spring of 1887. His boarding house owner reported that he went to bed all right, or comparatively so, but the next morning was found dead in bed. The newspaper headline proclaimed he "Waked Up Dead."

William Farquhar, a Scotchman and foundry molder, was a glutton for hooch and punishment. Will was known as a good man when sober but one night boozed up and stumbling along the railroad tracks, a train chugged by and took his arm with it. He survived and opened up a café in the basement of a Brierfield store and eventually became a merchant there himself. His taste for alcohol was not diminished, however, with the loss of a limb. One day while transacting business, he managed to guzzle a good quantity of blackberry wine becoming quite quarrelsome eventually pulling out a revolver. He sprayed bullets and perforated the atmosphere and surrounding buildings in true Texas style and soon had possession of the whole town. When Clem Moore, another Brierfield merchant, happened to come into sight, Farquhar immediately began



Though fallen into disrepair in this c. 1970 photo, the Alvis Hotel was at one time the finest building in downtown Brierfield. It was here that Mr. Bessie "waked up dead." The house was struck by lightning in May 1988 and burned.

blazing away at him. After dodging and running 200 yards, Moore turned around and fired 2 shots from his .44 pistol, the second slug hitting Will in the chest. Again, he survived and managed to live until 1923 finally succumbing to heart disease and pneumonia.

So-called low class foreigners were not the only fellows with a whiskey weakness. Locals fought their own battles with the demons of intoxicating spirits so available in Brierfield. The son of local farmer Henry M. Seale, affectionately called General Seale, had a rumpus with the northbound passenger train one night just outside Brierfield though he probably never knew what hit him. The Calera newspaper supposed he had been drinking and laid down on the track to get a little shut-eye and snored his way to the hereafter.

The hard stuff was known to break-up friendships. One Sunday evening in the fall of 1888, Thomas Warren, a one-armed Confederate

veteran, invited his buddy John Espey outside for a nip or two. They moseyed off to a secluded spot near the Bibb Furnace and partook freely of the red-eye in Warren's jug. Soon, they were arguing and each stormed off home but Warren returned to Espey's place hollering threats and waving a shotgun. Espey's wife Caroline marched out to Warren and wrestled the weapon from him firing off the loaded gun into the air. The first reports of the incident had Espey following his wife outside and drubbing not only Warren but two of Warren's brothers. A later report admitted that the first was "somewhat overdrawn, there being very few licks passed."

When Brierfield carousers wanted to imbibe legally, they came to Montevallo. In December 1882, a local pundit noted that 12 men from Brierfield were in town drunk and he was relieved a petition to the legislature for an election to make Montevallo dry was in the works with every prospect for success.