

# Montevallo Historical Society

*Opening the Portals of Our Heritage*

540 Shelby Street  
Montevallo, AL 35115  
[www.historicmontevallo.org](http://www.historicmontevallo.org)



Like Us On Facebook

## AN ABSENCE OF STIFF FORMALITY

*Marty Everse*

The Kroell sisters knew how to throw a party. Their father knew how to build an extravagant house. Both talents were blended when in July 1900, Kate and Mary hosted a gala in honor of their friend, Alice Barganier, recently engaged and called "one of the fairest rosebuds in Greenville's garden of girls" by her hometown newspaper. That same evening George Kroell unveiled his newly completed mansion, Owl's Cove, on Main Street Montevallo. Everyone who was anyone was there, and the Shelby Sentinel noted "the house and grounds were brilliantly illuminated and inside the spacious parlors and galleries handsomely gowned matrons and beautiful young women were attended by chivalrous men in a delightful absence of any stiff formality. Dainty and delicious refreshments were served from a table which the fair sex would say was a 'dream in its loveliness.' A band of musicians helped the hours to glide swiftly away, and the stroke of the midnight hour surprised all for it had come so soon."

A friend of Kate and Mary, Christabel Mahan of Brierfield, knew the family well. In fact, George Kroell and his wife were her godparents. A few weeks after the gala, Christabel scribbled in her diary, "Mr. K. is a splendid old German. Mrs. K. is a splendid old Irish woman with a penchant for cooking and housekeeping. Her standbys are these: that everyone except herself is dirty in housekeeping, that all women but her two daughters are breaking their necks to get a man, that any man is worth a half dozen women – and that everybody envies them their "high estate." She is charitable and ready to assist any one in trouble. The girls are kind hearted but when arrayed in their silks and satin remind me of Cinderella's two step sisters."

Christabel was impressed with the shindig or "reception" as she called it though there was a slight misunderstanding with the invitations. She wrote, "The Kroells gave a "reception" awhile after they moved into the fine new house. I painted 75 cards for them for which Miss Mary was unwilling to pay me \$2.00. I'd have done them for nothing but they insisted on paying me. I like a gump waited till after the event, to which I was invited, to say what I charged. I usually act first and think afterwards. The "reception" was an event in our lives but as Sonny [Christabel's brother] said of the Kroells, they would henceforth date everything from The Party."



*The Kroell house, Owl's Cove, graced Montevallo's Main Street from 1900 until it was demolished about 1967. Kate and Mary were the last members of the family to live there. Kate passed away in 1962, Mary in 1965. The University of Montevallo on Main building now occupies the site.*

The fame of the party outlasted the participants and even the house. Montevallo historian Eloise Meroney, in her 1977 history of the town, wrote that the affair was talked about for years noting that society folks from near and far gathered at Owl's Cove to graze off "tables piled with all sorts of German delicacies to satisfy the most fastidious appetites." Her parents were two of the lucky guests.

The honoree, however, was not so fortunate. Four months after her party, Alice Barganier married her beau, Robert Dickson, in her mother's Greenville home and moved with him to Lowndesboro. Thirteen months later, she died. The local paper lamented, "Bliss and grief were closely allied for the death requiem followed closely on the marriage feast. Mrs. Dickson was a lovable character and wherever she went she carried sunshine."

**Please join us for our next  
general membership meeting  
on Sunday, July 14th at 2 p.m.  
at the Parnell Memorial Library**