

*“Our duty is to preserve Mammoth Cave, to keep it and to preserve it for the millions of persons in the United States who are proud of the wonder.”*

*Dr. J.L. Harman*

## II

# Sentiment Develops For A National Park

Probably at no time since the saltpetre mining operation in Mammoth Cave has there been any serious intention of using this grand natural phenomenon for anything other than for public amusement, curiosity and education. It was operated for profit, of course, but the caves in the area were left pretty much in their natural condition, and when the area was set aside as a national park there was no serious problem of restoration. Of course, Dr. John Croghan's foresight in preserving the cave and its surrounding territory as a natural estate for 77 years and his own responsible stewardship of it for ten years set a pattern which led naturally to its eventual dedication in perpetuity as a facility for all the people of this country as well as those from beyond our shores who wished to visit it.

### Early Promoters of a Park

The L&N Railroad must have had some idea of making Mammoth Cave a public facility when it established the Colossal Cavern Company in 1898, the entire stock of which was owned by the railroad. The Colossal Cavern Company by the time of the main drive to establish a park owned 1,084 acres in fee simple and 2,305 acres in cave rights in the Mammoth Cave territory. Undoubtedly the railroad intended to use this property to

<sup>1</sup>The L&N Employees Magazine, September, 1926

encourage rail travel to the site; public ownership however would not have detracted from the use of the railroad for transportation.

A Louisville *Courier-Journal* article on May 26, 1936 said that L&N's former president, Milton Smith, had suggested some 35 years earlier that Mammoth Cave should be made a national park. So the idea had been extant for some time.

M.M. Logan, Bowling Green lawyer, former Attorney General of Kentucky, circuit judge and U.S. Senator, wrote a letter in 1934 to the editor of the *Glasgow Times*, Joseph R. Richardson, in which he gave credit to Richardson's father, James M. Richardson for the earliest endeavors on behalf of a national park for the Mammoth Cave. In this letter he said,

"Perhaps you were unaware of the fact that the first man who ever took up the question with the Department (of Interior) in Washington, looking toward the establishing of a national park at Mammoth Cave, was your father. As I recall, it was about 1905 while he was in Congress, that I wrote him a letter suggesting that in my judgment Mammoth Cave should be made a national park. He called upon the Secretary of the Interior at the time and talked it over. Later he wrote me that he had talked to the Secretary and that the Secretary had expressed some interest in the matter. I later saw your father in Louisville and I recall very distinctly his conversation on the subject. He said that it would be necessary to create a sentiment for the Park and that, after we had created some interest in the matter, he would introduce a bill. Of course, you recall that the political wheel of fortune changed and he was not elected for the succeeding term."



Hillside farm land in the area that became Mammoth Cave National Park.

Senator Logan went on to say that in about 1908 he discussed the matter again with Congressman R. Y. Thomas, who succeeded Richardson as Congressman from that area. As a result of this conversation, Thomas introduced such a bill but nothing came of it. From the tenor of Senator Logan's letter it would appear that he had himself drafted the legislation which Thomas introduced. It also is apparent that Senator Logan was the instigator of the matter being taken up by Congressman Richardson with the Secretary of the Interior in 1905.<sup>2</sup>

In 1912, Emmet Garvin Logan, editor of the *Louisville Times*, induced Congressman Young to introduce a bill that would authorize taking over the Mammoth Cave property of some 1,710 acres as well as other lands as necessary, at government expense. This effort, too, was unsuccessful.

In a letter dated May 20, 1966 from John B. Rodes to Blakey Helm, Rodes gave some insight into the part played by the L&N Railroad.<sup>3</sup> The L&N began promoting the cave area as a tourist attraction just prior to the turn of the century. The railroad purchased the Colossal Cavern lands and organized the Colossal Cavern Company. Eventually, the railroad owned 3,300 acres of land, caves and cave rights. In about 1924, said Rodes, the L&N real estate agent, George E. Zubrod, approached Rodes with an interesting proposition. The L&N would be willing to donate the railroad holdings in the cave area provided the citizens of Bowling Green would actively support the establishment of the Mammoth Cave area as a national park. This action, according to Rodes, led to the establishment of the Mammoth Cave National Park Association. Others involved in the discussion between Rodes and the L&N representative included Milton Smith, Jr., and Eugene Stuart.

By 1925, Congressman Thomas was still promoting a national park for Mammoth Cave. In a letter to S. D. Caldwell, Cave City banker, in that year, he said, "In regard to the Mammoth Cave National Park project, I do not think there is any hope for it at this session of Congress; in fact, I know there is not, and whether there will ever be I do not know. The Administration from the President down is against the project. I had done everything I possibly could concerning it, but it will not be favorably acted on unless the Secretary of the Interior recommends it. I feel quite certain he will not do it."<sup>4</sup> This was only a little more than a year before the legislation was passed, which authorized a national park for Mammoth

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<sup>2</sup>The *Glasgow Times*, June 7, 1934.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from Rodes to Helm, May 20, 1966. In the files of the Mammoth Cave National Park Association.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from Congressman Thomas to S. D. Caldwell, January 23, 1925. In the Caldwell papers, Mammoth Cave National Park Archives.

Cave after sufficient land had been obtained without cost to the government.

### **Organization of the Mammoth Cave National Park Association**

Following the suggestion of representatives of the L&N Railroad, a meeting was held in Bowling Green on May 19, 1924 and those in attendance constituted themselves as the Mammoth Cave National Park Committee. The committee was to follow through and promote the idea of establishing a national park for Mammoth Cave. Those in attendance were as follows: M.M. Logan, J.L. Harman, Eugene Stuart, Lieutenant Governor H.H. Denhardt, Sterrett Cuthbertson, John B. Rodes, Max B. Nahm, Milton Smith, Dr. E.R. Riggs, Emery Dent, General E.H. Woods, M.C. Ford, and G.E. Zubrod.

After some preliminary work by this committee, a larger open meeting was held on October 7, 1924 at Moorehead House (later named the Helm Hotel) in Bowling Green. This meeting was attended by about 200 people from all parts of the state and nearby Tennessee. As a result, the Mammoth Cave National Park Association was formed. The officers elected at this meeting were M.M. Logan, President; J.L. Harman, First Vice President; Sterrett Cuthbertson, Treasurer; and Robert M. Coleman, Jr., Secretary. An executive council of thirty members was also elected.



A road in the Mammoth Cave area before it became a national park.

The organization meeting of some 200 delegates included 125 from Bowling Green, 20 from Louisville, 8 from Elizabethtown, 9 from Nashville, Tennessee, and others from Cave City, Franklin, Glasgow, Horse Cave, Russellville, Scottsville, Munfordville and Smith's Grove.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. J.L. Harman, President of the Bowling Green Business University, presided. In his opening remarks, he declared, "Our duty is to preserve Mammoth Cave, to keep it and to preserve it for the millions of persons in the United States who are proud of the wonder." Those in attendance were unanimous in their determination to begin a movement which would enlist the friends of Mammoth Cave everywhere in the United States; members would be sought for the Association in every state at one dollar per member.

The new association began to work immediately in advance of any authorizing legislation, obtaining options for land and collecting contributions. At their Board of Directors meeting on August 6, 1925, a committee on options was appointed including S.D. Caldwell, Robert M. Coleman and George E. Zubrod. A committee on legislation was appointed, including John B. Rodes as Chairman, M.M. Logan, J. Blakey Helm, R.Y. Thomas and M.H. Thatcher (the latter two were members of Congress). The Association was incorporated on July 16, 1925.

By the meeting on January 29, 1926, the Options Committee reported \$593,000 worth of options for 13,335 acres had been obtained. This was four months before the authorizing legislation was approved; in fact, it was even in advance of the introduction of the Senate and House bills which resulted in the authorization.<sup>6</sup>

### Authorizing Legislation Promoted

In May 1925, members of the National Park Commission visited the cave area in Kentucky to assess its potential as a national park. This commission was appointed by the Secretary of the Interior pursuant to an act of Congress entitled "An Act for the Securing of Lands in the Appalachian Mountains and in the Mammoth Cave Regions in Kentucky for Perpetual Preservation as National Parks." The act authorized and directed the Secretary of the Interior to determine the boundaries and areas of certain portions of the Blue-Ridge-Shenandoah area in Virginia, certain portions of the Great Smoky Mountains in North Carolina and Tennessee and the Mammoth Cave region of Kentucky; and in his judgment, determine which should be acquired and administered as national parks.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>The *Louisville Times*, October 7, 1924.

<sup>6</sup>From Association records.

<sup>7</sup>Congressman Maurice H. Thatcher, "Mammoth Cave -- A National Park?", *Automobile Bulletin*, Louisville Automobile Club, March 1926.

John B. Rodes, in a letter to Blakey Helm, said that Milton H. Smith, Jr., son of the former President of the L&N Railroad, led a trip to Washington in 1926 when Kentucky representatives in Congress were called on, a dinner was held and they had an appearance before President Calvin Coolidge.<sup>8</sup> The January 12, issue of the *Louisville Times* reported on this mission by the leaders in the move to establish Mammoth Cave as a national park: "Prospects for the selection of Mammoth Cave as a national park became brighter today with the presentation to President Coolidge of a strong appeal for his support of that project..." The article went on to say that the appeal was made by nearly a score of Kentuckians representing the Mammoth Cave National Park Association. Included in the group were J.L. Harman, John B. Rodes, R.C.P. Thomas, Mrs. B.W. Bayless, Eugene Stuart, Alex E. Johnson, Milton Smith, Robert J. Ball, J. Graham Brown, together with Representative M.H. Thatcher and Mrs. Thatcher, Representative R.Y. Thomas, Jr., Representative Alben Barkley and Lee Lemar Robinson, Secretary to Senator Richard P. Ernst.<sup>9</sup>

After visiting the President, the entire delegation went to the Interior Department where they made their representations to Secretary Hubert Work and other officials of that department. J.L. Harman, as Vice President of the Association, acted as spokesman for the group, both at the White House and the Interior Department.

In 1925, M.M. Logan, President of the Association, sent a brief to Secretary Hubert Work of the Department of the Interior summarizing the reasons why Mammoth Cave should be set aside as a national treasure available to all of the people of the country. In this brief, he referred to a previous conclusion that the Secretary had made about the desirability of Mammoth Cave as a national park:

Niagara Falls and the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky should both have been claimed by the National as too important scenically to have passed into private hands. In the case of Niagara it has been only by the closest cooperation between the American and Canadian governments that so much of the present Falls as are now the scenic marvel of the East has been saved.

The Mammoth Cave area in Kentucky is a remote probability as a national park. It is owned privately, administered under a will the terms of which provide that upon the death of the last-named legatee it is to be sold at public auction to the highest bidder. There are only two surviving legatees both over 90 years of age, so it may be expected that this area known the world over will be disposed of before many more years pass by. Only a purchase, either by appropriation of Congress for the specific purpose or privately, for donation to the United States will enable the creation of this area as a national park.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Rodes to Helm, op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> *Louisville Times*, January 12, 1926.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Logan to Work, February 5, 1925. In the S.D. Caldwell papers, Mammoth Cave National Park Archives.

On April 8, 1926, Congressman Thatcher introduced a bill in the 69th Congress which provided that "when the lands of the Mammoth Cave region of Kentucky, recommended as a national park area by the National Park Commission and comprising approximately 70,618 acres shall be invested in the United States in fee simple, the same shall be established, dedicated and set apart as a public park for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." Hearings on the bill were held on May 11, 1926, at which Representative Thatcher and others, including Representatives Moore and Vincent of Kentucky and Robert J. Ball, a director and representative of the Mammoth Cave National Park Association, appeared and were heard in behalf of the measure. Senator Ernst of Kentucky introduced the duplicate of the House bill in the Senate.

The bill was passed without much delay and was signed by President Coolidge on May 25, 1926. The measure specified that the area be known as the Mammoth Cave National Park and that the lands would be secured by public or private donation. It designated the Mammoth Cave National Park Association as the agency through which the money should be raised.

Many years later, in a letter to the Association, former Congressman Thatcher had some recollections on the events leading up to the passage of the act. He said that the Secretary of the Interior had in mind an adverse recommendation to Congress, but he withdrew it when Thatcher showed him that in his previous annual report, a year or so before, he had strongly recommended the preservation of the cave and adequate surrounding terrain for national park purposes. When this was pointed out to him, "he literally threw up his hands and asked me what I wanted him to do." He was recommending to Congress the establishment of the Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Park, but was going to ask that the Mammoth Cave proposal be reserved for further consideration -- which meant to kill it...

I told him just to send the favorable report of the Congressional Committee to Congress with no recommendation from him involved, and I would draw up my own bill and have the Congress to act on it. He agreed to this and I thus acted and obtained the desired enactment."<sup>1</sup>

### **But There Was Some Opposition, Too**

At the time the legislation was being considered and promoted, there was some opposition in the Mammoth Cave area. For example, a handbill signed by the initials A.C.J. (whoever that was) said, "Is there any necessity for the establishment of another national park in addition to the more than 160 national forests and reservations for the care of which the

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Maurice H. Thatcher to the Mammoth Cave National Park Association, July 14, 1971.

Congress is now making annual appropriations? Has the U.S. government the right to condemn and expropriate the private property of citizens of a sovereign state for the purpose of providing show-places, play-grounds and pleasure resorts for the public?"

Another handbill said this:

*The scheme to make a national park of the Mammoth Cave Estate and provide jobs for three commissioners, etc. What advantage would the people of the United States derive from U.S. government ownership of this property? It is owned by the great-nieces and great-great-nieces of George Rogers Clark -- the conqueror of the West -- and the descendants of Colonel George Croghan -- the Hero of the Sandusky... The present owners of the property keep the cave and hotel open for visitors the entire year at a heavy loss to the hotel in the winter.. But the most important question is this: Is the Mammoth Cave establishment, under private ownership, conducted as much to the satisfaction of the visiting public and to the transportation agencies as it would be under government ownership?*

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Now, the stage was set for the real work of raising money, buying land and promoting the establishment of a national park. The enabling federal legislation had passed and a citizen organization was in being to provide leadership and sustained work to reach the objective.