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The Journal of Spelean History is the Association’s publication and is mailed to all members. The Journal includes articles covering a wide variety of topics relating to man’s use of caves, including historical cave explorations, saltpeter and other mineral extraction, and show cave development. All members are strongly encouraged to contribute material and to comment on published material. Please send typed manuscripts to Carolyn Cronk at the address below. Photos and illustrations will be returned upon request.

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Proprietor Great Onyx Cave.

Submitted by William Halliday
TRINITY CAVE NITRE WORKS

By Marion 0. Smith

Dry and maze-like Trinity Cave is located on the north end of low-lying Trinity Mountain in Morgan County, Alabama, some five miles west of Decatur. Surveyed on January 28, 1970, by William W. Torode and John Minor of the Huntsville Grotto, its six entrances lead to 4,053 feet of mostly stooping or crawling passages, which penetrate no more than 220 feet straight back into the mountain. During the Civil War, Trinity was one of thirteen Alabama caves mined for saltpeter directly by the Confederate government.¹

In April 1862, the Southern Congress created the Nitre Bureau to oversee the production of saltpeter, the main ingredient of gunpowder. A year later the Bureau's responsibilities were officially expanded to include the procurement of all other minerals. The Confederacy was ultimately divided into fifteen districts, with a superintendent in charge of each. Captain William Gabbett (b. c1830), an Irishman who before the war lived in Atlanta, commanded the Ninth or Northern Alabama district.²

Many districts were subdivided and the smaller areas were managed by assistant superintendents. Both the superintendent and his assistants had similar responsibilities. These included locating and exploring "Nitrous Caves", keeping accurate accounts, setting up government operations or making contracts with private producers, making sure each work site had enough laborers, materials, and food, conducting the saltpeter to the appropriate powder mill, and inspecting the various caves and potash works to ascertain their condition. In essence, these managers were to do everything possible to see that their respective territorial charges produced saltpeter.³

The sub-district commanders of the Trinity Cave area were Alonzo C. Ladd (c 1832-1893), a pre-war Huntsville auctioneer and lightning rod salesman who in after years moved to Atlanta, Georgia, and Henry W. Grantland (1832-1926), a Triana, Alabama dry goods merchant who in the late 1870s became a Nashville, Tennessee cotton broker. Ladd served from about October 1862
until the end of February 1863, and Grantland from March 1, 1863 throughout the remainder of the war. This sub-district, designated No. C, apparently included Marshall, Morgan, Limestone, Winston, Lawrence, and Franklin counties. Until March 1864, its headquarters were at Decatur and occasionally Trinity Cave, afterwards at Apple Grove in eastern Morgan County.4

The Bureau began mining Trinity Cave during the fall of 1862. Between September 25 and October 21 a crowbar, broad axe, cooking utensils, a 312 pound kettle, and two picks were purchased from Huntsville merchants and other civilians for use at the cave. From October 10 to 23, A. C. Ladd traveled "back & forth putting into operation Trinity Nitre Works." The owner, John T. Adair (1813-1885) was a farmer who on December 15, 1862, received twenty dollars for rent of the cave "during [the] pleasure" of the Confederate government.5

Bureau employees mined Trinity Cave until March 1864. Payrolls from December 1862 until then, with the exception of February 1864, still exist. These rolls show a monthly labor force ranging from sixteen to thirty-two men, totaling seventy-one individuals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thomas B. Alexander</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Nov. 1863 - Jan. 1864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. J. Ashley</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker Bailey (Raly)</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Sept. 1863 - Jan., Mar. 1864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. L. Brisco</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>July - Sept. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. V. Brisco</td>
<td>from kettles</td>
<td>Dec. 1862 - Jan., Apr., June, Aug. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Feb., May, Sept. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>boiler</td>
<td>Mar. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dewitt Brown</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Nov. - Dec. 1863, Mar. 1864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. B. Clapp</td>
<td>foreman/supt.</td>
<td>Dec. 1862 - Dec. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Clifton</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Jan. - Feb. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Jackson Couch</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Feb. - Nov. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. H. Cox</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>July - Sept. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Eudy</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Aug. - Sept. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Fuller</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>July 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wagon &amp; team</td>
<td>Dec. 1862 - Jan. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Goin</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862 - Feb. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Goin</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862 - Apr. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Goin</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862 - Apr. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Graham</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Feb. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Hill</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862 - Apr. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. C. Holesapple</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>May 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>John N. Howell</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Sept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>boiler</td>
<td>Dec. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Irwin</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Irwin</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reubin Irwin</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Irwin</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Aug.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watson Irwin</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Irwin</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph/James Jolly</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robt. G. Johnson/Johnston</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Apr. - Nov. 1863, Mar. 1864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. H. Langston</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. G. Larkington</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Lock</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Lynch/Leech</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John McAfee</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Mar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. McClure</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thom. McCulloch/McCullock</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862 - Dec. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred McDaniel</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John H. [M. or C.?] McMullen</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862 - Feb., May 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John McAfee</td>
<td>laborer boiler</td>
<td>Mar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William B. McMullen</td>
<td>laborer boiler</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry McSwain</td>
<td>laborer boiler</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry McWhorter</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Nesmith</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Jan.-May, Nov. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Nesmith</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Jan.-Feb. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. R. Newson</td>
<td>laborer cook</td>
<td>Oct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Peck</td>
<td>asst. supt.</td>
<td>Mar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Points</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Predy</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Oct.-Dec. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Prince</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Aug.-Sept. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Dates</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Rains</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Aug. - Sept. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. J. Rivers</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>July - Sept. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levi Rose</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Sept. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Rose</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Aug. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William F. Rose</td>
<td>overseer/foreman</td>
<td>Dec. 1862 - Mar. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>supt.</td>
<td>Apr. 1863 - Jan., Mar. 1864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nealy B. Scott</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Apr. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John R. Sibley/Sivley</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862 - Jan., Mar. 1864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Sibley</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Mar. 1864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Smoot</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862, Feb. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>carpenter</td>
<td>Jan. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. J. Stewart</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Stull/Steele</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862-Sept. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. W. Thrasher</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862 - May 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John A[or B]. Thompson</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Sept. - Dec. 1863, Mar. 1864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. W. Thompson</td>
<td>wagon &amp; team</td>
<td>Feb. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph/James Tolbert/</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Mar.- Apr., July - Nov. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talbot/Talbott</td>
<td>boiler</td>
<td>Dec. 1863, Mar. 1864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Vercer</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Aug. - Sept. 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron Walker</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>July - Nov. 1863, Mar. 1864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Webster</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Mar. - June 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Whittoii/Wliitiow/</td>
<td>laborer</td>
<td>Dec. 1862 - July 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitworth</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the workmen, perhaps half, were residents of Morgan and Lawrence counties. Besides the laborers, a few men from Captain James H. Young's Nitre Guard Company, raised at Larkinsville, Alabama in late December 1862, were assigned to protect Trinity Cave. Private Levi B. Jones reportedly deserted from the cave June 23, 1863. Although unlisted on the payrolls, Bureau vouchers indicate that April 1 - May 15, 1863, John L. Bartow was also superintendent of the cave. He was paid sixty dollars per month whereas Elisha B. Clapp and William F. Rose were only paid thirty and forty-five dollars a month. Bartow (c 1834-1870) after the war lived in Fort Valley and Cave Spring, Georgia. Clapp (b. c 1835) was a Massachusetts native who prior to the war was an auctioneer and partner of A. C. Ladd in Huntsville. Rose (c 1829/33-1911), a veteran of the 4th Alabama Cavalry, was wounded at the battle of Iuka, Mississippi in October 1862. After the cessation of hostilities he lived in Lawrence and Etowah counties, Alabama.\(^6\)
Both the subdistrict and district offices interacted with the Trinity Cave operation. In mid-April 1863, H. W. Grantland went “to Tuscumbia Ala after Provisions” for the cave, and the following July he paid “ferriage and drayage” at Decatur for additional foodstuffs. Later that month and in August, he paid the expenses of a team and driver hauling saltpeter from the cave to either Guntersville or Gadsden, toward the ultimate destination at the Augusta, Georgia Powder Mill. September 19-24, 1863, Grantland went “from Trinity Cave to Kingston Geo to report to [the new] Hdqrs of Dist.” During March 1863, John J. Black (1844-1896), a veteran of the 8th Georgia Infantry, and the Ninth District’s office clerk, traveled from Captain Gabbett’s headquarters at Larkinsville, Alabama to Trinity Cave “twice with Provisions for laborers.” In August and September 1863, Stephen C. Loyd (b. c 1829), a Jackson County, Alabama farmer and member of the Guard Company, made trips from Kingston, Georgia to Trinity Cave to oversee the shipment of saltpeter to Gadsden and Rome. On his second trip he carried monetary “funds to Grantland.” During November 1863, and January 1864, assistant superintendent of Trinity Cave, J. C. Holesapple, hired a horse for a special messenger who carried monthly returns, dispatches, and vouchers from Grantland at Decatur to Gabbett’s latest office at Rome, Georgia. In February and March 1864, Holesapple had a new job as an “agent collecting subsistence” exclusively for Trinity Cave.7

Although Confederate commissaries and quartermasters were supposed to support saltpeter operations with all supplies necessary for production, in actual practice the bulk of necessities were purchased from local citizens or employees. This certainly was the case with Trinity Cave. Much of the food, forage, hauling, tallow, and other items were purchased from Lawrence and Morgan County residents.

Between November 8, 1862 and February 2, 1864, John Aston, John C. Baker (b. c 1807), Richard B. Goff (b. c 1830), J. C. Holesapple, Dr. William B. Irwin (1820-1883), E. Jacobs, Robert D. Nelson (1836-1900), G. B. Nesmith, John W. Peck (1825-1883), and William J. Thompson (b. c 1818) respectively sold 380, 482, 323, 2157, 1991, 1103, 1115, 1108.5, 638 and 1599 pounds of beef to the Trinity Nitre Works. These and other men contributed additional staples.
during the same period: Goff, 20 1/6 bushels potatoes; Holesapple, 39.5 bushels corn; W. Hollan, 51.5 bushels corn; Jacobs, 214 pounds pork; Nelson, 5 bushels potatoes and 40 pounds pork; Nesmith, 327 pounds pork, 107 pounds bacon, and 17.5 bushels meal; Richard B. Nevill (1819-1878), 20 bushels meal; Peck, 123 pounds pork, 66 pounds bacon, and 14 bushels meal; and Thompson, 66.5 pounds pork, 73 pounds bacon, and 17.75 bushels beans. On June 5, 1863 G. H. Buckingham sold 130 pounds salt “for curing fresh meat for subsistence of laborers at Trinity.”

At various times “Forage for [the] stock” was obtained from Aston, Baker, Irwin, Jacobs, Nevill, Peck, and Thompson. These men respectively sold to the Trinity Works 30, 68, 40, 65, 40, 15 and 17.75 bushels corn. In addition, Baker, Nevill and Peck provided 500, 450 and 700 pounds fodder, with Peck further contributing fifteen bushels of cottonseed.

Wagons and teams, usually consisting of four oxen, mules or horses were often hired from employees R. B. Goff and Martin Milligan, Lawrence County residents, or Milligan’s farmer neighbor, William J. Thompson. These men hauled furnace wood, ashes, corn, forage, and provisions to Trinity Cave. Milligan was paid for a wagon and team fifteen times between March 1, 1863 and February 19, 1864. On seven occasions either Dr. William B. Irwin or Robert D. Nelson provided teams or wagons and teams to haul saltpeter to Gadsden, Alabama or Rome, Georgia.

Tallow for “making Candles to light up Cave at Trinity Nitre Works” was often purchased from the local population. Between November 24, 1862 and March 7, 1864, Aston, Goff, Irwin Jacobs, Nelson, Nesmith, Peck and Thompson tendered 61, 10, 185, 34, 34, 64, 112.5 and 30 pounds of this substance.

R. H. Coleman, on November 28, 1862 and March 31, 1863, sold a total of 4,466 feet of plank and 4,690 feet of sheeting to the Trinity operation for building “Sheds for furnaces” and “Nitre Boxes.” In late April 1863, John Doyle was paid $1.50 a day for “rebuilding furnace to Trinity.” On the following December 8, Lawrence County farmer, Nelson Fennell (b. c 1820), contributed 1,400 more feet of plank for saltpeter boxes.
Tools and other items were also purchased from citizens and employees. During mid-December 1862 Goff supplied a grubbing hoe for “cleaning furnaces,” a bench screw and hammer for the “carpenter shop,” fifteen pounds of nails for “making nitre Boxes,” thirty-six feet of fuse “for blasting,” a two pound stone hammer “for Breaking Rock,” a bake oven, and an axe. Other axes were obtained from Nesmith and J. M. Wheeler. Nesmith also sold two barrels in which to pack saltpeter. An iron wedge “for splitting wood” came from Thompson, and spades for “Excavating Cave” were bought from Milligan and Doyle. Milligan also made available six sacks for “Packing out nitrous earth.”

Potash for the conversion of cave saltpeter (calcium nitrate) to gunpowder saltpeter (potassium nitrate) was largely supplied by local contractors. Allen and Rose delivered 493 pounds May 23, 1863 while on seven occasions between July 1 and December 16, 1863 J. H. and N. B. Scott provided a total of 6,386 pounds. On August 1, 1863 William E. Murphy (1819-1889), a Morgan County physician and farmer, sold 150 cords of wood “for making ashes for the manufacture of nitre at Trinity.”

During the week before Christmas 1862, Dr. William B. Irwin gave medical attention to the “Govt Employees at Trinity Nitre Works” three times. He charged four dollars per visit in addition to the cost of medicine and prescriptions.

The amount of saltpeter made at Trinity Cave is unknown, but it must have been considerable, judging by how many times saltpeter was hauled to Guntersville, Gadsden, or Rome. Production at the cave was disrupted during late April 1863 when Brigadier General Grenville M. Dodge led a large Union force from Corinth, Mississippi into northwestern Alabama to “take Tuscumbia, and, if practicable, push . . . [his] cavalry to Decatur, destroy the saltpeter works, and the Tuscumbia and Decatur Railroad.” Another detachment under Colonel Abel D. Streight temporarily joined Dodge before splitting off to try to cut the Western and Atlantic Railroad in north Georgia. Although successful with many of their objectives, Dodge’s men apparently did not raid any saltpeter operations. However as a precaution, between April 14 and 27, Superintendent Bartow
removed “Nitre, Tools Provisions &c from Trinity Nitre Works to a place of safety,” probably Huntsville. During the same scare, April 30 to May 4, Captain Gabbett went to Trinity Cave and moved the entire labor force of twenty eight men and three horses across the Tennessee River, and set out “to see Genl [Nathan B.] Forrest.”  

The Confederates stopped mining Trinity Cave in March 1864. Eighteen men were on duty that month and none of them worked more than seven days, implying that their last day was March 7. Within a day or two, General Dodge occupied Decatur and sent units to capture Courtland and Moulton. Primarily near the latter place, on March 10 and 15, 1864, Trinity employees Dewitt Brown, J. C. McCleskey, Joseph and Thomas McCulloch, Henry N. McWhorter, and John and Joseph R. Sibley were captured. March 7 through 26 J. C. Holesapple served as a “special messenger in charge of tools & materials” from Trinity Cave, and later, April 27 – May 6, 1864, he hired a wagon and four oxen “for hauling nitre & tools from Trinity to Apple Grove,” so as to keep “Government property out of way of the Enemy.” Soon after Trinity Cave had been abandoned, March 12 – 16, 1864 Captain Gabbett left his latest headquarters at Blue Mountain, Calhoun County, Alabama and apparently not understanding the situation, made a vain attempt to visit the cave “to settle government claims at that place.”  

EPILOGUE

In late 1980 the author and Merilyn Osterlund visited Trinity Cave to detect signs of Civil War mining. There were many rocks piled on ledges and dirt had been dug from crevices, ledges and the floor. Numerous soot smudges indicated where torches or candles had been used and there were a number of mostly illegible names. Smoked dates, “DEC 26 18[?2]” and 1862[or backwards 3]” were found by themselves. One curious undated name on the ceiling looked like “m. r. CONCH.” This undoubtedly was made by W. J. Couch (1845-1924), an employee at the cave and a Lawrence County farm laborer.


3. CSR, Cobb’s Legion, William Gabbett File, CSR – Nitre and Mining Bureau (M258, Roll 111), William Gabbett File; Confederate Papers Relating to Citizens or Business Firms, RG109 (M346, Rolls 370,562), NA, H. W. Grantland and A. C. Ladd Files.

4. Ibid.; 1860 Census, Ala., Madison, Huntsville, 40, (1870), Madison, T5R2W, Triana P.O., 1; *Huntsville Southern Advocate*, May 26, 1859; *Cartersville Courant American*, April 16, 1893; Atlanta directories (1867, 1870); *Nashville Daily American*, September 16, 1879; *Nashville Banner*, February 17, 1926.

6. Confederate Payrolls, Trinity Cave; Citizens Papers (M346, Roll 46), John L. Bartow File; Compiled Service Records, RG109, NA, Young’s Nitre Guard Company, Levi B. Jones File; John L. Bartow to Andrew Johnson, April 15, 1869, Andrew Johnson Papers, LC; 1860 Census, Ala., Madison, Huntsville, 1; (1870), Ga., Floyd, Subdiv. 141, Cave Spring P. O., 14; (1870), Ala., Lawrence, T6R6W, Dry Creek P. O., 14; *Huntsville Democrat*, March 27, 1861; Alabama Confederate Pension Applications, Rosa Rose File.


10. Ibid. (M346, Rolls 492, 690, 736, 1025), W. B. Irwin, M. Milligan, R. D. Nelson, and W. J. Thompson Files; Confederate Payrolls, Trinity Cave.


17. Confederate Payrolls, Trinity Cave; Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 32, Pt. 1: 492; Pt. 3: 94; Nashville Daily Times and True Union, March 23, 1864; Citizens Papers (M346, Roll 456), J. C. Holesapple File; CSR, Cobb’s Legion, William Gabbett File. McWhorter (1841-1928) was sent to Camp Chase, Ohio, where on January 24, 1865, he was released on taking the oath of allegiance “to remain north of the Ohio River during the war.” CSR-Nitre and Mining Bureau (M258, Roll 112), Henry N. McWhorter File.

18. Diary of Marion O. Smith, December 24, 1980; Confederate Payrolls, Trinity Cave; Waldrep, Cemeteries of Lawrence County Volume 1, 113; 1860 census, Ala., Lawrence Northern Div., Courtland P. O., 56.
Located in eastern Pennsylvania, the city of Reading is found on the banks of the Schuykill River, 40 miles upstream from Philadelphia. Since colonial days, Reading has served as the economic, civic, and social center of Berks County. By the early 1870s, citizens had the opportunity to join scores of social and benevolent organizations. For example, there were 11 different groups of Masons, 13 orders of Odd Fellows, and eight orders of the Brotherhood of the Union. However, for 20 years prior to 1869, there were no scientific societies in the city. This deplorable situation changed when on New Year’s Day, 1869, a new scientific association was founded: the Reading Society of Natural Sciences.

With 11 founding members, the first meeting of the Society took place on a Thursday night on the second floor of John B. Raser’s Drug Store at 6th and Walnut Streets. The program was the first of a series of astronomy lectures by Professor John A. Stewart, principal of Reading High School. The constitution of the Society called for the establishment of 17 committees, including ones for geology and mineralogy. Dues were set at $5 to join and $2 a year thereafter. Elected officers were Fred H. Strecker, president; Dr. John

The first meeting of the Reading Society of Natural Sciences was held on the second floor of Raser's Drug Store in 1869.
Heyl Raser, vice president; Dr. Walter J. Hoffman, recording secretary; and Robert S. Turner, corresponding secretary. President Strecker was an architect and sculptor, but his passion was collecting butterflies, and it was believed that he had the biggest collection in the world. Druggist turned artist Dr. John Heyl Raser, in whose son’s drug store the meeting was held, was one of the driving forces of the society. He was obviously interested in science and technology; he had earlier brought the first soda fountain and acetylene lighting to the city.

The Society soon moved to the second floor of the Reading Library building at 5th & Franklin Streets. However, the initial enthusiasm of the group began to fade. Minutes from the Society indicate that from a roster of 87 members, only five to twelve men were attending meetings. By January 1872, the newly elected president, William Strickland, asked the members present to express their opinions as to what should be the future of the Society. Each one said that they wanted to keep the Society alive. With this new life, Strickland appointed a committee to study and report on a cave which had just been discovered in Berks County.

Just a couple of months before Strickland’s poll, on Sunday, November 12, 1871, William Merkel and John Gehret were blasting limestone from a small quarry on the property of William’s father, Gideon. After the smoke cleared from one particular blast and the resulting shattered rock removed, the two men were surprised to find an opening which lead directly into the hillside. As the men had no source of light, they only explored for a few feet before they turned back. A few days later a more thorough exploration was
undertaken, and a cave decorated with stalactites, stalagmites and crystals was found. Because of the glimmering aragonite crystals, this natural wonder was soon named “Crystal Cave.”

One of the early explorers of the cave was 31-year old Samuel D. F. Kohler, who lived in neighboring Greenwich Township. Kohler was so impressed by the cave’s beauty that he bought the cave and 47 acres for the sum of $5,000. He immediately made improvements to the cave and grounds, which took him the next four months.

S. D. F. Kohler promoted his new attraction by allowing writers and scientific parties to visit Crystal Cave. The first of these excursions was undertaken even before the cave was opened to the public, when sometime in February of 1872, the committee from the Society of Natural Sciences of Reading toured the cave.

The committee sent by Strickland to visit Crystal Cave consisted of five professional men who had a keen interest in natural history. Rev. Dr. Abram R. Horne was respected as a minister, teacher, author, and lecturer. Horne was principal of Keystone State Normal School from 1872 to 1877, after which he became principal of the academic department of Muhlenberg College.

David B. Brunner was an educator and congressman, and in 1872 was the county superintendent of public schools of Berks County. Interested in collecting local Indian relics, Brunner presented to results of his study to the Society, and wrote *Indians of Berks County*. Another of his hobbies was mineralogy. He produced a catalog of mineral varieties of the county.

Two Reading physicians, Dr. John A. Schoenfeld and Dr. Robert S.
Turner, were members of the committee. Schoenfeld practiced in Reading at 118 S. 9th Street. The doctor collected minerals, and had some outstanding specimens of crystallized gold in this collection. He is also remembered for getting stuck in a cave in a quarry near Bowers which today bears his name. Little is known about Turner, corresponding secretary of the Society, other than that he practiced medicine at 114 Penn Street.

Mineralogist, chemist, and astronomer Hiriam W. Hollenbush worked at 320 Spring Garden Street. Although he spent only 15 days in school, in his early years he used all of his free time in the library of Dr. P. G. Bertolet to teach himself geology and mineralogy. As a close companion of Schoenfeld, the two men must have spent many weekends traveling around the county searching for minerals.

The exact date of the visit to Crystal Cave is unknown; the event was not recorded in the Reading newspapers. In the American Naturalist, Hollenbush wrote that the cave was explored for about 500 feet, and he marveled at its great beauty. Probably aware of the 1870 discoveries at the Port Kennedy Bone Cave, only 40 miles away.
away, he commented that an entrance to a bone cave might be found below the present floor. After the Committee’s visit to the cave, the following testimonial appeared in Crystal Cave advertisements for more than sixty years, and even appeared in part on owner S. D. F. Kohler’s business card:

The undersigned Committee, appointed by the Reading Society of Natural Sciences, visited Crystal Cave and found it filled with very interesting curiosities; the stalagmites, stalactites and crystalline formations present a variety of beauty such as is seldom seen. Persons who visit the Cave will be amply repaid.

Three months later, on Saturday, May 25, 1872, the “Grand Illumination” of Crystal Cave took place, making it the first commercial cave in Pennsylvania.

In the autumn of 1881, a notice for an excursion to Luray Caverns sponsored by the Reading Society of Natural Sciences appeared in the local newspapers. Luray Caverns was already well known to Reading residents; advertisements for the cave and Inn were frequently

Hiram W. Hollenbush (1821-1883), shown with his instruments, was a self-taught scientist who wrote about Crystal Cave in the American Naturalist.

The announcement for the Reading Society of Natural Science’s excursion to Luray Caverns appeared in the October 5, 1881 issue of the Reading Times & Dispatch.
The trip was organized by two Reading physicians, John Schoenfeld (who visited Crystal Cave nine years earlier) and M. Albert Rhoads. It attracted 95 participants, including Reading Mayor William G. Rowe and his wife Sallie.

On the cool Tuesday morning of October 11, the excursion left Reading by train and traveled through the Lebanon Valley to Harrisburg, and passed on the route through the fertile Cumberland and Shenandoah Valleys. The group arrived at Luray that day and spent a comfortable night at the Inn. During the night, as the travelers slept, a team of workers labored to fix a problem with the electric lights inside the cave. On Wednesday, at about 9am, after a short delay, the excursionists set out for the cave, which was illuminated by the electric lights and 3,000 candles. The distance that they traveled was estimated to be three and a half miles.

The Society received permission from the Luray management to dedicate the Double Column in Giants Hall to the memory of Professor Henry, the first secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and to his successor, Spencer F. Baird, who was born in Reading.

Most of the participants returned the next day. Back in Reading the trip was well received by Society President Dr. J. Landis. He wrote:

This memorial monument, unlike those erected by the faltering hands of men, was begun in the dark silent vault many thousands of years ago, by the laying of two corner stones, one upon the bottom, the other in the canopy. Upon these foundations, the architect, Nature, with no other hammer or chisel, than the incessant
tricklings and drippings and spatterings of calcareous waters, slowly raised the two approaching superstructures by gradual accretions, until, by coalescing in the center, they formed a continuous edifice, which now, with its fantastic nodules and tuberosities, its scrolls and flutings, stands in royal magnificence firm as the eternal hills. May it remain immaculate for ages, to commemorate the illustrious achievements of the honored men whose name it bears. ³

This excursion was the last undertaking of the Reading Society of Natural Sciences. A few years later the Society was dissolved and its collection of stuffed birds, minerals, and natural curiosities was sold to the Reading School Board, after which it became part of the Reading Public Museum.³ In the end, the Society failed because it never received adequate support from its members. Some of its scientists later became members of the Berks County Natural History Society.¹⁶

Two of the major accomplishments of the Reading Society of Natural Sciences were its excursions to Crystal Cave and Luray Caverns. Dr. John Schoenfeld, namesake of Schoenfeld Cave near Bowers and the most enthusiastic caver in the Society, practiced medicine in Reading until 1907, when he died at his home.¹⁷
REFERENCES

1. Reading City Directory, 1878.

2. Reading City Directory, 1870-71.


10. Owen's Reading Directory, 515 Court Street, Reading, Pennsylvania.


12. Testimonials are found in several different Crystal Cave brochures and broadsides. After many years of use, errors crept into them. Some brochures state that it was the “Society of Natural Sciences, Muhlenberg College” that visited the cave, perhaps confusing Dr. Horne’s later association with that institution; Hollenbush’s name is misspelled as “Hollenbach.”


THE LIFE AND WORK OF A LITTLE KNOWN BIOSPELEOLOGIST: THEODOR TELLKAMPF

By Aldemaro Romero

INTRODUCTION

One of the first names associated with the research of cave fauna at Mammoth Cave was that of Theodor Tellkampf. He not only described several of species, some of which are still valid, but also conducted a number of morphological studies. Yet very little is known about this scientist. Below I present what I have been able to gather about him. Although more needs to be known, this paper represents the first attempt to produce a narrative on his life and scientific career.

HIS LIFE AND TIMES

Theodor Tellkampf was born on 27 April 1812 in Heinde, Germany. Although Juettner (1909: 98) wrote that he had been born in Bückeburg, his birth certificate shows he was a native of Heinde, where he was christened on 19 May 1812. The family had lived in Bückeburg until sometime between 1808 or 1809 but moved to Heinde where Theodor’s father had leased an estate. These two towns are about 70 km apart, a considerable distance at that time (today the village of Heinde is part of the town of Bad Salzdetfurth).

Theodor had 5 brothers and 3 sisters. The eldest of the brothers was the son of his father, Johann Georg Diedrich (b. Hannover, Germany, 2 May 1771; d. Hannover-Linden, Germany, 25 May 1846) and his first wife Johanna Friederike Catharina Margaretha Werner, whom he married on 28 August 1797. The rest of Theodor’s brothers and sisters were the progeny of Johann’s second wife Charlotta Rosina Christina Baum (b. 1778 Mollenfelde; d. 10 March 1857 Hannover-Linden). Theodor was the sixth child of this union.

The Tellkampf family name has been changing through time. Spellings of Theodor’s earlier ancestors include Tellkamp and Tellkampff. There is also some confusion about the way Theodor
spelled his own name. In the parish register of Heinde his name is written as August Otto Theodor Tellkampf. While in America, his first name was sometimes spelled “Theodore.” More confusing is his “middle” name. First of all, Germans do not use middle names (with the exception of people living in East Frisia until about 1900). Sometimes the name they use as a first name is the last one of the series of names given when baptized. That explains why he always used “Theodor” or “Theodore” as his name in America. For his middle name he sometimes used “A.” which would be an abbreviation of his first christened name August (see, for example, Juettnar 1909: 98, White 1884: 240.). In the only letter written by Theodor that I have been able to locate, deposited in the Archives of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard, he spells his name “Theo A. Tellkampf.” Yet the “G.” as a middle name appears in a number of sources.

Why did he feel compelled to create a “middle” initial for himself? It was not very unusual for Germans coming to the U.S. to add a middle initial in order to “Americanize” their name. An example was Carl H. Eigenmann, another German by birth and one of the most prolific authors on cave fishes who added an “H” as his middle initial (Romero 1986).

Theodor attended the gymnasium (high school) at Hannover and studied Medicine at Göttingen until the summer of 1838. A 26 August 1838 letter from Adolph Tellkampf (the eldest brother) to Johann Ludwig (another of Theodor’s brothers) states that Theodor had studied Medicine in Göttingen until the summer of 1838 and intended to go to the University of Jena in the Fall of 1838 to do his doctorate. The University of Jena has no information about him. He attended the University of Gottingen from 28 October 1831 until February 1833. He was a student in the Faculty of Philosophy (where the natural sciences were taught) and studied physics. According to White (1884) he obtained his M.D. at the University of Würzburg, Bavaria, in 1838. His doctoral dissertation was titled "Beitrag zur Lehre der Hautkrankheiten" (On skin diseases) but it was dated as published in Vienna in 1839. During my initial investigations I thought that he might have graduated from the University of Vienna not only because of the place of the publication of his doctoral ("inaugural") dissertation but also because of two
other factors: one, the University of Vienna had one of the most prestigious medical schools in the world at that time, with very strong morphological leanings (the kind of things Theodor emphasized in his papers on cave fauna); the other is that he had a brother, George Hermann Daniel Tellkampf, a merchant, who also had lived in Vienna since at least 1831.

According to the University of Würzburg, Theodor’s dissertation was published in Vienna in 1839. However, the registrar of the University of Vienna did not find any record of Theodor attending that institution nor can a copy of his dissertation be found in its library.

The question, then, is why was his dissertation published in Vienna if he did his M.D. studies at Würzburg? It is possible that he may have got his degree from Würzburg in 1838, but because of the time when it was printed the date on his dissertation is 1839.

Among Theodor’s siblings, one achieved notoriety - his brother Johann Ludwig (Louis) (b. Bückeburg, Germany, 28 January 1808; d. Berlin, 15 February 1876). Johann was a lawyer of international reputation who arrived in the U.S. in 1838 and taught political economy at Union College, Schenectady, N.Y. until 1843 when he went back to Germany. He returned to the U.S. again in 1844 where he occupied the Frederick Gebhard Chair at Columbia College (today Columbia University) until 1847 when he was replaced temporarily by Theodor until Columbia found a permanent replacement (Anonymous 1843, 1876, Danton 1946). He studied the American institution of prisons. Maybe that is why Theodor published a book on the health of prisoners (Tellkampf 1844d).

Ludwig returned to Germany in 1884 by invitation of the King of Prussia and was appointed Professor at the University of Breslau. In 1855 he became a member of the House of Lords (“Herrenhaus”) of Prussia (among other parliaments in Germany) and was regarded as the leader of the liberal party in that aristocratic body. Another of Theodor’s brothers, George Hermann Daniel Tellkampf (b. Heinde, Germany, 29 January 1810; d. Hannover, Germany, 23 November 1893), also lived in the U.S. until 1886. He was a stockbroker in New York.
Theodor traveled to America for the first time in 1839. He sailed from Bremen to New York on board the ship New York. Instead of staying in New York with his brothers, Theodor went to Cincinnati where there was a sizeable German colony and where his services as a doctor may have been very welcomed. He lived there until 1843 where he “spent much time traveling and studying” (Juettner 1909:99). Cincinnati provided him with a location much closer to the Mammoth Cave than New York. He returned to Europe in 1843 and in 1844 he was offered (but declined) a Chair at the University of Berlin and that same year he returned to America and lived in New York until 1880. That year he returned to Germany and died on 7 September 1883 in Hannover.

Little is known of Theodor’s descendants. He married Marie von Roth in 1858, who died the following year in New York, but nothing else is known about her. He also had one son named Georg Tellkampf, born in New York in 1858, who later became a physician. There is a record of Georg traveling from Hamburg to New York in June 1876. He was a student at that time, 19 years old. Another source mentioned him living as a physician in New York (year unknown) (Kuwert, pers. comm.).

**Scientific Work**

Theodor published some of the earliest morphological descriptions of the first cave fish reported in the scientific literature, *Amblyopsis spelaea*. He contributed detailed descriptions of this species and concluded that its eyes and those of blind cave crayfishes had become rudimentary as a result of disuse:

> ‘While it is true, in general, that all animals retain their essential form, and that no species passes over into another by transformation, we know that less material changes of form are produced by external influences such as changes in climate or food, lasting though many generations of the same species’.

For Tellkampf the original, unmodified species was still a mystery. Therefore, he did not want to settle this issue until “such species,
corresponding with them in all essential points, are found” (Tellkampf 1844b: 393).

Theodor also described two members of the Class Arachnida. In 1844 he described the opilion *Phalangodes armata* new genus, new species, from Mammoth Cave. Both taxa are still valid and the genus became the type for the subfamily (Phalangodiinae), family (Phalangodidae) and superfamily (Phalangodoidea). Also in 1844, Tellkampf described *Anthrobia monmouthia*, new genus and new species of spider. Keyserling in 1862 corrected the spelling of the specific name to *mammouthia*. This genus and species are still considered valid and are placed in the family Linyphiidae.

Other valid species named by Theodor are two beetles, *Ptomaphagus hirtus* and *Neaphaenops tellkampfi*, and the eyeless crayfish *Oreonectes pellucidus*.

Theodor was frequently cited by contemporaries studying the Mammoth Cave fauna such as Jeffries Wyman (b. Chelmsford, Middlesex, Massachusetts, 11 August 1814; d. Bethlehem, New Hampshire, 4 September 1874), Alpheus Spring Packard, Jr. (b. Brunswick, Maine, 19 February 1839; d. Providence, Rhode Island, 14 February 1905), and Frederic Ward Putnam (b. Salem, Massachusetts, 16 April 1839; d. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 14 August 1915). He also belonged to the major scientific societies of his time. By 1844 he appears as a member of Lyceum of Natural History of New York (Winsor 1991: 108), the predecessor of the New York Academy of Sciences. In 1848 he was inducted as a fellow of the Academy of Medicine of New York, the year the Academy was founded.

After his brief return to Germany and establishment in New York as a physician, he apparently abandoned the study of cave fauna altogether. He may still have had some interest in natural history. In the Archives of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, at Harvard, there is one letter by “Theo A. Tellkampf” to William Greene Binney (b. Boston, Massachusetts, 22 October 1833; d. Burlington, New Jersey, 3 August 1909) a malacologist graduated from Harvard. In this letter dated 14 Dec. 1867, Theodor discusses ascidian (sea squirt) anatomy but says that he is in no position to help Binney...
with his research. His name and New York address appeared in the Naturalists’ Directory, part I, 1865, edited by F.W. Putnam (p. 28.) and described him as an expert in “Ascidians, Histology.”

Theodor also achieved certain notoriety as a physician. For example Heinrich Schliemann, who discovered the ruins of Troy, says that he used a formula based on quinine devised by “Tellkampf, the German doctor from New York” in order to fight fevers (Schliemann 1995).

As far as I can tell, this is the first biography on Theodor Tellkampf. Some biographical notes have been published as short obituaries in medical journals, some of them inaccurate and never with any reference to his speleological work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Uwe Kunert, from Hamburg, Germany, provided me with very valuable, first hand information about Theodor and his family. James Cokendolpher provided useful information about Tellkampf’s contributions to arachnology. The following people provided me with valuable information: Jocelyn K. Wilk, Assistant Archivist, Columbia University Archives & Columbiana Library; Toby A. Appel, Yale University; Dennis B. Worthen, Executive Director of The Lloyd Library and Museum in Cincinnati; Mary Person, Curatorial Associates, Harvard Law School Library; Melanie M. Halloran, Reference Assistant, Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library; Ed Mormon, Associate Librarian, New York Academy of Medicine; Robert Young, Ernst Mayr Library, Harvard University; Lynn Nyhart, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Fred Churchill, Indiana University. U. Kunert, J. Cokendolpher and Kelly M. Paulson read the manuscript and made valuable suggestions
LITERATURE CITED


**ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS BY T. TELLKAMPF**


**Translations by T. Tellkampf**


**Taxa Dedicated to Him**

*Neaphaenops tellkampfi* is a troglobitic ground beetle who feeds exclusively on cave cricket eggs, which it sniffs out and digs up.
A MINNESOTA SHOW CAVE ADVERTISEMENT FROM 1876

By Greg Brick

Chute’s Cave, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, operated as a show cave from 1876 to 1880 (conservatively estimated). A newspaper advertisement for Chute’s Cave, from the Saint Paul and Minneapolis Pioneer-Press and Tribune, August 26, 1876, is transcribed below. Although there are earlier newspaper advertisements for Fountain Cave, in nearby St. Paul, dating back to 1852, they are rather brief. I recently submitted a forty page manuscript of Chute’s Cave to the Minnesota Historical Society and plan to abridge it for a future issue of the Journal of Spelean History. The cave, tunnel and springs still exist and are accessible.

CHALYBEATE SPRINGS.

A PLEASANT PLACE OF RESORT.

Chute’s Cave - - A Boat Ride of 2,000 Feet, Under Main Street.

Under Mr. Manasseh Pettengill’s enterprising management, the Chalybeate Springs, on South Main street, East Division, have become a very pleasant and popular place of resort, and promise to prove a bonanza to their proprietor. The water from these springs is pure and sparkling, and possessed of mineral qualities highly beneficial to many classes of invalids. Those who visit the springs may drink freely of the waters, without money or price, and Mr. Pettengill is delivering the water to a large number of our citizens daily, at a moderate charge. He has erected upon the platform at the springs, a neat and commodious building for the accommodation of visitors, containing ice cream parlor and cigar stand, as well as a number of bathrooms that will soon be supplied with hot as well as cold water, and on the river front of the building a balcony invites one to a comfortable seat in the shade, from which position a handsome stretch of romantic scenery is visible.
An easy foot path has been constructed, leading from Main street down to this platform, and is preferable to the stairway. This path passes a little building occupied by M. Nowack, as a photograph gallery, where may be found stereoscopic views of that locality, and of all the prominent points of interest in the state, as well as an endless variety of Indian goods.

Mr. Pettengill is also constructing a platform for dancing parties, which will be appropriately “dedicated” with music and dancing, this evening. The band plays at the springs every Saturday evening, and with the grounds brilliantly illuminated, and the grand old Mississippi rolling and tumbling at your feet, the scene is a beautiful and impressive one.

If you have a desire to EXPLORE THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH, Mr. Pettengill can accommodate you in that particular also. The mouth of the “Chute Cave” is just below the springs, and the bottom of this cave is covered with about eighteen inches of water. For the moderate sum of ten cents you can take a seat in a boat, with a flaming torch at the bow, and with a trusty pilot sail up under Main street a distance of 2,000 feet, between walls of pure white sandstone, and under a limestone arch which forms the roof. It is an inexpensive and decidedly interesting trip to take.

Mr. Pettengill is constantly adding new attractions about his premises, and those who have not visited the locality since last season will be surprised and delighted to see what has been accomplished there. It is really one of the most attractive spots for sight seers as well as citizens within our corporate limits, all of which the reader can verify by personal observation, which we heartily recommend, not forgetting “Chute’s cave.”
CAVE OF THE OUTLAWS

Submitted by Bill Torode

When I was a youngster I used to go to the movies on Saturday mornings. One of the most popular types of movie was the cowboy picture. Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, The Lone Ranger and Hopalong Cassidy were some of the most popular. In a few of the shows the bad guys, or the gang, would have a hideout in a cave behind a waterfall. This is a true story of a gang with a real hideout in a cave behind a waterfall in Alabama.

IN THE YEAR 1822

THE PURSUIT AND CAPTURE OF THE COUNTERFEITERS.

Great was the excitement in the village of Tuskaloosa, with its 2,000 inhabitants, when the news went abroad that the town had been done for by a gang of counterfeiters, and that several fifty-dollar counterfeit bills had been left in the hands of a prominent merchant for goods sold to that amount. Every cabin in the village was emptied of its inhabitants – men, women, and children – agape for news, and craving revenge.

At that time the penalty for the crime of counterfeiting was death. And in this particular case the honor of the town called for pursuit, capture, and execution. Within two hours after the spreading of the news of this outrage, a band of bold citizens was organized for the pursuit; and Major James Childress, as leader, came rapidly riding into the village on a large iron-gray horse, accoutred with rifle and pistols, and in hunter’s garb, followed by a lively pack of hounds, yelping in response to the mellow winding of the huntsman’s horn.

This band was made up of the best and most daring of the citizens* of Tuskaloosa and North Port, well armed and accoutred for the emergency, and, with a wagon drawn by two mules, supplied as if
for a party on a camp hunt. The raiders took the road leading to Walker County, as it was known that the counterfeitors had come from that direction.

After crossing North River, eight miles from town, the party encountered John W. Prewitt, a sterling young pioneer, just then beginning to expand into a man of means and power. He was returning home from a trip into the upper end of Walker County. Prewitt, the day before, as he stated, had met a party of men going from Tuscaloosa to Walker, and who told him they lived on Clear Creek. Prewitt’s description of the men seemed to cover the objects of the pursuit, and he was at once put in possession of the facts of the passing of the counterfeit money, and was requested to join the party in pursuit. When the word counterfeit money fell upon Prewitt’s ear his eye flashed and his face glowed as if something had stung him. He put his hand in his pocket, drew out his wallet of money, and examined its contents. A black frown passed over his face as he returned his wallet to his pocket, when he exclaimed with much eagerness in the response to the request that he should join the party, “Yes, yes, boys, I’m in,” while he at once wheeled his horse into the road, and, placing himself by Major Childress, inquired into the particulars.

The fact is that Prewitt, in examining his money, found that the rascals had put upon him two fifty-dollar bills, paid him as boot in a horse swap.

He had parted with a magnificent young filly of his own raising for that amount of money and the horse he was now riding, which was a fine roadster, deep black, and of good size. While Childress and Prewitt were talking apart, Brown, one of the North Port squad, rode up to Prewitt, and said familiarly, “John, where did you come across that horse? I saw him in North Port day before yesterday.”

The explanation that followed convinced Childress and Brown that the man who had swapped horses with Prewitt was one of the men pursued, and that his party was composed of the identical counterfeitors.
Major Childress now called the party to a halt, and said: “Men, we know the neighboring locality of the homes of the persons we are pursuing. It will be unnecessary to spend more time in making inquiries. I advise you to say nothing to any persons we may meet, about our real object, but to let it be understood that we are out on a camp hunt. Our destination is Clear Creek, in Walker County, where we will pitch our tent to-morrow about sunrise.”

Our hunters traveled all night, and next morning, about daylight, pitched their tent on the edge of a bluff on Clear Creek, in the neighborhood of ?’s mill. In the meantime several wild turkeys had been shot, and the breakfast was such as only Daniel Boone had ever enjoyed.

As a caution, Childress had suggested to Prewitt that he had better leave his horse behind, for, if discovered, it would give a hint of the pursuit; to which Prewitt readily assented, and the black steed was left with a thrifty young farmer on Crabb’s road, about six or eight miles south of Wolf Creek, and thirty-five miles north of Tuscaloosa.

About half a mile from the camp there was a rude log cabin on the edge of a small clearing of four or six acres of land, on which corn and cotton (the latter in a small patch) had been produced. In this cabin were found a woman and two small children. The cabin was of the rudest sort, but fresh built, only one room, about twenty feet square, a bed in each of the four corners. About fifty yards off was a row of small stables, of logs very strongly put together, four in number, by the side of a small but very substantial crib well filled with corn and oats. Our hunters agreed to spread themselves around the neighborhood as observers for the day. Childress and Prewitt visited the cabin and inquired for the master of the place. The woman said that her husband had gone to Huntsville; she did not know when he would be back, for it is “a good way out there.” Loitering around, Prewitt looked in at the stables and noted that in each stall there was a horse freshly fed and groomed. And lo! in one of the stalls he saw his veritable filly! Upon this discovery he called Childress and exclaimed: “We have treed the coon! There stands my filly. It is all a lie about going to Huntsville. It takes men to look after stock in this way.”
Childress was of the same opinion, and concluded from the facts that the counterfeiters were in the adjacent woods. The party was speedily made acquainted with the facts, and every rifle and pistol was well prepared for whatever emergency might arise. Childress took pains to conceal from the women in the cabin that he had made any discovery, and the idea of camp-hunters was sedulously cultivated. But Prewitt insisted that the stables should be picketed, and four men were detailed with special orders to keep an eye on the stables while the party carelessly scattered themselves up and down on the edges of the bluffs and cliffs of the creek, each with an eye for discovery.

If Clear Creek was in Switzerland it would be renowned for its scenery. It is a small stream, but its fierce waters dash along within their craggy confines uttering a sound as if made up of the mingling of a thousand rivulets, yet soft and distinct; the harmony never ceases. Here are crags to be castled in the future, with adjacent lands in valleys surpassingly rich. Here, for the distance of twenty sinuous miles, is room for as many mills, with natural power to drive enough spindles to clothe the population of a small empire. The whole is broken into numerous cascades, over one of which the water rolls without a break for the width of nearly one hundred feet and with a ten foot plunge that seems the mimic of an echo of some far-off Niagara.

Near this, just above on one side, is a frightful crag, overlooking the bed of the stream, with a continuous threat to topple over, and bathe its rugged limbs in the lucid waters below, while, on the farther side, the bluff is of moderate height, declining gradually into a rich valley.

Just below this fall, comes in from the adjacent hills a frothing rivulet — a never-dying feeder to the larger stream, and empties itself, as if dropping its fleecy treasure from great baskets of snow.

But our camp hunters are suddenly excited, and at the same time perplexed, by having discovered a very light curl of smoke issuing from a crevice in the edge of the crag, near the summit. Clambering up to the locality of the bluish emission, they discovered the mouth of a miniature crater about the size of the head of a large barrel.
The conclusion was that the smoke came from a cavern below; and the gang began reconnoitering the place to find an entrance, having jumped at the conclusion that the counterfeiters were concealed underground. While our hunters were eagerly looking around for a trail, a little girl, one of the children from the cabin aforenamed, came dashing down the hill with a little water-bucket in her hand.

Major Childress hailed her, and looking into her little bright eyes, which glowed like those of a scared minx in her full, round face, he inquired where she was going. “To the spring,” she said, her face nothing exhibiting, excepting the flushing eagerness natural to a child running. She was about six years old, very alert and active, in her bare feet; her long black hair was twisted into two rolls, after the country fashion of putting up pigtail tobacco.

Now just below this cascade the bed of the creek widened considerable, and the body of the water spreading out over a larger extent of space disclosed the rocky bottom, so that the stream was very shallow.

Twenty or thirty yards below, a row of rocks had been thrown, making a foot-path over which one could pass almost dry-shod. Over this path the child glided, and went up toward the cascade on the other side, where there was a spring, by which she sat down, resting her bucket on a stone.

In the meantime the hunters had crossed the rocky foot-path, and bent their course into the woods beyond. Childress, walking up to the spring where the little girl sat, said: “Will we find plenty of deer out in this direction?”

“Oh, yes; pap killed a buck over there yesterday.”

The little girl kept her eyes on Childress, as he passed along, until she thought he was out of sight, when she darted like an arrow, and disappeared under the waterfall.

Childress had seen her, and at once beckoned to his friends, who were on the lookout; and four of the gang, besides Childress, followed the child under the waterfall hastily.
There was a space of about three feet between the cascade and the bluff, serving as an opening, so that one could pass in and under, keeping at the same time perfectly dry. They found, over head, a flat rock extending the entire width of the creek, over which the waters rushed in a body with a regularity and precision as if the hands of man had made the dam out of solid timbers for the express purpose of letting the stream pour over it. There was also under foot a solid rock, without a perceivable crack in it, and this was dry within a few feet of the plunge. Under the edge of the rock over which the waters poured, and for eight or ten feet inwardly, there was light enough to see clearly across the cavern, but beyond all was darkness impenetrable. The five men passed rapidly across and at the side beyond groped onward in the darkness, feeling every step of the way by pointing their rifles ahead, above, and under foot. The rock was firm beneath, while above and all around them was nothing visible. The hunters touched each other to assure themselves, said nothing, and moved on cautiously, listening.

Suddenly a gleam of light flashed upon them, as is from an opening shutter.

“What is it, Lizzie?” said at gruff voice at the opening.

“There’s a gang of men here – hunters they say – just now crossin’ the creek.”

The opening was closed and the hunters advanced rapidly to the spot. Feeling, their hands came in contact with a rough plank or slab, upright, and firmly set as is in a wall. It was about two feet wide, six or seven feet high; on one edge of it was a strip of undressed raw-hide running all the way from top to bottom, and was nailed to the slab on one side and to a post on the other, and was undoubtedly used as a hinge for the slab to swing on. Childress made a light from his tinder-box and took the surroundings. There was a cavernous yawning on each side of them; in front a wall with a slab door. The men arranged themselves on the opening side of the slab, the light was extinguished, and they waited for events, supposing that the door would open directly to let out the little girl.
There were voices within, but unintelligible. In a very little while the door swung open, the girl passed out, and a naked, brawny, and stalwart arm was extended, grasping the edge of the shutter with intent to close it: Childress clutched the wrist of that arm in his left hand with a deathly grip, and with his right hand seized the man by the throat and dragged him at once out of the door and to the ground; placed his knees upon his breast, and cried out: “Enter, boys; I’ve got this fellow;” whereupon, in an instant, four rifles were leveled at the occupants within — two men, sitting on a bench, in front of a log-fire. The men sprang up.

“Hands up!” cried Prewitt, “and surrender or die – right here.” The men were paralyzed, they offered not the slightest resistance. One of them, a tall, straight man, over six feet high, simply said: “Don’t shoot, men;” then turning to his comrade, exclaimed: “The jig’s up.”

In twenty minutes the three were handcuffed, and led out of the den. In the den were found quantities of paper counterfeits on the North and South Carolina and Georgia banks, tools and implements for engraving bills, and dies for casting counterfeit coin of all denominations, and a quantity of poorly executed counterfeit metal dollars, half-dollars, quarters, and dimes.

The den was nearly triangular in shape, with rugged walls, but dry to the touch, and with a solid stone floor. On one side of the den was an opening to another and a darker cavern, which the hunters did not care to explore. A fire-place, quite snug, had been made in the corner, and over it was built up a sort of chimney by stones, adhering to the walls on the inside, so as to convey the smoke to the apex.

The submissive men were mounted on their own horses and well secured. Prewitt had captured his lost filly, on which he rode “proudly pre-eminent.” Childress wound his melodious hunting-horn, the hounds yelped a long and sonorous response, when the hunters took up their homeward march. The raiders halted at Jasper for the night, and the prisoners, well ironed, were lodged in the cellar of old Jemmy Daniel’s house. About three o’clock on the second day after this, the victorious raiders, with their prisoners,
were entering the ferry boat, on the Black Warrior River, at Tuscaloosa.

The news that the counterfeiters had been captured and were approaching was a signal for another emptying of the houses! There were no church bells in that day – in that place; but there was many a horn, and they tooted many a toot. The storehouses were closed, all business suspended; the doors of school-houses were thrown wide open; the pupils, boys and girls, rushed out, and men, women, and children, exulting and hallooing, darted down the long hill toward the river landing, where, on the brow of the bluff, stood almost the entire population of Tuscaloosa to witness the crossing.

As the leader of the returning crowd, Major Childress was conspicuous, on his old, iron-gray horse. But the eye was familiar with his figure, and eagerly sought for the culprits, amongst whom was seen, towering above all the rest of the crowd, a long, lean man, straight in his stirrups, with a rugged face, and clothed in butternut jeans. The long locks of his half-gray hair fell down over his shoulder, covering the collar of his coat. This was John Davis, the leader of the gang. Straight to the jail the culprits were conveyed, and the more alert and active of the crowd managed to get ahead of the troop and fix themselves about and around the jail, so that, upon the arrival of the prisoners there, the locality was well packed with a solicitous multitude.

John Davis, and ? Randall, one of his associates, were tried, convicted, and sentenced to be hanged. Randall furnished the State some facts without which Davis could not have been convicted, and for this he was reprieved; but this fact was not communicated to him until the halter had been put around his neck, under the gallows. I was an eye-witness to this scene. Randall’s conduct under the gallows was notable, amusing, and disgusting. He sang, shouted, and danced; called for water, and whooped an Indian yell. Everybody was anxious for him to be hung, and great was the disappointment and disgust when his reprieve was made known to the crowd.

The public feeling toward Davis was very different. His demeanor after his arrest had created a universal sympathy for him, and the
intrepid manner in which he met his fate was long the theme of admiration, coupled with expressions of regret. He was a splendid specimen of a man physically – over six feet high and elegantly formed. His hair was long and turning white, his eyes gray and sparkling, and his face was expressive of benevolence and animated with intelligence.

His behavior under the gallows was significant of great courage; his composure was perfect; there was deep disdain depicted on his lips; but whether this expression was caused by his disgust at the conduct of Randall or by a deeper feeling of resentment at mankind it would be difficult to determine.

Davis was said to be a Kentuckian, and of good family. Nothing was known or suggested against his character, excepting the present case of counterfeiting, but it was admitted that he was the chief actor, the “scribe” of the gang; in other words, the brains and the pen of the conspirators.

“The jig’s up,” said Davis, when he was arrested; a most ludicrous remark, but significant of his sagacity as well as of his resignation. He was a fatalist.

Randall’s reprieve was for thirty days. He was brought under the gallows a second time – a month after Davis had been executed. The rope was again adjusted to his neck, and he went through the same antics that had distinguished him before. It seems that he had been kept in ignorance of a pardon up to the last. He confessed to many and great crimes. He exhorted, he wept, he sang, he danced and shouted, while the excited crowd surged restlessly around as if they were angry at the possibility of being cheated out of a “genuine hanging,” for it had been hinted during the day that a complete pardon had come. Hence, there was little surprise when the sheriff pulled from his pocket a long paper with a great red seal attached to it. This proved a pardon, at the exhibition and reading of which the crowd dispersed, and Randall was escorted back to the jail.

But Randall was not allowed to escape “scott free.” A mob gathered about the jail, and when the convict had been discharged by the sheriff, as he came forth out of the jail with his little wallet on his
shoulder, and was about to go on his way rejoicing, the mob seized upon him, and taking him off into the woods, tied him to a stump, and inflicted upon him a terrific whipping with cowhides; whereupon he was ordered to leave, and never again show himself in that community. Judge Lynch was more lenient then than he is in these latter days. Randall disappeared with universal execrations howling after him.

In the machinery of the gallows upon which Davis was hung there were no springs, traps, falls, or levers – no break-neck stratagems; it was an old-fashioned hanging – two upright posts with a beam over head, the hemp rope, the primitive cart, and the inevitable mule: “Get up!” was the only signal.

I could locate the spot of this scene within twenty yards. I have passed near it a thousand times since. It was in an open space, within half a mile of the center of the village, in an old field, with no dwelling near, only a gin-house contiguous; but now the most beautiful dwellings and mansions in the city, with their yards and gardens, embellish the locality. To name the spot would be to hang a gibbet in some friend’s yard to glare at him.

[I had here described the locality minutely, but the thought in the lines above occurring to me, I made haste to blot out the description forever; and I do not believe there is now another person living who can designate the locality].

The crowd on this occasion was a vast one, for that day. Amongst the spectators was a gang of Indians, men, and squaws with babies tied upon their shoulders, agape with curiosity at this development of the new civilizations. These Indians have gone to their hunting-grounds; and that vast assemblage, where are they?

It is believed that this was the only instance of an execution for counterfeiting in our State. If all the forgers and counterfeiters of this day had to be hung, Broadway would not be able to furnish space for the gibbets.
FROM:


NOTE:

The Clear Creek Falls in Walker County, Alabama was really two majestic falls of 38 and 42 feet about 600 feet apart. The most spectacular aspect of the falls was that they were about 200 feet wide. The rock formation is the Pottsville Sandstone. The cave was most likely a large shelter. Unfortunately in 1961 the falls were flooded by the waters of Lewis Smith Lake. If you are a scuba diver you might still be able to visit this site.