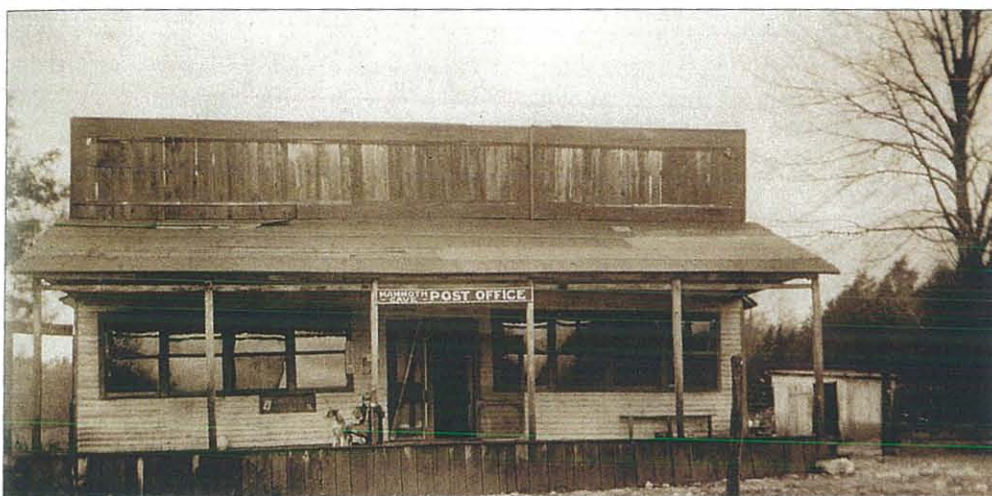


Tourism influences the growth of Mammoth Cave and Cave City Kentucky post offices from 1842 to 1915

Thomas Lera



1913 Demumbrun Store & Post Office.

Abstract

In October 1853, Thomas T. Duke envisioned the creation of a resort town on a tract of land he owned near Mammoth Cave. He conveyed his property to the Knob City Land Company of Louisville, for \$6,850 or a mere \$20 per acre.¹ The site, which became known

1. In 1798, James Perry acquired 200 acres on which Cave City is now situated. Later in 1811 Henry Roundtree, as assignee of James Perry, conveyed this tract to John Owen for \$19 who added 142½ acres to the original tract. When he died, the entire 342½ acres was conveyed to Thomas T. Duke for \$1,732.

as Cave City, was located near the Telford Turnpike which joined Louisville and Nashville Turnpike, along which stage lines carried passengers, mail and tourists to and from Mammoth Cave. Tourism would play a major role in the growth of Cave City and Mammoth Cave post offices in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

John Croghan

With the completion of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad ("L & N Railroad") and the post office, Cave City became a gateway to Mammoth Cave. Visitors from all over the world came to Cave City by train, then took stagecoaches operated by Andrew McCoy, to visit Mammoth Cave.

Newspapers often promoted the larger and better known Mammoth Cave. J. D. B. Debow (1849) believed Mammoth Cave was "next to Niagara, the greatest wonder of nature in the western world."

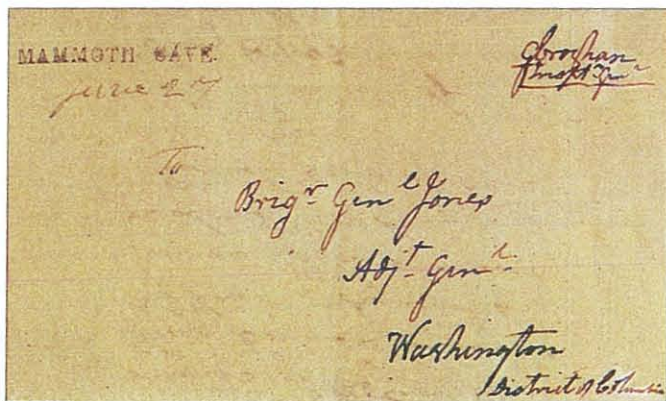
A short piece, entitled "Notes for a Tourist," appeared in the December 5, 1846, issue of *Scientific American* (2:58) urging, "If you should have been born in America; the greatest country in the known world; nature has clustered all her stupendous and dazzling works upon this land ... go and see the falls of Niagara ... Then, you should go and see the great cave in Kentucky ... if you go back to England without seeing our Mammoth Cave ... you'll leave a pretty big hole in a book you're going to write." These representations positioned Mammoth Cave as one of America's, if not the world's, greatest natural wonders (Sears 1989).

Upon arriving at the cave, guests stayed at the Mammoth Cave Hotel, considered at the time, one of the finest hotels in the state. The old hotel was created from the original log cabins built and used by saltpeter miners around 1812, connected and weather-boarded under the ownership of Franklin Gorin (1837-1839).

Later, under the ownership of John Croghan (1839-1849), a resort hotel was built to meet the expectations of future tourism at Mammoth Cave. The large two-story building included a first floor dining room and a second floor ballroom, and had guest rooms to accommodate several dozen visitors.

Croghan also spent huge amounts of money on advertising to continue to attract visitors from all over the world. He established a reputation for the cave as an international

June 27, 1843 straight line Mammoth Cave, free frank by Col. G(eorge). Croghan, Inspt. Genl.
(Ex. Christie's Robson Lowe Auction Catalog. October 9, 1990: 134.)





October 27, 1861 Cave City manuscript cancel Cincinnatus Roberts, Postmaster.

showplace, used his family fortune to expand tourism, and, at his own expense, built roads to connect Mammoth Cave with the Louisville and Nashville Turnpike.

The first road was opened from Cave City to the Mammoth Cave Hotel and then continued on across Green River to connect to a road at Grayson Springs. Another road began at the Louisville and Nashville Turnpike near Rowlett's Station and led directly to the hotel, bypassing Bell's Tavern in Glasgow Junction (Thomas 1970).

By the 1860s, Cave City had one hotel, one church, one schoolhouse, a Masonic Hall, three dry goods stores, three saloons, two drug stores, two doctors, one wagon shop, two blacksmith shops, one jewelry store and watchmaker, two lawyers, one tobacco warehouse, a depot, and a telegraph office. The nearby Woodland post office (established in 1850) moved to the site in 1860, and Cave City was incorporated on February 2, 1866, with a population of 150.

The *Records of the Post Office Department, Bureau of Transportation, Domestic Mail Transportation, Registers for Star Route Contract, 1814-1960*, announced Samuel B. Thomas was awarded Contract 9638 for a bid of \$1,493 for three times a week mail service between Cave City and Elizabethtown. When the Post Office added Mammoth Cave pick up and delivery six trips per week starting July 1, 1862, the payment went to \$1,693 for a contract period of four years.²

2. Postmarks or cancels are terms often misunderstood. All cancels are postal markings, only markings that cancel something are cancellations. The first postal markings in Cave City and Mammoth Cave were handwritten. Manuscript markings were used until mail volume required local postmasters to obtain handstamps. The 1859 Postal Laws and Regulations stated post offices with gross receipts less than \$500 but over \$100 would get Class-3 devices made of wood. The use of town marks to cancel stamps was banned by U.S. Post Office Department edict after 1860. The 1863 stock of Class-3 devices had two double circles duplexed with target killers. There was considerable variation. Postmasters would order Class-3 markings directly from the manufacturers and they were shipped direct to postmasters under contract arrangements with the Post Office Department.

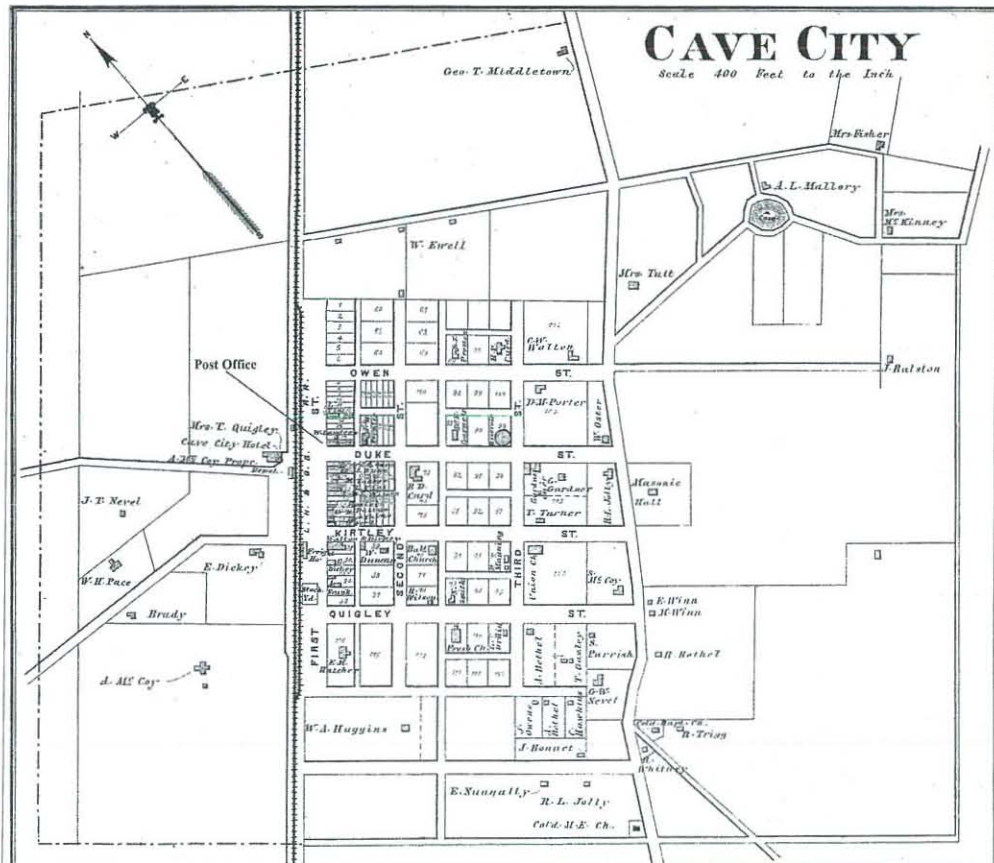
Postal Regulations 1845-1856

Prior to 1845, letters mailed in the United States were rated on a combined basis of distance and the number of sheets of paper. Weight was only considered when a letter weighed more than an ounce. Mail handling changed with the postal reform laws of 1845 (Act 1845), and the Post Office Department no longer specified what mode of transportation was needed on a particular route and schedule. Although as the railroad moved west, passengers abandoned the stage coach for this faster, smoother mode of travel, freight and most mail were still carried by the less expensive wagon (Harris and DeBlois 2007).

The July 1, 1851, postal law required prepaid letters to carry 3-cents in postage, provided they weighed more than a half ounce and were sent a distance of less than 3,000 miles within the United States. Letters with similar specifications were charged 5-cents when sent collect. The previous rate, which dated from July 1, 1845, had been 5-cents per half ounce for letters sent less than 300 miles and 10-cents for letters sent further (Graham 1992).

To mail a prepaid letter, one either had to wait in line to pay cash at the post office counter or maintain a charge account with the postmaster. Prepayment by stamps became compulsory on January 1, 1856, and allowed the sender to mail a letter by dropping it through a slot into the post office.

Inset from the Map of Barren Co., Kentucky compiled by Beers & Lanagan 1879, Philadelphia, showing the location of Post Office.



The first postal markings in Cave City and Mammoth Cave were handwritten. Manuscript markings were used until mail volume required local postmasters to obtain handstamps. The Postal Laws and Regulations of 1852 provided marking and rating handstamps to be furnished to offices that collected postage in excess of \$300 per year, but wood handstamps would be furnished to offices collecting only \$200 postage a year.

Under Postal Laws and Regulations of 1859, postmasters' compensation was based upon the amount of postage received each quarter, with compensation capped at \$500 per quarter, per the following schedule: 60 percent of the first \$100, 50 percent of the next \$300, 40 percent of the next \$2,000. Compensation was a direct function of the amount of business the post office did. It was the sum of the box rents, the value of the stamps canceled and the proceeds from the sale of wastepaper or newspaper (History 1922). This latter figure is an indication of the economic activity of the town Hines and Velk 2007). (See Table I)

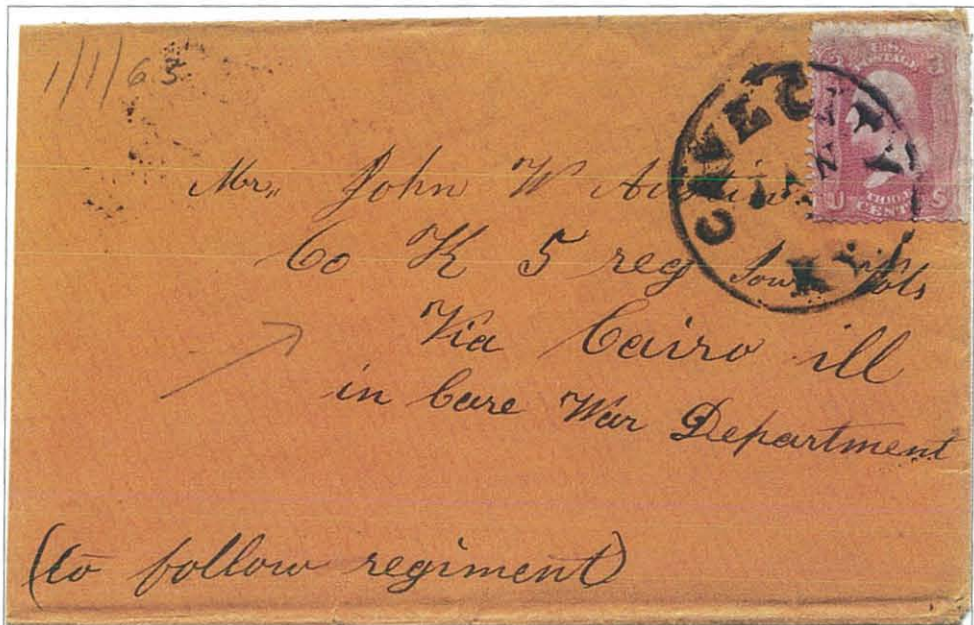
Postmaster compensation data contained in the Official Register provided valuable economic information on the business climate and activity in individual towns across Kentucky and the nation (Hines and Velk 2008).

Records in the U.S. Register of 1867 show the postmasters at Cave City received \$200 and Mammoth Cave received \$5.00 respectively in the fiscal year ending June 30, 1867. The amounts due the government totaled \$154.65 and \$9.47 respectively, which entitled these post offices to a Class-3 postmarking device.

The Civil War Period

The Civil War brought unrest to southern Kentucky; however, E.K. Owsley, manager of the cave and staunch supporter of the Union, continued to conduct tours. The railroad was a strategic resource for Cave City during the Civil War, serving Federal troops in the area and helping bring their mail free as they moved by military orders.

Circle date cancel, John E. Harlow, Postmaster; endorsed "to follow regiment."



This caused such letters to be endorsed "Follow the Regiment," to remind postmasters of the free-forwarding provision. Free-forwarding was not granted to the general public until

Table I

Postmaster Compensation 1843-1911

Mammoth Cave			Cave City		
Year	Postmaster Compensation	Net Proceeds	Year	Postmaster Compensation	Net Proceeds
1843	1.82	3.65			
1845	9.87	19.06			
1847	15.06	17.21			
1849	13.04	17.12			
1851	12.35	17.75			
1853	13.32	15.52			
1855	23.12	11.52			
1857	17.18	0.98			
1859	25.85	24.26			
1861	19.44	19.28	1861	70.47	50.35
1863	18.14	31.97	1863	240.30	76.98
1865	n/a		1865	225.48	98.09
1867	5.00	9.44	1867	200.00	154.65
1869	n/a		1869	200.00	170.89
1871	n/a		1871	200.00	
1873	12.00		1873	200.00	
1875	n/a		1875	n/a	
1877	n/a		1877	197.98	
1879	n/a		1879	157.06	
1881	0.00		1881	192.18	
1883	36.60		1883	230.36	
1885	n/a		1885	377.90	
1887	153.67		1887	480.38	
1889	104.55		1889	544.69	
1891	147.45		1891	480.17	
1893	136.63		1893	323.61	
1895	130.14		1895	505.15	
1897	109.60		1897	510.59	
1899	145.82		1899	485.26	
1901	143.03		1901	583.61	
1903	225.52		1903	600.97	
1905	243.31		1905	724.51	
1907	447.00		1907	1,000.00	
1909	521.00		1909	842.00	
1911	870.00		1911	1,100.00	

Source: *Official Register, Volume II—The Postal Service, Compiled by the Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census. 1843-1911.*

July 1, 1866, and permitted forwarding only when addressees notified local postmasters in writing of a change of address.

The 180-mile stagecoach journey between Louisville and Nashville took thirty-three hours and cost \$12 (Slaughter 1894, 10). Six miles per hour was a typical speed on roads of average condition. On the southward journey, the stage left Louisville's Galt House at 5 a.m., stopped at either the Eagle Tavern or Hill House in Elizabethtown for the noontime meal, and by 9 p.m. arrived at Bell's Tavern at Three Forks (now Glasgow Junction), the changing point for travelers bound for Mammoth Cave (Coleman 1936, 190).

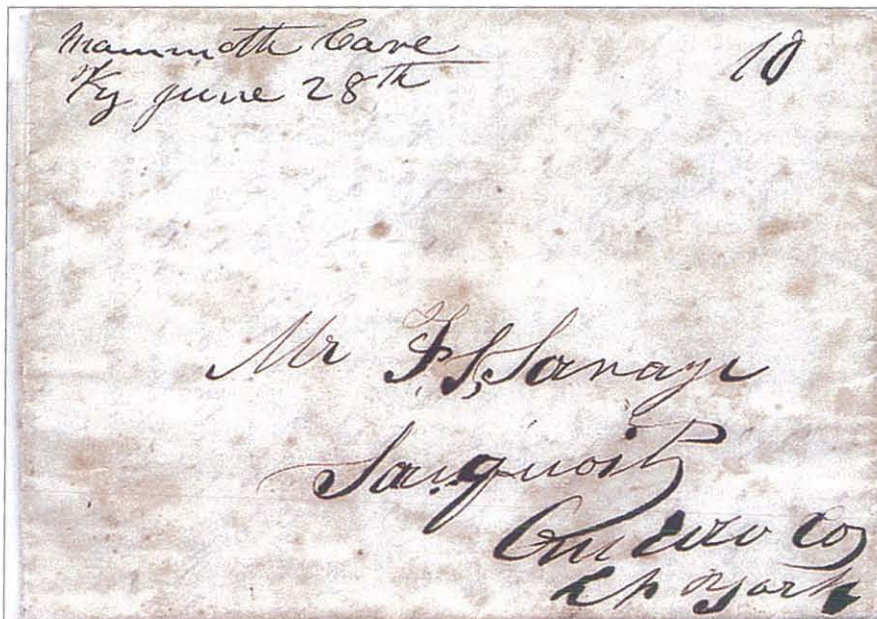
With the completion of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad in 1859, and stops added in Glasgow Junction and Cave City for Mammoth Cave, the journey was shortened to three or four hours. Stage coaches covered the last nine miles to the cave.

Even though Mammoth Cave remained open throughout the war, tourism naturally declined. Its revival did not occur until the middle 1880s, with the expansion of steamboat traffic, better connecting stage lines, and the extension of the L & N Railroad, with a spur directly to Mammoth Cave Hotel.

From the time Mammoth Cave Hotel opened in 1837, records show the cave and hotel were advertised in various ways. In 1844 the average number of daily visitors was ninety-three, some having traveled hundreds or thousands of miles, even crossing the Atlantic to visit the cave.

Mammoth Cave Hotel had its share of managers during its operation. After John Croghan died in 1849, his will specified the lands and buildings (except the cave) were to be rented out for terms of five years. Some of the hotel lessees included: William S. Miller, Sr., 1850–1856 and 1874–1878; Larkin J. Procter, 1856–1861 and 1866–1871; E. K. Owlsley, 1861–1866; David L. Graves, 1871–1874; Francis Klett, 1878–1882; William Charley Comstock, 1882–1887; Henry C. Ganter, 1887–1902; and Willis W. Renshaw, 1902–1911 (Thompson and Thompson 2003, 12–13).

1847 manuscript by Archibald Miller, Postmaster.





The Miller folded letter has a wood block impression of Mammoth Cave House.

Crogan's will had left the property in trust to his thirteen nephews and nieces who were scattered all over the country. They apparently thought the financial stream would keep on running without any expenditure on their part for advertising, and devoted themselves to spending the income they derived from the cave (Thomas 1970).

Advertising had always been essential to the cave's success (Meacham 1908). When the advertising stopped people became indifferent about the cave, and figured it was no longer one of the great showplaces of the world. By 1905 the average number of visitors had dropped to less than a dozen a day.

Between the end of the Civil War and 1880, approximately 40,000 to 50,000 passengers travelled annually on the L & N Railroad, stopping at Glasgow Junction and taking a stagecoach onto Mammoth Caves (Klein 2007). Larkin J. Procter owned and operated this stagecoach line from Bell's Tavern; the stage from Cave City to Mammoth Cave was operated by Andy McCoy with his two coaches named Florida and John E. Bell. Both operators had contracts to carry the mail.

Prior to the Congressional appropriations act of May 4, 1882, postmasters of third-class post offices like Mammoth Cave and Cave City had to order much of their office equipment, including letter scales, postmarking and canceling devices and ink pads. In the early 1880s, these were bought from private parties and manufacturers. The *Postal Guides* (1879–1909) of the 1880s carried a large number of advertisements from suppliers of town date stamps and other postmarking tools. Many of these were much the same from supplier to supplier.

Around 1883, the Post Office Department decided to supply all post offices with a standardized type of postmarking devices, thus eliminating inadequate devices that sometimes produced illegible postmarks and cancellations which were often struck in inks that could be removed from stamps.



Coaches with departing passengers from Mammoth Cave, 1896 © H.C. Ganter

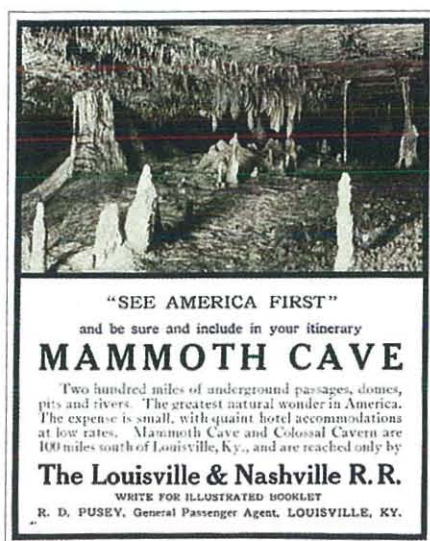
Some people soon realized a better and more rapid means of transportation than a stage coach was needed. In 1856, Barren County Railroad Company was formed. It did not last very long and in 1866, the Glasgow Railroad Company acquired the properties of Barren County Railroad. Nothing was built and in 1874 the Mammoth Cave Railroad was chartered from the Glasgow Railroad Company.

The Mammoth Cave Railroad

In 1874, Larkin Procter, along with his brother George (proprietor of Diamond Caverns) and other investors, leased the railroad rights to Mammoth Cave from the L & N Railroad (Herr 1943). It was to take twelve years of negotiations and planning before contractors Henry Chapman and Jim McDaniel could begin construction on July 3, 1886 (McLurg 2008).

However, before the actual construction work began, the L & N Railroad had agreed to lease the railroad rights to Mammoth Cave for twenty-five years from the completion of the spur. When the line finally opened in November 1886, Diamond Caverns was one of the chief stops. The Proctor Brothers also commercialized Proctor Cave and Grand Avenue Cave, each accessible from railroad stops between Diamond Caverns and Mammoth Cave. The Mammoth Cave Hotel register recorded "November 8, Monday, W.F. Richardson, U.S.A., 1st passenger on Mammoth Cave Railroad—Ticket No. 1350 for \$3.00," and a maximum journey speed of thirty-five miles per hour (Bridwell 1971).

The railroad had acquired four steam engines, two wooden passenger coaches, and two wooden combination coaches and baggage cars. Usually there were two sets of trains operating at any one time. The coach cars were painted red, contained open vestibules and were heated with a coal stove (Thompson and Thompson 2003). The cost of the entire Mammoth Cave excursion in 1913, including roundtrip railway fare, cave fees, hotel, and meals was \$11.75. There were also other services at additional costs, including a side trip to Colossal Cavern for \$1.50, and a bed inside a Pullman Sleeper for \$1.75 (90 cents each if two occupied the space) (Thompson and Thompson 2003).



Portion of 1891 Kentucky Geological Survey map showing the location of the railroad lines by John R. Proctor, State Geologist.

Louisville & Nashville Railroad advertisement.

Within two years, the Mammoth Cave Railroad was awarded a mail contract (#20036 and later #129036). Table II shows that between 1888 and 1905 the railroad was making between seven and fourteen trips per week.

In the early part of the 1900s, as automobile vacations became popular in America, tourism at the cave increased. Additionally, the building of locks and dams on the Green River around 1906, brought steamboats and towboats from Bowling Green and Evansville to Mammoth Cave. The Evansville & Bowling Green Packet Company offered an "All River Excursion Route to Mammoth Cave" during the summer months on the steamboat *Chaperon*. The Myers Packet Company also had a trip to the cave on the boat *Leona*.

As reported in the December 19, 1916, headline story from *The Louisville Time* newspaper: "Mammoth Cave Hotel Destroyed by Fire, Historic Structure Caught Fire from an Unknown Source Early Saturday Morning. The original Mammoth Cave Hotel, a part of which was built in 1811, was entirely destroyed by fire, of unknown origin, which started at three o'clock this morning, consuming the hotel in two hours. There were no injuries sustained by the guests or employees, but many of the employees of the hotel lost all their personal belongings. All the registers of the hotel and cave, which contained perhaps the greatest collection in existence of the autograph signatures of famous men and women of this country and other parts of the world, were destroyed." (Bridwell 1971).

Twelve of the "destroyed" Mammoth Cave Hotel registers have been found; two are in the collections at the Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University, in Bowling Green, Kentucky; the other ten are at Mammoth Cave National Park. These original hotel registers give a glimpse into the day-by-day operations more than 100 years ago at Mammoth Cave. In 1919, a new twenty-two room hotel was built at Mammoth Cave. A much larger portion of the hotel was built in 1925, with another addition in 1930.

In 1904, an Indianapolis judge was the first of many persons who began to drive a car to the caves, which signified the beginning of the end for the railroad line. In 1910, the Mammoth Cave Railroad acquired a Ford rail-bus and the U.S. Post Office Department paid \$80 a month to get the daily mail moved.

For the fiscal year of 1930, gross receipts of the railroad were \$2,026.56 and the ex-

Table II

Mail carried to and from Mammoth Cave 1888-1905 by rail

Route Number	Title of Company	Length of Route (miles)	Pay per mile for Transportation	Annual rate of pay for Transportation	Average Number of Trips per week	6/30/ year
20036	Louisville & Nashville Railroad	8.51	23.94	203.72	14	1888
20036	Louisville & Nashville Railroad	8.51	42.75	363.80	14	1889
20036	Louisville & Nashville Railroad	8.51	42.75	363.80	14	1890
129036	Louisville & Nashville Railroad	8.51	42.75	363.80	14	1891
129036	Louisville & Nashville Railroad	8.51	42.75	363.80	14	1892
129036	Louisville & Nashville Railroad	8.70	42.75	371.92	7	1893
129036	Louisville & Nashville Railroad	8.70	42.75	371.92	7	1894
129036	Louisville & Nashville Railroad	8.70	42.75	371.92	7	1895
20036	Mammoth Cave Railway Company	9.15	42.75	391.16	12	1896
129036	Mammoth Cave Railway Company	9.15	42.75	391.16	12	1898
129036	Mammoth Cave Railway Company	9.15	42.75	391.16	12	1899
129036	Mammoth Cave Railway Company	9.15	42.75	391.16	12	1900
129036	Mammoth Cave Railway Company	9.53	42.75	407.40	7	1901
129036	Mammoth Cave Railway Company	9.53	42.75	407.40	7	1902
129036	Mammoth Cave Railway Company	9.53	42.75	407.40	7	1903
129036	Mammoth Cave Railway Company	9.53	42.75	407.40	7	1904
129036	Mammoth Cave Railway Company	8.66	42.75	370.21	7	1905

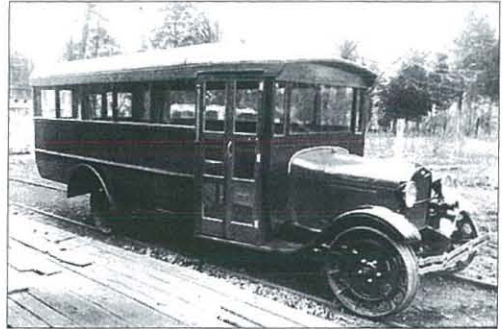
Source: Annual Reports of the Postmaster General 1888-1905

penses were \$2, 926.99, leaving a deficit of \$900.43 which included a monthly payroll of \$105.00.

On March 31, 1931, for the sum of \$5,000, the Mammoth Cave Railroad transferred all of its stocks, bonds, and property to the Mammoth Cave National Park Association. This Association had been formed to secure adequate lands and rights of way to have the entire area declared a national park. As the federal government did not allow operating a railroad within a park, on June 8, 1931, the railroad stockholders voted to cease operation, and, on August 1, 1931, the last roundtrip was made (Thompson and Thompson 2003).



Postcard of the Mammoth Cave Railroad.



Ford Rail Bus brought the mail as well as passengers.

Tourism impacts the mail

The twentieth century did not come quietly to the cave country of southern Kentucky. The rivalry that flared up between David Graves and a rival stage line in the 1870s was only the beginning. As it turned out, there would be two realizations that brought about what has been called the “Cave Wars” of the early 1900s.

The first was cave tourism was not only very popular, but it could actually be profitable in southern Kentucky. It became obvious the locals must simply get in on the economic boom.

The second realization was the dawning of the era of the automobile vacation. More and more Americans were buying cars and using them to travel to places where they had never been before. To folks in the surrounding states, Mammoth Cave became a natural destination point. Soon, automobile travel would gain the attention of the entire country and historic monuments would be erected.

In 1890, the nation’s rural mail system was virtually the same as it had been in colonial days. In the course of a few years, hundreds of small fourth-class post offices had been established in rural towns and even for isolated farmhouses throughout Kentucky. The farmers went for their mail just as their fathers and grandfathers had done before them, sometimes daily, but more often weekly or semiweekly. When possible, they arranged their trips to coincide with those of the star carriers, who brought the mail in a closed pouch from the railroad centers to the little post offices in the hinterland (Fuller 1959).³

3. Star route carriers contracted with the government to carry mail. The closed pouch meant that the mail bag was not to be opened between post offices. In some places, even before the RFD, some star carriers did open the pouch and drop off a farmer’s mail as he passed the farmer’s house.



Pen cancels with Sep 4, 1886, double circle registered cancel, Moses Tucker, Postmaster.

The postmaster of a fourth-class post office wore many hats and was always a political appointee selected more for his political activities than for his ability to handle the mail. The average fourth-class postmaster made very little money, but for a variety of reasons, clung to his postmaster appointment as though it were his sole means of support. On January 1, 1911, Cave City changed from a Class-4 to a Class-3 Presidential Post Office, which meant the postmaster would be appointed by the President, with the advice and consent of the Senate, at an annual compensation that would exceed \$1,000.

In addition to facilitating the arrival of parcel post, rural delivery added greatly to the improvement of southern roads. The very fact that state rural route roads were used to deliver the mail helped to break down constitutional scruples against government aid for state road building. Rural delivery was the most important inroad upon rural isolation in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Mammoth Cave and Cave City Post Offices became important meeting places and significantly grew in the populations.⁴

4. Post-Civil War industrial progress brought extended accumulation of capital under relatively competitive market conditions. The societal division of labor broadened, and factory production emerged along with demands for transformations in the nation's transportation and communication systems. The expansion of railroads and the Railway Mail Service (1864) provided the new systems. These systems were shaped by private demands to move mail and commodities faster over much longer distances. Mail rates had been adjusted in 1851 so a sealed letter could be sent across the continent as cheaply as it could be sent across the street. City-free delivery of mail (1863) regularized and expedited mail communication and greatly simplified the process of business correspondence. Increased production and expanded markets meant increased mail volume and demands for increased consumption. The Post Office responded with the pound rate (1885) which allowed one pound of newspapers or magazines to travel anywhere in the nation for one cent to promote the circulation of second class magazines and newspapers (Baxter 1979).



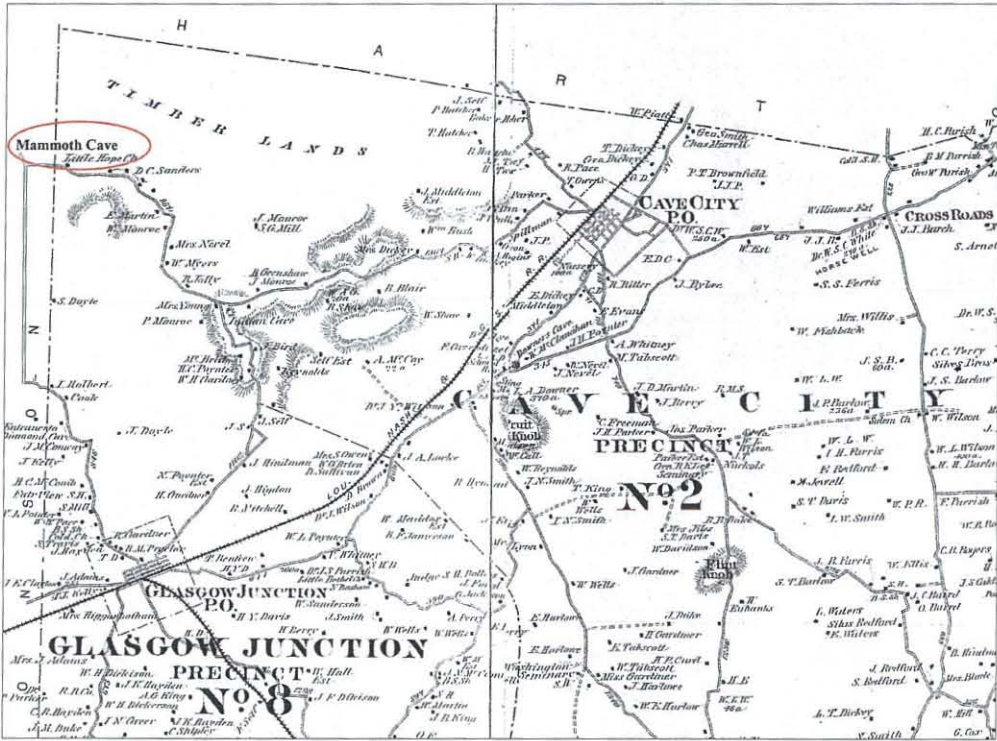
Circle date stamp with inverted year, Miss Jennie H. Bush, Postmaster.

The area around Mammoth Cave today is virtually a time capsule of the past. The “boom years” between 1920 and the early 1970s, as shown in the postal history of the post offices, helped solidify these communities as a major tourist destination in the United States.

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Map of Barren Co., Kentucky compiled by Beers & Lanagan 1879, Philadelphia, showing location of Cave City with Mammoth Cave at upper left.