

WORLD WONDER SAVED

How Mammoth Cave Became A National Park

Excerpts from this book:

The preservation of Mammoth Cave in Kentucky represents a living monument to the public-spirited determination of a large group of prominent Kentucky citizens and others from throughout the land. What makes this effort especially noteworthy is the prolonged attention and effort required to obtain legislative approval for the endeavor, to raise money and to acquire land necessary for a national park.

Mammoth Cave, one of the seven wonders of the world, had been visited since the early 1800s by the famous of the world who braved the privations of the time. There were practically no traversable roads and the cave was situated in a remote, forested and rugged area.

Recorded history of the cave goes back to 1799 when a land grant of 200 acres, including the cave, was awarded to Valentine Simmons . . . The geological history, however, makes the known history seem less than an instant in time. Geologists tell us that the processes that developed Mammoth Cave started some 350 million years ago.

To see and explore the cave has been a much sought-after experience of the famous of this country and abroad ever since the cave was opened to visitors in 1836.

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

In 1924 the Mammoth Cave National Park Association was organized with the objective of making Mammoth Cave a national park. One of the organizers became the Association's first president and later a United States Senator . . . Another of the organizers, a wealthy and prominent banker, became the second president and continued as a foremost leader for many years in the effort to raise money and to purchase land for the national park. Others devoted thousands of hours of their own time, without any compensation, to promote the park and bring it into reality. Governor Flem D. Sampson was very active in the [fund raising] campaign and assumed the role of state campaign chairman. The Governor led a tour of the state in the interest of the campaign.

After the major campaign . . . a Buy-An-Acre drive was mounted. Those who bought an acre were given a *pro forma* deed signed by the Governor. Another campaign was amongst school children of the Commonwealth. Various public reports stated that some 17,000 people in Kentucky subscribed to the fund raising campaign for some \$800,000 payable over a period of two years.

It was not until 1941 that the National Park Service took full charge of Mammoth Cave, the surrounding land and the caves encompassed by it; and it was not until 1946 that the park was officially dedicated.

It was reported by the Mammoth Cave National Park Association that some 500 families were moved off the land to make way for the park. The park now comprises 52,369 acres of land. By far the greatest portion is situated in Edmondson County, with much smaller acreage in Hart and Barren Counties.