

# Montevallo Historical Society

*Opening the Portals of Our Heritage*

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[www.historicmontevallo.org](http://www.historicmontevallo.org)

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## A LOVELY OLD HOME

Marty Everse

If you lived in Montevallo in the thirty years prior to the Civil War, you knew John Strong Storrs. Few have heard of him today though at one time he was one of the more influential men to ever saunter the streets of town. Short and stout, he wasn't much to look at, but did have a handsome face according to his contemporaries. Depending on who you talked to, Storrs was either a "hail-fellow-well-met" or "always deficient in the warmth of social feeling for which Southern men are noted." The Storrs family genealogy published in 1886 noted, "He was a man of very winning and agreeable ways." Reared in Vermont those mixed reviews were surely due to his foreign accent and unfamiliar New England customs. After graduating from Middlebury College, he came to Montevallo in 1832 and began studying law under Daniel Watrous, a Connecticut transplant. He soon entered the legal profession and did quite well for himself. He acquired a successful practice, was appointed Justice of the Peace in 1841, was elected to the Alabama House of Representative serving Shelby County and Montevallo from 1841-1851 and then later to the state senate from 1857-1859. In 1849 he wooed, won, and wed Martha Aylett Hazard, seventeen years his junior. Together they had four children while John accumulated 1,150 acres of land, a tannery on Shoal Creek, interests in area coal mines, and fifteen slaves. Living in the Storrs household in 1850 were two free people of color, Dave Butler, and a seven year old girl, Frances Butler, a highly unusual arrangement for the time.

John died in 1862 but not before building a comfortable four-columned dwelling for his growing family just a stone's throw from the King Mansion. Martha was left with a complicated estate and four young children, ages 3 to 8, in the middle of the Civil War. She survived the brief occupation of the Union Army in the spring of 1865 but entered into another occupation of sorts when she married the newly arrived former Yankee soldier Samuel S. Holbrook in the fall of 1866 despite the advice of a close family friend. The marriage produced two daughters and 30 years of anguish for Martha. She often pleaded to be "delivered from laziness and whiskey drinkers." When she passed away in 1911, 12 years after the death of Holbrook, "the laziest man I [she]



*Montevallo has lost most of its antebellum buildings. One of the more prominent was the Storrs House, located on the site of Palmer Hall. It was called "a lovely old home" in an 1886 Birmingham Sunday Chronicle." For more information on the Storrs house, see Clay Nordan's article in the Spring 2019 issue of the Montevallo Historical Society's newsletter. <http://www.historicmontevallo.org/newsletters.html>*

ever knew," her obituary proclaimed that she was "one of the most brilliant and best loved women" in Alabama. According to her will, the Montevallo house passed to her oldest, unmarried daughter, Electra. Eventually, Alabama College would assume ownership of the building and use it for a teachers' residence and temporary dormitory for a few students until it was moved a short distance to make way for the construction of Palmer Hall in the late 1920s. Its last use was for the Montevallo High School home economics department. Declared unsafe, the old Storrs home was demolished in 1951-1952 and the lumber used in the construction of the Alabama College faculty club house, a building that no longer exists.