



# Death of an Overseer : Reopening a Murder Investigation from the Plantation South

*Michael Wayne*

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In May of 1857, the body of Duncan Skinner was found in a strip of woods along the edge of the plantation near Natchez, Mississippi, where he worked as an overseer. Although a coroner's jury initially ruled his death to be accidental, an investigation organized by planters from the community concluded that he had been murdered by three slaves acting under instructions from John McCallin, an Irish carpenter. Now, almost a century and a half later, Michael Wayne has reopened the case to ask whether the men involved in the investigation arrived at the right verdict. Part essay on the art of historical detection, part seminar on the history of slavery and the Old South, *Death of an Overseer* is, above all, a murder mystery--a murder mystery that allows readers to sift through the surviving evidence themselves and come to their own conclusions about who killed Duncan Skinner and why.

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