

## MAXEY CAVE AS IT IS AND WAS BY C. C. SMITH

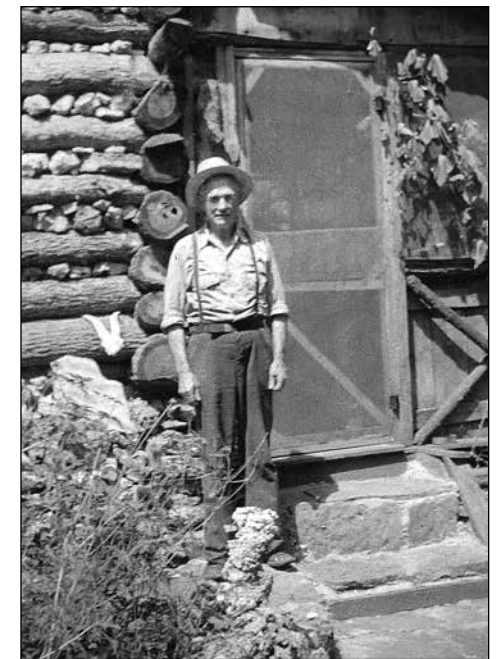
In 1948, the Pulaski County Democrat published an eight part series about Maxey Cave by Christopher Charles (C. C.) Smith (1866-1954), known to locals as Uncle Cummy. Margaret Tarbell owned the cave, which she purchased in 1944, and it seems Uncle Cummy came with it. Uncle Cummy came to Missouri from Iowa in 1932 and a previous owner of the property allowed him to build a cabin near the cave. He spent many hours exploring underground. Ruth Long, publisher of the Democrat, allowed that she would not like to go beyond the first big room of the cave but she thought the history of the cave was important to the county. She certainly demonstrated that by giving Uncle Cummy so much space in the paper. We think likewise and reprint his collected columns here. Photographs used in this feature courtesy of Margaret Tarbell Wehmeyer.

February 12, 1948  
*Pulaski County Democrat*  
**MAXEY CAVE AS IT IS AND WAS**  
 by C. C. Smith, Member  
 Missouri Archaeological Society



Above Uncle Cummy's cabin that he built in the early 1930s near the cave.

Millions of years are as one in the mysterious subterranean region hidden in the rugged range of the Ozark mountains in Pulaski and adjoining counties. Strange forces have plied their disastrous and fantastic way for millions of years before man set foot upon this earth.



Right Uncle Cummy posing near the door of his cabin.

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While glaciers were sliding over the continents, and creeping back to the north, leaving destruction in their wake, while men lived in caves and slashed their prey with weapons of stone, while the mammoth and mastodon roamed the hills and valleys, and we have incontrovertible evidence they did roam these hills, these forces have been at a task, the result of which shall last for untold ages to come.

If you will look at any road map published after 1934 you will find a red square located west of Waynesville, and located near the old post office at Hanna, Mo., and listed as a place of interest to tourists.

This place of interest is Maxey Cave, and prior to 1934 was known only to people living nearby. On account of the poor roads, tourists were unable to drive to the cave, but when WPA put on its road making program, visitors from all over the U. S. visited this wonder of nature.



A view of the large entrance to Maxey Cave. The opening is in the base of a 150-foot high bluff. The opening faces south and sunlight penetrates for an unusual distance into the cave's large first room.

A register has been kept since that time and during years of 1934 to 1941 thousands of visitors have been registered.

The cave has never been commercialized but during the war a small charge was made for lights. Thousands of soldier boys from all over the United States and Canada visited here.

Maxey Cave is one of the oldest, if not the very oldest of the many large, but practically unknown caves in this region. This mammoth cavern undermining the earth for miles is the architectural masterpiece of potent, baffling elements that have conspired to cut this wonderful passageway thru the solid rock of the mountain and gnaw huge bites that leave gaping forbidding apertures as a challenge to man and his feeble powers.

No one knows exactly how long these strange forces have been at work. We can only look, conjecture and marvel at the fantastic grandeur





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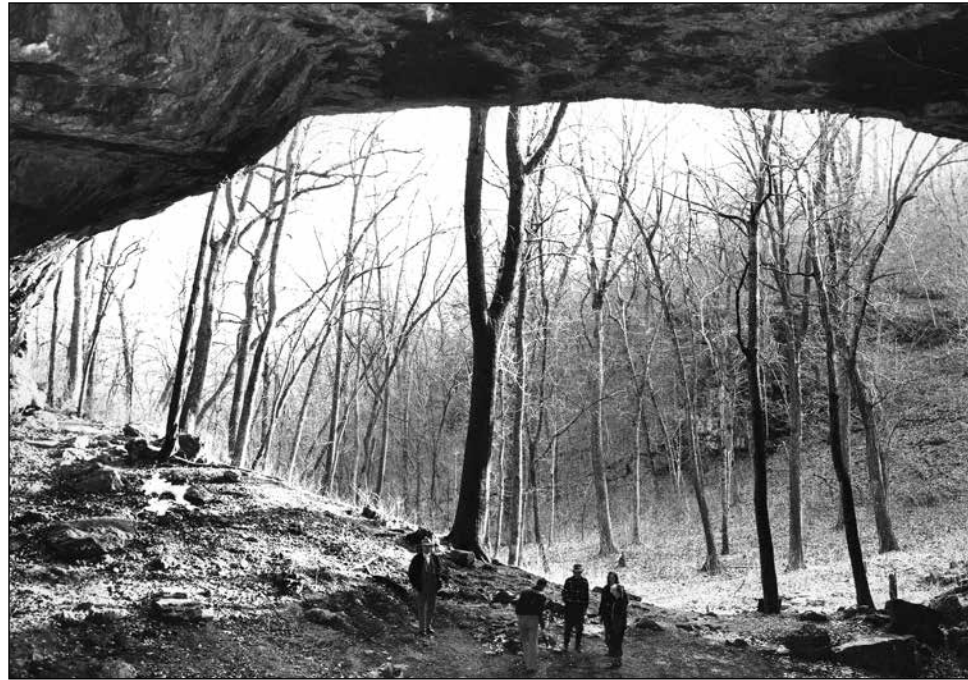


of the place. Should the searchers for the "Missing Link" have the perseverance to blast the solid stone and send the walls shivering to the bottom of the cavity, there would be an enlightenment that would thrill alike the hearts of the best, and also the least informed of anthropologists.

The first historic reference to this cave I have been able to find is contained in the field notes made in a government survey made in 1836. They refer to the cave as "Roubidoux Cave," probably on account of its nearness to the creek of that name which may have been named at the same time. They speak of it as being very large, but on account of lack of time and inadequate lights were unable to explore it to any extent. They did say, however, that they found evidence that it had been inhabited at some time in the ages past, and that gunpowder had been made there. The remains of these reports are still to be traced in the cave.

February 19

The local history of Maxey Cave dates back to the beginning of the Civil War. About 1850 a family by the name of York settled on a claim about a mile below Maxey Cave on Roubidoux Creek. They lived for a time in what is now known as the "York Cave" and to Mrs. Church, who was formerly of the York family, the writer is indebted for many of the stories and legends of Maxey Cave. Somewhere about 1865 a family by the name of Maxey settled on a claim a short distance below the cave,



A better view of the large arched cave entrance, which measures 30 feet high and 70 feet wide. The cave was a popular place for outings for generations of locals. Cave pictures courtesy of Margaret Tarbell Wehmeyer.

although they never owned the cave property itself.

Sometime in the later sixties the elder Maxey became involved in a dispute with a neighbor by the name of White. According to the stories told, some say over a line fence, and some say over a mule. Anyway, in the altercation White was killed by Maxey. He was tried and convicted, in spite of his plea of self-defense, and was sentenced to a term of ten years. After serving seven years he was pardoned and resumed his residence here. Just before the settlement of the Maxey family, the cave was occupied by a band of bushwhackers, the renegades of both armies, numbering about 25, who made this their hide-out for several months. They

raided hen-roosts, pig-pens, and occasionally a cow or calf was missed among the farmers in the surrounding neighborhood, and made a general nuisance of themselves. Patience finally ceased to be a virtue among the settlers who proceeded to get down their old squirrel rifles and did a little bushwhacking of their own. For awhile there was a decided drop in the bushwhacker population as well as among the squirrels, until the cave residents dwindled to the vanishing point, and nothing more is known about them.

Until coming to the locality by the Maxeys, the cave was known by various names, as Roubidoux Cave, Big Cave, Indian Cave and Spirit Cave. The name "Spirit Cave" was given it

by the Indians, for reasons that will be spoken about later.

After the Maxey-White affair it was called Maxey Cave, which it unfortunately bears to this day. The Indian name is far more appropriate for this wonder of nature.

There are many stories and legends of the cave, which in the words of Mark Twain, "May have happened, May not have happened, but they could have happened." They are strictly a story of "They Say." Many of them have some foundations in fact, as investigation by the writer have proven, while some are purely legendary.

According to many stories told of this cave, many people have been lost in the labyrinth of this wonder of nature, and were never heard of again. One of these stories, and most probably true, are of three men who entered the cave with a violin in order to test how music would sound in the far reaches of the cavern.

After they had been gone for several hours, and there was no sign of their coming out, parties of searchers were organized and the cave was searched for them. But the lost men were never seen again nor heard of again. After many days and weeks of search they were given up as lost and the search was abandoned. Mrs. Church, spoken of before as living near here, was a sister of one of the men. Mrs. Church, who was born about 1864 was five years old at the time, which would be about 1869 that the men were lost. There is still a superstition that for many months



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Uncle Cummy poses with Marjorie (left), who was Margaret's sister and Margaret Tarbell at right.

and years the sound of the violin could still be heard. The superstition still persists. The writer who has explored the cave and taken visitors through it for ten years has never heard the violin, although he can find many places where a rockfall could have buried them forever.

March 18

One of the many Indian legends that have been handed down from the distant past may have some foundation of fact. The story is that a tribe of enemy warriors from the north made a foray in this region. The native Indians rallied to repel the invaders and a fierce battle was fought on the hill above the cave. After many had been killed on both sides the invaders were routed and a band of about twenty-five escaped to the cave and took refuge in the vast labyrinth of passages.

The natives laid siege and built large fires in the mouth of the cave in an endeavor to smoke them out. After many days and nights of fruitless endeavor they lifted the siege. The warriors were never seen again. This legend accounts for the name Spirit Cave given it by the Indians. The large number of bats

that come out nightly was thought by them to be the spirits of these imprisoned warriors and the cave was shunned by the natives.

Some facts that tend to bear out this legend is that in the back of the large entrance to the cave, ashes and charcoal to the depth of about four feet have been uncovered, which shows that large fires have been maintained there for a long time. Also on the hill over the cave where the battle is supposed to have been fought, many arrow-heads, spear-heads and war-clubs have been found. All of these artifacts are of the war-head type and are of two kinds. One of these types are found in plenty in the cave, but none of the other. Also it is known that the "Missouri" Indians that are supposed to have lived in this part of Missouri were at war with the "Osage" Indians of the northern part of the state, and are supposed to have been driven out by them.

Another Indian legend, which is pure legendary, is that an Indian maid, the daughter of the chief of

the native tribe, met and fell in love with a young brave of an enemy tribe. Her father was very wrought when he found out and warned his daughter that if she continued to meet her Indian lover he would take drastic action. In spite of her father's objection, they continued to meet. Their trysting place was a cliff a short distance below Maxey Cave, overlooking Roubidoux river.

One night, when the moon was full, he surprised the lovers, and according to one legend, he shot the lover as he stood on the cliff edge. The warrior fell into the river and as the chief turned to his daughter who leaped from the ledge and joined her murdered lover in the waters of the river. The other story is that the lovers escaped along the cliff to Maxey Cave where they took refuge but were never seen or heard from again.

There are many stories of people being lost in the cave for days and weeks. The writer has talked with many who have been lost for a day and night. The writer himself was lost for thirty six hours, but finally

got out under his own power, but in the last eight years many have been lost for six or eight hours. The writer, who has been caretaker at the cave the past thirteen years, has had to go in and find over a dozen men and boys that would attempt to explore the cave with a small flashlight and get turned around in their directions and would wander around until found. There are miles of passages that go up and down and around and around and lead nowhere. It has never been thoroughly explored and probably never will be. There are stories of another opening, but up to the present time it has not been found. An army engineer, testing the cave for bad air, spent nearly a week in the vast labyrinths but found nothing in the way of foul air. He found that there was a current of pure air through the cave and that the air blew from the interior to the front. There is always a breeze from out of the cave. The hotter the day the brisker the breeze. There are stories of different people that have gone into the cave and came out miles

away, but the writer has been unable to meet these people. That there is another opening there can be no doubt, but up to the present time it has not been found.

March 25

Back of this front chamber are two openings to the two branches of the cave. These openings lead to a larger chamber than the entrance itself. This chamber is only an extension of the entrance but at some age in the past an immense rockfall has filled up the entrance to a height of about fifty feet. This rockfall has left a large domed ceiling over two hundred feet high. In this chamber is found one of the most interesting sights in the cave. An immense stalagmite, twenty feet in diameter and about thirty feet high, has built up from

this rockfall from the drip of the stalactite overhead. This drips about



Posing in an upper chamber above the main room in 1950 are (l-r) Margaret Tarbell, Mr. Wilson, Mrs. Frank Thomas, and Ersie Tarbell, Margaret's father.

two drops per minute and has been falling for centuries and will be falling when all of this has faded into the twilight of oblivion. According to some geologists, stalagmites grow not faster than one cubic inch per century. The Encyclopedia Britannica does not give the growth of either stalactites or stalagmites but says that "each drop of water impregnated with limestone, depositing its mite, thus beginning the formation of stalactite and stalagmites, takes many centuries to bring to respectable proportions." On the basis of this statement, the great age of this cavern can be visualized. This stalagmite was building when Rome was built, when Carthage fell, and when Christ was crucified. This chamber stands as the handiwork of nature, unmarked by the hand of man, except where some visitor has penciled his name on the white surface of the stalactites and stalagmites. There are many names written from 1900 to the present time and those older ones are covered with a glaze like varnish, which shows that the growth is very slow.

In this chamber many bear wallows are found which shows that this was a great winter spot for bears as they sought out this spot for their winter hibernation. In the Pulaski County Democrat, about 1932, was an item to the effect that two men from a stave mill at Hanna, Mo., had found a skeleton and two flint-lock muskets in this chamber. Nothing was said whether they were found together or

in separate places. The writer tried to get in touch with the finders but was unable to locate them. But we did see a party that had seen one of the muskets and he said the one he saw was not a flint-lock but an old army Springfield. As a party of renegades were known to have stayed in this cave about the end of the war, it is more than likely that both skeleton and guns were some of that party. The writer found an old Colts cap and ball revolver at the entrance to the cave and it was well preserved and was in a dry place and was not rusted bad. The number on the brass handle, and the name on the barrel was sent to the Colts people and they said it was one of a thousand issued to General Walker in 1846 and was called "The Walker Dragoon." It was the first rifled revolver and was of 31 cal. It had a nine and one half inch barrel and weighed four and one-half pounds. It is now in a collection of old guns in Minneapolis, Minn.

There are many places of interest in this cave, the Lost River, Devils Kitchen, Bat Heaven, Torture Chamber, Rock of Ages, Sweetwater Spring, etc. In the next article we will give its past history.

April 1

That Maxey Cave was inhabited many, many years ago is an established fact. That there were a people of unknown race and lineage that inhabited the caves and rock shelters of the Ozark hills perhaps

a thousand years ago, seems to be proven by stone implements found in abundance in these places, and are thought by competent authorities to date back to the rough stone age. Both the Paleolithic and the Neolithic age are represented in the finds throughout this section.

Untold thousands of years before Christopher Columbus made his famous voyage, the ancestors of the American Indian discovered America. From which arises the question, where did the Indians' ancestors come from originally?

Is it true that the early Phoenicians crossed the Atlantic and planted colonies in the New World which were subsequently forgotten for centuries? Did Chinese junks bring immigrants across the Pacific thousands of years before Columbus's voyage? Are the Indians the descendants of the refugees from the lost continent of Atlantis, who left it before it sank beneath the waves? Are they, as many have contended, the descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel? Are some of them the offspring of the bold Welshman who sailed into the unknown west with Prince Modoc about the year 1170, never to be heard of again?

All of these and many other theories have been advanced and supported by voluminous arguments. The lost ten tribes theory in particular has persisted for generations and is a fascinating story in itself.

The Bible, which is an historical

authority, gives an excellent account of the early Jewish history and of the twelve tribes that made up the Hebrew nation. The wandering of these twelve tribes are followed with meticulous detail.

On the death of King Solomon in 975 B. C., ten of the twelve tribes revolted against Solomon's son and successor, Rehoboam, and formed the separate kingdom of Israel, with the capital at Sumeria. At the same time, the tribes of Judea and Benjamin became the kingdom of Judeah, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Following the Babylonian captivity, Cyrus the great, of Persia, issued an edict permitting the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple. Some fifty thousand of the tribes of Judea and Benjamin did return and completed the reconstruction of the temple in 515 B. C.

At this time the Bible and all contemporary history completely drops any mention of the other ten tribes. To this day, no one knows for sure what became of the lost ten tribes of Israel. They walked out of history and off the face of the earth.

Though some scientists believe that man actually originated in the New World, the weight of competent opinion supports the belief that the ancestors of the Indians came into Alaska from northern Asia. Now it is believed that long before this, the first discoverers of America came over from the Old World to the New in the far northern latitudes where



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Asia and America almost join, and where in the Miocene age there was an actual land connection. How long ago these original discoverers of the New World arrived can only be guessed. Some authorities place the date no farther back than five thousand years. Others believe that at least twenty thousand years and perhaps more, were necessary to produce the various types of Indians, and the hundreds of different languages which developed before the white man came upon the scene. For though the Indian was still in the stone age (the only exception was the Inca civilization of Peru, which had reached the age of Bronze), the red nation varied endlessly.

April 8

That many of these different tribes roamed the hills and valleys of the Ozark mountain region at different periods in the many hundreds of years before the coming of the white man, there can be no doubt. The mild climate in winter, the abundance of game of all kinds, the heavily wooded hills and valleys, the pure springs of sparkling water, all tended to make this a veritable hunters' paradise.

But recent excavations and explorations in Texas, Missouri and Arkansas have brought to light the fact that there was a civilization or culture, if you prefer, that inhabited this region many, many thousands of years ago. This culture, or civilization, was older by far, than any of the tribes or people spoken of before. At present time, there is but little known of this people other than they lived in a very primitive way. They may have been both hunters and agriculturists after a fashion, as many rude implements, such as hoes, axes etc., have been taken from the old rock shelters and caves of this region. These implements are of the crudest make and may have been in use long before the last glacial period.

In the book, "Stone Age in North America" published by the Smithsonian Institute, and written by Warren K. Moorhead, I take the following

and I quote: "The Ozark mountain region, a strange country, about sixty miles in extent where Dr. Peabody and myself found evidence of a culture different from any other existing in this country, containing two kinds of chipped material; that found on the surface generally, and that which occurs in caves and caverns occupied by man."

Also in the same book, Dr. Moorhead again writes, "But the strangest culture it seems to me, in America, is that of the cave region of the Ozark mountains, where Dr. Peabody and myself made several investigations in southwest Missouri and northwest Arkansas in both limestone and sandstone formations are some thirty five or more natural caves and caverns which have been inhabited by primitive man. In these caves there are great quantities of ashes and debris. Our inspection of these caves, the study of local collections, and the examination of the village sites in the region revealed the fact that the chipped implements of the village sites were of a different flint and type from those of the ashes and debris in the caves. The cave implements are rough, save here and there a long slender well-chipped object.

They are seldom well made. There is a profusion of sandstone manos and mortars. There is every indication that these cultures are very old."

That there were three separate cultures that inhabited Maxey Cave at widely separated periods is proven by excavations that have been carried on intermittently for the past ten years. A collection numbering nearly five

thousand pieces, and several smaller collections, all from Maxey Cave and several other caves all in Pulaski county, are proof that this immediate vicinity was at one time the home of the "cave man."

In 1938 Mr. S. F. Wogan, of Montevideo, Minn., came to the Ozarks for two weeks vacation. His and his wife's hobby for several years has been collecting relics of a time long gone, and for some time his interest was centered on the finds in the fields and on the hills in this neighborhood. But one day he chanced on one type in Maxey Cave, which interested him greatly. It was an entirely different type than found anywhere else. And from that day his investigations have been centered on the old caves and rock shelters in Pulaski county.

The writer, who was himself something of an amateur archaeologist and had some experience in the west in excavating, joined with him in excavating and began a systematic investigation of the cave's history.

About this time, Mr. J. E. Pierce, of Austin, Texas, head of the University of Texas, came for a few days visit and at his direction the systematic excavating began. A trench was dug

through the cave and it was discovered that there had been three cultures, or periods of inhabitation, in the cave.

May 6

In this second level many types of arrow heads and spear points are found. Many of these are of the "Yuma" type found in Old and New Mexico, and also in Texas. Also many sea shells only found on the Pacific coast.

This points to a migration from the west instead of from the east as has been thought probable. One large "corner tang" obsidian knife was found here. About two inches of the point was broken, but it was a beautiful flaked specimen. It was about seven inches long originally and without question came from the west. Hundreds of bone beads were found—most of them about the size of a lead pencil, and from one-quarter of an inch to three-eighths of an inch long. Some of them were made from solid bone, while some were made from hollow bones. One cache was found of fifty-four beads which had probably been on a string, but which had rotted away. Some large bone beads were found and some bone disks.

A large number of finely made flint drills, flint knives and flint disks (the use of which are unknown), all of a kind of flint not found locally. Hundreds of pottery sherds are also found at this level ranging from a finely tempered and fired type to a very crude type that was only baked or sun-dried. On many of these crude sherds the prints of fingers can still be seen. Several of these old sherds are found at the very bottom of this level and are from pots that have a pointed bottom, very likely to sit between stones and are from three-quarters to one-half inch thick. They are smooth on the inside and outside and are blackened on the inside from use. They were about twelve inches in diameter. No iron or other metals of white man's make were found. No "trade" articles are in evidence and it is not probable that the inhabitants of the cave at this time had any connection with the east. All these artifacts found at this level are of fine workmanship and are of the polished Stone Age without doubt. On the east side of the cave, and well to the front and about six feet below the west side surface, another level seems to be encountered.

How deep this strata is can not be guessed as water is encountered and a black, sticky mud prevents any



Uncle Cummy with a few of the projectile points he found in Maxey Cave.

further excavation. But this seems to be the real floor of the cave in pre-historic times. All the artifacts found here are of the chipped type and are of flint found locally. Fist axes, war spikes, and very crude knives and scrapers and other implements are found. All this material is of the oldest, and no bones or other stuff is found. A very few projectile points of a different type and material is encountered but on account of the condition of the water soaked earth, their exact position in this strata is not known. They are of a type and material found nowhere else in this vicinity.

Geologists tell us that many thousands of years ago the mouth of the cave was thousands of feet below the present site and that originally the mouth of the cave was much larger. If the people that dwelt in the cave at that time occupied the front, or daylight part of the cave, it seems

to bear out the fact that this habitation was indeed thousands of years old, as they are found in increasing numbers as you advance toward the front. Debris that has fallen from the roof has covered this former level and we are unable at the present time to make much progress in excavating this part of the cave. We are expecting to make some progress this summer but there is so much work to be done before the water can be drained that it is likely to be some time before much can be done.

This, then is the story of Maxey cave. There are three other caves in Pulaski County that show some evidence of having prehistoric history. They are the oldest so far examined by the writer. Many caves and rock shelters show evidence of the secondary inhabitation.

May 20

The ordinary classification of the

Indian tribes that formerly inhabited this part of Missouri is Osage, as they were the first tribe known to have been located west of the Missouri River.

Marquette and Joliet, after completing their exploration of the Mississippi river in 1673, made maps of the area which they had traversed and included on the maps a great expanse of the country west of the Mississippi river. The Osage appeared on these maps south of what is now known as the Missouri River and west of the Missouri Indians. The information which furnished the basis for the maps was obtained from the Indian tribes living on the Mississippi river.

Although the Osage were mentioned as early as 1673, the first recorded visit to these people was not until 1719. LaHarpe, at this time, was among the Little Osage at their village on the Missouri river in what

is now Saline County, Missouri, and the same year DuTisne was with the Great Osage at their village on the Osage river. Apparently these two branches of the tribe remained in the area where they were discovered until about 1800. About this time the two tribes appear to have split and the Little Osages moved west and south. According to some authorities they made war upon a tribe of Indians in the south and drove them from their homes. This ties in with the story of the warriors spoken of before as having been entombed in Maxey cave. Spear heads, arrow heads and war spikes are found on the hill above the cave where the battle was supposed to have been fought corresponds to the type found in the Osage sites, and differ a great deal from the older type found in the cave.

The cave objects are classified by some archaeologists as being of the

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Woodland pattern which is supposed to have predated the coming of the white man to this county. No trace articles of any kind have been found in any of the caves in this territory show any contact with the white man. In the villages of the Osages many articles were found which showed that white traders were in contact with the Indians at that time, but these articles were entirely lacking in Maxey Cave.

Also all evidence found in the Osage sites pointed to an Eastern trend, while all the older objects found in the caves close about here decidedly show a western culture. The pottery, especially, shows a western touch, and the sea shells

and obsidian artifacts are decidedly western, and the "Yuma" type projectile points lead to the belief that the people who inhabited these cave and rock shelters infiltrated these mountains came from the west many years before the Osages settled to the north.

Much of the material found here is typical of the articles found in New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma. Many of the bone beads found are identical with those found in the "Great Temple Mound" in Oklahoma.

All these things lead to the thought that a people, filtering in from the south and west may have come here many, many hundreds of years before the white man came to the shores of

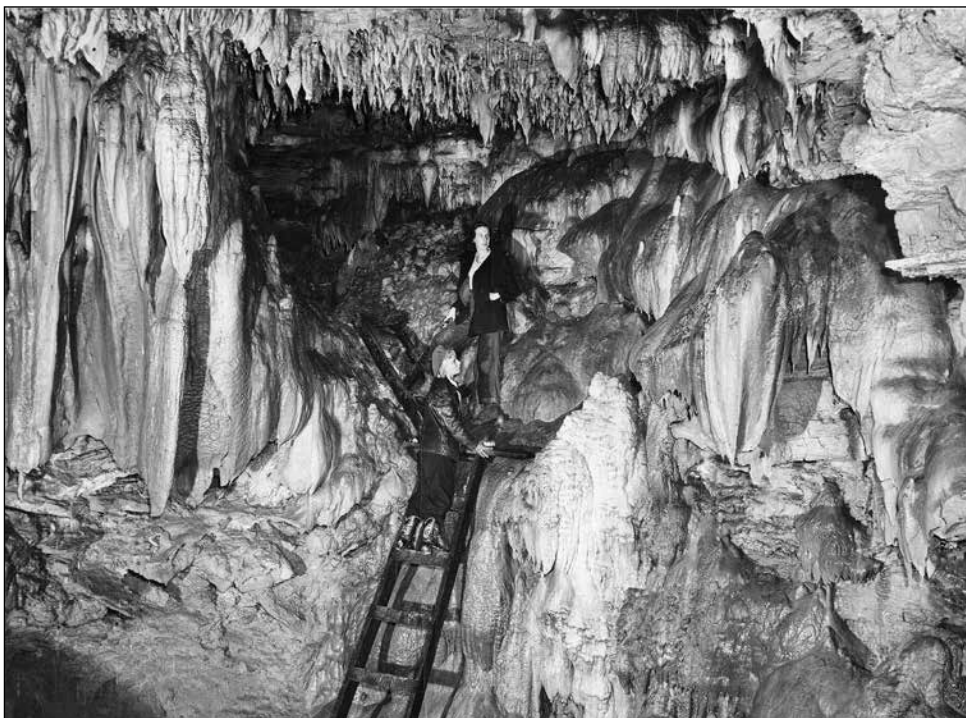
America.

Excavations are being carried on by the Missouri Archeology Society, in the southern part of the state this summer. The building of the "Bull Shoals Dam" will inundate a great many old campsites and the society plans a trip there before the water covers the sites forever. Some work will be done in the Maxey Cave vicinity also.

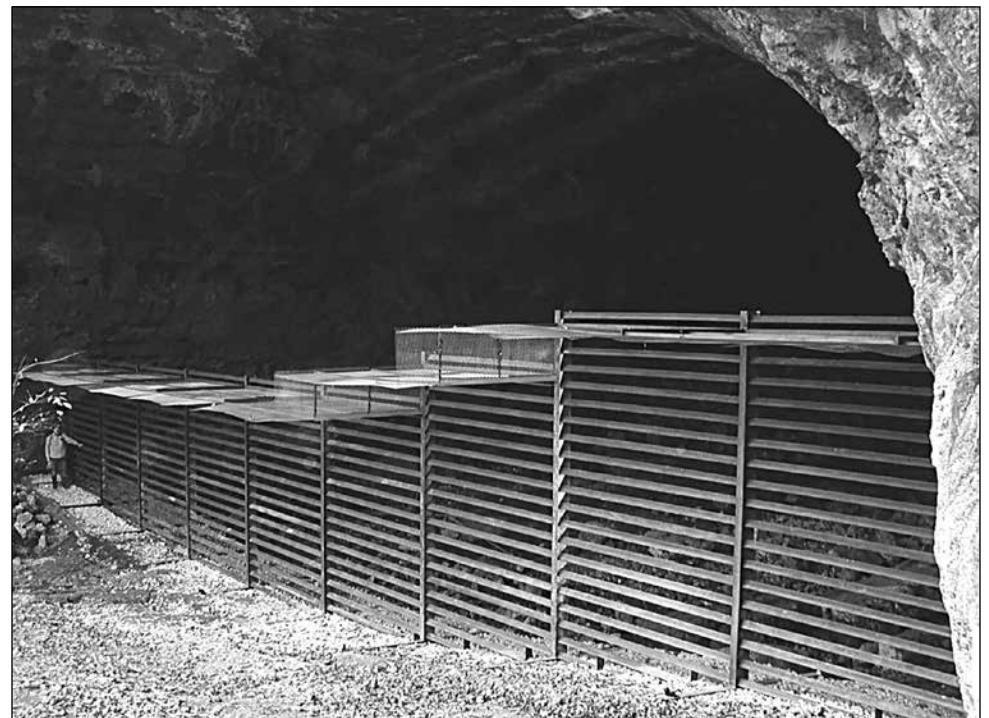
Such then, is the story of Maxey Cave as far as has been unearthed but future researches may bring to light a great many things interesting to archaeologists.

**The End**

*Uncle Cummy, at age 83, moved from his cabin at Maxey Cave to Devils Elbow in September of 1949 to live with the Tarbells. He lived in a small A-frame log cabin next to Hiawatha Lodge. He busied himself with building a large model of a castle from local rocks. Uncle Cummy died in 1954 and is buried in the Hooker Cemetery. Maxey Cave became a show cave in the spring of 1953 until 1960 and renamed Inca Cave. Margaret Tarbell Wehmeyer sold the cave and 15 buffering acres to the Missouri Department of Conservation in 1980 to protect it. For more information on Uncle Cummy, see "Uncle Cummy" in the 2008 Old Settlers Gazette. For an account of the cave during its commercial years, see "Inca Cave and Tarbell Planetarium" in the 2012 Old Settlers Gazette.*



The cave has several areas of active formations. Standing in a particularly rich area of speleothems is Margaret Tarbell. Standing near the top of the ladder is Margaret's friend Mrs. Wilson.



A large half gate or fly-over gate was constructed at the cave in 2002, which the Missouri Department of Conservation renamed Great Spirit Cave. The gate protects gray bats in summer and Indiana bats in winter, as well as the cave.

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*I hope you enjoy  
this edition of the  
Old Settlers Gazette.*

**Thank you for allowing me  
to serve you.**

**RACHELLE BEASLEY**

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