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Front Cover: Bromley’s Cave, one of the lost caves of Minneapolis. See article in this issue.
Spelean Post Offices of the United States Part Four:  
Tennessee through Wyoming

By Thomas Lera

TENNESSEE SPELEAN POST OFFICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY / TOWN / ZIP</th>
<th>DATE OF OPERATION</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bone Cave</td>
<td>3/9/1866 - 1978</td>
<td>Van Buren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave</td>
<td>12/21/1848 - 11/30/1901</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave</td>
<td>1/1/1902 - 9/30/1925</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave Bluff</td>
<td>2/1/1899 - 10/15/1900</td>
<td>Unicoi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave Creek</td>
<td>9/2/1873 - 12/1/1875</td>
<td>Roane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave Creek</td>
<td>5/27/1879 - 11/14/1903</td>
<td>Roane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave Hill</td>
<td>10/8/1831 - 5/16/1845</td>
<td>Greene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave Mills</td>
<td>6/12/1827 - 10/28/1828</td>
<td>Warren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave Mills</td>
<td>2/19/1887 - 10/20/1896</td>
<td>Dickson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave Point</td>
<td>5/23/1898 - 3/31/1905</td>
<td>Macon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave Spring</td>
<td>5/7/1832 - 1/19/1844</td>
<td>Maury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave Spring</td>
<td>8/10/1846 - 2/8/1849</td>
<td>Maury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave Spring</td>
<td>7/6/1855 - 1/25/1884</td>
<td>Carter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave Spring (s) Station</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Logan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TENNESSEE SPELEAN RELATED POST OFFICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY / TOWN / ZIP</th>
<th>DATE OF OPERATION</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limestone</td>
<td>1837 – 1867</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limestone</td>
<td>1873 – OPEN</td>
<td>Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limestone Cove</td>
<td>1852 – 1886</td>
<td>Carter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limestone Cove</td>
<td>1886 – 1903</td>
<td>Unicoi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limestone Springs</td>
<td>1846 – 1903</td>
<td>Greene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Creek</td>
<td>1834 – 1858</td>
<td>Campbell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sink</td>
<td>1881 – 1906</td>
<td>Monroe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinking Creek</td>
<td>1837 – 1852</td>
<td>Bedford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinking Spring</td>
<td>1807 – 1813</td>
<td>Anderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinking Spring</td>
<td>1868 – 1903</td>
<td>Sevier</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the spelean town names in Tennessee were derived from nearby natural features, like cave point, cave spring, and limestone cove, or man-made features like cave mills. Detailed information on the postmasters can be found in Tennessee Post Offices and Postmaster Appointments 1789 – 1984, compiled by D. R. Fraizer. The following is a brief listing of the post offices and their first postmasters.

Bone Cave in Van Buren County was opened March 9, 1866, with James Sparkman as postmaster and was discontinued October 31, 1978. Named after Big Bone Cave, it is one of the best-known and most historic caverns in Tennessee. It was the center of extensive saltpeter mining operations during the War of 1812 when as many as
300 men dragged sacks of nitrous earth some two miles from the depths of the cave to the leaching vats near the entrance. Mining was renewed during the Civil War and the vats, tramways, and ladders still may be seen in the cave in an excellent state of preservation. The total length of the cave is between 3 and 4 miles. Cave in White County opened December 21, 1848, with William Anderson as postmaster and was discontinued September 30, 1925, with mail sent to Doyle, which is still operating. Cave Bluff in Unicoi County was opened February 1, 1899, and discontinued October 15, 1900, with Mary J. McNabb as its only postmaster. Cave Creek in Roane County opened September 2, 1873, with Samuel E. Harvey as postmaster and was discontinued on November 14, 1903. The town and creek were named after a stream that flowed from a nearby cave. Cave Hill in Greene County was opened October 8, 1831, with Cain Broyles as postmaster and was discontinued May 16, 1845. Cave Mills in Dickson County opened February 19, 1877, with William J. Norris as postmaster. On October 20, 1896, its name was changed to Ruskin and it was discontinued in 1927. Cave Point in Macon County was opened May 23, 1898, with Charles J. Cartwright as the only postmaster and was discontinued March 31, 1905. Mail was then sent to Lafayette, which is still operating. Cave Spring in Carter County opened July 6, 1855, with Phineas Williams as postmaster. The name was changed to Milligan on January 25, 1884, and it was discontinued in 1910. Cave Spring in Maury County was opened May 1, 1832, with Joseph Brown as postmaster and was discontinued February 8, 1849. Limestone in Hamilton County was opened March 9, 1837, with John Anderson as postmaster. On April 3, 1867, the name was changed to Georgetown, which is still operating. Limestone Cove in Carter County was opened August 12, 1852, with David Baker as postmaster. It was discontinued and reopened several times, with the mail finally sent to Limestone Cove in Unicoi County on June 28, 1886. Limestone Cove in Unicoi County was opened June 28, 1876, with Elisha L. Garland as postmaster. In 1886, county boundaries were redrawn and it also began to receive mail from Limestone Cove in Carter County. It was discontinued December 14, 1903. Limestone Springs in Greene County was opened February 16, 1846, with John Love as postmaster and was discontinued August 15, 1903, with mail sent to Greeneville, which is still operating. Lost Creek in Campbell County was opened January 2, 1834, with Charles Rice as postmaster and was discontinued April 13, 1858. Sink in Monroe County was opened April 11, 1881, with James Henderson as postmaster and was discontinued February 14, 1906, with mail sent to Tellico Plains, which is still operating. Sinking Creek in Bedford County was opened December 15, 1837, with Thomas Coffee as the only postmaster and it was discontinued January 30, 1852. Sinking Spring in Sevier County opened January 24, 1868, with Martin Bates as postmaster and was discontinued February 28, 1903, with mail sent to Boyd’s Creek, which was discontinued in 1955.
TEXAS SPELEAN POST OFFICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY / TOWN / ZIP</th>
<th>DATE OF OPERATION</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bee Cave (s)</td>
<td>1870 – 1915</td>
<td>Travis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grotto</td>
<td>1901 – 1905</td>
<td>Hopkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Bridge Caverns (78218)</td>
<td>1982 – 1999</td>
<td>Comal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio Natural Bridge Caverns Rural Station</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Comal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Named by early settlers for a large cave of wild bees found near the site, **Bee Caves** (Beecaves or Bee Cave) is located twelve miles west of Austin in Travis County. A post office opened there in 1870, with Martin V. Lackey as postmaster, and a year later Wiley Johnson was operating a trading post at the settlement. In the mid-1880s, the Bee Caves community had a general store, church, school, steam gristmill, and cotton gin. However, the Bee Caves post office was discontinued in 1915 and mail was forwarded to Cedar Valley.
Natural Bridge Caverns, the largest known cave in Texas, was discovered on March 27, 1960, by students from St. Mary's University in San Antonio. The cave is located in the hill country of Comal County, midway between New Braunfels and San Antonio. Its name was derived from the sixty-foot natural limestone slab bridge that spanned the amphitheater-like setting of the cave's entrance. Commercial development of the cave began in 1962 and it was opened to the public on July 3, 1964. Natural Bridge Caverns was declared a National Natural Landmark in 1971.

UTAH SPELEAN POST OFFICES

There are no spelean or spelean related post offices in Utah.

VERMONT SPELEAN POST OFFICES

There are no spelean or spelean related post offices in Vermont.

VIRGINIA SPELEAN POST OFFICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY / TOWN / ZIP</th>
<th>DATE OF OPERATION</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cave Spring (s)</td>
<td>1847 – 1908</td>
<td>Roanoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cave Spring Br. of Roanoke</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Roanoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavesville</td>
<td>1816 – 1837</td>
<td>Orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endless Caverns</td>
<td>1929 – 1943</td>
<td>Rockingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Tunnel</td>
<td>1860 – 1955</td>
<td>Scott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saltpetre (er) Cave</td>
<td>1858 – 1923</td>
<td>Botetourt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shenandoah Caverns (22847)</td>
<td>1926 - 1949</td>
<td>Shenandoah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shenandoah Caverns (CPO)</td>
<td>1949 - OPEN</td>
<td>Shenandoah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shenandoah Caverns Rural Station (Quicksburg)</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Shenandoah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to *The Heritage of Virginia: The Story of Place Names in the Old Dominion* by James Hagemann, the town of Grottoes, VA (originally called Shendun) began when people came to work the iron mines and furnaces. Iron mining was a boom-and-bust operation in Virginia, however, and Shendun flopped. It was reincorporated in 1912 and named after the caves because cave tourism was the big economic spur in Rockingham County and the Shenandoah Valley.

Weyers Cave began March 3, 1874, when the first passenger train stopped at the still unfinished depot. The railroad stop had been chosen because of its close proximity to market cities and to another transportation artery, the Valley Pike. This brand-new stop on the railroad became Cave Station because of the nearby Grottoes. By 1912 Weyers Cave had one of the first rural electrification systems in the country from a water-powered mill located on the outskirts of town.

**Cave Springs**, south of Roanoke, was named for Cave Spring Cave, which provided the town’s water supply. In 1888 the “s” was dropped and the town name changed to Cave Spring. **Endless Caverns**, at New Market, in Orange County, was discovered in 1879 and the post office was named after the caverns. **Grottoes** is named after a cave that was discovered in February 1804 by Bernard Weyer and was later visited by Thomas Jefferson. The post office, opened in 1888, was named after the cave and is still operating. **Salt peter Cave**, located at Natural Bridge in Botetourt County, was a major source of niter for the Confederate Army. The neighboring town was named after the cave in 1858. **Shenandoah Caverns** in Quicksburg County was discovered in 1884 during the construction of the Southern Railroad and was commercialized in 1922. The post office is named after the caverns. **Weyers Cave**, now known as Grand Caverns, west of Grottoes, was discovered in 1804, and is the oldest commercial cave in the United States. Also visited by Thomas Jefferson, the town and post office are named after the cave and the post office has been in continuous operation since 1877.
Cave Spring Manuscript Cancel and Cave Springs CDS with Target Cancel

Natural Bridge Station Four-bar Cancel, Natural Bridge, VA Precancel PSS 705 issued 6/1932
Grottoes CDS with Duplex Handstamp

Sinking Creek CDS and Target Cancel and Natural Bridge Four-bar Cancel

Weyer’s Cave Station B & O Railroad Handstamp with Manuscript Cancel
Salt Peter Cave Manuscript Cancel dated November 25, 1858

Natural Tunnel and Shenandoah Caverns Four-bar Cancels and Shenandoah Caverns Rural Station Double Circle Cancel
Endless Caverns Machine Cancel with seven wavy line cancel. The special marking, from National Air Mail Week, illustrates the first flight of the Shenandoah Valley Air Mail Route, May 19, 1938

WASHINGTON SPELEAN POST OFFICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY / TOWN / ZIP</th>
<th>DATE OF OPERATION</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grotto</td>
<td>1910 – 1980</td>
<td>King</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WASHINGTON SPELEAN RELATED POST OFFICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY / TOWN / ZIP</th>
<th>DATE OF OPERATION</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lost Creek</td>
<td>1911 – 1943</td>
<td>Pend Oreille</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grotto, Washington, is four miles northwest of Skykomish on the South Fork of the Skykomish River in northeast King County. The name was derived from the deep ravines and gorges of Grotto Mountain a mile to the northeast, which resembled caves.

WEST VIRGINIA SPELEAN POST OFFICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY / TOWN / ZIP</th>
<th>DATE OF OPERATION</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cave</td>
<td>1886 – 1954</td>
<td>Pendleton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grotto Dell,</td>
<td>1860 - 1866, 1867-1875</td>
<td>Roane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organ Cave</td>
<td>1887 - 1950</td>
<td>Greenbriar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Cave (6234)</td>
<td>1859 – OPEN</td>
<td>Upshur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Cave W.VA - Arlington Rural Station</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Upshur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grotto, WA Manuscript
Cancel dated 11/19/10
WEST VIRGINIA SPELEAN RELATED POST OFFICES

<table>
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<th>CITY / TOWN / ZIP</th>
<th>DATE OF OPERATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lost Creek</td>
<td>1833</td>
<td>Harrison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost River</td>
<td>1832</td>
<td>Hardy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limestone Station</td>
<td>1854 – 1858</td>
<td>Harrison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limestone Hill</td>
<td>1856 – 1884</td>
<td>Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limestone</td>
<td>1854 – 1911</td>
<td>Marshall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sink</td>
<td>1882 – 1894</td>
<td>Raleigh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinks</td>
<td>1848 – 1848</td>
<td>Monroe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinks Grove</td>
<td>1853 – OPEN</td>
<td>Monroe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saltpetre</td>
<td>1905 – 1950</td>
<td>Wayne</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organ Cave in Greenbriar County, south of Ronceverte, is named after its unique stalactite formation resembling an organ. Later mined for saltpeter, it served as General Robert E. Lee’s Underground Powder Works. The post office of the same name operated between 1887 and 1950. Rock Cave, both a small mountain village and a post office, is named after a nearby rockshelter.

Rock Cave CDS with Target Killer and Rock Cave Arlington Rural Station Four-bar Cancel

Lost River Manuscript Cancel dated June 1, 1891 and Organ Cave CDS with Target Cancel

Sink Grove, Cave, Saltpetre, and Cave, WV Four-bar Cancels
WISCONSIN SPELEAN RELATED POST OFFICES

<table>
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<th>CITY / TOWN / ZIP</th>
<th>DATE OF OPERATION</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limestone</td>
<td>1843 – 1845</td>
<td>Ozaukee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Creek</td>
<td>1873 – 1902</td>
<td>Pierce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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WYOMING SPELEAN RELATED POST OFFICES

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<th>CITY / TOWN / ZIP</th>
<th>DATE OF OPERATION</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lost Spring</td>
<td>1896 – 1950</td>
<td>Converse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Springs</td>
<td>1951 – OPEN</td>
<td>Converse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acknowledgements

All images of cancellations not in the collections of the author are from the collections of Ronnie Nixon and William R. Halliday. The author would also like to thank Sandra Fitzgerald and Charles Peterson for reviewing and editing this research report.

References


McKain, Bob (pers. com.), August 14, 2001, regarding Pennsylvania post offices.


Turner, Tom (pers. com.) Email dated 9/26/2001 regarding Alabama post offices.


END OF PART FOUR
Historical Accounts of Nickajack Cave

By Donald B. Ball

Situated in Marion County near the left bank of the Tennessee River at the base of Sand Mountain (cf. Barr 1961:305-306), Tennessee’s Nickajack Cave is perhaps best known to students of spelean history for its association with niter mining activities during the Civil War (cf. Osterlund 1982; Smith 1990; 1997; see also applicable extracts from the War of Rebellion series appearing in Ball and O’Dell 2001) and its visitation by a number of Union soldiers during the course of that conflict (cf. Blair 1986; Metzgar 1999; Smith 1974). In actuality, it had a long and interesting history both before and after the Civil War. Accordingly, it is the purpose of the present article to examine some aspects of the history of this notable cave which have not been previously discussed in detail by other cave historians.

Historically, Nickajack (also rendered “Nicojack” and “Nickojack”) Cave is associated with the dawn of Euro-American settlement in the Tennessee region. Beginning about 1779 and extending until 1794, the area immediately adjacent to the mouth of the cave (Figure 1) was occupied by one of the five villages inhabited by the Chickamauga Cherokee, a relatively small but war-like segment of the tribe that would not make peace with the flood of settlers increasingly moving into eastern Tennessee following the demise of British control of the area due to the Revolutionary War. Using the cave as a base of operations, the warriors of this enclave routinely attacked white settlements throughout the region and posed an obvious impediment to navigation on the Tennessee River. Above and beyond the “inconvenience” of these depredations, such attacks were viewed by the political establishment as a direct impediment to Tennessee being granted much desired statehood. This situation was to rapidly change when Major James Ore, commander of a militia unit based in Nashville, was guided along with 550 volunteers (including a then Private Andrew Jackson) to the site by Joseph Brown, a young white boy who had been held captive by the Indians for several years and later escaped to Nashville (cf. Haywood 1891:407-409; Kirke 1887:660-664; Mooney 1900:78-79; Ramsey 1853:609-615; see also Halliday 1987). A decisive attack on September 13, 1794, resulted in the death of The Breath (one of the principle war chiefs), the killing of 50 warriors, and the destruction of the villages of Nickajack and nearby Running Water at a cost of only three wounded. Soon thereafter peace was finally established and statehood followed in 1796.

Ironically, several years later the same Major Ore who had successfully defeated the Cherokee ingratiated himself with the tribe and was allowed to actively mine niter in the cave. As recorded by Bishop (1866: II, 142):

[In 1809] The general statistics of the Cherokee nation in Tennessee, communicated to the Secretary of War by the Indian Agent, Return J. Meigs, showed them to consist of 12,359 persons... Since the year 1796, they had acquired [among numerous other properties] ...two saltpetre works (one of which, carried on at Nickajack by Col. [sic] Ore, made in five years over 60,000 lbs. of saltpetre, most of which was used in making powder); one powder mill...
Figure 1. “Nicojack Cave” looking toward the Tennessee River (reproduced from Kirke 1887:664).

Figure 2. Early depiction of the mouth of Nickajack Cave (reproduced from Darnell 1996:336).
This resource did not fail to capture the attention of the era’s scholarly community. Remarking on the cave (Figure 2), Cornelius (1819) offered the following descriptive comments regarding the cave:

Immense layers of horizontal limestone form a precipice of considerable height. In this precipice the cave commences… with a mouth fifty feet high, and one hundred and sixty wide. Its roof is… level as the floor of a house. The entrance is partly obstructed by piles of fallen rocks… [and] the cave consists chiefly of one grand excavation… preserving for a great distance the same dimensions as at its mouth.

…It forms for the whole distance it has yet been explored, a walled and vaulted passage, for a stream of water… where it leaves the cave, is six feet deep and sixty feet wide.

The sides of the principal excavation present a few apartments which… furnish large quantities of the earth from which nitrate of potash is obtained… At Nicojack [sic], it abounds, and is found covering the surfaces of fallen rocks, but in more abundance beneath them. There are two kinds, one is called the “clay dirt,” the other the “black dirt”; the last is much more strongly impregnated than the first. For several years there has been a considerable manufacture of saltpetre from this earth… One bushel of the clay dirt yields from 3 to 5 lbs. and the black dirt from 7 to 10 lbs. of the rough shot-petre.

The abundance of niter in the soils of the cave was reemphasized by Shepard (1857) on the eve of the Civil War.

In addition to the varied reported accounts of visitations by Union soldiers during the war, two additional experiences may be noted. As recorded (Anonymous 1864) in the pages of *Littell’s Living Age*, a popular periodical of the era:

Nicojack Cave, from which the enemy derived their chief supply of nitre for the manufacture of gunpowder, is a wonderful cavern, extending under the base of Sand Mountain [Tennessee], a distance of over seven miles. The earth is impregnated with nitrate of lime, and this is mixed with carbonate of potash. A double decomposition takes place. The nitric acid of the nitrate of lime goes over to the potash, forming nitrate of potash, and the carbonic acid of the carbonate of potash passes over to the lime, forming carbonate of lime, which, being insoluble, precipitates to the bottom, leaving the nitrate of potash in solution, and this is afterwards crystallized by boiling in iron kettles after the manner of the manufacture of potash. Before their capture, these mines produced over three hundred pounds of nitre a day.

I yesterday procured a guide and visited the cavern. We dressed ourselves in rough clothing, and procured long pitch-pine torches and candles, penetrated and explored its devious windings and turnings for more than three miles. The entrance is through a large opening or gateway in the rock at the base of the mountain, eighty feet broad, and as many feet high, through which rolls a volume of water large enough and deep enough to be called a river. The water is as cold as ice, and clear as crystal. In the wet, stifling atmosphere, floundering in mud and water and darkness, we climbed over rocks, and explored the interior for more than six hours, until we were glad enough to come out into the light again. There are caverns here of infinite size and capacity, so lofty and so broad that we could not throw a stone to the rocky roof overhead, or the rocky wall beyond. There are other caverns whose only entrance is through a small cavity, reached only by crawling on the belly for rods. These are covered overhead with crystals and stalactites of wonderful beauty. A canoe lies in the mouth of the cave, which will take the adventurer to the source, several miles into the interior; but I had had enough of exploration and did not care to repeat it.

These visits are not unattended with danger. It is necessary to have the services of an experienced guide, or there be great likelihood of losing one’s way in the labyrinth of caverns and curious windings. Several accidents of this nature are related. One of them happened within the last ten days. A lieutenant and three men went into the cavern for an afternoon’s diversion, and have not been heard from since. They doubtless lost their way, and wandered until starvation and then death relieved them.

An equally harrowing tale was later preserved by Reuben Williams (Williams 1866), editor of *The Northern Indianian*, published in Warsaw, Indiana:
During the autumn of 1863, while the Federal army, under the command of Maj. Gen. Rosecrans lay encamped near Chattanooga, with its flanks extending to the right and left upon the line of the Tennessee river, the facts which lead to the narration of the following adventure occurred, which, from its very nature was attended with as thrilling effect as can well be conceived. The scene of our narrative is laid within the windings of the great Nickajack Cave, which is situated in such a manner that a person can stand upon the soil of three States when upon the mountain above it - Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee. The entrance is in the last mentioned state, near the little railway station of Shell Mound.

The entrance and the rocky face of the mountain surrounding it, is visible for miles around, which, with the stream emerging from its base, and the innumerable small cascades which leap forth from the almost perpendicular face of the rock, give to the eye of the visitor a wild and picturesque attraction.

The entrance to the cave is a ragged opening among the rocks of perhaps sixty feet in length and varying from ten to fifty feet in height, and presents as rude and uninviting an aspect as perhaps any other point of the same magnitude in the world. At the base of the entrance a stream of considerable volume emerges.

This cavern, now supposed to excel the far-famed Mammoth Cave of Kentucky, is of very great extent. Its exploration has been attempted a number of times by various expeditions. Many of the parties have reached what was, to all appearances, the terminus, but subsequent explorations has succeeded in traversing some of its many passages for miles, without any apparent success in finding how far it reached into the bowels of the mother earth. Indeed the very number of its windings and intricate ways, with the innumerable obstacles thrown in the way of the explorer, precludes the idea that the end has or ever will be reached. It was a beautiful morning early in the month of October, that our adventurers set forth on their visit to the cave, determined to shake off the ennui [sic] consequent upon the monotonous routine of duties while in camp. Our party consisted of but two persons, one of whom, Lieut. Col. Baker, late of the 74th Indiana Regiment and a resident of Goshen, Ind., was killed during the famous Atlanta campaign while in command of his regiment in front of the enemy’s works. Captain Andy S. Milice was the second member of the party, a gentleman well known to all of our citizens as a gallant soldier during the late rebellion.

Provided with some provisions, a lantern, and some matches, they commenced their explorations. Proceeding nearly a mile with comparative ease they were frequently compelled to halt and view the wonderful construction of this great curiosity. Sometimes passing through long corridors with lofty arched ceiling, and again passing through mere crevices in the rocks barely capable of admitting the body of a man, they would suddenly emerge into spacious halls and chambers, some of them hundreds of feet in extent, with the roof scarcely discernable at so great a distance overhead. Here they found fountains spurting up their placid waters, and natural formations of granite so shaped as to give them the forms of men and objects, with nearly all the clearly defined distinctness of the professional artist. While massive stalactites adorned the walls and roof of these subterranean palaces; while through each ran the stream of which we have made mention as emerging from its mouth. The light carried by our adventurers being just sufficient to bring out in the outlines of objects quite near them only, the remote corners seemed surrounded by a weird, ghost-like drapery, which gave to the eye of the beholder new and startling effects.

As they cautiously proceeded along the banks of the stream, taking it as their guide, they met a soldier who was returning from a visit to the interior, in a boat which he had found in the stream. Our friends, quickly appreciating the novelty of taking a boat ride underground, soon made an exchange with the soldier, whereby they become the proprietors of the frail vessel, and transferring themselves to it with their little baggage, continued their course.

In many places they found the stream of great depth and breadth and again so shallow and narrow as to barely allow the passage of the boat.

In this manner they continued their journey for a considerable distance, probably a mile or more, when arriving at a point of especial interest, they disembarked for the purpose of getting a closer view. Remaining some time up on shore they at length commenced their embarkation for their return as they were fully aware that they had passed hours in the cavern and that it was well that they should commence their homeward journey.

Col. Baker had just stepped into the boat and taken the oar when Capt. Milice in attempting to gain the boat caused it to push from the shore losing his footing and precipitated himself and lantern into the water. The light was of course at once extinguished and now began the horrors of their situation.
Only those who have experienced intense darkness of these caverns can imagine with what feelings our adventurers found themselves surrounded by a worse than Egyptian darkness. However their case was not yet desperate; if the lantern could be regained they being in possession of matches could easily relight it and pursue their homeward journey.

A long and diligent search was at length rewarded by finding the object of their solicitude. With great joy at the prospect of a speedy deliverance the matches were produced. Their joy was soon dampened by the fact that the matches proved worthless, refusing to ignite. Now ensued a moment of horror. The idea which seemed so nearly possible, that they were without hope of succor and that they could but die a long lingering death with no witnesses but those damp dripping walls of granite. That they should never see home or kindred, nor even be permitted to see again the dear sunlight, chilled the hearts which had never recoiled from danger on the field of battle.

They knew full well that it was many miles to the entrance that there was innumerable passages which would lead them astray, that there was frightful chasms, hundreds of feet in depth and again the dangers of the stream, which in many places would float a monitor, and what was still worse the whole enshrouded in such Cimmerian darkness as to render a single step fraught with much consequence.

In this dilemma our friends held a consultation and ascertaining that ten matches still remained they used great caution to secure their ignition. Smooth dry surfaces were found and the attempt again renewed. But with no better results than before, with the failure of each match their chances of life decreased. All gone but two; with what intense anxiety did they repeat the attempt, another failure. But one is left. Upon this slender chance hangs the existence of two brave men. Starvation and death stare them fully in the face; a horrible death indeed. Not a word is uttered, not even a breath disturbs the intense stillness, when the attempt is resumed with the last match. Carefully it is drawn over the smooth surface, slowly a little, very little gleam of light appears from the match. It flickers for a moment as if it little knew or cared for the tenderness with which it is nursed. But at length as if inspired with a new resolve, it leaps forth into a flame. The lamp is relighted and our adventurers are saved.

With hearts too full of thanksgiving for utterance they pursued their journey to the entrance, carefully watching that no ill should again befall their lamp.

And now though the sole survivor has passed through dangers innumerable there have been none with which he looks back upon with more thankfulness than when saved by the last match.

By the late nineteenth century, scholarly interests in Nickajack Cave took an entirely different turn with groundbreaking research by Packard and Cope (1881) resulting in one of the earliest descriptions of the cave’s indigenous wildlife. These efforts were followed several years later by excavations conducted under the auspices of the Department of American and Prehistoric Archeology of the University of Pennsylvania by Henry Chapman Mercer (1894) seeking Pleistocene vertebrate remains. An interesting scholar in his own right, Mercer would (among other activities) subsequently investigate caves in Yucatan (Mercer 1896) and later author a classic study of early American tools (Mercer 1929).

Likely a lesser known event of historic interest which occurred in Nickajack Cave was the abortive effort of country music singer Johnny Cash attempting to commit suicide there in October 1967. After reaching an obvious low point in his life as a result of alcohol and drug abuse, he drove to the cave and entered with only a flashlight. When the batteries in his flashlight eventually gave out, he was left alone to ponder the events which had brought him to his point and the consequences of his actions. Realizing that his fate was in the hands of God rather than his own, he opted to live and managed to find his way back into the daylight and the long and successful career which awaited him (Cash and Carr 1997). These events transpired about the time of the impoundment of the Nickajack Reservoir on September 14, 1967, which eventually flooded the lower half of the mouth of the cave. Although it is yet possible to explore a portion of its passages via boat, no one is ever again likely to walk within this historic cave.
Anonymous

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Albert Tissandier’s Drawings of Mammoth Cave

By Bob Thompson

Albert Tissandier (1839-1906) was a French artist and journalist best known for his travels to North America during 1885 and 1886. In 1885, Tissandier came from Paris to the United States for a period of six months (March-August). He traveled across the United States and documented his journey with many wonderful descriptions and drawings. Tissandier’s journey took him from the big cities of the East to the uncharted territories of the West. As a skilled draftsman, Tissandier documented in drawings America’s architecture, industry, and landscape. He was trained in the architecture program at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Tissandier returned to the United States for briefer visits in 1886, 1890, and 1893.

Albert was the brother of famous balloonist and science writer, Gaston Tissandier (1843-1899). The Tissandier brothers helped document the early history of aeronautics by participating in and observing balloon flights in France between 1865 and 1885. While Gaston tested the limits of balloon ascents, Albert made drawings of natural phenomena in the upper atmosphere. Albert also made drawings of several balloons that were used to carry passengers and supplies during the Siege of Paris in 1870. As a team, the brothers developed a design for an electric powered airship in 1885.

In 1873, Gaston founded the weekly scientific magazine, La Nature, which he edited until 1896. As Albert traveled across North America in 1885, he wrote descriptions and made drawings that would appeal to the readership of La Nature.

As part of his journey across North America, Albert Tissandier spent two days at Mammoth Cave in May 1885. At the time, William Charley Comstock was leasing the Mammoth Cave Hotel and Henry C. Ganter had control of the cave. According to Tissandier’s journal, he was at Mammoth Cave on Saturday May 2, and Sunday May 3, and made nine drawings in his sketchbook of the cave’s curiosities. The first day of his visit on Saturday lasted four hours in duration. After he expressed dismay to Ganter that he had not had sufficient time to make drawings “in order to preserve the memory of the marvels of the caverns,” he was given permission to return Sunday with cave guide Henry Bransford. Bransford led Tissandier on a private 7-hour tour to different areas of the cave including some of the same places he visited on Saturday.

On Tissandier’s first day (Saturday) in the cave, he mentions visiting the Gothic Chapel, Devil’s Armchair, Star Chamber, Dead Sea, River Styx, and Natural Bridge. Because “the water was too low to permit travel by boat,” Tissandier did not get to visit the rest of the cave, beyond the lakes.

On Tissandier’s second day (Sunday) in the cave, he mentions visiting Gorin’s Dome and the Egyptian Temple. Four of his nine drawings were done of Gorin’s Dome (2) and Egyptian Temple (2). At Gorin’s Dome, Tissandier notes that “My guide has lights that last several minutes each, so despite the soft showers that sprinkled the tourist’s sketchbook it was possible to draw.” Tissandier mentions cave crickets as “blind, lively grasshoppers with extremely long antennae and high legs.”

The University of Utah has an online exhibit featuring approximately 167 drawings from the Albert Tissandier Collection. These drawings are now in the Utah Museum of Fine Arts (UMFA). In 1978, UMFA acquired 225 of Tissandier’s drawings at
a cost of $25,000, including nine drawings of Mammoth Cave. The drawings can be viewed on-line at: http://www.lib.utah.edu/digital/tissandier/index.html. Included in the online exhibit is a translation of Tissandier’s journal by Mary F. Francey of UMFA.

In 2001, the Utah Museum of Fine Arts hosted an exhibition of 56 works by Albert Tissandier including three drawings of Mammoth Cave. One drawing of Mammoth Cave was included in the exhibition catalog.

Here is the English translation of the Mammoth Cave portion of Tissandier’s book, *Six Months in the United States*:

The largest tourist attraction in Louisville is the six-hour trip to Mammoth Cave. One goes first by rail to Cave City, then board a seated wagon harnessed to four horses to cross the woods on impossible routes. Only the victims themselves can believe the number of dreadful bumps, holes and ruts in the road. But in the United States it is necessary to accustom oneself to this kind of voyage and the only thing to do is to laugh heartily. The American ladies who were the ornaments of our little excursion were the first to give us the signal. They were delighted, and the more the wagon shook, the happier they seemed. We tried to ease the shocks and bumps by giving them our shawls and blankets, but they only burst out laughing again. It is true that, although the roads don’t exist so to speak, the country is charming. Kentucky forests are beautiful in the spring; they seem to be illuminated by flowers and are enlivened by brilliantly colored birds such as the crested cardinal so sought after by our aviaries. One must, therefore, forget the smaller annoyances.

Entrance to the caverns is set in the woods, under the oaks and pines, at the bottom of a sloping road. A light waterfall that falls slowly, drop by drop, from the delicate moss growing on the rocks closes it, so to speak. The banks of the Green River are almost veiled under the shrubby trees (Dogwood or Cornus Florida) whose bracts of involucres spread out and are white like snow. The blue tints of the Phlox divaricata and the beautiful green foliage of the Podophyllum Peltatum (May Apple), the Heuchera Americana and the Adiantum Pedatum help to make these woods a veritable paradise. One would gladly spend the summer months in this part of Kentucky, which would be easily done thanks to the large hotel there. It is an enormous wooden construction made up of two stories of large galleries just as we see in ancient cloisters. Tall pines provide shade from the sunshine in the interior garden. Tourists have a most sparsely furnished room, almost a monk’s cell, which opens on the primitive looking galleries. There is, in this manner, space for four or five hundred people. Provisions are not easily obtained at Mammoth Cave; consequently the food here is simple. However, it is not in this last part of the itinerary that the enjoyment of the trip is to be found. It is necessary only to think of the charm of the woods of Green River, the marvels of Mammoth Cave and the neighboring caverns; one can only imagine their strangeness.

Mammoth Cave was discovered in 1802 but it wasn’t explored until 1809. During War of 1812, potassium nitrate was discovered and mined there. Workers employed for this operation were, for the most part, Negroes, some of who were required to spend an entire year in the cave without leaving. After the War of 1812-1814, the mining operation ceased because it could not meet the competition of what was imported from the East Indies. The cave is in Edmonson County, in the southern part of Kentucky, about 152 kilometers from Louisville. It is so vast that, to date, not all parts have been visited. The map indicates the routes, which have been explored. Almost all the surrounding region has been undermined by water, and it is not inconceivable that someday the ground may cave in under the weight of cars that transport curious visitors to the entrance of the cave. Mammoth Cave has branches in the neighborhood, including Proctor’s Cave, White Cave, Diamond Cave and Indian Cave. This last one is nearly a mile long. One admires the beauty of the stalactites and stalagmites, some of which surround a spring of pure water, clear and pleasant to drink. Indian Cave owes its name to some Indian skeletons discovered there, but which have since disappeared.

Careful experiments have proven that the subterranean waters connect, by hidden conduits, with the Green River that flows under the open sky. In almost any season of the year one sees light mists hovering above the principal entrance to Mammoth Cave. This proves the temperature difference that exists between the outside air and that inside the cave. When one enters the cave in the middle of the summer a current of air strong enough to extinguish the visitors’ lamps comes from the cave. The composition of the inner air is the same as that of the outside air as far as proportional quantities of oxygen and nitrogen. In the cave animal materials mummify instead of putrefying; I mean the subterranean areas furthest from the
outside rivers. Therefore, one can, without feeling the slightest malaise, stay for hours under the rocks that form the cavern.

These immense caverns are almost everywhere high enough to walk with ease, and the temperature is regular and pleasant. According to experiments, the highest temperature in any part of the caverns is thirteen degrees Celsius and the lowest, eleven degrees. Average temperature in summer seems to be twelve degrees Celsius (sixty degrees Fahrenheit), and in winter eleven and a half degrees Celsius (fifty-four degrees Fahrenheit). There are fewer stalactites than in other caves such as Trou du Han in Belgium, but the effect achieved here by water over the centuries is marvelous. Carved rocks take on the most bizarre forms as they have been polished and worn by the force of ancient streams. The volume of water must have been enormous as galleries ten meters high, and often higher, were entirely filled. Torrents ran rapidly and frighteningly as they dug trenches in beds of sandstone or limestone. The curious passage, Fat Man’s Misery, is a striking example. This narrow channel which must be entered one by one in order to proceed further into the caves, makes a number of turns and bends. It is a hundred meters long and, at some points, barely a meter high. It is certain that a slightly large person would not be able to get into this stone trench. We are just now seeing the traces of all these strange revolutions. Our first visit, during which we surveyed the principal curiosities, was only four hours long; not enough time to examine everything in detail. So we saw the Gothic Chapel, gigantic stalactites in the form of columns support the vault of which. It is reported that a marriage was celebrated there by a couple who, when their plans for an elaborate wedding were thwarted, vowed never to marry each other upon the earth. This vow was kept to the letter of the law, and they were married under the surface of the earth in Kentucky’s Mammoth Cave.

The guides also named the Devil’s Armchair. The meeting and junction of stalactites and stalagmites form it. The celebrated singer Jenny Lind sat there, I was told, for a rather long time in order to recover from the fatigue caused by her journey. In other galleries the guide makes one sit in a dark depression in the ground while he takes the lights held by everyone in the party. He then disappears behind a crag and, suddenly; it seems the vault of the gallery has disappeared as if by magic. The faces of the walls glitter so it seems one is looking at a night sky brilliant with stars. The stars are formed by the thousands of protruding small stalactites hanging from the vaulting and which the lights held by our guide light.

Proceeding a little further, one encounters The Dead Sea which is a pool, four and one half meters deep, six meters wide and fifteen meters long. Although some places are difficult for ladies to maneuver, we descended to the subterranean river on the banks of the Styx over which we crossed over it on the Natural Bridge. The Styx is a veritable pool about one hundred forty meters long, fifteen to forty meters wide and three to thirty meters deep. The ceiling of the avenue parallel to this lake is thirty meters above the surface of the water. Following long and abundant rains, the interior lakes rise up to the ceiling making it impossible to visit all parts of the cavern.

Unfortunately, during my visit in May 1885, the water was too low to permit travel by boat, the usual means of transport, making it necessary to retrace our route. The next day was Sunday, but thanks to the obliging overseer of the caverns I was able to obtain the services of a guide. When I explained that my objective was to make sketches in order to preserve the memory of the marvels of the caverns, all difficulties were smoothed away and I was able to spend seven hours in Mammoth Cave.

The guide lent me a suit that enabled me to crawl comfortably through the mud of the lower galleries and pass through holes narrow as chimney flues. They might have been dangerous except these passages are not very long, usually a matter of descending or climbing three or four meters. However, surfaces are slippery and one is constantly sprinkled with droplets of water while clinging to small projections of rock that form a sort of natural ladder. The darkness makes things appear mysterious and fantastic, arousing a sense of trepidation in spite of oneself. If one can pass through these gloomy detours without undue hindrance, it is rewarding to find oneself at the bottom of Glorin’s [sic] Dome, the blackest imaginable pit. When the guide lights a packet of flares, one is seized immediately by shock; only in Dante’s Inferno can one see such things. This abyss may be one hundred meters high, is entirely hollowed out by water, and is relatively narrow. It forms a sort of well the walls of which are worn and jagged with immense draperies that seem almost detached from the walls. These are thick stalactites which, in the glimmer of the flames, seem to shift and take on a thousand different shades. The drops of water descend slowly along the stones, then break away like luminescent pearls. Climbing again toward another place in Glorin’s [sic] Dome, one finds sights no less beautiful than the first, but there are no more stalactites. My guide has lights that last several minutes each, so despite the soft showers that sprinkled the tourist’s sketchbook; it was possible to draw.
In yet another place the stone vaults were supported by six columns chiseled by water, with stalactites forming the capitals. This is named the Egyptian Temple. The blocks of stone are twenty-six meters high and about eight meters in diameter. They form sort of an immense exedra at the back of the cave. While I drew, my guide sang Indian songs. Suddenly I heard moans at the bottom of the precipice and called for help, sure that it was a lady who had inadvertently extinguished her lamp and was frightened. What a frightful drama! But my guide burst into laughter; he is a ventriloquist and had arranged this experience to entertain me.

At the bottom of Mammoth Cave, a depth of two hundred fifty feet, entomologists can collect interesting insects. There are, among other things, a large number of blind, yet lively, grasshoppers with extremely long antennae and very high legs. They jump wonderfully well and we had difficulty in trying to capture them with only the aid of the feeble glimmer of the candle we each held in our hands. In the subterranean river there lives a blind fish and a pretty white crustacean. One does not tire of the endless list of curiosities that may be seen in this cavern; it would become a veritable catalog. In spite of the long hours spent in this dark cave, I nonetheless left regretfully.

**Tissandier’s Drawings of Mammoth Cave**

Title: The Green River Entrance to Mammoth Cave, Kentucky
Alternate Title: Entrée de Mammoth Cave dans les bois de Green river – Kentucky
Artist’s Notation: "Dessin paru dans la Nature no 662 6 février 1886"
Date. Original: 1885-05-01

Title: Mammoth Cave – Gorin’s Dome
Alternate Title: Gorin’s Dom – Mammoth Cave (Kentucky)
Artist’s Notation: "Dessin paru dans la Nature no 662 6 février 1886"
Date. Original: 1885-05-01

Title: Mammoth Cave – Gorin’s Dome
Alternate Title: Gorin’s Dom – Gouffre de Mammoth Cave (Kentucky)
Date. Original: No date.

Title: Mammoth Cave – Lower Gallery
Alternate Title: Galerie basse dans Mammoth Cave (Kentucky)
Date. Original: 1885-05-01

Title: Mammoth Cave
Alternate Title: Mammoth Cave (Kentucky)
Date. Original: No date.

Title: Mammoth Cave
Alternate Title: Mammoth Cave – Kentucky
Artist's Notation: "le théatre de la Galerie Gothique"
Date. Original: No date.

Title: The Egyptian Temple
Alternate Title: Le temple Egyptien dans Mammoth Cave
Date. Original: No date.

Title: The Gothic Chapel
Alternate Title: La chapelle gothique, Mammoth Cave (Kentucky)
Date. Original: 1885-05-02

Title: Mammoth Cave – The Grand Gallery
Alternate Title: Mammoth Cave – La grande galerie
Date. Original: 1885-05-02
Sources

Online exhibit: http://www.lib.utah.edu/digital/tissandier/index.html. Digital images of drawings in the permanent collection of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts. The site also includes an essay on Tissandier’s journey and a translation of his journal, both by Mary F. Francey.


Tissandier Collection, P&P Online Catalog, Library of Congress

*Entrée de Mammoth Cave dans les bois de Green River*, engraving by E. A. Tilly, from Tissandier’s *Six Months in the United States*, 1886.
Once Mammoth Cave in Kentucky became famous it was soon adopted as the standard of comparison for other caves across the country. Such and such a cave was said to be “another Mammoth Cave,” and so forth. The same phenomenon applies on a smaller scale to regionally well-known caves. A good example is the celebrated Carver’s Cave, located in St. Paul, Minnesota. Other caves in the state, especially those in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, were frequently described as “another Carver’s Cave.”

Bromley’s Cave, one of the lost caves of Minneapolis, is a case in point. The following newspaper clipping, “Famous Caves Along the Mississippi River Were Scenes of Important Historical Events,” is from the Minneapolis Sunday Times, August 17, 1902. It describes a Minneapolis cave with uncanny similarities to Carver’s Cave—in terms of its alleged relation to Indians, the presence of petroglyphs, as well as its geology, mode of formation, and tube-like morphology. The only thing missing is the famed cave lake. As for the gypsies who inhabited the cave, they may have been displaced residents of the nearby Bohemian Flats colony, which existed from 1865 to 1931.

The article was written by Edward A. Bromley (1848-1925), a well-known early Minneapolis journalist and photographer. Whatever the truth of Bromley’s stories, the fact that the cave existed is proved by one of the photos accompanying his article. This photo frames the former Heinrich Brewery (1866-1903) on the opposite (west) bank of the Mississippi River, making for a unique cave image. He gave the exact location of the cave as 800 feet downstream from the Washington Avenue Bridge. I examined the outcrops of St. Peter Sandstone at this spot, in what is now East River Flats Park, and it is quite conceivable that a cave once existed there. However, the entrance is buried or the cave was quarried away—it’s at the edge of the former University Quarry, which provided Platteville Limestone (which caps the underlying sandstone) for buildings on the early University of Minnesota campus.

Another possibility is that Bromley’s Cave was incorporated into the university’s steam tunnels, perhaps as a drainage outlet. While I recall having seen irregular voids in the corresponding tunnels, I regard this alternative as unlikely because the outlet concerned is just a bit too far upstream to frame the same view. Interestingly, there was an impecunious student living in the steam tunnel outlet at the time of my investigation, so the local cave dwelling tradition continues!
Bromley’s article has value beyond its description of this former cave, however. He describes another lost Minneapolis cave, under St. Anthony Falls, otherwise poorly known. Moreover, he indicates that Fountain Creek, the stream that ran through historic Fountain Cave, in St. Paul, and long since dried up, was still flowing as late as 1902.

FAMOUS CAVES ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER WERE SCENES OF IMPORTANT HISTORICAL EVENTS

Long before the advent of the white man in this neighborhood thousands of cave dwellers made their homes in the sandstone bluffs that fringe the Mississippi river and some of their descendants still occupy the ancestral domiciles. They fed upon insects and seeds, maintained friendly relations with each other, were not disturbed by their neighbors and when they died at home found sepulchre in the holes they had bored in the precipitous sides of the bluffs.

These cave dwellers did not use ladders, neither did they climb the crags to reach their dwelling places. In a word they were flyers commonly known as sand swallows.

Perhaps they taught the Indians by example to hollow out places in the bluffs and may, by their congregational habits, have also suggested the advisability of using the caves so created as meeting places for the tribes. The red men invested all of the large caves that they found prepared for their use with supernatural attributes and never invaded them without first performing religious rites to propitiate the god that was supposed to dwell therein.

Indians Use the Caves.

The Sioux Indians, who for many years were the undisputed possessors of all the land in this locality, made frequent pilgrimages to some of the larger ones and on several occasions after they realized that traffic with the white men was a desirable business proposition, made treaties with them in the “Waukan tepees,” the “Homes of the Great Spirit,” as some of them were called.

The most historic cave in this vicinity is known as Carver’s cave, located near St. Paul.

There, in October, 1766, Jonathan Carver made the celebrated treaty with Little Crow, the Sioux Chief, which has since furnished material for several debates in the halls of congress and some litigation in other localities.

Treaty Made in a Cave.

Under that treaty Carver’s descendants have claimed an immense tract of land comprising all of St. Paul and thousands of acres in this region but have not yet acquired even one quarter acre of that desirable tract.

Another cave that has been frequently mentioned in local histories is Fountain cave, a short distance below Fort Snelling, through which a stream of water still flows, as it did when the cave was discovered. Newspapers of the fifties mentioned its neighborhood as an undesirable locality given up to lawlessness and crime. It has been redeemed since that time and is now the center of a peaceful community.

It used to be the custom, until a few years ago, for visitors to Minnehaha Falls to penetrate behind the falls into the cavern made by the overhanging limestone ledge, but
since the park board obtained possession of the property this practice has been discontinued.

A large ledge of limestone that hung over the brink of St. Anthony Falls before the apron dam was put in formed a roomy cavern to which several adventurous people penetrated, but when it fell in the late fifties, the cataract barred any further communication with the caves.

**Caves on the River.**

In the seven miles from the Pillsbury A mill to Fort Snelling there are probably twenty small caves, some natural and others artificial. All of them have at one time or another been inhabited as storehouses, either by brewing companies or individuals who valued them for their roominess and the cool, equable temperature which made refrigeration possible there.

One of the most peculiar caves in the river bank is the one which inspired this article. It is located in the vicinity of the state university on the east bank of the Mississippi river, about eight hundred feet down stream from the end of the Washington avenue bridge. As will be seen from the accompanying diagram, it penetrates into the bluff for a considerable distance, is spacious, clean, and for a distance of seventy-five feet, well lighted.

The mouth, which is about twenty feet above the brink of the river, is half closed by the debris that has fallen from above.

**Formed by Action of Water.**

It was undoubtedly formed by a stream of water which came through the limestone ledge and percolated through the sandstone to the river front, where the mouth of the cave is now located. At some later period, the date of which is at the present time unknown, the Indians undoubtedly assisted in making it larger.

They probably held possession when the first white man came to the northwest, and it is probable that when Fort Snelling was built, in 1819, some of the Sioux looking out upon the Mississippi, from the mouth of the cave, saw the soldiers passing from the fort to the present site of Minneapolis.

In those days, and even many years later, the Ojibway Indians disputed with the Sioux the right to use the Father of Waters as a highway, and frequent conflicts took place between the rivals.

One of the fiercest battles that was ever waged between them was fought on the Minnesota river near the present site of Shakopee, and some of the old settlers are of the opinion that on the morning prior to the fight the Sioux “made medicine” to the god of the cave before taking to their canoes en route to the battleground.

**Novel Use of a Cave.**

Since the Indian tenants vacated the spot, the cave has been further enlarged, and at the present time shows some systematic work by men who had regard to its permanency as a storage place.

One of the brewing companies used it many years ago, but by far the most romantic occupancy since that of the Indians was its use as dwelling and stable by a gypsy and his wife.

He traded horses, and she told fortunes. The horses were stabled in the rear of the cave, and the Gitanos occupied the most accessible part, which was close to the opening.
They put up two partitions, one to separate them from the cold and inquisitive world outside, and the other from the cool atmosphere of the cave itself.

It is not at all likely that the proximity of the horses disturbed them in the least.

Five years ago, when the park board began improvements on the river bank, it ejected the gypsy family and its steeds. The partitions were torn down and all traces of their occupancy soon disappeared.

**Children Play in a Cave.**

The children in the neighborhood have since made the cave, or at least that part of it which did not suggest ghosts and other immaterial beings, a play spot. The sandstone through which it was cut, and which now forms its ceiling and floors, is snow white.

This year the exterior has suffered somewhat by the alternate rains and sunshine, and in many places large sections have fallen off and partially blocked the entrance.

A like fate overtook the Carver cave, already referred to, and it is likely that in a few years this one will, by the action of the elements, be entirely closed. The opening is in plain sight from the west end of the Washington avenue bridge, and the cave itself is well worth a visit.

The crude pictures which in former years adorned it interior and recorded hunting and fishing incidents in Indian history, have been obliterated by ambitious white children who have substituted their initials or those of their school mates.

Anyone penetrating into the third section of the cave will find water trickling from six holes in the roof, but will be in no danger, inasmuch as the fluid does not accumulate in the limestone ledge above in sufficient quantities to inconvenience anyone. Several attempts have been made to locate the surface indications of these holes, but so far without success.

Relic hunters have at various times dug all along the floor of the cave in hopes of finding arrow heads or other Indian curiosities, but, so far as is known, the sandstone has not yielded any valuable mementoes of the red men.—EDWARD A. BROMLEY.

**References**


5. Presumably this is the same cave described in Bromley’s *Minneapolis Album* (1890), despite the discrepancy in dates. The text accompanying a photo in the album, titled “St. Anthony Falls, 1852,” reports that “In August, 1850, a large piece of flat rock over which the water had plunged tumbled down stream. This rock had formed the roof of a pretty cave which was a favorite retreat for some of the citizens.”
The Mammoth Cave of Kentucky and the cavern of Luray must now share their fame with the subterranean chambers recently explored, for the first time, by white men at least, on the Powell River, near Cumberland Gap, in the State of Tennessee. The Powell River Cavern is indeed unrivalled for its majestic expanse, and the grotesque outline and startling beauty of its stalactites and stalagmites. No such subterranean corridors and chambers have been found elsewhere in America. The limestone formations along the Powell and Clinch Rivers, below the Cumberland mountain range, are dislocated in many directions, and caves are frequent. The mouth of the Powell River Cavern opens above the beautiful stream whose name it bears, at an elevation of several hundred feet. The Pinnacle Rock overlooking Cumberland Gap, through which English capitalists have now constructed a railroad, where a century ago Daniel Boone followed the trail of the bison, is visible from the cave entrance. The smiling valleys in which British enterprise has built the new town of Harrogate and laid out Cumberland Gap Park stretch away to the west. There its projectors expect to see an American Carlsbad, an international sanitarium. One may walk erect into the cavern, along a level corridor, to the “Sentinels,” grim stalagmitic formations which rise 30 ft. from floor to roof, seeming to guard the portal. The cavern beyond is much wider; its ceiling is vaguely visible by lantern light, and everywhere gleams the beautiful white limestone, its semi-plastic masses taking all sorts of curious shapes. There is a piece of wall covered by a growth resembling cauliflowers. In the “Catacombs” rise snowy pillars, which are startlingly like encrusted mummies; there is the “Corridor of the Inferno,” reminding us of Dante’s weird creations; in another place stands “Dante’s Pillar.” We observe also the “petrified waterfall,” which seems to be a cataract in stone; the “bamboo forest,” and the “Cloister.” Farther on, in a great three-cornered chamber, stands what appears to be an enormous “haystack,” 30 ft. high. It might be otherwise fancied an ideal beehive made by Brobdingnagian bees out of wax which turned to marble as fast as it was put together. The ceiling rises over it to a height of 50 ft.; and some odd little nooks, like little retiring rooms, are at the three corners of the chamber. There is a tradition that the Indians at some ancient time, or perhaps their Aztec predecessors, used this chamber for religious worship.

BOOK REVIEW


The Ajanta caves are a series of 31 manmade caverns excavated into the wall of a spectacular, horseshoe-shaped ravine along the Waghora River, some 200 miles northeast of Bombay, in India. Some of these caverns extend as far as 100 feet into the cliff face and may be as much as 40 feet wide. Stonemasons hewed massive columns, detailed wall and ceiling ribbing, porches and verandas, staircases, and decorative archways right out of the stone. Set in the midst of a ruggedly beautiful and remote wilderness—amid forests, cliffs, and waterfalls—the caves were built by followers of Buddha as a monument to religion and art. Ajanta was an isolated sanctuary where devout worshippers could meditate in peace, far from the bustle of everyday activity.

The rock-hewn monasteries of Ajanta—discovered in modern times by a hunting party of British soldiers in 1819—were found to be overflowing with a profusion of exquisite art that celebrated the enlightenment of Buddha. With priceless cultural artifacts dating from as early as the second century BC to as late as the sixth century AD, this finely crafted art—surviving examples of which now exist only at Ajanta—includes magnificent stone sculptures, friezes, carvings, and painted murals. Art experts from around the world universally agree that this early art of India represents a unique treasure and ranks among the finest art ever produced on the Indian subcontinent. The caves were declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO.

The artistic treasures of Ajanta were produced by guilds of professional painters, who worked on religious temples throughout India. Their ancient painting techniques have been described in great detail in the Chitrasutra of the Vishnudharmottara Purana. This ancient and revered text was produced around the fifth century AD and handed down through the guilds. Prior to this time, the techniques had been passed from generation to generation as an oral tradition. Today, the Chitrasutra is regarded as the oldest known discourse on painting in the world. As is written in the Chitrasutra: A painting cleanses and curbs anxiety, augments future good, causes
unequalled and pure delight, kills the evil spirits of bad dreams and pleases the household deity.

The painters—themselves described in the *Chitrasutra*—were fervent in their devotion to their art: *The painter in India was almost like a yogi lost in his art...He created his masterpieces not in the spirit of imposing his personality on an admiring world with a desire for personal honour and fame, but obliterated himself, almost deriving supreme satisfaction in that his art was an offering to God.* Their goal was to continue the legacy of their ancestors, breathing life into the divine spirit which underlies the whole of creation and which binds all living things together.

Religious thought in Indian life has traditionally been bound up with breaking through the veil of the material world. One of the ways to lift this veil, thereby experiencing *the eternal bliss of enlightenment*, was through contact with beauty, be it natural or artistic. Hence, art has played a profound role in Indian religious life.

Such is the symbolic meaning of the art that is portrayed in Behl’s stunning book about the Ajanta caves. The beautifully photographed murals depict the various *Jatakas* of the Buddhist faith (the parables of Buddha’s previous births—in both human and animal form—which inspire one to live a life of virtue and compassion). The numerous color plates are wonderfully reproduced on glossy pages. Each section of plates is devoted to a different fable (some of which are quite interesting) and prefaced by a brief synopsis. Additional details are provided in the legend accompanying each photograph.

Details of the text also touch on the damage unwittingly done by both early visitors as well as by well-meaning curators. Paradoxically, the worst damage to the paintings was done by early, but misguided attempts at preservation. Early failures in photographing the murals were due to the low-light levels eventually required by the Archaeology Survey of India for preservation purposes. It was not until the efforts of Benoy Behl, a photographer who is passionate about long-exposure photography in low-light settings, that the cloak of darkness surrounding these moving paintings could be pierced and the great treasures of India’s ancient heritage revealed to the world. Prior to the publication of Behl’s initial work, many of the finest artists of India itself had been unaware of the existence of Ajanta, or even of their country’s own rich heritage of artistic traditions. Ajanta’s legacy stands as a symbol of its people’s religious fervor, as well as of India’s fine tradition of ancient art, both of which eventually spread throughout Asia.
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