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The Journal

The Journal of Spelean History (JSH) is the Association's publication and is mailed to all members. JSH includes articles covering a wide variety of topics relating to man's use of caves, including historical cave explorations, saltpeter and other mineral extraction, and show cave development. Members are invited to contribute material and to comment on published material. ASHA assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

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Cover: Russell Trall Neville (1879-1950) took this photo of the “Bananna Stalk” in Crystal Cave, Kentucky, circa 1924.

Billy Alton Garrison, Caver and Art Scholar

Charles A. Lundquist, Research Institute, University of Alabama Huntsville, and William W. Torode, NSS Librarian

The caver community abounds with individuals having diverse interests. Indeed, the multifaceted character of the average caver is a cultural topic worthy of notice and study. Sometimes an ardent caver becomes a notable figure in a field other than speleology. Many examples of this circumstance can be cited. Bill Garrison is such an example.

Billy Alton Garrison was born in Russellville, Alabama on February 9, 1941. His parents were Jack and Gladys Garrison. Bill attended school in Russellville through his sophomore year of high school. As a boy, he was an avid reader of books. A passion for books stayed with him for the rest of his life. He moved to Huntsville, Alabama in 1957 and graduated from Butler High School in 1959. Figure 1 is his senior class picture in the 1959 Butler High Annual. In the spring before he graduated, he had joined the National Speleological Society, NSS 4699.

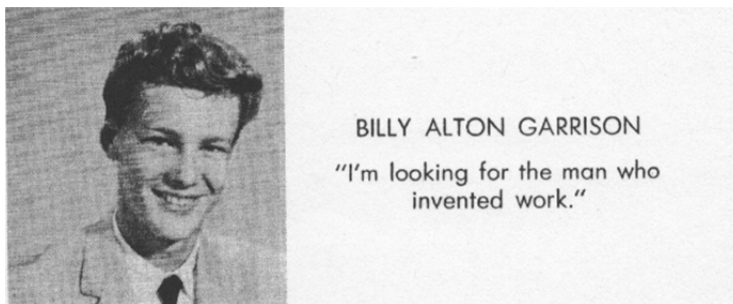


Figure 1. Butler High School 1959 senior class picture.

In 1960, he began a tour in the U.S. Army, where he became a Hawk Missile radar technician. In Okinawa, he met his wife, Ritsuko. After completing his Army tour, he returned to Huntsville. Billy and Ritsuko had one child, a daughter, Utica.

Professionally, he became a technical illustrator, working for aerospace companies such as Brown Engineering [1]. Figure 2 shows Bill at his drawing board at Brown Engineering (From Reference 1).

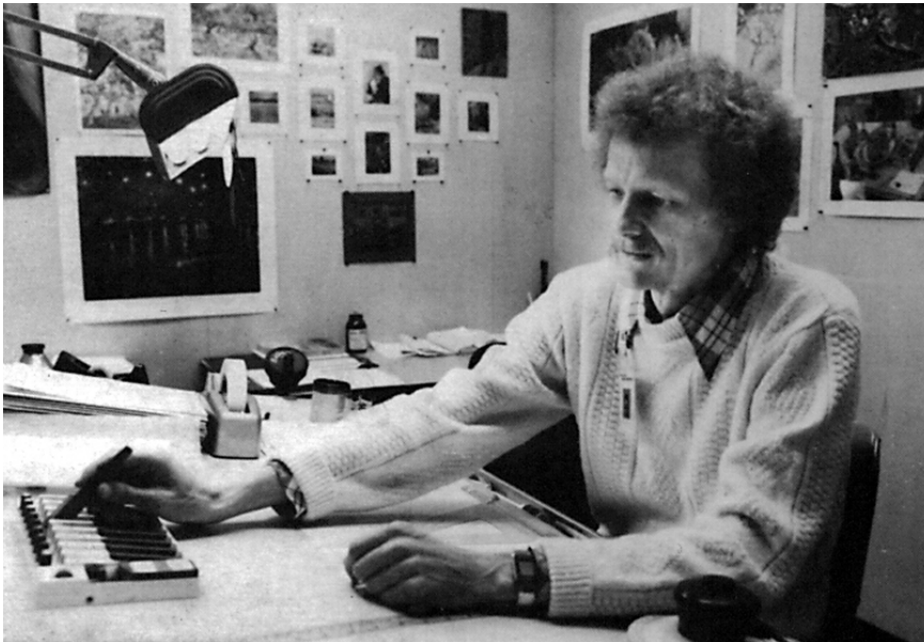


Figure 2. Bill Garrison at his board at Brown Engineering.

While living in Huntsville, Billy attended the University of Alabama Huntsville and graduated with a BA in Sociology in 1978. Later in his career, he had a business as a bookfinder. Ultimately, his work led him to live for periods of time in many cities around the United States, including Seattle, St. Louis, and San Antonio.

His last residence was in Hartwell, Georgia, where he was near some members of his family. Billy Garrison died on July 2, 2009, at age 68, after a brief stay in a hospice facility in Anderson, South Carolina [2]. A family memorial service was held in Hartwell, Georgia [3].

Huntsville Grotto

On April 11, 1959, Bill Garrison joined the NSS and the Huntsville Grotto. At that time, the Huntsville Grotto was only four years old, so he was a relatively early member of the grotto. He quickly became an ardent caver, with a particular passion for vertical exploration. Also, he immediately appreciated the importance of documenting speleological activities and discoveries. Thus he authored an *NSS News* article on the early exploration of Poplar Cave in which he had participated in 1959 [4]. The cave known at that time involved descending four pits.

Subsequently, he wrote another *NSS News* article on the Nittany Grotto – Huntsville Grotto Christmas Expedition in 1959 [5]. The ‘Expedition’ first involved a descent into Doodlebug Pit. At about 400 feet, it was one of the deeper pits then known. At this time, single-rope vertical technique was virtually unknown. Garrison relates that “It took twelve 30 foot cable ladders to rig it and we were using a 450 foot, half inch braided gold nylon mountain climbing rope for a safety”. The profile of Doodlebug Pit (AL 195) is shown in Figure 3, from Reference 5. Of course, Garrison wrote trip reports for the *Huntsville Grotto Newsletter*, some of which were reprinted in *Speleodigest*.

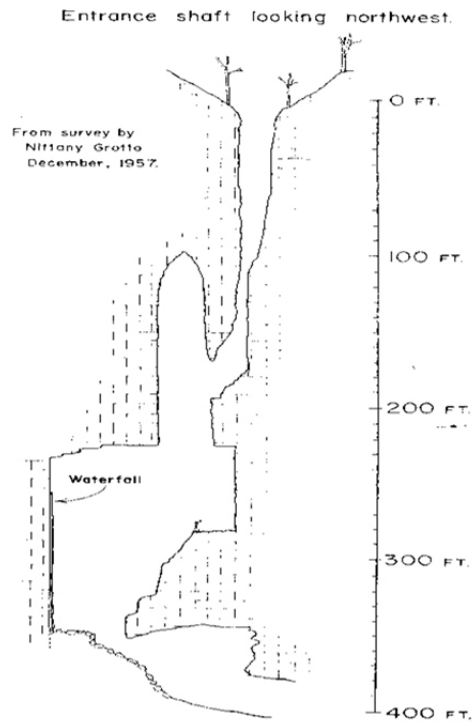


Figure 3. Profile of Doodlebug Pit, AL 195

Fern Cave, (AL 597) in a section of the Cumberland Plateau overlooking the Paint Rock River, was discovered on June 4, 1961 by members of the Huntsville Grotto. Bill Torode was the first caver to reach the lip where water falls into Surprise Pit [6]. The discoverers recognized it as a very deep pit, but were unequipped to determine its true depth. After several earlier efforts to measure its depth, Surprise Pit was first descended alone by Bill Cuddington (Vertical Bill) on July 2, 1961 [7, 8]. Bill Garrison was one of the ten other cavers present at the top of the pit. From rope lengths, Cuddington estimated that the pit was 426 foot free-fall. Later, more accurate measurements with a steel wire gave a depth of 437 feet. This was, at that time, the deepest free-fall pit known in the United States. Figure 4 is the sketch of the pit from Reference [8].

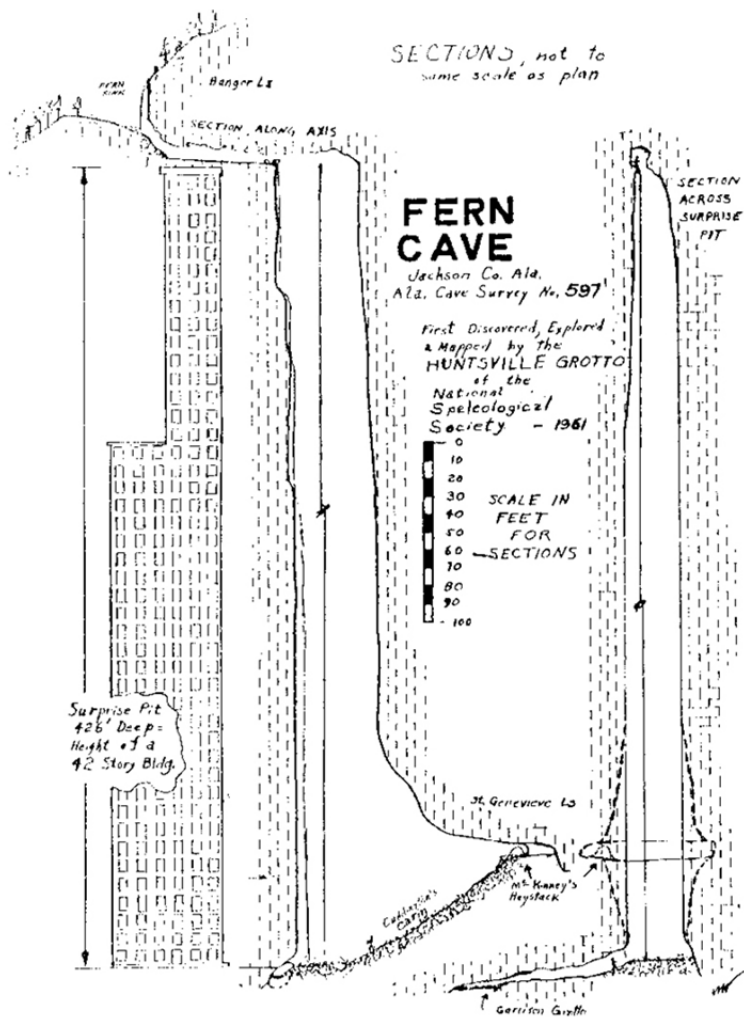


Figure 4. Surprise Pit in Fern Cave, AL 597

The next weekend, on July 8, another group of cavers went to Fern Cave with the intention of having a Huntsville NSS member descend Surprise Pit (Cuddington was from Virginia). A coin was tossed to determine whether Bill Garrison or Francis McKinney would be the first to go down that day; Francis won and became the second person to reach the bottom of Surprise Pit. Bill Garrison followed, becoming the third. Other members who remained topside included some distinguished individuals. One was Charles Mohr, a former president of the NSS. Another was Walter B. Jones, then Alabama State Geologist. Other members of the party were Bill Varnedoe, Chuck Lundquist, Verne Reckmeyer, Jim Johnson, Peter Grant and Tom Sawyer. This was truly an historic event [8, 9]. On Figure 4, the lowest point is identified as “Garrison Grotto.”

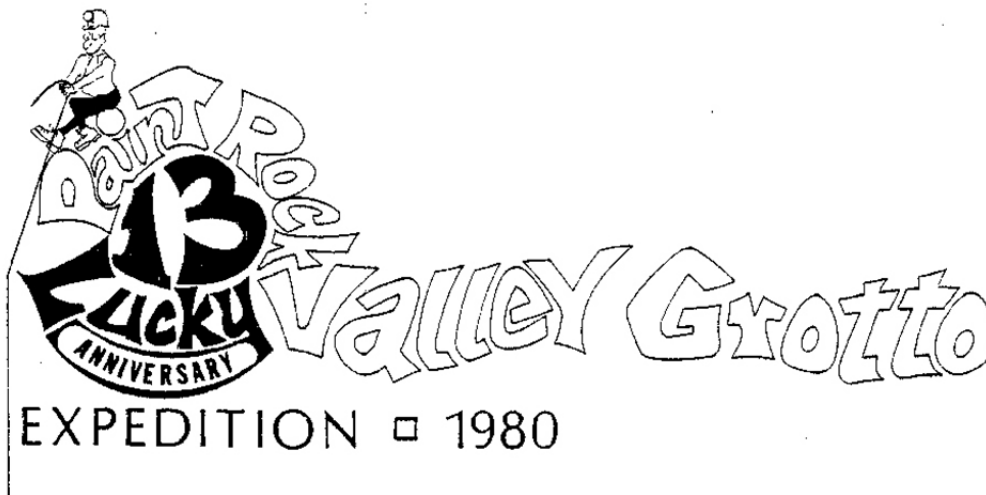
Paint Rock Valley Grotto

By 1966, the discovery and exploration of the Fern Cave System and many other major caves in the valley of the Paint Rock River had generated much attention. This circumstance seems to have motivated a group of young, independent-minded cavers to form a new NSS Grotto focused on the Paint Rock Valley. In September, Billy Garrison, Chris Kroeger, Ed Alexander, and John Veitch began

preparing the application form for the Paint Rock Valley (PRV) Grotto, which was finally dated November 19, 1966 and submitted to the NSS [10]. A charter was granted, dated January 22, 1967 [11].

Bill Garrison (NSS 4699) was the first PRV Grotto chairman, elected for an indefinite period, which turned out to be the total duration of the grotto existence. The PRV Grotto prided itself on informality in the 'hippie' spirit of the time. It published no newsletter, but occasionally distributed information to its members in a "nonnewsletter." The grotto by-laws specified three classes of membership: full (must also be NSS member), associate, and irregular. There were many irregular members, embracing various individuals with some interest in Paint Rock Valley caves. Bill Garrison's home became a common meeting place where members assembled frequently for conversations and social functions.

The Paint Rock Valley Grotto regularly submitted annual reports through 1972. After that date, the activities of the grotto members declined in scale and frequency.



However, there was a "Thirteenth Annual Bash" for the members in 1980 at a site in the Paint Rock Valley. This seems to have been a 'last hurrah' for the grotto. The art work above, by Garrison, headed the 'nonnewsletter' announcing the event [12].

Obsession with van Gogh

In addition to caves, Bill Garrison developed an interest in the art and life of Vincent van Gogh. This interest developed into what could be called an obsession. He sought to collect a copy of every publication about van Gogh. In 1982, while Bill was employed as a technical illustrator for Brown Engineering in Huntsville, the company news flier had an article about him [1]. At that time, of the 165 books on van Gogh, Bill was reported to own all but 16.

Bill also produced a comprehensive bibliography of van Gogh material. In 1980 he visited the van Gogh Museum and its library in Amsterdam. This library holds the largest collection of van Gogh material in the world. The Brown Engineering article relates that "To the head librarian's astonishment, Garrison owned nine books the museum didn't have. He later mailed these to the library and was awarded a certificate as a Contributing Fellow to the museum" [1].

Bill's collecting of van Gogh material and his compiling of a van Gogh Bibliography continued. In a 1999 letter from Huntsville to Fieke Pabst, Documentalist at the van Gogh Museum [13], Billy says "I am back hard at work on the never-ending Bibliography. Since I have to move around so much in my work, it is hard to take all the stuff I need to work on it, so I have had my van Gogh book collection (about 600 volumes now) in storage. In the past ten years, I have worked in St. Louis, San Antonio, Mobile, Dallas, Austin, back to San Antonio, Huntsville, Seattle, back to San Antonio, and now back to Huntsville." Later in the letter Bill continues "The Bibliography has almost 1685 items now. I recently printed a working copy for myself (to proofread), and it is 160 pages of 8 point type. I have information on about 1500 more – either complete or partial descriptions. ... My plan is to finish entering the approximately 1500 items I have left, then try to find a publisher."

During the later years of his life, Bill offered a free-lance book finding service. Figure 5 is a reproduction of a business card he used.

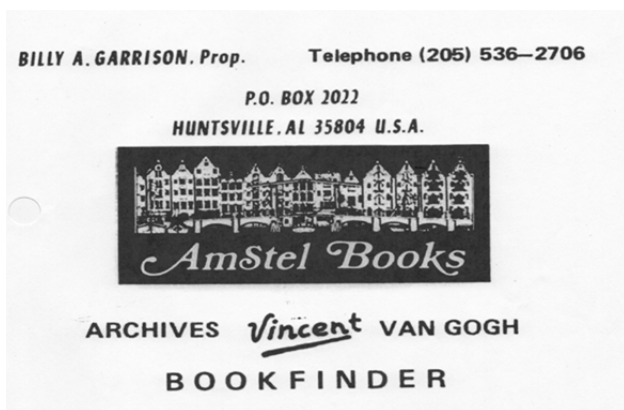


Figure 6. A Billy Garrison business card.

After Billy Garrison's death his world class collection of van Gogh material was donated to his alma mater, the University of Alabama Huntsville. This university is also the alma mater of his daughter, Utica, and her husband, Charles K. Crouch. This Billy Garrison collection, including the van Gogh Bibliography [14], is housed in the Archives of the Salmon Library at the university, where it can be accessed by art scholars and historians.



Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful for access to documents from the NSS Library and Archives and from the Archives and Special Collections at the Salmon Library of the University of Alabama Huntsville. The UAH oral history interview with Utica Garrison Crouch was particularly valuable. The authors thank Teledyne Brown Engineering for use of a photograph from "Brown News." The authors also thank David W. Hughes, Peter Grant and Christian Kroeger for permission to use information and photographs they provided.

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The History of Oklahoma Caves

Joe Looney

Humans have been involved with Oklahoma caves since the first proto-Indians arrived in the area as long as 22,000 years ago, some archaeologists contend, or, as other scholars maintain, around 500 years ago. However long ago men arrived, they left artifacts in some caves in eastern counties, suggesting that they lived in them, and in other counties in southern and western Oklahoma showing that they made occasional use of them.

The most visited Oklahoma cave is one which obviously would have been attractive to early humans. Bolton Cave is in a cliff above a park on the north side of the SH 10-U.S. 59 bridge over Lake Eucha (and Spavinaw Creek), a few miles south of Jay in Delaware County. It is heavily visited because it can be seen from a popular picnic area and campground. Bolton's entrance is 75 feet wide and 15 feet high, with a room of a few hundred square feet sloping west and north.

The humans who lived in the cave had easy access to Spavinaw Creek, and likely didn't use the "drip water" in summer. But it was important to these people as in winter, the pools provided enough water that the people would not have had to brave the winter cold to go to the creek. Archaeologists found typical history: beer and cola cans at the top, bottles further down, and finally bones, arrow and spear points, and other suggestions of "cave men" at the lowest levels.

A mile east of Bolton, high on a bluff above a popular picnic and party area on Spavinaw Creek just above the head of Lake Eucha, is a group of caves known to the public as the "Pit Caves." Caver Bill Puckette (NSS 10934) quoted oldtimers as remarking that Indians sometimes camped or stayed in these caves for hundreds of years, but any physical evidence has been wiped out by the hundreds of local people frequently visiting these easily-reached caves.

Signs of ancient men also were found in Adair County in Charley Owl Cave, one of many caves on Gittin'down Mountain. These caves are protected through ownership by conservationist individuals (the family of the late Don Russell, NSS 9417), the National Speleological Society, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nature Conservancy.

Charley Owl has a rectangular entrance 15 by 25 feet, sloping steeply into a large room. When NSS members first visited this property in 1967, Mr. Owl said that "college guys" had done digging in the cave. In 1973, Dr. Sherman Lawton and the University of Oklahoma's Oklahoma Anthropological Society did a detailed, professional dig and found 36 arrow and spear points, and a sandstone metate and mano, used in grinding grain, suggesting a fairly advanced hunter-gatherer culture.

Lawton determined that the artifacts were 400 to 1,100 years old. There were animal bones and evidence of fires. Excavators also found human bones, believed by Lawton to be those of a man, a woman and a child, buried in the cave. The excavators also found a wooden water trough, 27 inches long, six inches wide and deep. It was made with crude cutting tools scarred by fire. It was about 500 years old. It had been preserved, Lawton concluded, because it stayed wet because it was in an area where water, with a high mineral content, dripped constantly.

Jack Squirrel Cave, a marvelous shelter on the northeast edge of Grand Lake, was a paleo-Indian shelter for probably hundreds of years, and a “bootlegger bar” in the 1920s and for a time during Oklahoma’s “dry” era up through 1958.

Western Oklahoma's gypsum caves, however, did not accumulate the floors of limestone and chert gravel like the limestone caves and thus few artifacts were preserved in them. However, human bones were found in Middle McCarty Cave, Woodward County. During a trip with Central Oklahoma Grotto in the 1970s. I was descending into the cave, a pit with lots of broken rocks and debris. About five feet down, I spotted the top of a human skull. Also on this trip was Fontaine Apostol (NSS 13933), an archaeology student at the University of Oklahoma. She reported this find to a professor, who brought class members to excavate this find. They found fingers and much of the rest of the skull. The bones were those of a young man from about a hundred years earlier. He likely was a member of one of the plains tribes. He might have been buried in the cave, if his tribe lived nearby, or his bones might have washed into the cave during a flood.

Arrow and spear points have been found in many Ozark caves. There were dozens in the entrance chamber of Wickler Cave a mile east of the Mary and Murray Looney unit of the Ozark Plateau National Wildlife Refuge. It has the largest entrance of any limestone cave in Oklahoma, an arch 110 by 20 feet high.

I also found points in two caves 30 miles west on Spavinaw Creek, downstream from Spavinaw Dam. They were chips of agate which originated in Ohio’s Flint Ridge State Park. Similar “agate” flints were found at a shelter cave near Wyandotte in Ottawa County. All in all, records of use of caves in “cave man” times are a bit scarce in Oklahoma, as they are in the rest of the world. But there is evidence of later use.

What today is Oklahoma was claimed first by Spain then by France. Men from those countries did a bit of exploring but left little evidence which archaeologists could find. Anglo culture did not arrive in the future Oklahoma until after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. It became “Territory” after the actions of President Andrew Jackson in the 1830s to “remove” virtually all of the Indians from the states east of the Appalachians.

The Cherokee and Chickasaw “nations” were established in those parts of Oklahoma where most of its limestone caves are found, Delaware, Adair, Cherokee, Ottawa, Mayes and Sequoyah counties. (“Cherokee” is a combined rendition of the name Cherokees call themselves, Tsa-la-ghi, and the Creek name for them, “Chalakee” or, “the Cave People.”)

The NSS-owned Potter Unit Cave Preserve is in the middle of the Cherokee nation, as is the Mary and Murray Looney unit of the Ozark Plateau National Wildlife Refuge and the Don Russell Nature Preserve, donated to the NSS in 1971.

Chickasaw cave country is centered in Murray County, spreading slightly into Pontotoc and adjacent counties, and includes Wild Woman Cave, which was the first major cave project of Oklahoma’s first NSS Grotto, the Arbuckle Mountains Grotto.

Spanish Cave, on the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Comanche County, Oklahoma, has unusual markings which legend claims were made by Spanish explorers, or perhaps by “settlers” or people who came to prospect for gold. Spanish Cave was mentioned in the WPA’s *Oklahoma: a Guide*

to the Sooner State, published in 1941, with precise descriptions to reach it. The book related that the cave “opens from the side of a canyon wall. Inside, the walls are of yellow stone, spotted with a clinging olive-hued moss. The floor, stained by countless campfires, is a solid ledge of red granite, flecked with a blue substance.”

Buford Morgan’s 1973 *The Wichita Mountains: Ancient Oasis of the Prairies* adds that “the cave derives its name from paintings on its walls; believed to have been left by Spanish prospectors.... Three Spanish-type markings decorate the cave walls. Two are crudely drawn ‘Spanish Crosses’ while the third resembles a symbol of the sun, or perhaps a turtle.”

The WPA guide noted that for years, in the Wichita Mountains gold seekers dug up most of the ground around these places, finding no gold. Local tales claim, without documentation, that in 1902, “prospectors found the body of a small boy which had been mummified.” With the body were Spanish coins “dating to 1821, along with a few leather bags.” The WPA guide locates the cave as being near “Treasure Mountain, where scores of hunters have dug for gold said to have been cached here in the seventeenth century by Spaniards.” Most of the treasure tales sound a lot like the yarns which Americans have made up since the days of Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett when pioneers heading west were sitting around campfires.

For many years, “treasure maps” showed up frequently in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Missouri. They were scribbled on scratch paper, allegedly copied from “the original” drawn by Spaniards who supposedly buried the gold. Almost all of these maps depict a stream with a cave next to it, in which the alleged makers of the original map had hidden his gold. Between the Rio Grande in New Mexico and Texas, and the Ozarks of the “three states,” are a score or so caves with entrances beside streams. Many of these have been identified, mostly in 1920s-30s newspaper articles, as “the cave” in which the maker of the original old map hid all of his gold. (No original map ever has been found; all of the maps treasure hunters used are copies dating from the early 20th Century.)

The wildest treasure tale which COG explorers came across in the course of one of Central Oklahoma Grotto’s more interesting explorations, was chronicled by E. Buford Morgan in a article “The Treasure of Bat Cave.”

Oklahoma cavers know that perhaps a third of the caves in Western Oklahoma are called “Bat Cave” because most of them have large populations of either the cave bat, *Myotis velifer*, or the Mexican-free-tailed Bat, *Tadarida brasiliensis*. This particular “bat cave” stretches the term a bit, because there are no ceilings in the cave on which bats can “hang out” or high ceilinged rooms that enable bats to drop from the ceiling and begin to fly.

Morgan wrote that a popular story of buried treasure in the Wichitas concerns the “legendary platinum” from this cave. According to old-timers, the story began when a prospector turned up in Oklahoma City with sixty pounds of almost pure platinum which he said had been recovered from a cave in the Slick Hills, about nine miles northwest of Meers. This account pretty accurately describes a cave which looks like the one which Central Oklahoma Grotto calls “Windmill Cave.”

Morgan gave a pretty accurate description of this cave. “Entrance. . .is made through a vertical shaft with a depth of about sixty feet. . .at the bottom of the shaft, a large tunnel-like room extends both

to the east and to the west. In one end, there is a deep pool of water, reported to have sheltered the treasure, and according to some people, still shelters some of it.”

Someone dropped a ladder into the cave; this “ladder” actually was a dozen or so yards of hog-wire fence, a type of fencing consisting of six-inch woven squares of thick steel wire, tough enough that a hog couldn’t get through it. Getting to Windmill Cave is delightful. The whole trip along a limestone ridge called “The Slick Hills” provides an outstanding view of the Wichitas. Any cattle rancher in this part of Oklahoma, where water for cattle and such is not that easy to come by, would have quickly set up a windmill to pump water from pools in any similar cave or pit.

Thus, when the treasure stories began, one fellow ran pipes down into the water, hooked up a pump and began trying to pump the water out so he could get to the platinum. He pumped it into a wide sink north of the cave entrance, so in effect he was pumping the water right back into the cave.

When COG arrived at Windmill, the Bozemans, Looneys and other COG cavers looked warily at the hog-wire “ladder,” so John and Sue Bozeman rigged a nylon rope and the cavers dropped into the cave with proper equipment. They found neither the “large tunnel” nor any place where bats could hang. No written accounts of this cave give any clue as to why it was called “Bat Cave.”

Another legend tells of “The Cave With the Iron Door.” Morgan tells readers that, “Somewhere in the vastness of the mountains lies a legendary cave, sealed with a steel door, and hidden so cunningly that it is almost impossible to find. This is the fabled cave with the iron door. A cave surrounded with mystery, and endowed with properties bordering on the supernatural. It is reputed to contain a fabulous fortune; to possess an uncanny ability to conceal itself from treasure seekers, and a perverse inclination to reveal its presence to the unsuspecting for a few moments, then fade again into obscurity.” (This chap was the first writer in Oklahoma to utilize the dread “hyperbole” in writing about caves.)

Morgan claims the Frank and Jesse James gang hid tons of loot in the mountains, possibly in this cave, and the infamous Belle Starr also stashed treasure there. The iron door, Morgan claims, was a stolen item. Belle is alleged to have robbed a train of a half million bucks in gold, and stole the door off the baggage car so she could gate her cave. Belle supposedly is buried in or near a cave on the South Canadian River 40 or 50 miles west of Oklahoma City, in an area where no “true” caves are known. The WPA *Oklahoma Guide* gave directions to Belle’s hideout and grave site on the South Canadian, but the site today is part of the huge area which was drowned under Eufaula Reservoir in the 1950s.

One of the first members of the National Speleological Society in Oklahoma was a *Daily Oklahoman* photographer named A. Y. Owen (NSS 427). He is best known in speleo-history as part of the group of daredevils who figured out how to get into and out of the Devil’s Sinkhole in Texas, in the era before single-rope techniques for “deep” caves were developed. Owen also was proud of the caves he had explored in Oklahoma, and so invited many famous early NSS cavers (Bill Stephenson (NSS 3), Lydia Neubuck, (NSS 423) and Bill Petrie (NSS 126), among others, to come tour Oklahoma.

A. Y.’s proudest exhibit was Black Hollow Cave, in a wooded valley on the south shore of Spavinaw Lake. The November, 1947, *NSS News* reported “the entire group went across two-mile Spavinaw Lake via motor boats to Black Hollow Cave, which has an unusual amount of fossils imbedded into the ceiling and sides of the cave.”

The earliest published newspaper articles about Oklahoma caves, were from the *Daily Oklahoman*. A Sept. 24, 1908, article was datelined “ Sulphur, I.T.,” and headlined “Mystic Cave Near Sulphur Boasts River.” (I.T. meant “Indian Territory.” The dateline is technically incorrect in that it was written eleven months after Indian Territory was merged into Oklahoma Territory to form the State of Oklahoma. Sulphur had been a community in the Chickasaw Nation, which donated an area of unusual mineral springs to the U. S. National Park Service; it functioned for almost a century as the smallest national park, before it was merged into a large National Recreation Area around a large reservoir. An unknown number of seldom visited caves are reportedly in this federal reserve.

An Oct. 4, 1930, article was headlined “Explorers Visit the Mystic Cave—Members of Party Tell Story of Their Thrilling Experiences.” The account said, “The crowd that went out today to further explore the Mystic cave returned into late tonight with account of thrilling adventures and new discoveries.” The story named four spelunkers and their guide. “They were equipped with electric search lights, a collapsible boat, plenty of rope and bathing suits.”

Thus equipped, the group found lots of cave: “They found two new openings into larger caverns heretofore undiscovered and unexplored. They rowed down the Mystic river about 300 yards beyond the natural bridge where their progress was stopped by a great waterfall of more than 200 feet. Beyond this fall as far as their search lights would penetrate the darkness, the cave became larger and the river wider, and the volume of water seemed to be increased many times. Just before leaving the cave the explorers donned bathing togs and took a swim in the big lake in the ‘Council Chamber.’ ” The council chamber is “bigger than the great cavern through which the Mystic river flows.” A bit further on the stream was heard “the noises of a great storm or raging cyclone. No one has dared to penetrate the darkness beyond this passage.”

Well, with that tough exploring, it was lunchtime. “The explorers caught a number of the white-eyed fish that abound in the lake and river and had a fish fry after making their first exit from the cave.” At any rate, “The visitors pronounce the Mystic cave the greatest natural wonder they have ever seen. Tomorrow they will be joined by others on an expedition to the Burning Mountain which is again smoking and in eruption.”

The 200-foot waterfall must have been in some other well-hidden cave, because no recent Oklahoma explorers have come across a waterfall that size, which naturally would have been in a 200-foot vertical shaft. This is an obvious exaggeration; the deepest known vertical shaft in Oklahoma, as reported by pioneer Oklahoma caver Jack Burch (NSS 2175), is an 85-foot shaft which we in COG have not been able find (it’s supposedly right on top of a cliff.) COG poked into a few in the 40 to 50 foot range in the gypsum country.

I have come across references in 1930s Oklahoma state history books, some newspaper accounts in small town weekly newspapers in southern Oklahoma, a few old diaries in libraries from Ada to Lawton, and “oldtimer” conversations with chaps I met around country store pot-bellied stoves in the 60s, describing the mysterious “Burning Mountain.”

Somewhere, there may be places where natural seeping from a porous rock formation, as happens in parts of the Hale Formation in Adair County, has been set ablaze by natural brush fires, or sparks from caver and camper campfires. The porous red Hale is atop the Pitkin in much of Adair

County; joints in the Hale and some natural acidity in the rock has contributed to the alteration of some of the passages in the Pitkin formation.

Some of us who visited caves have had the experience of having chunks of this reddish sandstone near to campfires suddenly “explode” when the rock cracks open. These early cavers may have had the habit of telling cute stories about strange things they had found in caves in order to impress reporters, in the era before most cavers had decided to avoid public revelations of the caves they had discovered out “thar in them thar hills.”

Another such tale came 22 years later, when the Oklahoman’s correspondent in Sulphur, Alvin Rucker, gave an interesting account headlined, “Mystic Cave Near Sulphur Boasts River. One Stream, 65 Feet Under Surface, is Navigable, Writer Declares.” This was his optimistic account: “A business opportunity at Sulphur awaits someone with a small amount of capital. He will have no competitor and his patrons will be the thousands whose sense of thrill has become jaded by riding in airships, parachute jumping, by riding the ‘figure 8’ and speeding in automobiles. In addition to the money he will make, he will be Charon and his kingdom will be Erebus through which flows the mysterious river Styx and Cocytus and his boats will be the most trusted in all the world. . . east of Sulphur, there is a large cave in which flows two navigable streams, one . . . 35 feet below the earth’s surface and the other 65. . . On the 65-foot level stream there are now nine boats, two of which are new, the others being of various ages and conditions.” They were “placed on the underground river by adventurers seeking the thrill of under-ground navigation on the mysterious stream. During the past 20 years, many have swam and waded the stream at least a half mile up stream. In places the ceiling. . . is so low as to force waders and boatmen to bend low. In other places the ceiling is as high as that of an ordinary room.” The writer notes “it is essential to safety that each explorer possess a flash light, regardless of how many are in the party, and no one should venture into the stream with more clothing than a bathing suit.”

Ah, but comes the profit-seeker: “The Sulphur chamber of commerce . . . emulating Carlsbad, tried to find some one to thoroughly explore and exploit the cave as a tourist attraction.” They’d need stairs, the chamber warns, because “the descent is very difficult except to athletes and venturesome young persons. Blind fish and blind crawfish are in both streams . . . Although it cannot be compared with the Carlsbad cavern in size, the rivers make it infinitely more mysterious, as the Carlsbad cavern is bone dry.”

In 1960, R. C. Harrell published in the *Proceedings of the Oklahoma Academy of Science*, “A preliminary report on the invertebrate animals of Wild Woman Cave. A year before, N. M. Curtis Jr. had published “Caves in the Arbuckle Mountains area of Oklahoma” and “Cottonwood Cave, Sequoyah County, Oklahoma,” in *Oklahoma Geology Notes*. It was that latter publication which later cavers found in the Oklahoma City library that led the Looney family to Cottonwood; for a brief period Oklahoma cavers referred to Cottonwood as the state’s “largest” cave (they had not yet begun the NSS practice of referring to “length”).

With his 1960 article Harrell was the first scientist to recognize that Oklahoma’s cave biology was outstanding enough to relate the caves of the state to “great caves” in other states.

Another early article about Oklahoma caves was in the May 16, 1948, edition of the *Daily Oklahoman*, with a photo of a lady in slacks admiring speleothems in Black Hollow Cave. This article has descriptions of Mystic, Robbers Cave, Crystal Cave near Marble City, Black Hollow, “Bat cave a

few miles east of Vinson, south of Reed,” Basket Makers, and four of the Corn Caves. The article stated that Alabaster Caverns has “25 or 30 different rooms, 185 feet underground. The survey of Alabaster by Central Oklahoma grotto uncovered no such features or depth. The article concludes saying “Other caves are located near Okeene in Blaine county; west of Orienta in Major county; near Vamoosa and southwestern Seminole county, and near Flint in southern Delaware County.” All of these locations are spots where modern COG and Tulsa cavers have found caves, all of them quite near well-traveled state highways and thus visited by casual spelunkers and, eventually, NSS cavers, over the years. The Orienta group obviously includes the Vickery karst; the Vamoosa group is the small bunch now largely destroyed in Seminole County north of Ada, while “near Flint” is the Red Bluff group and a few others in Delaware County.

This article began a “tradition” which was carried on by *Oklahoma City Times* columnist R. G. Miller for years. Once every year or so, he would list in his “Smoking Room” column, “all of the caves in Oklahoma” which were reported to him by his readers. Country folks sent him items ranging from prize recipes at county fairs to parties for golden anniversaries and visits by school or other groups to caves in the countryside.

Early Oklahoma NSS members in the state explored many easily-found caves and did articles for the *NSS News*. Two “Caves of Oklahoma” articles were published in the society’s newsletter in 1955.

In January, Del Walker (NSS 1562) penned *Some Caves of Oklahoma*, which borrows a bit of copy from the *WPA Oklahoma Guide*. He and his wife poked around the area later named “Horseshoe Valley” by Central Oklahoma Grotto cavers. He noted that “ all six or eight of these sink-holes and small cave entrances lead into the main passages of Dry Cave.... You will find very little formation in the two miles of tunnels, but you will be delighted in studying the effects of solution in gypsum.”

These caves described by Walker, I learned in the 1990s, when reading journals of early American Army explorers which I located in the stacks of the Bartlesville city library, are the same caves which were found by soldiers under Army Capt. Randolph Marcy in the 1850s They were listed by Burch, as “Reed Cave”, “Dry Cave” and “Vinson Cave” on a list he known Oklahoma caves he gave to Central Oklahoma Grotto members in 1967. And so, by an interesting coincidence, the first caves in Oklahoma to be found and reported in official documents by “Anglo Americans” are also the first caves to be studied and recorded in print by Oklahoma members of the National Speleological Society.

Walker and his caving companions found thousands of bats in the caves along what is today named Cave Creek, and naturally named one “Bat Cave.” A natural bridge is next to another, which naturally was called “Natural Bridge Cave.” He noted that a cave called Jester is eight miles north, and he says “do not waste your time exploring the several sinkholes approaching this particular cave; they are plugged up. Jester Cave is over two miles in length and is said to have another sink type entrance to the north.” He got that right. Jester, with 63 entrances, may hold the U. S. record for the number of entrances to a single cave and for many years was the longest surveyed cave in the state.

In the April, 1955, *NSS News*, V. A. Watson (NSS 1930) of Ardmore wrote an article grandly titled “Caves of Oklahoma.” He tells of a trip made by him and Burch to Corn, where they visited six of the caves near that Washita County community (He gave no clue as to how they had found out about those caves. Those of us who in the 1960s tracked down the many rumors of caves on Jack’s famous

“list” of caves, noted that Jack does not say how he found out about these various caves. He obviously had sources. One of Jack’s caving companions worked in the County Agent’s office, and these officials often know about interesting things on all of the farms in their counties.

Watson’s account tells of a cave in the Corn group which obviously is the one known to COG as Gyp Falls. This article mentions something they found in one of the caves which really impressed the reporter: “... an endless series of travertine dams similar to those in the Arbuckle Mountains.” This feature readily identifies the cave as possibly one of those studied by Del Walker in 1955, and definitely one which Vivian and I found years later and named “Gypsum Falls,” for a waterfall where the cave stream flows over a steep gypsum creek bank into Gyp Creek. Their name was shortened to Gyp Falls by later explorers from Central Oklahoma Grotto who found the cave independently. Walker reported that the cave has numerous “rimstone dams” of calcium carbonate, not calcium sulfate, one of the more spectacular examples of speleothems of “lime” rather than “gyp.” As noted below, Walker and Watson noticed this oddity, even if they did not then recognize what is an important aspect of western Oklahoma gypsum caves. Many have speleothems of calcium or magnesium carbonate, (limestone and dolomite) as a result of the many strata of rocks above the gypsum with carbonate, rather than sulphate, mineralogy. “This cave,” Watson wrote, “as far as we know is nameless and about a half mile in length. It is a tunnel for a small stream. We headed down-stream, walking upright and comfortable but soon we came upon some low natural terraces that completely dammed the stream. As we descended, these terraces became higher and held more mud and other debris. These terraces were beautiful and unlike any that we had ever seen. They looked like the limestone travertine terraces of the Arbuckle Mountain streams. These little dams got higher and the mud deeper until our progress was slowed to a crawl.” Anyone familiar with lots of Oklahoma caves will notice that this passage strongly resembles the famous series of rimstone dams with mud piled behind them in Three Forks Cave on the Don Russell Cave preserve.

Watson and Burch, too, prowled to Reed to examine Dry Cave and Bat Cave. They got quite a surprise. Watson said they “expected a few hundred” bats but “we were in for a surprise, for when the bats began to spiral out like the smoke from a huge campfire. The bats emerged for an hour and fifteen minutes. They estimated that there were between 600,000 and a million. They camped, and in the morning had the experience few cavers have with bats, being there when they flew back home to the cave: “The sound of whirling wings was like a strong wind as they plummeted from a height to the portal of the cave.” Walker said that when the bats all had arrived home, the cavers went into the cave “and trampled over huge piles of guano to disturb the bats to flight in such numbers that we could not see and the bats did not have room to fly without striking us and each other.”

Burch, Watson, and Walker went all over the state, finding many caves. Their “biggest” was Selman, in Woodward County.. A note on their map of this cave, which they called “Virgin Cave,” has the notation “possibly Oklahoma’s largest cave.” This note was alongside the map in what is one of the largest rooms in a gypsum cave anywhere in the United State. These cavers also examined, and mapped, a cave a mile or so east of “Virgin” cave, the Selman Bat Cave, which has a large colony of Mexican Free-tailed bats.

The Arbuckle cavers also located and mapped, more or less, Cottonwood Cave in Sequoyah County, which they also announced as the largest cave so far found in the state, and Twin Cave in Delaware County. Theirs was the first decent map of Twin, while their map of Cottonwood bears little resemblance to the cave; no satisfactory map of this complicated cave has been done to this day. Their

wanderings included going to the Adair County railroad community of Bunch where they reported “Yellow Cave” near the Bunch Community Center, and a “cave on a hilltop” in Adair County. Jack’s list included a cave with the attention-getting name of “Twenty Room Cave.”

In later years, Tulsa Grotto cavers established that “Yellow” and “Twenty Room” were the caves today known as Charley Owl and Three Forks. Locals referred to them as “Charley Owl’s Cave” and “Jones Cave,” for the families who lived at the bottom of the hill at that time.

The “cave on a hilltop” proved to be Duncan Field. In Burch’s description, he said this cave was only about 300 feet long. The early Arbuckle explorers did not notice two crawlways at floor level, each of which, years later, led Tulsa Grotto explorers into thousands of feet of apparently virgin cave. There are many unverified claims made by assorted non NSS spelunkers that they had prowled through “miles and miles” of what, in 2009, is claimed as the longest cave in Oklahoma.

Arbuckle Mountain Grotto’s forays into far corners of Oklahoma ended with a discovery in their own back yards. One of Oklahoma’s frequent “dust bowl” droughts, still going on in the 1950s, enabled them to slither their way into what had long been thought of as a tiny little cave in the Arbuckles. This cave was noteworthy because of an unfortunate lady of the depression years, named Ethel Hindeman. She was a young, pretty woman who made her home near Turner Falls. As a young lady in the 1920s, she hung out with barnstorming airplane pilots and other such performers of daring stunts common in that era.

During the dry “depression” years, farmers everywhere were in search of potential water well sites. Ethel daringly slithered into a natural vertical shaft on a hilltop a mile or so from Turner Falls, found water in a cave down below, and gave directions for the ranchers for where to drill. One of the well drillers remarked, “Ethel Hindeman was sure a wild woman,” and so the name was attached to the cave. This “wild woman,” it is said, moved to Hollywood and became a motion picture stuntwoman, finally returned to Oklahoma, married, had children, moved to Pawhuska, Oklahoma, and lived to a ripe old age, and was not known ever to gone into any more caves.

When, years later, Jack Burch and others slithered through the spring at one end and went into the cave, they assumed there probably were other entrances and set off a smoke bomb. Smoke emerged in a sinkhole crack, and Jack and his group found their way through this crack into the cave. They thought it was a “new entrance,” but it sounds a great deal like description of the vertical shaft made by “the wild woman” of the ‘20s. I’ve heard more than one story of local people having pushed far into caves, long before modern “speleologists” come along and assume that they have discovered miles of “virgin” cave.

The *Daily Ardmorite* newspaper published an item about the “wild woman’s” cave, and I heard of it from a friend on that staff of the newspaper and got in touch with Burch. Jack invited Joe to come to Springer and join in a trip he was making with newsman Mac Magalliard from the Ardmore newspaper. I came along with a lady named Donna Kirkendoll, who became the first female since “the wild woman” to actually tour the cave, and spent several hours poking through this huge cave. Burch and pals had mapped over 10,000 feet of passages and in those days the few serious Oklahoma cavers doubted whether any other cave in the state ever would surpass this length.

My account of the trip, along with an interesting photo of the young woman admiring a stalagmite which Burch had found in the gravel of the spring outside the cave, was published in the

Oklahoma City Times in March of 1959, followed by an article with pictures in the cave, which was sent to *The Daily Oklahoman* by Magalliard. The *Times* article was headlined “Wild Woman Cave Can’t Frighten Cityan.” Burch said he wanted to make Wild Woman into a commercial operation, since it was located less than a mile from where old U.S. 77 crossed the mountains. But the rancher, a wealthy oilman named Chapman, thought that a cave would interfere with his cattle grazing and so he turned the idea down. It is difficult to imagine what a money-maker that cave would have become, particularly in later years when one of the Midwest’s busiest Interstate Highways was built just a couple of miles away, and the huge Chickasaw National Recreation Area appeared on the scene a few miles to the east. It could well have turned Murray County into something akin to Branson, Missouri, or Gatlinburg, N. C., but with perhaps superior natural attractions-- lots of easily reached wild caves in the immediate area of the beautiful Turner Falls, the spectacular Washita River canyon and other such attractions. (Some of us older Okies regard it as fortunate that the Arbuckles did not get turned into some kind of Branson or Gatlinburg.

A note on caves appears in *Oklahoma Geology Notes*, a publication of the Oklahoma Geological Survey in Norman, in its June, 1960, issue. The author was Arthur J. Myers, who wrote a number of items in this and similar publications about caves and karst in Oklahoma, many of which have geological observations which differ from conclusions reached by John Bozeman, David Jagnow and other professional geologists who spent time in western Oklahoma caves.

In one Myers article, we read: “Alabaster Caverns is the largest known gypsum cave in the world. The main chamber is 2,256 feet long . . .” At that time this famous show cave, the only gypsum cave lighted and shown to tourists, was in fact not even the largest known gypsum cave in Woodward County. It is just a few miles from Selman.

Myers wrote at least four articles dealing with gypsum karst in the state, and led noted cave geologist J Harlan Bretz to Alabaster Caverns. This trip resulted in an article “A Solution Cave on Gypsum,” in a 1952 edition of the *Journal of Geology*. In this article Bretz sought to apply his observations of “vadose and phraetic features” in limestone caves to this gypsum cave.

Bretz noted that the management of Alabaster Caverns told him about a cave nearby with “stalactites as thick as your arm.” He wrote several paragraphs explaining why it was very unlikely that any stalactites of that size could possibly be found in a gypsum cave.

Still, one should never ignore tips from locals about caves. Some years later, members of COG were exploring the caves in Alabaster Caverns State Park, and a few others in the immediate neighborhood. They entered a nice cave on the southeast edge of a huge valley sink spread south of many of the entrances into Alabaster Caverns and others in the state park.

Not far into the cave, the COG group came upon “stalactites as thick as your arm.” They proved to be calcium or magnesium carbonate, from the “carbonate” layers a few inches thick at the top of the Blaine gypsum in which Alabaster is excavated. Interestingly, Myers, in his *Oklahoma Geology Notes* article made an observation about gypsum caves which was confirmed in later years by the work of Oklahoma geologists-speleologists John Bozeman and David Jagnow. In his article, Myers cited a 1938 publication by geologist C. A. Mallot, in the Geological Society of America Proceedings, titled “Invasion Theory of Cavern Development.” It essentially suggested that surface water “invaded” limestone (or gypsum), and eroded caves along faults or joints through which the water first seeped, then flowed. A principal difference in limestone and gypsum cave formation hinges on the fact that

limestone can only be dissolved by water with acid content, while gypsum dissolves in neutral water. On one or two occasions, Mary and Murray Looney picked up nice boulders of gyp-rock outside to put into their rock gardens at their Oklahoma City home, put them into the trunk of their auto, where they were covered with damp cave clothes, and by the time they had gotten home, the “rock garden” items had become powder.

Mallot never visited any gypsum caves of which we are aware. But his “invasion” thesis appeared to apply to most gypsum caves, and Myers noted that Alabaster seemed to fit the pattern Mallot had observed about some limestone caves in karst areas.

Every gypsum cave or group of caves in western Oklahoma is a group of caves with stream systems which generally conform with the surface drainage in the area. The Vickery Karst is typical. One group of streams flows through two courses in Nescatunga, Vickery Bat and the Selenite Channel Caves, a second through Vickery Waterfall and a few minor caves. A third course flows through Sculpture and some adjacent caves, all into an outdoor canyon which extends southward across the Vickery Ranch.

The first record of Anglo-Americans visiting a cave in Oklahoma was in the journal of an officer who served with the U. S. Army’s Capt. Randolph Marcy in the 1850s. He was part of a group of soldiers who had been sent to find the source of the Red River. This is the southernmost major tributary of the Mississippi, flowing into it 50 miles northwest of Baton Rouge, La. It is the Oklahoma-Texas boundary for just over 300 miles. Marcy’s explorers came upon the North Fork, which at that time was flowing more water and seemed to them to be the “main” branch. At this point, the Red flows on a straight north-south course and what is today considered to be the “main fork” flowed in from the northwest. A few of Marcy’s explorers on the North Fork turned left to probe up a stream, today known as Cave Creek. They soon came upon caves.

The journal said, “ Taking provision for six days, packed upon mules, we went forward over a constant succession of steep, rocky ridges and deep ravines, in one of which we discovered a grotto in the gypsum rocks, which appeared to have been worn out by the continued action of water, leaving an arched passway, the sides of which were perfectly smooth and symmetrical, and composed of strata of three distinct bright colors of green, pink and white, arranged in such peculiar order as to give it an appearance of singular beauty. On our arrival here the men were much exhausted by rapid marching over the rough ground, and were exceedingly thirsty. Fortunately we found near the mouth of the grotto a spring of very cold water bursting out of the rock.” The soldiers who drank this water were much cooled, while those who drank creek and other nearby water got quite ill. Anyone who ever has drunk “gyp” water knows how the sick guys felt. I noticed that the water in “Reed Cave,” the original name of Horseshoe Valley Cave, did not have a “gyp” taste to it.

Modern cavers from Del Walker in 1955, through Burch a few years later, Vivian and I a few more years later, and finally present-day Central Oklahoma Grotto explorers led by John and Sue Bozeman, all recognize these as the same caves which pioneer Oklahoma Burch called “Reed Cave” and “Dry Cave” on the list of Oklahoma caves which he provided to the Looney family in the 1950s. Many other names of gypsum caves in the neighborhood are on other old caver lists, including “Vinson Cave,” described as a nice cave, but which later cavers have been unable to specifically identify from among the many caves in this part of Greer County, to the irritation of Sue Bozeman whose methodical mind causes her to seek apply to a cave new to the grotto, as positively as possible, one of the “antique” cave names given by Walker or Burch in the old days.

The *WPA Guide* got the attention of many cavers with its directions to follow a county road to a natural bridge, described as “more than 200 feet high.” That seemed to put it in the same category as famous natural bridges in Virginia, Tennessee, Utah and elsewhere, so as soon as we was able, Vivian and I headed for this bridge. It turned out that the span of the bridge was only about 15 feet above the stream, with 185 feet of “overburden.” Cave entrances are all over the place. Some of them still are being examined by COG cavers. The “road” in the WPA guide apparently had been blazed by early Greer County pioneers as the main road from Reed, then a prosperous town with a typical “country” store, a gas station and many homes to Erick. This road was abandoned by the state or county highway department sometime in the 1940s, in favor of widening a standard section line road, but remained as a well-used private road by the rancher and locals. (A somewhat embarrassing moment for me came when I casually opened the front door of the building which looked like a store to me and found that I had walked into the living room of a somewhat irritated elderly woman. She accepted my apology and said that town had become a bit of a ghost town after World War II when the locals got automobiles and were able to drive to “big” stores in Mangum or Altus.)

Marcy’s army folks who first visited Horseshoe Valley Cave made another exploration trip along the South and North Canadian and possibly Cimarron rivers. Marcy’s explorers found numerous large caves. These were identified in an *Oklahoma Underground* article, with little documentation, as Vickery Bat Cave and Alabaster Caverns.

This is unlikely because both of these cave entrances are several miles north of the area shown in the published map of Marcy’s route. The one copy I saw looks as though the Army chaps were prowling about in the land between the South Canadian and Washita Rivers in Custer, Washita and neighboring counties, rather than between the North Canadian and Cimarron Rivers in Major and Woodard counties, as the *Underground* writer presumed.

For one thing, Vickery Bat and Alabaster are both at the heads of heavily wooded canyons and not visible from afar. Someone on horseback might easily have spotted Bear Cave, which has one of the largest cave entrances in Oklahoma, 100 or so feet wide, 20 feet high and on a hillside visible from a mile or so away. Some other caves meeting these same criteria are some of the Washita Bat caves, Mary Jo Fletcher Cave, and the “upper” entrance to Nescatunga. Outlaw legends, including claims about Jesse James and others, have it that badmen used all manner of caves in Oklahoma as hideouts. Several score caves, most of them minor little cracks, are named “Jesse James Cave.” No reliable documentation exists that the James boys came into Oklahoma or Indian Territories, since there were few banks to rob anywhere in the area.

Although not precisely “outlaws,” cowboys on the cattle trails from Texas to Kansas came through Oklahoma, and naturally looked for such things as springs, and possibly caves, for water and temporary shelter. One such stop was near Erick in Beckham County, a few miles south of the North Fork of the Red River. The *WPA Guide* says “ Southwest of Erick is an old salt springs, nature’s gift to early-day cattlemen. As the beeves were driven north from the Texas ranches each spring, many herders made this a stopping space so that the cattle might lick the salt. The fresh-water springs which flow through Cox’s Cave nearby made the spot an ideal camping site.”

In the 1930s Depression, a few homeless folks made use of caves as “homes.” One was Gideon Cave, north of Tahlequah. This cave was near a small community of a few homes, a church and a general store, now long gone.

This country store was one of many I visited in the 1960s while I was prowling about looking for caves in the Oklahoma Ozarks. Alas, by the 1990s, Gideon was gone. Still, I visited the cave again. There was a trail of a sort to the cave. There were signs that a great many people had used it: a large clay bank rising on the east side just beyond the entrance had “steps” carved to provide easy access to the top of the bank. There were holes filled with gravel at the back of the entrance chamber which might have been “indoor privies.” An oldtimer in Tahlequah recalled, “Those folks had a garden out on the flats north of the cave, and some kind of pump to draw water up outar the crik.” He described a device similar to the Archimedes screw used to this day by farmers along the Nile in Egypt; This device has a spiral inside a tube, so that when flowing water makes the screw turn, water “flows up” the spiral.

Another “human use” cave is near Summerfield Creek a bit west of a county road from Langley to SH 20 several miles west of Jay. There was a town at this spot on SH 20 up through the 1930s depression, with a Justice of the Peace and Constable This was the rural system of justice used in Oklahoma as recently as the early 1960s. According to oldtimers, these officers put a door with metal slabs behind wooded slats over a cave entrance a few miles north, to serve as a jail until the officials could transport them to Jay’s county jail.

The town is long gone but farmers remember the “jail” story. However, an elderly lady who hung out in a bar in nearby Langley said that this “doored” cave was not a jail, but a “natural icebox.” She said that someone hung meat from hooks on the ceiling when the cave was used as a “refrigerator”. Indeed, “Jail Cave” was modified by the folks who used it. There are some odd holes in the ceiling where there might have been hooks A large, flat limestone slab was turned on edge and made into a wall. A large breakdown block at the far end had chip marks suggesting it was used as a “butcher block.” There are a few holes in the clay floor filled with water, and sometimes blindfish have been spied in them, suggesting that the ground water below the cave might well connect with the permanent water table for several counties around. The holes appear to have been dug to use as “indoor wells” by the users of the cave.

A neighboring cave to Jail is Summerfield Creek, a nice limestone cave around 800 feet long which has an underground stream which flows out in a spring and into the main creek. Besides being used as bars during prohibition, caves in Oklahoma were widely used as hiding places to brew “white light’nin”. The most famous moonshiner cave is Crystal Cave, now the centerpiece of a preserve owned by the National Speleological Society. The “moonshiner” operated during World War II. He had a substantial stove inside, and ran a “chimney” through ceiling cracks. This caused smoke to sometimes appear to be rising out of the ground. This was at the time considerable publicity went to a volcano that erupted out of a farmer’s field in Mexico, the Paracutin volcano. The Okies in nearby Marble City saw smoke rising out of the hillside and thought a volcano was going to rise up and wipe out their town.

Local authorities never bothered this still. They may have had a profit-sharing arrangement with the booze makers. For many years, some cavers, in an effort to “separate” all of the “Crystal Caves” in the state, called this cave “Crystal-Moonshine.” It also is sometimes called “Old Crystal,” being the first cave in Oklahoma named Crystal. It was not the only northeast Oklahoma cave used as a moonshine still.

Crystal was a show cave in the 1930s, mentioned in the WPA Oklahoma guidebook, with wonderful descriptions of many speleothems. The cave is bare today, all of the speleothems having been removed by vandals. Some claim that one of the vandals was a chap who owned a “rock shop” at Picher, center of a longtime lead and zinc mine industry, who also sold crystals allegedly removed from fabulous caves in the area, caves which modern cavers have been unable to find. Other claims are made that a few show caves in Arkansas and Missouri acquired the mined stalactites and stalagmites and cemented them into their caves.

One noted moonshine still was in Three Forks, where the first NSS cavers, led by Don Russell, in the course of exploring, found a stove, barrel staves, empty bottles and broken glass. The opportunistic whisky maker had chosen a spot where lots of water pours from the ceiling. Barrel staves, left to sit in the water on the floor, acquired visitors. When Don first picked up one, the bottom was covered with little white critters. They proved to be two species of flatworms in the genus *Asellus*.

In “Cave Life of Oklahoma” Jeff Black (NSS 12719) wrote “ Two different isopods were collected under rocks and boards in a stream running through Gittin’ Down Mountain Cave. These isopods represent two new species....” Since the only place they ever have been found was in this ten square foot section of Three Forks, they may be the animal with the smallest known range of any critter on earth.

On my first trips into January-Stansbury cave I noticed, in the largest room, all manner of equipment suggestive of whiskey-making, which is why this largest room is called the Moonshine Room. It was rather ideal for such use because of a large amount of available water. And, in case the authorities raided the place, there were three “exits” through which the moonshiners might escape. The moonshine stuff was washed out of the cave when the area was hit by a 15-inch three hour downpour in the 1960s.

Saloon Cave in Major County is one of the few “ bootlegger” or “ moonshiner” caves in Western Oklahoma, and it has its own fascinating history, a bit of a mixture of the prohibition era of 20th Century Oklahoma and the outlaw and badmen era of the 19th Century.

In the early 20th Century, a chap named Jim Wilson set up a brewery and saloon in what was called Wilson Cave. As often happened, revenuers found the cave and smashed the bootlegger’s equipment. Wilson is reported to have come to a sad end when his “saloon” was destroyed. Old tales say he hanged himself from a tree near the cave.

Jack Squirrel Cave in Ottawa County operated as a saloon of a sort for a great many years; this cave has a natural patio out front, slick limestone and a beautiful entrance. The cave took its name from the Wyandotte Indian man who operated it for many years, while living in a battered old house trailer that he set up just outside the cave.

Big Mouth Cave, on a bluff near Grove overlooking Grand Lake, is a favorite party cave for boaters on the lake, and was operated as a sort-of saloon during World War.

Cave Springs Cave, in Adair County, is a lovely cave located in a corner of the back yard of a home next door to Cave Springs High School. This school had a football rivalry with the Watts High School which was near the home of Joyce Thompson and I. I covered the Watts athletic teams for the Westville-Stilwell newspapers. During a football game, Joyce, who was in the stands with the parents

of some of the players, noticed bats flying around. The women said, "They come from the cave." She told the ladies that "my husband is an expert spelunker who know all about caves and bats." This got us an invitation to visit the cave, and to learn an interesting legend.

In pre-removal days, the local Indians used the cave as storage for foodstuffs and other valuables. When they would go west to hunt Buffalo, they always left someone in charge, to guard the valuables in the cave. Once, the guy in charge abandoned his post, and other folks came and robbed the local Indians of the foodstuff in the cave. The careless guard, thus, was condemned by the tribe to "guard the cave forever." And, to this day, from a few dozen yards away, one can see the profile of a man, "forever guarding the cave."

Vague rumors, alluded to in old newspaper articles, tell of some sandstone "caves" scattered about eastern parts of Oklahoma City which functioned as bootlegger operations until the repeal of state prohibition laws in 1958.

Murray Looney, in his days as an "oil well shooter" in the 1950s was a partner with a guy named Frank in a firm called "Southern Torpedo Corp." They kept their stash of nitroglycerin in a powder magazine in what was then wild woods north of the Oklahoma City zoo in Lincoln Park in northeast Oklahoma City. . Murray reported "a real nice cave in the sandstone cliff." This cave now is a "patio" for a family which likes to call Edmond their address.

The second group of NSS cavers in Oklahoma was the original Tulsa grotto, in the 1950s. These cavers spent most of their time exploring distant caves in Arkansas, as reported by Bill Halliday in one of his cave books.

In 1967, two grottoes of the NSS were organized at the same time. Mary and Murray Looney (NSS 9804 and NSS 9805) and others organized a group in Oklahoma City, Central Oklahoma Grotto, while Don Russell, Don Fowler, Buell Hamilton, Warren Wheeler, Nick Looney and I, and a few others, including an entire Explorer Scout Post, organized Tulsa Grotto.

The organization of TG followed some odd media happenings. I was still a busy amateur spelunker in those days, and was a reporter for the Tulsa Tribune. My editor, needed a feature story on a dull day, suggested that I write an article about "all of the caves in our circulation area." I did so, mentioning Twin, Cottonwood, January-Stansbury, Anticline and a few others. In the article I wrote that, "Oklahoma's largest caves are in the Ozark counties."

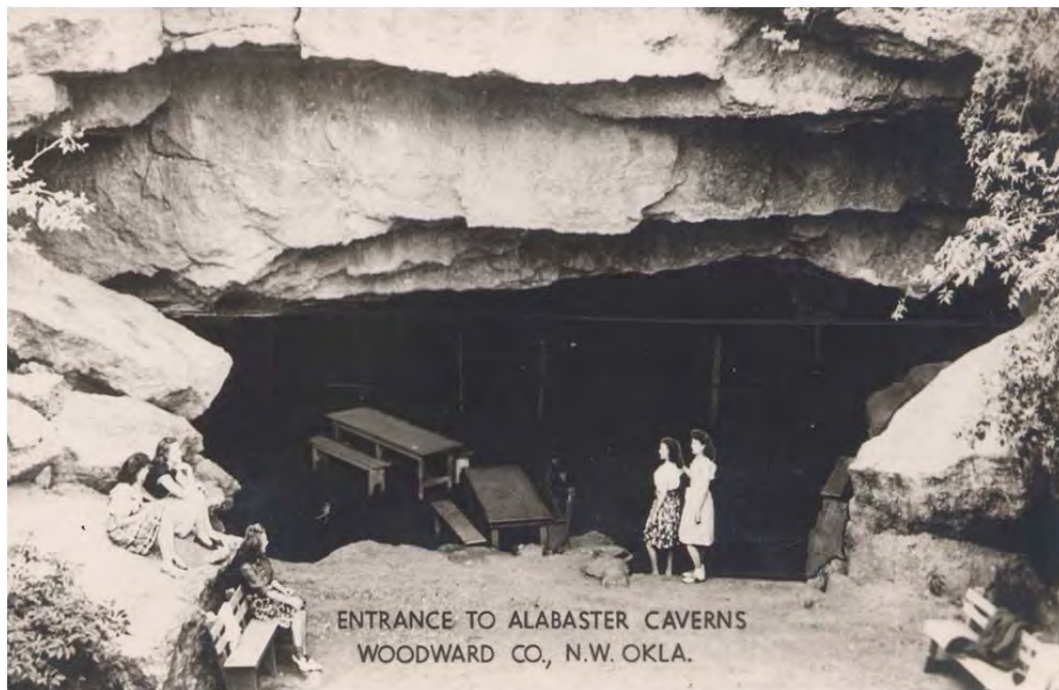
Russell read this article and called me at the Tribune and said, "I heard that you know how to organize a cave exploring club." I said that I more or less did, and we organized a trip to Twin Cave. We were somewhat surprised to find, from inside the cave, that a surface sinkhole had collapsed forming an entrance in the cave's largest room.

Also reading the article was former Oklahoma caver James Schermerhorn, in Harrison, Ark. He wrote to me about "inaccuracies," noting that many of the gypsum caves in western Oklahoma were larger than any of the limestone caves in the Ozarks.

I invited Schermerhorn to come to Oklahoma and see the new Twin entrance. Russell and Nick joined us on this trip, and after leaving Twin, Schermerhorn led us to the cave then known just as "Bat Cave," on the grounds of the Cookson Hills Christian School in Adair County. This cave is noted for a

huge guano bog, populated with thousands of isopods, amphipods and other cave critters, and a nice network of passages. It was the only Oklahoma cave to merit mention in *Celebrated American Caves*, written by Charles Mohr.

Don Russell was so impressed with the cave that he did a detailed map of it and took dozens of pictures of the wildlife. Most of his pictures of unusual insects and other small critters illustrated a special edition of "The Cave Life of Oklahoma," by Jeff Black and Mary Looney, in 1971 a special edition of *Oklahoma Underground*.



Abstracts from the 2011 History Session, NSS Convention, Glenwood Springs, Colorado

Sulfur Galleries: The Historic Caves of Wyoming's Shoshone Canyon

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In early 1937, miners with the Utah Construction Company, contracted with the Bureau of Reclamation to complete a lengthy irrigation tunnel along Shoshone Canyon east of Yellowstone National Park, opened a natural cavern of unknown extent. Located less than half a mile from the multi-level Shoshone Cavern, protected by the federal government as a national monument since 1909, this new cavern posed unusual technical problems for the Bureau's engineers and dangers for the miners. Building a 120-foot-long flume across the large natural cavern, miners discovered the cave's high sulfur content and fluctuating carbon dioxide atmosphere was dangerous. The cave twice caught on fire during operations, resulting in work stoppages. In addition, two miners perished on April 1, 1937, being run over by the mine train after high levels of carbon dioxide dropped the workers in their tracks. For decades, this cave was closed to the public.

Only recently have skilled scientists and cavers been permitted to tentatively explore and document this forgotten cavern, discovering extraordinary crystalline gypsum and sulfur speleothems. Speleologists believe this incompletely explored cavern may include lower levels where ascending hot spring water and carbon dioxide gas fill the cave and extremeophile life flourishes in an acidic environment. Explorations have found evidence of past visitation, including a 1930s-era wooden ladder and decaying trash. With its proximity to Shoshone Cavern, dropped as a national monument in 1954 and managed by the Bureau of Land Management as Spirit Mountain Caverns, Shoshone Canyon Conduit Cave may contain astonishing and fascinating curiosities.

Sauta Cave, Carlisle and Henderson, and the U. S. Supreme Court

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During the Civil War, Hugh Carlisle and George Henderson managed extensive mining operations in Sauta Cave. Events related to these operations resulted in their saltpeter production being described in records of the U. S. Supreme Court. Carlisle and Henderson both immigrated from Scotland to the U. S., where they

formed a general contracting company. In 1859, they won a contract to build a railroad between the Coosa and Tennessee Rivers. They were preparing the right-of-way when the Civil War began and federal support disappeared for railroad building in the South. They then sought other enterprises, including the saltpeter operation and a venture that resulted in ownership of a considerable amount of bailed cotton. When Union forces occupied northern Alabama for several months in 1862, the Sauta operations were stopped and the cotton seized and sold. The proceeds went into the U. S. Treasury. During reconstruction, President Andrew Johnson signed a pardon for all Confederate war participants. Under this pardon, Carlisle and Henderson applied in the U. S. Court of Claims for the money from the sale of their cotton. The U. S. attorneys noted that the claimants were not citizens and documented their saltpeter operations as evidences of support of the rebellion. The Court of Claims denied the Carlisle and Henderson application. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court, which ruled that although Carlisle and Henderson were not citizens, they were included in the Johnson pardon and entitled to their money. Carlisle later finished the railroad.

**Which end is up?
Mysteries of Weasts/Fountain Cave, Augusta County, Virginia**

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The third of the three most famous caves discovered in Cave Hill, Augusta County, Virginia, Fountain Cave (formerly Weasts Cave) remains somewhat of an enigma even after 50 years of commercial visitation. Discovered, celebrated, and promptly forgotten for a quarter century before being “rediscovered,” the cave has been slow to give up her secrets. Although hundreds of articles were written on the neighboring Weyer’s Cave (now Grand Caverns), only a few tidbits were ever published on Fountain. The discovery of a complete description of the cave from the year of its discovery in 1835 turned conventional thinking on end. While trying to follow the original route, none of it made any sense. One day, while in a passage at the very “back” of the cave, I realized that I was standing next to the pools, or fountains, from which the cave derives its current name, which were supposed to be next to the entrance! After a mental 180, feature after feature fell into place. Another cave, currently known as TI-59 Cave, turns out to have been the original entrance. A voice connection has since been established, even though the entrance passage was blasted shut many years ago.

The “Lost” Third Reel to Russell T. Neville’s *In the Cellars of the World*

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In the late 1920s, Russell Trall Neville of Kewanee, Illinois, took some of the first cave movies in the United States. Neville showed these segments with his lecture which he called *In the Cellars of the World*. After Neville’s sudden death in 1950, the original 35mm nitrate films were acquired by Burton Faust for the NSS. They were later transferred to 16mm film and shown at the NSS Convention in 1970. However, a third film, containing original, duplicate, and damaged footage was not used to produce the film that is

seen today. This third reel was located in 2010 and will be added to the *In the Cellars of the World* DVD in the NSS AV Library. Some of the caves seen include Mammoth, Wyandotte, Salts, and Carlsbad.

Photographer Ben Hains at Cave Hill, Augusta County, Virginia

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By the time New Albany, Indiana photographer Ben Hains came to visit the boom town of Shendun (now Grottoes), Virginia, he was already recognized as the premier cave photographer in the United States. Familiar with his work at Mammoth Cave, Marengo Cave, and Wyandotte Cave, “Major” Jedediah Hotchkiss, founder and chief promoter of Shendun, had recruited Hains to visit Shendun in hopes of stirring up tourism through photography. Hains accepted and spent five days in town in May, 1891, taking a series of stereo photographs by magnesium lights, and delighting the town with his geniality while not underground. After he returned home, he sent 27 proofs to be named by Major Hotchkiss and Rev. Dr. Hovey, and eventually produced a series of 25 stereoviews, 21 from Weyers Cave and four from the Cave of the Fountains. Hovey debuted these images to the American Geographic Society on the stereopticon. Although Hains’ stereoviews from Kentucky and Indiana are still readily available, almost none are known to survive from Virginia. A few of the available images will be shown.

Investigations at Cheeks Stand Cave, Tennessee: History, Folklore, and Archaeology

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The current study examines the history, folklore, and archaeology of Cheeks Stand Cave, a modest spring cave near the Red River in Robertson County, Tennessee. Located on an early road and stagecoach line halfway between Nashville and Bowling Green, Kentucky, the cave was utilized as a water source and for cold storage by Elijah Cheek, a tavern owner whose inn (or stand) was located a few yards away. According to folklore Cheek murdered a traveler and disposed of the body in a nearby sinkhole that supposedly communicated with the back of the cave. When confronted with this rumor by naturalist Alexander Wilson in 1810, Cheek denied the accusations in a remarkable confrontation. An examination of the cave and surface sinkholes sheds doubt on the story, while some of the other folklore associated with Cheek is also dubious. A deeper look at Cheek suggests a more complex man than the popular caricature of evil. Material culture extant in the cave sheds light on other aspects of the cave’s history, including occasional social outings in the 19th and 20th centuries and its possible use to hide and shelter livestock during the Civil War. Finally, there is evidence of prehistoric Native American exploration in the form of charcoal and stoke marks from river cane torches which date to Cal BC 1010 (Cal BP 2960) and are contemporaneous with other Early Woodland Period deep cave explorations in the Mid-South.