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Western Kentucky University Manuscripts & Folklife Archives – Mammoth Cave Collections



This is a list of collections in the [Manuscripts & Folklife Archives](#) holdings of [WKU's Department of Library Special Collections](#) that contain materials relating to Mammoth Cave. Our collections include descriptions of the Cave by visitors and guides, operation of the Cave as a tourist attraction, archaeology at the Cave, the creation of Mammoth Cave National Park, and Cave legends and lore.

Clicking on a collection name will link you to [TopSCHOLAR](#)[®], WKU's online digital repository, where you can download a detailed finding aid for that collection, and in some cases view materials in the collection. For further information, e-mail mssfa@wku.edu.

To broaden your search to include sources such as books and other publications, postcards, advertising material and photographs, search [KenCat](#), the [Kentucky Library Research Collections](#) catalog.

Visitors to Mammoth Cave

Over generations, visitors have recorded their impressions of this great natural wonder in diaries and letters. The collections below contain extended accounts of Cave visits. In several cases, famed African-American guide Stephen Bishop (pictured above, far right) escorted the visitor.

[Mammoth Cave, Kentucky – Letter](#)

Typescript of a gentleman's January 1810 letter to a friend in Russellville, Kentucky, later published in a Richmond, Virginia newspaper, describing his five-hour tour of Mammoth Cave.

[Kite, Thomas, b. 1818](#)

Kite's journal of a trip from his Cincinnati home to Kentucky, with a lengthy account of three days in May-June 1847 spent touring Mammoth Cave. Stephen Bishop and "Alfred" were his guides.

[Lucas Collection](#)

Robert W. Lucas of Warren County, Kentucky describes the stations visited during his 9-1/2 mile tour of Mammoth Cave in June 1850. The guide of the nine-member party was "Mathew."

[Sargent, George Henry, 1828-1917](#)

This diary of New Yorker and Harvard graduate George Sargent describes his three months of travel in Kentucky, including his December 1852 tour of Mammoth Cave in the company of Stephen Bishop.

[Ward, John, 1838-1896](#)

Typescripted excerpts from New Yorker John Ward's diary (original at New York Historical Society) detailing his June 1854 tour of Mammoth Cave with guide Stephen Bishop.

[Mammoth Cave - Letter](#)

A tourist writes about her May 1928 tour of Mammoth Cave with guide "Mat"; she also comments on Great Onyx Cave, Crystal Cave and Sand Hill Cave.

Mammoth Cave before it was a national park

The collections below relate to Mammoth Cave as a tourist destination (and briefly in the 1840s as a tuberculosis hospital) before it became a national park. Dr. John Croghan, the Cave's last private owner, died in 1849. The property was administered by trustees on behalf of his heirs until federal legislation passed in 1926 began the process of creating Mammoth Cave National Park.

[Anderson, Oliver Hazard Perry, 1813-1845](#)

In a letter written in 1842, Frankfort, Kentucky native Anderson describes his experiences as a tuberculosis patient at Mammoth Cave, where owner Dr. John Croghan had opened an experimental underground sanatorium. A [second](#) letter written in 1843 describes Anderson's departure.

[Calvert-Obenchain-Younglove Collection](#)

An 1899 letter to Josephine Calvert of Bowling Green, Kentucky from manager H. C. Ganter suggests an itinerary for touring Mammoth Cave and provides price information.

[Croghan, George, 1852-1911](#)

In a public notice, this descendant of Dr. John Croghan details his grievances against the custodians of the trust administered for the heirs of Mammoth Cave's last private owner.

[Mammoth Cave – Deeds](#)

Copies of five deeds, 1799-1814, of Mammoth Cave lands, including the original 200 acres entered by Valentine Simon under a Commissioner's Certificate.

[Mammoth Cave Hotel – Registers](#)

Two registers record the name, residence and destination of visitors to the Mammoth Cave Hotel from 1858-1860 and 1862-1866. A [second collection](#) contains typescripts of these registers, sorted by date and guest name.

[Moody, Thomas Newton, b. 1938](#)

A hotel bill and clippings relating to the 1879 double wedding performed in Mammoth Cave of Anna D. Moore to Thomas N. Moody, and of Virginia "Jennie" Lucas to James W. Helm.

[Underwood, Joseph Rogers, 1791-1876](#)

A copy (original at Huntington Library) of trustee Joseph Underwood's report on the state of business and tourist activity at Mammoth Cave in 1867.

Mammoth Cave becomes a National Park

The collections below relate mainly to the acquisition and development of Mammoth Cave from the 1920s through 1941, when the National Park Service assumed full responsibility for the site.

[Goode, Cecil Earnest, 1915-2011](#)

A manuscript copy of Goode's book, *World Wonder Saved: How Mammoth Cave Became a National Park* (Mammoth Cave National Park Association, 1986).

[Lally, Kelly A.](#)

A history of the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps, a public work relief program established during the Great Depression, in the development of Mammoth Cave National Park. Includes recorded and (some) transcribed interviews with 29 enrollees and others involved with the CCC. Topics include the background of enrollees; work projects; life in camp; relations with the local population; and the effectiveness of the CCC's work. Click on the links to access interviews with:

[James Ashby](#)

[George Childress](#)

[Troy Davis](#)

[Joe Kulesza](#)

[Smith Meredith](#)

[Oral Lee Thomas](#)

[Elmer Britt](#)

[Albert "Shorty" Coats](#)

[Donald Hazellett](#)

[Sherman Moffitt](#)

[Henry Scott](#)

[Clint Thompson](#)

[Gilbert Bush](#)

[Lewis Cutliff](#)

[Kathryn Kadel](#)

[Gilbert Sanders](#)

[Ray Scott](#)

[Vernon Wells](#)

[Mammoth Cave – Land Acquisition](#)

Copies of deeds relating to lands of the Vanmeter family conveyed to the Kentucky National Park Commission. Includes a list of former owners of 575 tracts of acquired for the park, and sketch maps of the tracts.

[Mammoth Cave National Park Association – Land Acquisition](#)

Copies of deeds, title abstracts, purchase summaries and other documents relating to the acquisition of land for Mammoth Cave National Park, as well as a few early administrative records.

[Mammoth Cave National Park Association](#)

Records of the Mammoth Cave National Park Association, incorporated in 1925 for the purpose of encouraging the U.S. Congress to create a national park at Mammoth Cave. The Association continued to serve as an advocacy group after the national park was established in 1941. While not complete, the records are extensive and include correspondence, meeting minutes, administrative records, clippings and superintendent's reports.

[Mammoth Cave National Park – 50th Anniversary Celebration](#)

Audiotapes in this collection include oral histories about the park and its traditions, made in June 1991 at the 50th anniversary celebration.

[Nahm, Max Brunswick, 1864-1958](#)

These papers of Max Nahm of Bowling Green, Kentucky, first president of the Mammoth Cave National Park Association, include meeting minutes, correspondence, and materials relating to all aspects of the process—funding, land acquisition, development, and legislation—by which Mammoth Cave became a national park.

[Rodes Collection](#)

A 1966 letter of Bowling Green Judge John B. Rodes reflects on his early work with the Mammoth Cave National Park Association. Included are his daughter's 1974 remarks on long-range planning for Mammoth Cave.

[Wells, Vernon P., 1914-2001](#)

An audio recording (with transcript) of Wells, a park ranger at Mammoth Cave from 1933-1942, discussing his work at the cave, and in particular the contentious process of land acquisition for the national park.

Exploring Mammoth Cave: Geology, Archaeology, History and Lore

The collections below concern miscellaneous aspects of Mammoth Cave, including the experiences of guides, scientists, and naturalists.

[Backlund, Gilbert and Peter Givens](#)

Kentucky Historic Resources Inventory (1981) of structures within Mammoth Cave National Park, some of which were constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Also includes four churches.

[Björkman, Brent Alan, b. 1964](#)

Video interviews of Mammoth Cave National Park rangers conducted from 2013-2014, part of a larger project called "Rangerlore: The Occupational Folklife of Parks." Click on the links to access interviews with:

[David Alexander](#)

[Bobby Carson](#)

[Josh Clemons](#)

[Joe Duvall](#)

[Joel Gillespie](#)

[Dan and Alice Lee](#)

[Brad McDougal](#)

[Darlene Owens](#)

[Brian Sacia](#)

[Phil and Mary Jo Veluzat](#)

[Jackie Wheet](#)

[Jerry Bransford](#)

[Vickie Carson](#)

[Lewis Cutliff](#)

[Sharon Ganci](#)

[Coy Hanson](#)

[David and Joy Lyons](#)

[Johnny Merideth](#)

[Lora Peppers](#)

[Jenny Smith](#)

[Bob Ward](#)

[David Wyrick](#)

[Jim Carroll](#)

[Bob Cetera](#)

[Chuck DeCroix](#)

[Saene Garcia](#)

[Henry T. and Pamela Sue Holman](#)

[Joy Lyons](#)

[Keven Neff](#)

[Kathy Proffitt](#)

[David Spence](#)

[Eddie Wells](#)

[Peter Zahrt](#)

[Braden, Linda](#)

“Torch Throwing in Mammoth Cave,” a student paper discussing Cave guides, torch making, and the skill of torch throwing to illuminate the Cave during tours.

[Catchings, Glenn](#)

“Mammoth Cave Folktales,” a WKU student project with Mammoth Cave National Park folktales and traditions collected from park rangers.

[De Paepe, Duane – Collector](#)

The Duane De Paepe Kentucky Cave Saltpetre History Research Collection includes historical research, field notes, cave surveys and reports on saltpetre mining in Kentucky, especially at Mammoth Cave.

[Faust, Burton Sherwood, 1898-1967](#)

Faust’s research, manuscript drafts and extensive bibliographic material relate to the chemical, historical and cultural aspects of spelean saltpetre mining in the United States, including at Mammoth Cave.

[Green, Frank Henry](#)

“Mammoth Cave Stories,” Frank Henry Green’s illustrated collection of tour narratives, stories and anecdotes relating to his work as a guide at Mammoth Cave from 1975-1986 and 2008-2009.

[Green, Frank Henry](#)

“The Rich Tradition of Torch Throwing at Mammoth Cave,” guide Frank Henry Green’s illustrated history, with technical data on making and using torches.

[Green, Frank Henry](#)

“Mammoth Dome of the Mammoth Cave National Park, Plus My Ramblings,” guide Frank Henry Green’s illustrated narrative about Mammoth Cave explorations, and a chronology of events relating to Mammoth Dome.

[Helm, Margie May, 1894-1991](#)

Research papers on Mammoth Cave maps, the Gatewoods and other cave guides, and a folk tale about Mammoth Cave.

[Mammoth Onyx Cave](#)

A 1922 letter to the cave’s owner reports on a recent study by the Kentucky Geological Survey. Includes a promotional pamphlet for the cave, opened to the public that same year.

[Medley, Joy](#)

“The Power of the Press: Elements of Folklore Surrounding ‘The Death of Floyd Collins,’” a paper discussing the song commemorating the 1925 death of Floyd Collins after he became trapped in Crystal Cave. Crystal Cave was purchased by Mammoth Cave National Park in 1961.

[Meredith, Tracy](#)

“Early History of Mammoth Cave,” a student paper focusing on early owners, guides and visitors at the Cave. Includes taped interviews with three individuals about their work at the Cave with the Civilian Conservation Corps.

[Mullin, Marsha A.](#)

Historic American Engineering Record for Mammoth Cave Saltpetre Works, prepared in 1986 by Project Historian Marsha Mullin. The Mammoth Cave Saltpetre Works “represent the most complete example known of the equipment used in the processing of cave saltpetre, a major component of gunpowder during the War of 1812.”

[Pond, Alonzo William, 1894-1986](#)

A 1935 report from this National Park Service archaeologist describes a discovery of prehistoric human remains at Mammoth Cave. Includes photographs.

[Ross, Michelle & Mark Brown](#)

An audio interview of Professor Christopher G. “Chris” Groves of WKU’s Department of Geography & Geology about Mammoth Cave.

[Smith, Gary](#)

“Legends of the Mammoth Cave Area,” a WKU student project with stories about Mammoth Cave collected from several employees, some of whom were also longtime residents of the area.

[Williams, Debbie](#)

“Cave Legends of the Mammoth Cave Region,” a WKU student project with information about Mammoth Cave collected from local informants.

[Wilson, Alexander Gordon, 1888-1970](#)

These papers of WKU English professor and folklorist Gordon Wilson include his studies of the ornithology at Mammoth Cave National Park and the folkways of the Mammoth Cave region. His diary also records a 1909 excursion to Mammoth Cave while he was a student at WKU.

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