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The Mammoth Cave Mushroom Company: A Brief History of a Short-Lived Venture

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Abstract

The Mammoth Cave Mushroom Company was formed in August 1881 during a particularly contentious period of family struggle for control of the cave, its resources, and tourism operations. This paper documents the history of the company from original company records and family letters. It places the Mammoth Cave operation within the larger historical context of mushroom production in caves as possibly the first such operation in the United States. It traces developments at the cave during the fall of 1881 as Anthony Muzarelli oversaw preparation of mushroom beds and supporting infrastructure and identifies sources of tension between the new mushroom business and the long-standing tourism operation. Finally, it offers a hypothesis about who sabotaged the mushroom beds with coal oil in December 1881, leading to the demise of the company before it had produced a single fungus.