

Feb 15th, 9:10 AM

History of Long Cave

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Recommended Citation

Stanley D. Sides and Norman L. Warnell, "History of Long Cave" (February 15, 2013). *Mammoth Cave Research Symposia*. Paper 4. http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/mc_reserch_symp/10th_Research_Symposium_2013/Day_two/4

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Long Cave, Mammoth Cave National Park, Edmonson County, Kentucky

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Abstract

The story of Long Cave, later to become Grand Avenue Cave, is thoroughly intertwined in the rich history of saltpeter production and the show cave industry of Central Kentucky. The cave's history parallels the early history of Mammoth Cave that is five miles away, the history of nearby Short Cave, and the development of Diamond Cave and Proctor Cave as show caves by the Proctor families. Today the cave is an important bat hibernaculum protected by the National Park Service. The cave is gated and locked, and entry is by research approval only.

A patent on the land that included Long Cave was taken shortly after Kentucky became a state in 1792. Mammoth Cave was known by 1797, and Pheltius Valentine Simons received a certificate of ownership of Mammoth Cave in 1798. Simons sold the property to his relative, John Flatt for the purpose of making saltpeter. Flatt's Cave was soon one of several caves under the name of McLean's Cave after John, Leonard and George McLean purchased the cave sometime before 1808. The McLeans sold Dixon Cave to Charles S. Morton on January 22, 1808. Sometime before 1810 the McLeans sold Flatt's Cave, soon named Mammoth Cave, to Fleming Gatewood and Charles Wilkins for the manufacture of saltpeter.

The McLeans bought other saltpeter caves including Long Cave and nearby Short Cave. Richard Richardson's 50 acres including Short Cave were surveyed for George and Leonard McLean on October 19, 1810. David Smith's 70-acre tract including Long Cave was surveyed for George, Leonard, and John McLean on the same date after it had been assigned to the McLeans on September 1, 1810. Saltpeter production began in Long Cave and nearby Short Cave. Jim Cave, to the north of Long Cave, was stripped of its sediment with the saltpeter likely produced at Long Cave's nearby furnaces. In August 1811

the mummy Fawn Hoof was discovered in Short Cave by the nitre diggers and displayed at Mammoth Cave, bringing fame to the cave.

Robert Montgomery Bird visited Mammoth Cave in 1833 and 1836, and was guided through the cave by Fleming Gatewood. In his 1838 book, "Peter Pilgrim or a Rambler's Recollections," Bird related a story that is the first printed mention of Long Cave as Wright's Cave (Pit Cave). Gatewood was to meet at the cave with Wright and another man who was a saltpeter miner to investigate Long Cave's use for saltpeter mining. Gatewood failed to arrive due to bad weather. Wright and the miner proceeded to explore the cave alone and ran out of candlelight. Wright fell down a pit and was killed. The other person crawled in the dark and finally reached the surface to spread the alarm for help. Gatewood and workmen from Mammoth Cave retrieved Wright's body in the published story. W. W. Wright's name is prominently seen on the wall today at the edge of the pit at Shaler's Dome, but he did not die in the cave in 1812. He was writing his name on the cave walls as late as 1853.

Saltpeter dirt was mined in the entrance passages of Long Cave, but apparently much of its deep sediment fill was not rich in nitrate. The McLeans sold Long Cave and Short Cave to John Hann of Lancaster,

Kentucky on January 10, 1812. On April 20, 1818 Hann assigned the property, including both caves, to Jane and Elizabeth Wright, presumably the daughters of W. W. Wright. Jane Wright married Gelon Hann on October 13, 1829. She later married Thomas Proctor on March 8, 1835 after Gelon Hann's death. Following Elizabeth's death, her heirs sold one half of Long Cave to William Hopkins Woolsey in 1839. Jane Wright Proctor sold the other half to Eldridge Hopkins Woolsey in 1860. The Woolseys also owned Short Cave by 1860.

Eldridge Hopkins Woolsey conveyed the Long Cave property to his two sons Chester Porterfield Woolsey and Felix W. Woolsey. Felix conveyed his part to his brother Chester Porterfield. Nancy Woolsey conveyed that portion of the land she owned to W. W. Age. Age was an agent between the Woolseys and Proctors. Larkin J. Proctor had assisted Age, crippled by the Civil War, in getting a Civil War Pension. W. W. Age purchased the Long Cave property from the Woolseys and transferred it to George M. Proctor, his brother Larkin J. Proctor, and Larkin's spouse Mary E. Proctor for \$700.00 on April 5, 1876.

George Proctor's name was on the deed for the Long Cave property but he was insolvent. Proctor was a landowner, had run Bell's Tavern with his second wife, Maria Gorin Bell Proctor, had commercialized Diamond Cave, and produced lithographic stone from a quarry in Glasgow Junction (Park City). Maria Proctor had died in 1865. Her uncle, Joseph Rogers Underwood, owned Diamond Cave from 1859 until he sold it to George Proctor's son, John Proctor, in 1866. John and his father continued to develop Diamond Cave as a show cave.

Larkin Proctor owned the stagecoach line from Three Forks or Glasgow Junction to Mammoth Cave. He ran Mammoth Cave from 1856-1861 and 1866-1871 for Joseph Rogers Underwood who was the Mammoth Cave Estate managing trustee.

Thereafter he practiced law and farmed until becoming owner of Long Cave and Proctor Cave.

H. C. Briggs and Joseph Reynolds held George Proctor's promissory note, which he was unable to pay. The Edmonson County Court sold George Proctor's half to pay the debt he owed Briggs and Reynolds. Larkin and Mary paid their brother's note and became owners of Long Cave and land in September 1877. Larkin proceeded with opening Long Cave to the public as Grand Avenue Cave and brought the Salts Cave mummy to the cave. He simultaneously developed nearby Proctor Cave as a show cave. He was deeply involved in the development of the Mammoth Cave Railroad to serve his caves. John Proctor, his nephew, lost Diamond Cave from the Proctor family on April 21, 1879 to Seth B. Shackelford because of unpaid debts from land speculation. John Proctor moved on to a distinguished career in public service, becoming Kentucky's state geologist and a prominent federal civil servant.

Thomas E. Lee was a close friend of Larkin Proctor and assisted in Long Cave's commercial development as Grand Avenue Cave. He, with J. L. Lee and W. D. Cutliff, had discovered the mummy of an aboriginal male child in Salts Cave on Flint Ridge on March 8, 1875. Lee and his family lived in a house on the Grand Avenue property while managing the cave. He was a skilled carpenter that probably built the extensive ladders in Lee Avenue today named the "banzai ladders." The cave had a wooden door at the entrance leading down substantial wooden steps into Grand Avenue at the 1812 saltpeter hoppers. Just beyond Shaler's Dome in Echo Avenue the passage continued as Fairy Avenue. Larkin Proctor had a hut constructed in an alcove in Fairy Avenue where Little Al, the Salts Cave Mummy, was on display as having been found in Grand Avenue Cave. The book "Grand Avenue Cave," published in 1892 by T. O. Chisholm to promote the

cave states, "In 1876, while Mr. Thomas E. Lee was making some explorations in an avenue which was subsequently named for him, and which has not yet been visited, he found lying on a ledge of rock in a deep chasm the remains of one of the human species. Closer examination revealed it to be the body of a young girl." The mummy was the prominent feature of a visit to the cave, much as Fawn Hoof, the Short Cave mummy, had been in Mammoth Cave sixty years earlier.

An article entitled "The New Wonderland," subtitled "A Kentucky Cave of Vast Extent Just Coming into Notice," was published in the Bismark Daily Tribune, November 25, 1891 and included a sketch map indicating miles of passages in Grand Avenue Cave. It states the mummy had been discovered in the cave 25 years earlier. The article declares the cave atmosphere preserved the mummy, and that fruits and vegetables were improved by storage in the cave. A Louisville Courier Journal article March 28, 1896 tells of J.B. Briggs of Russellville "and others" experimenting with storing "lemons, oranges, and other Florida fruit and eggs that were kept fresh for months." The same article tells how Col. R.H. Lacy "kept eggs in the cave for nearly a year." Tracks for a railed transport system were placed in the cave, but using the cave for storage was never successful. The tracks found today in nearby Martin Cave are probably the tracks that were once used in Long Cave.

Larkin and Mary Proctor lived at Long Cave promoting its commercialization as a show cave until later moving to Proctor Cave Hotel. A small railroad depot and platform terminated the short spur line to Grand Avenue Cave from the Mammoth Cave railroad at Chaumont. However, a railroad line to the cave, an Indian mummy, a book, and articles written on the cave were not enough for the cave to compete with nearby Mammoth Cave, Diamond Cave, Proctor Cave, Osceola

Cave and soon, Colossal Cave. The arrival of the automobile at Mammoth Cave in 1904 signaled the expansion of self-directed tourism that was not confined by horseback, stagecoach or railroad. This led to the opening of many show caves in the area and competition for visitors that was named the "cave wars."

On September 1, 1884 Larkin and his wife conveyed the Proctor Cave tract of land to Robert Rodes because of an old debt of long standing. Several years earlier, the Proctors had obtained money from the Globe Building & Loan Company of Louisville, Kentucky, to build a hotel on the Proctor Cave tract and executed notes and mortgages on the same. A few years later, finding themselves "utterly unable to pay this mortgage," they deeded a one half interest in the tract to their grandson, James W. Proctor, if he would pay the note. James paid the note, but was never told that Rodes was also holding a note on the property.

Rodes informed Larkin that he could redeem the Proctor Cave tract by paying him \$478.00 with 8% interest from September 1, 1884. Despite increasing problems with their health and the lack of commercial success of the caves, Larkin and Mary's interest in their caves never dwindled. In January 1885 Mary Proctor became sick with an abdominal abscess and was confined to her bed for three weeks. She died January 27, 1885 at age 69 years.

Following the death of his wife Mary, Larkin Proctor paid only \$60.00 on the Proctor Cave debt and nothing more was ever paid. Finally the court, ruling in favor of Robert Rodes, ordered the land sold at public auction on September 13, 1888. Rodes became the owner. In a quick maneuver on May 1, 1891 Larkin Proctor and his second wife, Jennie Fernoy Proctor, sold the Grand Avenue Cave tract of land to R.H. Lacey of the L & N Railroad. Using the money from this sale, they redeemed the Proctor Cave tract from Rodes. In March 1894 Proctor surrendered all his

interest and rights in the short railroad line to the platform and depot near Long Cave to Lacey, who was secretary of the Mammoth Cave Railroad. Larkin Proctor lived at his Proctor Cave Hotel until his death on November 19, 1895.

Lacey and his heirs did not attempt to redevelop Long Cave as a show cave, and its use for storage must have been short-lived. However, a famous aspect of Long Cave's history is stories that a hermit lived in the cave. In reality a cave explorer and digger of note, John D. Hackett of Tesnus, Texas, did spend time in the cave. On arrival in the cave region in 1917, Hackett boarded at the County Line House near Chaumont with E. M. Doyel. For a short period Hackett could not stay at the Doyel's house. Friends assisted him to move temporarily to Long Cave. The winter of 1917-1918 was one of the coldest on record. Hackett lived in the cave three months or less during the harsh winter, but was still exploring local caves and would walk daily to the Chaumont post office and store. His letters state he nearly froze to death on March 4, 1918 when it was 24 degrees below zero. Walking from the cave to the Chaumont post office he froze his left ankle, from which he never completely recovered.

After Larkin Proctor's death the Warren Deposit Bank demanded settlement of the Proctor Cave tract to redeem a note left unpaid by Larkin's widow. James Proctor then discovered, to his alarm, that he was about to lose Proctor Cave. He promptly took his step-grandmother to court, in an effort to reclaim his half interest in the property.

The Edmonson County court ordered the sale of Proctor Cave on April 3, 1899 at the courthouse in Brownsville to settle the claim that James Proctor held against the estate of Jennie F. Proctor. James Proctor became the purchaser of the half interest in the property for \$143.50 in addition to paying the debt on the note to the Warren Deposit Bank. He soon sold this land

and Proctor Cave to the Colossal Cavern Company of L&N Railroad on August 20, 1901 finally ending the Proctor families' interest in the caves of Joppa Ridge: Diamond Cave, Grand Avenue Cave, and Proctor Cave. L&N Railroad later donated Proctor Cave to Mammoth Cave National Park.

In March 1935, the United States District Court at Bowling Green filed condemnation proceedings against R. H. Lacey's estate to force sale of the Long Cave property. The deed of conveyance of the Long Cave property to the United States was entered April 1940 for the sum of \$2,300.00. Long Cave thereafter became a valued part of Mammoth Cave National Park. Short Cave and Diamond Caverns remain private property outside the National Park.

Written as part of Stanley D. Sides' Mammoth Cave National Park research project, MACA H1, and Norman L. Warnell's research project, Mammoth Cave Communities.

February 16, 2011