

“A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.”

Ecclesiastes 1:4

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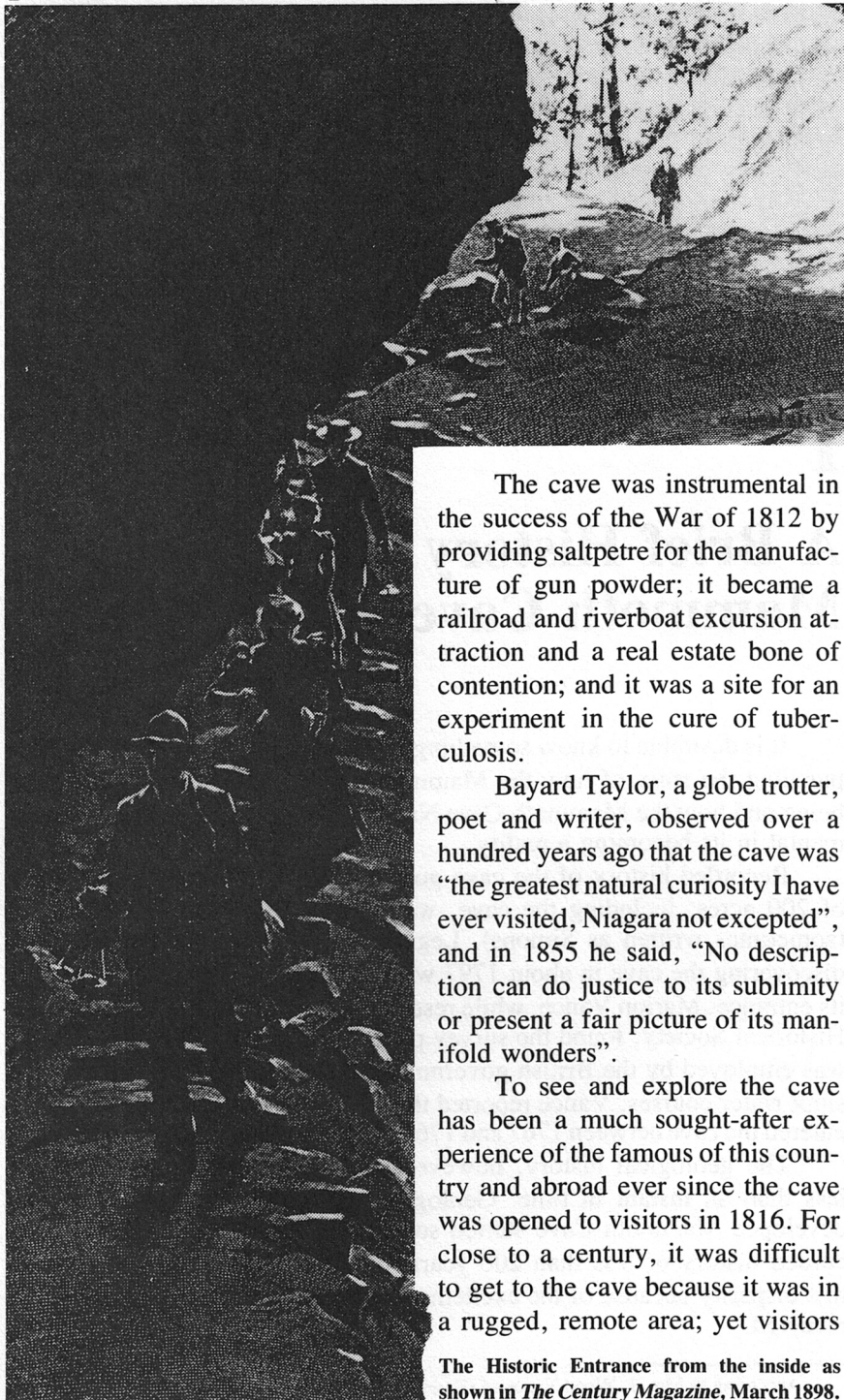
A Brief History Of Mammoth Cave

It is desirable to know something of Mammoth Cave's history before pursuing the story of how the Mammoth Cave National Park came into being and how the Mammoth Cave National Park Association was instrumental in its becoming a reality.

Recorded history of the cave goes back to 1799 when a land grant of 200 acres, including the cave, was awarded to Valentine Simmons (sometimes written as Simons). Legend has a hunter named Houchins discovering the cave in about 1797 when he chased a wounded bear into its entrance. Marion Vance, while researching records in the Pennsylvania Historical Society, found the survey papers of Lt. Thomas Hutchins who was employed by the British government to survey the Ohio and Mississippi water courses. Vance reported that he found evidence that Hutchins entered the cave between 1767 and 1769 while surveying the Green River.¹

The geological history, however, makes the known history seem less than an instant in time. Geologists tell us that the processes that developed Mammoth Cave started some 350 million years ago. The recorded history of less than 200 years, however, makes up for some of this disparity because of the excitement and public attention the cave has received.

¹According to Mrs. J. Wood Vance of Glasgow and Ellis Jones of Cave City.



The cave was instrumental in the success of the War of 1812 by providing saltpetre for the manufacture of gun powder; it became a railroad and riverboat excursion attraction and a real estate bone of contention; and it was a site for an experiment in the cure of tuberculosis.

Bayard Taylor, a globe trotter, poet and writer, observed over a hundred years ago that the cave was “the greatest natural curiosity I have ever visited, Niagara not excepted”, and in 1855 he said, “No description can do justice to its sublimity or present a fair picture of its manifold wonders”.

To see and explore the cave has been a much sought-after experience of the famous of this country and abroad ever since the cave was opened to visitors in 1816. For close to a century, it was difficult to get to the cave because it was in a rugged, remote area; yet visitors

The Historic Entrance from the inside as shown in *The Century Magazine*, March 1898.

came from distant points in the country and from Europe to see the cave, traveling by horseback and carriage and later by picturesque but primitive railroad train and riverboat. Exploring and viewing the cave is much different today from what it was then. Of course, the cave was not electrically lighted; instead the visitors and guides carried torches and lanterns.

Accommodations in the Mammoth Cave hotel were described expansively in the mid-1800s -- the sumptuous food, the gracious care of guests by the servants and the delightful entertainment. Visitors were so much impressed with the guides and the cave that they wrote extravagantly of their cave experiences. It was chiefly, however, the well-to-do and famous who could afford a trip to Mammoth Cave in the early days. It was better known afar than near.

Mammoth Cave is the longest known cave system in the world, with over 300 miles of explored and mapped passages. Undoubtedly there are many more to come. New passages are being discovered continually and explorers are finding that many of the other caves in the area are connected to Mammoth Cave -- perhaps all of them are.

The millions of years of the cave's existence means that strange animals have evolved, adapted to eternal darkness, including fish without eyes. Indian artifacts and mummies have been found that are two to four thousand years old. The constant, even climatic conditions have preserved these artifacts -- items of clothing and prehistoric tools -- in virtually the same condition as when they were left there. The cave was a challenge to prehistoric man just as it is a challenge to speleologists and tourists today.

The Geological History

About 350 million years ago during the Mississippian period, this part of Kentucky, in fact most of the southeastern United States, was covered by a shallow sea. The climate was considerably warmer than today and consequently supported a great number of sea-living organisms. These organisms produced shells, which together with the calcium carbonate from sea water and the pressure of layer upon layer of the sediment produced a layer of limestone 500 feet or so in depth. Later, several hundred feet of sandstone was deposited over most of the area by a large river system that emptied into the sea.

The sea level started to drop some 280 million years ago and the continent rose, exposing layers of limestone and sandstone. The effects of nature beneath the earth's crust produced a buckling and warping of the crust resulting in cracks in the layers of limestone and sandstone. The river systems as known today began to form. Slightly acidic rain water

ran into the cracks and crevices dissolving the limestone and forming channels through which the water ran seeking the lowest level, which was the river, now Green River. Meanwhile, the land continued to rise and the level of the river fell deeper and deeper as it eroded its way down through the rock layers. This action over millions of years resulted in the multitude of passages in the caves at successively lower levels. This action is still going on so that the lowest levels, like Echo River, are still functioning aqueducts or underground waterways. The oldest channels are near the surface and the newest ones are the deepest ones until they reach the level of the river.

While this process was going on, dripping limestone water over thousands and millions of years formed interesting and awe-inspiring stalactites and stalagmites that are found in the cave's passages. Stalactites are produced by dripping from above and stalagmites result from the pileup of dissolved limestone where it dripped below. After a long time, the stalactites and stalagmites come together, forming columns. This process continues; it is never-ending; hence Mammoth Cave is a continuously evolving phenomenon.²

Prehistoric Man and the Caves

Prehistoric people began to use Mammoth Cave some 4,000 years ago. For some reason these people left the caves about the time of the birth of Christ, and the cave was undisturbed for about 2,000 years until it was discovered by the early settlers in Kentucky. The prehistoric people lived seasonally in the caves' entrances. They stored some food, such as hickory nuts, and ate wild game, including deer, racoon and fish. They cultivated some plants for food and clothing. Remains of charred cave torches prove that they explored the caves and went in to gather gypsum and flint for arrows and spear points and for trading. Soot from their torches found as much as two and a half miles inside the cave shows that they did not remain merely at the cave's entrances.

One such explorer or miner was discovered by two guides, Lyman Cutliff and Grover Campbell, in 1935. While crawling through a narrow passageway, a slab of rock collapsed on the prehistoric explorer and pinned him there for more than 2,300 years. When found he was barefoot and was wearing a wrap-around skirt of woven fiber. Next to him were some charred torch fragments and a woven bag presumably to carry food with him and the gypsum or flint out again when he left the cave.

Only a few years after Mammoth Cave was rediscovered by white man, an Indian mummy was discovered by saltpetre miners during the

² John J. Wagoner and Lewis D. Cutliff, **Mammoth Cave**. Interpretive Publications, Inc., Arlington, Va., 1985, pp. 4, 5, 30, 31.

War of 1812. This was in 1813; another was found in 1814 and two more the following year. These mummies were ballyhooed and exhibited in museums for many years. Another one discovered in 1875 and later owned by Henry C. Ganter, who was manager of the Mammoth Cave Estate, was shown in Mammoth Cave and later at the New Entrance to Mammoth Cave. George D. Morrison, the owner of the New Entrance, bought the mummy from Ganter after the latter's retirement.

Rediscovery of the Cave and Saltpetre Mining

The first recorded owner of the land that includes Mammoth Cave was Valentine Simmons (sometimes recorded as Simons) who owned the land in 1799 according to a land survey entry in Warren County for 200 acres of land on Green River. The metes and bounds of the tract concludes with "to the beginning including two saltpetre caves."⁴ The patent for this land was issued by Charles Scott, Kentucky's Governor, on January 31, 1812 and it describes the same metes and bounds but names the caves as Dixon's and Mammoth. Simmons probably settled on the land in 1795 because he filed for the land on September 14 in that year under a state law allowing up to 200 acres of land to bonafide settlers on land south of the Green River on or before July 1, 1798.

At this early time the caves had no particular value or use -- merely a curiosity -- and the land of the area was the least desirable, being rough and rocky ridge land; but it was cheap as a grant from the state could be obtained for as little as \$40 for a hundred acres and could be used for subsistence farming. This was the time when land, even poor land, was craved by the new settlers. After all that was why they came over the mountains to Kentucky in the first place.

Even before Simmons received his official patent from the state, he sold his cave property to John Flatt of Barren County for \$116.67. On the same day, Flatt sold the tract to George, Leonard and John McClean (also written as McLean) for \$400. Later the same day, the McClean brothers sold 156 acres of their purchase to Fleming Gatewood and Charles Wilkins of Lexington for \$3,000. The fact that these transactions took place on the same day could be merely a legal formality to legitimize transactions that had already occurred earlier; for example, Simmons had not obtained clear title before he sold to Flatt, and there are indications that Flatt and the McClean brothers owned the land for several years, not a few minutes or hours. Then on August 25, 1812, Gatewood sold his interest to Hyman Gratz of Philadelphia, who was an experienced gunpowder manufacturer.

³Harold Meloy, *Mummies of Mammoth Cave*. Published by the Author, Shelbyville, Ind., 1968.

⁴Warren County Surveyor's Book A, p. 268.

It is obvious that Gratz and Wilkins were interested in the property because of its mining prospects. The supply of saltpetre was usually provided from Europe but was cut off by the French and English embargoes. Then in April of 1820 Gratz bought the remaining 44 acres of the original 200 acre plot for \$400. He had paid \$10,000 for the half interest in the 256 acres owned by Gatewood.

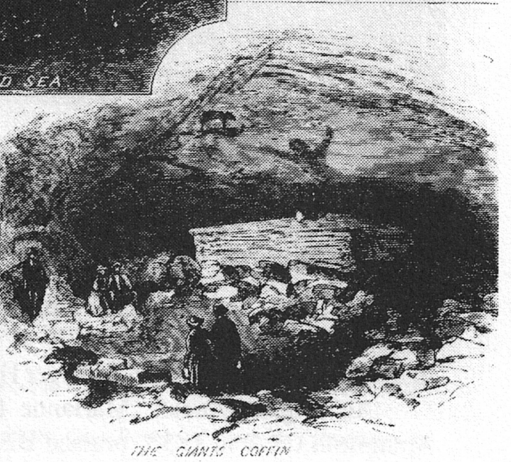
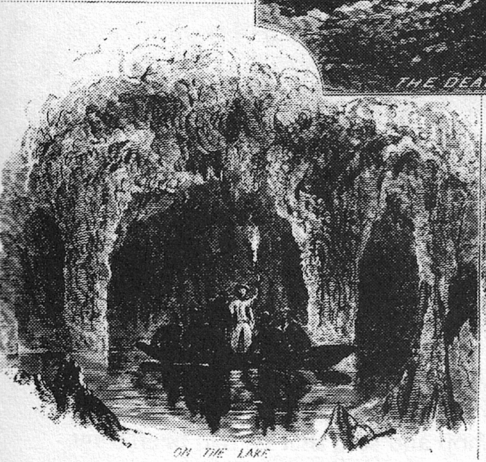
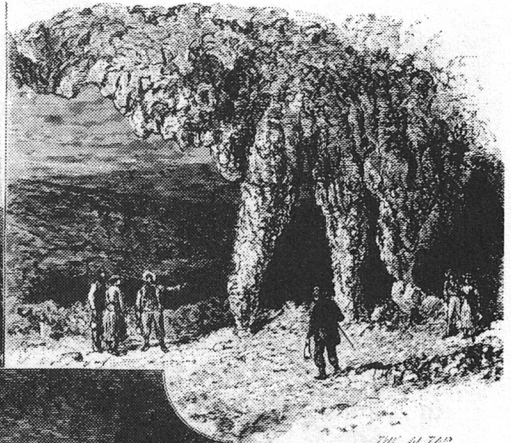
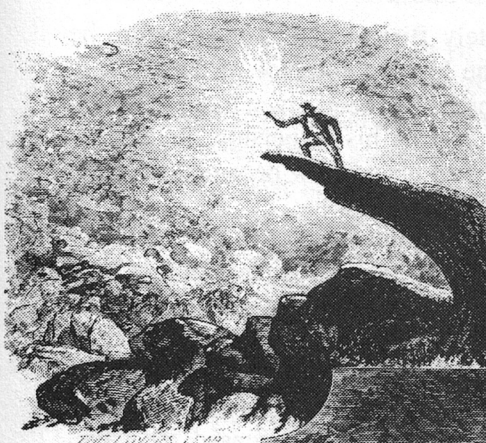
Gratz and Wilkins exploited the saltpetre deposits found on the floor of the cave all during the War of 1812 and undoubtedly increased their wealth greatly in the process. The floor of the caves was mined by black slave labor for the nitrates of calcium and potash which were placed on carts pulled by oxen and processed through a leaching out process. Water was brought into the cave through wooden pipes into wooden leaching vats. These pipes and vats are still present in Mammoth Cave near the historic entrance. They are well preserved because of the constant temperature and atmospheric conditions of the cave.⁵ Some 70 slaves were used to mine the "petre dirt" which resulted from thousands of years of bat droppings.

Operation of the Cave Under Private Ownership

After the War of 1812, saltpetre mining ceased to be profitable and mining for it ceased. The cave was opened in 1816 to sightseers and of course has continued to this day. By 1828, the Gratz and Wilkins ownership had increased to 1,300 acres. On June 28, 1828, the executors of Charles Wilkins' estate sold his entire half interest for \$200 cash. Ten years later, Gratz sold the entire 1,300 acres to Franklin Gorin, a prominent Glasgow lawyer, who was the first Caucasian child born in Barren County. Gorin held the property less than two years and sold it, then totaling 1,610 acres, to Dr. John Croghan, a Louisville physician, for \$10,000, doubling the original investment of \$5,000.

Even though Gorin held the property for only two years, he left his mark on the famous site. He built the first hotel, which stood until 1916. Some log cabins had been built during the saltpetre operation and were later incorporated in the hotel complex. He provided some very intelligent and resourceful slaves who served as guides and explorers of the cave. These were Stephen Bishop and Mat and Nick Bransford. As a part of the sales agreement with Dr. Croghan, he included these three slaves, but Bishop was to be freed and sent to Liberia after a specified period of time. At that time there was a movement afoot to free slaves and

⁵Harold Meloy and William R. Holliday, "A New Concept of the Initial History of Mammoth Cave, 1798-1812," a historical paper prepared for and in the files of Mammoth Cave National Park, 1968. Also, a paper by James P. Helm used in an address in 1931 before the Prerian Club in Louisville; reported in *The L&N Employees' Magazine*, November, 1955, pp. 8-9, 41, and 42.



From *One Hundred Miles in Mammoth Cave* - In 1880, by H.C. Hovey.

colonize them in Liberia. Unfortunately Bishop died a year before he was to be freed. His grave is near the historic entrance of the Cave in the Guides' Cemetery. Also Gorin's name has been given to a prominent feature of the cave -- Gorin's Dome. During his ownership, he and the cave received international attention when his nephew became lost in the cave for 39 hours.

Croghan only lived ten years after he purchased the cave property but his influence was felt more strongly and over a longer period of time than any of the other owners. He was the son of John Croghan, an Irish immigrant, and his mother was General George Rogers Clark's sister. It was while Dr. Croghan was taking a supplementary course in medicine in Edinburgh, Scotland, that he became interested in the cave and its possibilities. When he returned to Kentucky, he purchased the cave, helped to explore it further and put it in condition for full commercial exploitation. He advertised it as one of the great wonders of the world as, of course, it was. Dr. Croghan inherited from his father's estate, Locust Grove, in Louisville, where General George Rogers Clark lived his last days and which is now preserved as a historic site.

Dr. Croghan attempted an experiment for the cure of tuberculosis in the cave. He thought that the even temperature and atmospheric condition of the cave would be conducive to a cure. The experiment was not successful and was discontinued.

Famous Guides

Stephen Bishop was probably the best known of the Mammoth Cave guides. He was a young 17 year old slave owned by Franklin Gorin who owned the cave from 1837 to 1839. The deed for the property was dated in early 1838, but evidently Gorin took possession in 1837. Bishop was a brilliant, self-taught man who explored and mapped the cave, discovered some of its most notable features, and was charming and very informative as a guide. He seemed to have been greatly respected by visitors, so much so that they described him in diaries and published writings as a very unusual man. He married Charlotte, a mulatto slave, who supervised the Mammoth Cave dining room. They had one son who followed his father as a guide at the cave. Stephen guided tourists with grace and good manners, the famous as well as the lowly of the world. He guided Jenny Lind, the "Swedish nightingale" and a group of scientists who gave names to many of the cave's outstanding features. He was the first to cross the Bottomless Pit, accomplishing it in 1837 on a cedar sapling. This feat opened up later discoveries of River Hall, Echo River and Roaring River.

An Englishwoman, Marianne Finch, who wrote about her trip to Mammoth Cave in 1853, praised Bishop and said that he had been trans-

ferred to Dr. Croghan as part of the sale agreement between Croghan and Gorin, but was to be freed to go to Liberia after a specified period of time. She said he had only another year to go until he would win his freedom. As he guided parties through the cave, he sang at certain points so they could hear the echos.

Bishop was described by a contemporary cave visitor, Nathaniel P. Willis,⁶ as quoted by Helen F. Randolph, in 1853:

He is a very picturesque-looking personage -- part mulatto and part Indian (not proved), but with more of the physiognomy of a Spaniard -- his masses of black hair, curling slightly and gracefully, and his long mustache, giving quite a Castilian air to his appearance. He is of little size, but built for an athlete -- with broad chest and shoulders, narrow hips and legs slightly bowed. He is famous for the dexterity and bodily strength, which are very necessary to his vocation. The Cave is a wonder which draws good society and Stephen shows that he is used to it. His intelligent face is assured and tranquil, and his manners particularly quiet. He talks to charming ladies with the air of a man who is accustomed to their good will and attentive listening.



Mammoth Cave guides around 1905. Left to right: Ed Bishop, guide; Josh Wilson, guide; Will Bransford, guide; Henry Gossom, hotel clerk; Dr. Willis Ranshaw, hotel operator; Louis Charlet, hotel manager; John Nelson, guide; Matt Bransford, guide; Bob Lively, guide.

⁶Thomas Kiter "Journal of a Trip Through Kentucky and Visit to Mammoth Cave," Cincinnati, Ohio 1843.

Marianne Finch, *An Englishwoman's Experience in America*, Richard Bentley, London, 1853, p. 351.

Helen E. Randolph, *The Mammoth Cave and the Cave Region of Kentucky*. (Quotation of Nathaniel P. Willis on Stephen Bishop, pp. 53, 54.)

The dress of the renowned guide is adapted to dark places and rough work. He wears a chocolate-covered slouched hat, a green jacket and striped trousers and evidently takes no thought of his appearance. He is married, has one boy, takes a newspaper, studies geology, and means to go to Liberia as soon as he can buy his wife, child and self from his present master.

Marianne Finch added her tribute to Bishop in 1853 in her book written after her return to England, saying he was "a prince of guides":

He has a firm foot, and a strong hand, to help you over the impassable places; he points out the different strata -- wakes up the echos with his songs -- places you in the best positions, for seeing the grand and the beautiful -- lights up the domes, and compels the dark abyss to give up its secrets; and looks so handsome -- with his white teeth and flashing dark eyes -- while expatiating on the wonders of this place; that he seems more like the high priest and expounder of its mysteries than a hired guide, much less a slave.

Two other well-known guides in the early days were Mat and Nick Bransford, who were brothers and slaves hired by Franklin Gorin from his friend, Thomas Bransford. These three Gorin brought to the cave as guides and made them generally responsible for the facility. They were not content with being merely guides; they were curious enough to venture into the many recesses and the result was many new discoveries.

The Bransfords and Bishop helped Dr. Groghan establish his tuberculosis treatment experiment in the cave by building cabins inside to house the patients. But of the eleven patients who came, only one left feeling that he had been improved. Most of them died and the experiment failed. Bishop died at only 37 years of age, but the Bransfords served much longer. Nick served for 50 years and was one of Ralph Waldo Emerson's guides in 1850. All three of them saw many famous visitors.

A second generation of Bransfords included Henry, son of Mat, who was described by a German visitor in 1887 as:

...a handsome young Negro man built like Hercules, tall and broad shouldered. On Echo River, he sang with a full melodious voice...a three-tone sequence of notes...which came back a splendid chord.⁸

By 1930, eight Bransfords were serving as guides; there had been four generations of them; there had been Bransfords working in the cave for more than a hundred years.

A later noted guide was John M. Nelson of Glasgow, who served as guide from 1894 to 1907. Interestingly, all four of these famous guides came originally from Glasgow. Nelson gained a part of his fame because of his collection of Indian and geological artifacts. He impressed one lady visitor from Washington, D.C. (Miss Alice Garnett) so much that

⁷Finch, op. cit.

⁸Harold Meloy, "The Bransfords Show Mammoth Cave," a paper written in 1953 for Mammoth Cave National Park. Available at the park.

she fashioned a pitcher with his likeness on it and gave it to him. This pitcher is still a prized possession of the Nelson family. A part of his collection now resides in the Mammoth Cave National Park and some of it in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. After leaving the cave's employment, Nelson settled in Glasgow and continued his avid hobby of hunting for and collecting artifacts. Included in his collection was a black iron kettle used in the saltpetre operation in 1812.⁹

Noted Managers of the Estate

There were two managers of the Mammoth Cave Estate who had long terms of service and whose names are indelibly etched in the Cave's history. These were Henry C. Ganter and Martin Leo (Marty) Charlet. Ganter served as manager for several years; one account says from 1887 to 1902, but family sources in Glasgow say he served for 29 years. Previously he had operated Andrew McCoy's stage line between Cave City and Mammoth Cave. For a time he exhibited one of the prehistoric mummies found in the Cave, and one of the formations in the Cave bears his name.



A group of visitors with their guides around the turn of the century. The guides are: extreme left, Bishop; extreme right, Will Bransford.

⁹ A special paper written for the *Louisville Courier Journal* by Joseph H. Mader, January 1946. Available from the Nelson family.

Charlet's parents settled at Chaumont near the Cave and of course he was born there. He served the Cave for 47 years, fifteen as manager, from 1915 to 1934. Then, after the National Park Service took over, he served as chief tour leader, from 1941 to 1956 .

The Famous Hotels

During Franklin Gorin's ownership of Mammoth Cave from 1837 to 1839, he built a hotel capable of accommodating 30 to 40 guests.¹⁰ It is said that the hotel included at that time or later the cabins built during the saltpetre mining days during the War of 1812. The hotel became famous and was spoken and written about glowingly by visitors far and wide. The hotel stood until 1916 when it burned. A later frame structure built in 1925 became almost as famous. But it was demolished in 1979 by the National Park because the old hotel had become a fire hazard and modernizing it was considered cost prohibitive.

A description of the first hotel was contained in *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion* of May 22, 1952:

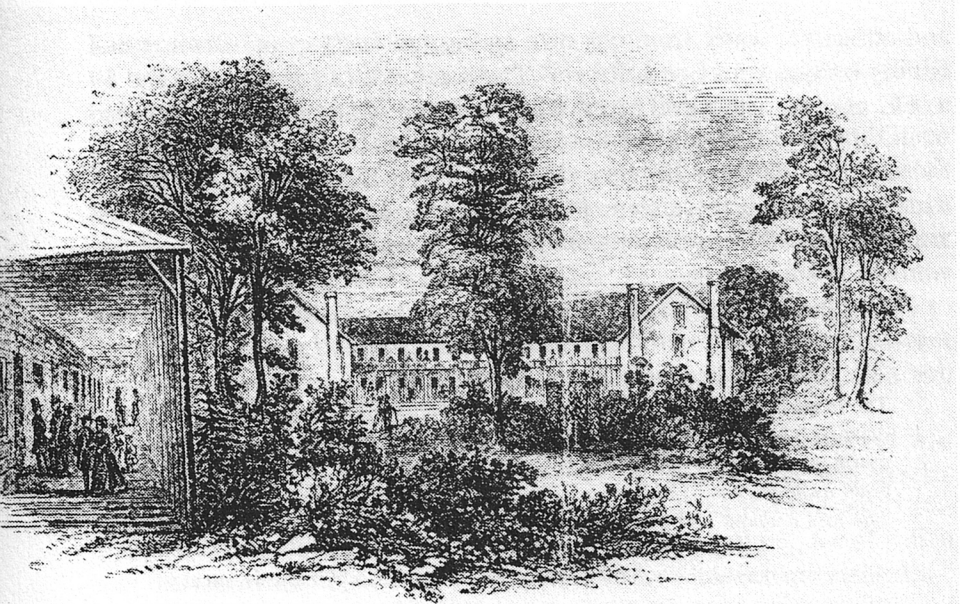
In this beautiful and retired spot, the stranger will meet with polished and refined society, from all parts of the world meeting there. The hotel is two stories high, and 200 feet long, with brick buildings at each extremity, showing their gable ends in the front. The space between is occupied by a long wooden building, with a piazza, and gallery over it. At the end of the hotel runs a long row of log houses, one story high, with colonnades in front, the whole length, which must be near 200 feet. The dining room of the hotel is a spacious apartment, while the fare displayed upon its table is of the finest quality.

H.C. Hovey in 1909 described the hotel as follows:¹¹

The hotel itself is an architectural curiosity. The original cabin, built by the miners in 1812, still stands and is used as a wash-house. Next came a more stylish log-house with a wide hall between two large rooms. As visitors multiplied the cabins also multiplied, until they stood in a long row. These isolated structures were, at a later date, connected with each other and weather-boarded, the halls and rooms remaining unchanged. Then a spacious frame house was erected in front, with offices, parlors, ball-room, and other appointments in modern style. Finally wide verandas were added, having about 600 feet of covered portico. The structure thus evolved from a log-cabin germ, is shaped like the letter L, and a more airy, delightful place cannot be found in the State of Kentucky!

¹⁰Ebenezer Meriam, "Mammoth Cave," *The Municipal Gazette*, New York, February 21, 1844, p. 320

¹¹H.C. Hovey, *Guide Book to the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky*. J.P. Morton & Co., Louisville, 1909, pp. 15-17.



THE CAVE HOUSE.

The first hotel at Mammoth Cave, as depicted by *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion* in 1856.

Hovey went on to describe the treatment of guests. A bugle flourish would herald the arrival of passengers and bring around the coach a throng of guests expecting to see friends or curious to see strangers, together with a sizable group of Negro servants ready to offer their services and take care of the luggage. The hotel register showed from two to three thousand visitors a year. Many came from the north and a few from various parts of Europe. The majority however were from Louisville, Nashville, Memphis, New Orleans and other cities of the South. Loitering along the long colonnade in the evening, guests would look between tall white pillars through the noble grove of aged oaks and across the bluegrass lawn. At 11 p.m. the band left the ball room for the veranda and according to their custom gave the signal for retiring by playing "Home, Sweet Home." The next morning at six o'clock the same musicians awoke the guests by playing "Dixie."

An advertisement put out by the management of the resort in 1906 said that the hotel was open all year around, that the altitude was about 900 feet, that the resort was delightful and the table excellent. "We slaughter our own beeves, hogs and sheep; milk, eggs and chickens plentiful; sanitary toilet arrangements, rooms screened, bedding clean

and attractive; water from our own spring, perfectly pure. Boating and fishing on beautiful Green River." The hotel rates were \$2 a day and \$9 to \$12 a week. The round trip to the cave by the Mammoth Cave Railroad from Glasgow Junction was \$2, by carriage or buggy for two or more \$1 each, by boat from Bowling Green including meals \$2.50. The advertisement said that there were 152 miles of explored passageways (there are now over 300), postcards were a penny each and cave suit rentals were 15 cents.

The famous old hotel with its gracious hospitality met its end by fire on December 9, 1916. The news account in the *Louisville Times* of that date gave the details:

The original Mammoth Cave Hotel, part of which was built in 1811, was destroyed by fire, which starting from an unknown cause at 3 o'clock this morning, consumed the building within two hours. The employees of the hotel escaped, but lost all their belongings. Practically nothing was saved. The loss is about \$50,000. There were few guests.

All the registers of the hotel and cave, which contained perhaps the greatest collection in existence of autograph signatures of famous men and women, were destroyed. The registers, which in part were more than a century old, contained the names of such famous personages as the late King Edward of England, Jenny Lind, Edwin Booth, the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia and Dom Pedro of Brazil.

While the ruins were still smoking this morning visitors who arrived on the morning train were sent on a tour of the cave at the scheduled hour.

The famous "cottage row," which was built in 1832, was burned to the ground, as was the main hotel. The Mammoth Cave Hotel was perhaps the most historic structure of its kind in the United States, as the first part of it was built in 1811 and was used in 1812 to shelter the miners who secured the saltpetre from Mammoth Cave to make gunpowder for the War of 1812.

The dining room and ballroom were made of hand-hewn timbers, and it is related that among those who assisted in building this part of the hotel were many of the friends and neighbors of Abraham Lincoln's family. A part of the hotel was originally built of logs and later weatherboarded.

Thus ended a famous hostelry but it was replaced by another in 1925, which became almost as famous and respected by the guests and community. This hotel was closed by the Park and demolished in 1979 because it was considered to be a fire hazard and it would cost too much to modernize it. The announced intention of tearing it down became a **cause celebre** by local residents and many Kentuckians as well who exercised all of their clamor and might to save it, but to no avail.

Transportation to the Cave

For almost half of Mammoth Cave's life since it was opened to the public the only way to get there was by horse, buggy or carriage. Later boat transportation on Green River became available from Bowling Green or Evansville. Public transportation was also provided by stage coach from Cave City and Glasgow Junction (previously called Three Forks and now Park City). Henry C. Ganter, who for many years was manager of the Mammoth Cave Estate, earlier was the manager of the Andrew McCoy Stage Line operating between Mammoth Cave and Cave City. As a part of the excitement and hazard of that era, it is recalled that Jesse James and his gang held up the stage between Mammoth Cave and Cave City and relieved all the passengers of their valuables.

In 1886, the Mammoth Cave Railroad was opened. The road was only 8.7 miles long but its route traversed rugged country and trestles and curves in order to avoid extensive grading of the right-of-way. The equipment consisted of two locomotives of the dummy type, one of which was the renowned "Hercules." There were several successor "Hercules," one of which is now in retirement near where the Mammoth Cave Hotel stood. The train had two combination coaches and two passenger coaches.¹²



Hercules #3, picturesque transportation from Glasgow Junction to the Cave.

¹²"Trails End," *The L&N Employees' Magazine*, May 1937, pp. 6-9.



Entrance to Mammoth Cave Estate, Rail Road station, grocery store, Post Office and souvenir shop.

Elbert Hubbard paid a visit to Mammoth Cave in 1907, arriving via the L&N And Mammoth Cave Railroads. He described his experience riding the Mammoth Cave Railroad, undoubtedly exaggerated but nevertheless entertaining, thus:

To reach the Mammoth Cave you take the Louisville and Nashville Railroad to Glasgow Junction. There you change cars and take the Mammoth Cave Railroad, an institution that has an equipment of one passenger coach and a dummy engine. I was interested in seeing a Kaffir cutting the grass between the two streaks of rust, and was told this had to be done three times a year, and is the thing that keeps down the dividends...

The conductor -- there is only one on the road -- came for my fare and said, "Two dollars please!"

I handed out the money.

"Well, say it!," he exclaimed.

"Say What?" I asked.

"What is in your head. Out with it."

"What do you want me to say or do?" I asked.

“Why kick, protest, rail or balk, at being charged two dollars for riding nine miles and back.”

“I never kick on any railroad that has less than ten miles of mileage,” I said.

When this merry conductor wanted the train to stop or go ahead he went to the front door and yelled to the engineer.

“You notice,” said the conductor, “that we have our cowcatcher on the rear end, so as to keep the cows out of the ladies’ coach.” He then explained, “Why a bull got after us last week and would have ketched us too if we hadn’t been on the down grade.”¹³

The coaches were heated by coal stoves. Upkeep of the tracks was performed by farmers who were recruited along the way and worked intermittently between crops. The line experienced not a single wreck or fatality despite its primitive condition. After the railroad ceased to operate, and also for some while before, buses with railroad-type wheels ran on the tracks. The line was bought in 1931 by a group representing the Mammoth Cave National Park Association. Shortly afterward, the new owners voted to discontinue operation because the line had suffered a loss for the last several years.

Cut-throat Competition

In the later years of private operation of the cave, several rival caves including the New Entrance to Mammoth Cave, used virtual cut-throat tactics in competition with Mammoth Cave such as confusing and ambiguous signs to divert tourists who might have been heading to Mammoth Cave. They were often side-tracked into other caves thinking they were seeing the famous cave itself. Solicitors also intercepted tourists on the highways leading toward the cave and inveigled them into going into their caves rather than Mammoth Cave. To combat this unfair competition, the Mammoth Cave management ran ads in the newspapers in their market area to inform the public. Here is an example of one run in the *Evansville Press* in about 1923:

UNSCRUPULOUS MISREPRESENTATIONS REGARDING CONDITIONS AT THE MAMMOTH CAVE

With solicitors at Louisville, Elizabethtown, Munfordville, Horse Cave, Cave City (principally), Glasgow Junction, Bowling Green and Nashville, and others stationed on automobile routes, representatives of other caves are threatening to “put old Mammoth Cave out of business.”

¹³ Ibid.

Everyday tourists coming to Kentucky to see the celebrated Mammoth Cave are held up and told such lies as that:

1. There are no decent accommodations at the Mammoth Cave for lodging or eating.
2. Echo River's banks are under water.
3. The old entrance has caved in.
4. The hotel waterworks are out of order.
5. The cave is being sold today.
6. A new entrance three and one half miles nearer to Cave City has been provided by the Mammoth Cave Management for the convenience of tourists (the New Entrance actually was a competitive operation to Mammoth Cave).

The situation actually was getting to such a point that public ownership would be the only way to assure the best use and protection of Mammoth Cave and the associated caves nearby. And this situation was one of the factors which led to the banding together of public spirited citizens to mount a drive for public ownership of the cave.