

Parts of Two Skeletons Found in Cave

6-22-38

Special to the Gazette.

Melbourne, June 21.—Acting on a tip in a letter from A. R. Miller, who lives about four miles northeast of Calico Rock, Deputy Sheriffs Homer Harris and Earl Collie drove to a cave on the Miller farm today and found parts of two human skeletons. The bones were about 20 feet from the entrance, behind a large rock and partially covered with dirt.

Miller, a newcomer in the vicinity, was exploring the cave when he found several small bones. One skeleton is almost complete. The large lower bone of the right leg appeared to have been fractured and knitted back together. There appeared to be another set of leg bones, but none of the other parts of the second skeleton was found.

Harris and Collie put the bones in a sack and brought them here. No identification or clue has been found.

Section Once Searched for Body.

It was theorized that the skeletons might be the remains of two bodies allegedly hidden by Rufus E. Edwards of Thayer, Mo., in May, 1932. In October, 1934, officers searched vainly in the same vicinity for the body of Bruce Claibourne. It was reported his body was buried there two years before.

Edwards, a real estate dealer, was charged also with slaying his step-son, Oscar Bushart, and Albert Johnson, iron worker, near Mt. Vernon, Ind., in an insurance plot. However, he told police that Johnson was slain by Bushart and Claibourne. He said that Claibourne was in love with Johnson's wife. Claibourne was said to have been killed by Bushart and Edwards' son-in-law, Will Ross, who was said to have committed suicide in Oklahoma in May, 1932.

Bushart's charred body was found in an automobile parked on a lonely road near Thayer in July, 1934. The death remained a mystery for more than three months until Mrs. Edwards told authorities she feared she was next on her husband's "murder list," and implicated him in the slayings of Bushart, Johnson and Claibourne.

Mrs. Vaudie Ross, wife of Will Ross, accompanied officers in October, 1934, when they spent several days digging in the vicinity where the skeletons were uncovered today.

The murder in the neighborhood was believed to have been committed at night with the use of a sawed-off shotgun. The skull of the skeleton found today was broken badly, indicating the victim might have been crushed or shot in the face.

Dazzling New Cave Found Near Jasper

10-16-39 Gazette

Jasper, Oct. 15 (P).—A five-story cave, filled with beautiful stalagmites and stalactites, has been discovered on Cecil creek near Compton in Newton county.

The first floor of the cavern was explored several years ago but not until recently when adventurous youths crawled in and came out on the other side of the mountain at a level above the original opening was the existence of the other floors known.

Three other floors have been explored since. Each has an opening of its own. A distance of approximately 100 feet separates the bottom floor and roof of the top floor. All corridors are approximately a mile long.

A half-mile back from the entrance of the ground floor is an immense round column of onyx, rising in the center of the corridor. It penetrates the floor above and goes on up through the upper floors, attaching to the roof of the fifth floor.

Parts of the ceilings on all of the levels are studded with onyx formations resembling onions in shape and size.

Exploring an Unknown Arkansas Cavern

Democrat

3-31-40 Daring Young Men Traverse 20 Miles in Heretofore Unexplored Fitton's Cave in Newton County

By GEORGE L. CONNELL.

Summer is coming steadily on. All of you are beginning to plan your vacations and your week-end excursions. Where will you go? What will you do? Do you plan to see Arkansas first? If so, what in Arkansas attracts you? The mountains, perhaps, with their verdant slopes filled with inspiring scenery, and their streams overflowing with trout and bass? Or maybe the farmlands where grow the finest of rice and cotton, and the choicest of fruits. Well, perhaps you haven't even heard of one of four scenic wonders, one of which the whole nation may someday be talking. One, however, which only a few of the more hardy adventurers among you will attempt to visit and explore for years to come.

One of Arkansas's greatest natural masterpieces lies practically unknown in a time when her people are searching for landmarks to commemorate and scenes to advertise in their bid for visits from an ever-growing traveling public. This wonder is an unassuming cave hidden beneath Gaither mountain in the wilds of northern Newton county. "A cave," say you, "why we've had caves for years. What's new about a cave?" Well, this cave is the largest known cave in the state, probably in all the Ozark region. It may some day be accepted as the most beautiful large cave in the nation. At any rate, some day all the United States is going to talk about Fitton's cave.

20 Miles Explored.

To reach Fitton's cave, one drives south out of Harrison on Highway No. 9. Ten miles from town, at Marble City, a graveled country road turns sharply to the right, and begins to climb its way into the hills. About eight miles up this picturesque mountain lane lies Villines chapel, a white, one-room church situated in a lovely little valley near Buffalo river. Here the hardy explorer must leave his car on one side of the creek or the other, depending upon the season of the year. From the chapel he makes his way on foot up Cecil creek, searching all the while for signs of the wagon trail which the natives call "the highway." It's about two miles to the foot of Gaither.

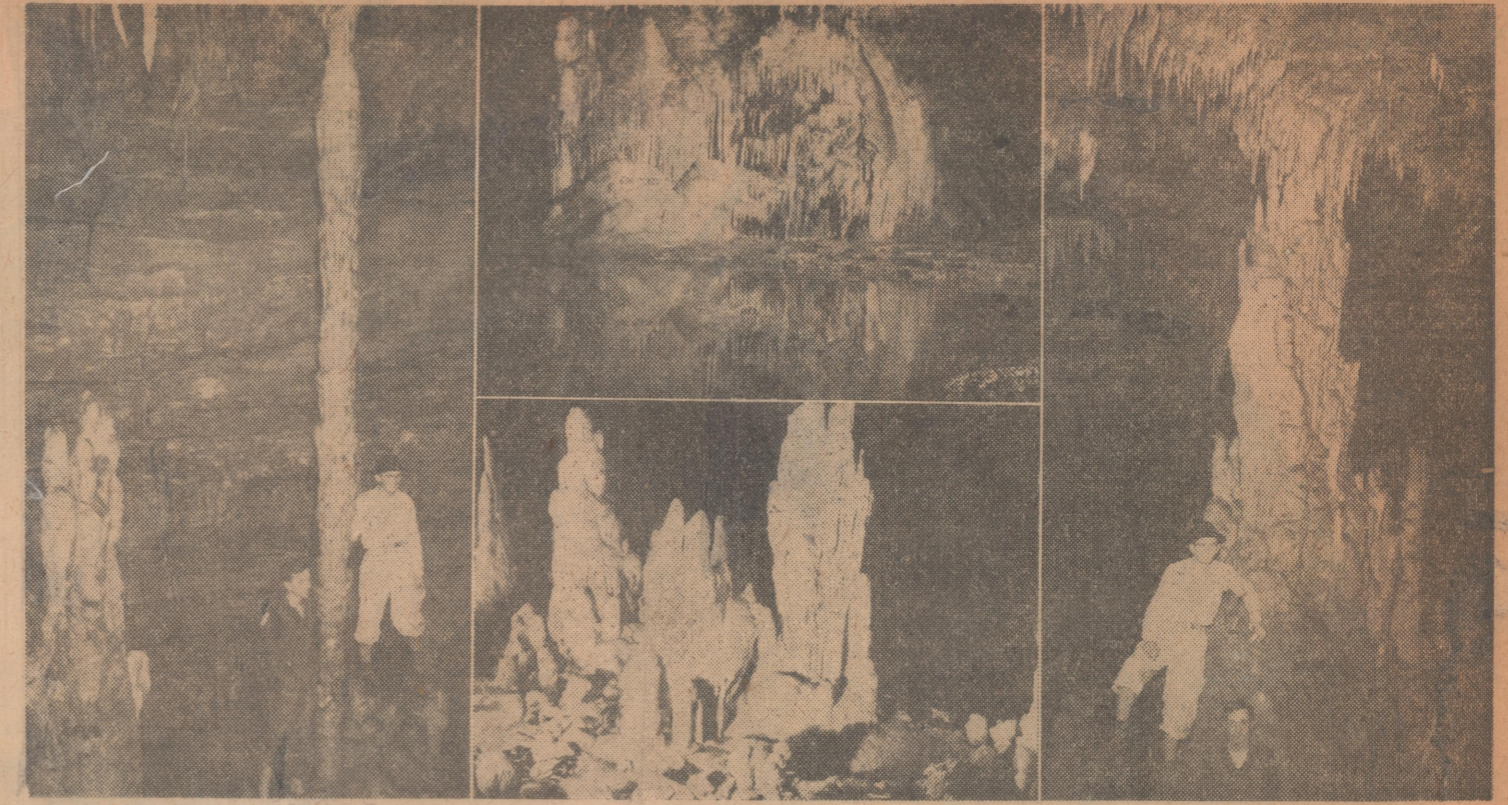
As one friendly old lady put it, "it hain't but a short piece, but hit may seem fer to you." Once at the foot of the right hill—and there are no signs to direct you—a stranger still needs a guide, even though the cave entrance is but one hundred and fifty yards away. Carefully concealed beneath a ledge of overhanging slate, the opening presents the inauspicious appearance of a common hole in the rocks. Once through this "hole," however, you've started on one of the grandest experiences of your life.

Once arrived at the carefully concealed entrance, one scoots feet first through the small opening and drops a few feet to an earthen mound. As soon as the eyes have become adjusted to the feeble candlelight, it is seen that this mound slopes steeply downward some 40 feet. As you go down, you find yourself in an immense room which measures about one-half a city block in size. Everywhere there are the most beautiful stalagmites and stalactites, some extending from floor to roof, and 30 or 40 feet high. In places the ceiling is one hundred feet above. The floor of this great room is uneven, with pretty lakes being formed in the lower strata. Here natural terraces have formed, so that the water stands at different levels up the sloping sides. Judging from the varying estimates of "cave-ologists" as to the speed with which stalactites are formed, the age of this great auditorium is from 50,000 to several hundred thousand years.

Laced With Tunnels.

Far over to one side of this "reception hall," so hidden as to escape our notice on our first visit, is a large hole. By clambering down to a depth of another 40 feet, one finds a passage-way leading farther back into the mountain. This passage is 30 feet wide, with the ceiling varying from three to 30 feet high. As the height indicates, it is necessary at intervals to resort to walking on hands and knees. Except for perhaps 50 yards, however, this passage can be traversed at a rapid walk. At one place along here a gigantic column of lime carbonate comes down out of a hole in the ceiling to disappear through another hole in the floor. This pillar is 40 feet in height and 12 feet around at the base. From this base of the pillar, 10 feet below the level of the first passage, another route leads off, following the course of a small stream of water. Several other tunnels lead off from the main passage, some of them being only blind alleys.

After continuing for approximately three-fourths of a mile from its entrance, passage number one (as



—Photos by the Author.

These photographs show beautiful formations which these daring young explorers found in 20 miles of travel through mysterious Fitton's cave. Unfortunately the shot of "Victoria Falls," mammoth underground waterfall, was not clear. The author said spray from the falling water made good photography impossible.

we shall call it) comes to an end in a mass of fallen rock. On our second trip along, however, we discovered a hole off to one side, about one-half mile from the entrance, through which we could drop 20 feet straight down into still another level, or floor, of the cave. From here starts another tunnel, which we shall term "number two." This one is even larger than the first. With a little work an admirable one-way automobile mountain drive could be made here.

Immense "Rooms."

Passage number two may be the main artery of the cave. Approximately two miles from its beginning it is closed up by fallen rock. A short detour seems to lead back into the same tunnel a little distance on, making it possible to continue one-half to one mile farther to a huge "dry" room measuring, on the average, six hundred by ninety by seventy-five feet. This room is so dusty and dry as to be considered dangerous by cave experts. From it extend two or three other passages, none of which any of our party explored.

Subterranean Falls.

Back up "passage two," about one mile from its beginning, a fairly large tunnel leads off to the south (?). Out of here comes the sound of running water. A few hundred feet along this way lies the "river," a stream of water averaging five feet across and three feet deep. During the past several thousands of years this stream has eaten its way down through the earth until the ceiling of its passage is one hundred and fifty feet overhead. Downstream, the banks allow fast and comparatively easy walking. One party followed this way for four or five miles without finding signs of its ending. Upstream, after about a mile, the walls close in, forcing the explorer to enter the cold water for further progress. In the spring of 1939, Mr. Gallaheer and Glenn Martin of Harrison dared face this cold march for a great distance, to be rewarded in the end with the discovery of "Victoria Falls," which, as far as can be learned, is the largest

known underground waterfall in North America. But this journey and magnificent waterfall can best be described as a small party of us saw it one week later.

We set out for the "river" loaded with a good supply of candles and electric torches, photographic supplies, and a change of clothing. Going up the river for nearly a mile from where we struck it, we came to a large, bell-shaped room, with a floor of dust, and a ceiling one hundred and fifty feet over our heads. Here we prepared to "take to the river" for the grueling march ahead. We placed photographic supplies and dry matches in coffee cans sealed with candle tallow. These were carried in a leather pack-bag by different members of the party. A few of the members undertook the water trip barefoot and clothed only in shorts. The rest, fearful of the cold, wore shoes, trousers and shirts.

We plunged into the cold, clear water under the leadership of Gallaheer and Martin. The walking was easy most of the way, with the water waist deep, and flowing slowly. At times the stream widened out to become only ankle deep. At other times the walls closed in to make it four to seven feet deep. In these

places the water flowed swiftly, but the walls were so close together as to allow us to make progress by placing our backs to one wall and our feet to the other. In one "chute," thirty feet long and three feet wide, the level dropped six or eight feet. Down this the water rushed with tremendous force, making progress extremely difficult.

A Majestic Fall.

After more than an hour's wading, the roar of falling water ahead began to grow. Suddenly we burst into a room to view the grandest sight of our lives. There, from far above our heads, fell a great sheet of water measuring fifteen feet across and one foot thick. Its height was estimated at from fifty to eighty feet. The party finally agreed on sixty-five feet. The roar was so loud that we could make ourselves heard only by shouting. The smallness of the chamber, the flying spray, as well as the intense cold, made satisfactory photography impossible. Of the pictures taken by the three camera addicts, none came near doing justice to the magnificence of "Victoria."

We were unable to reach the head of the falls. It is rumored that some one has since done so, and, by following passages leading on from there, discovered another entrance to the cave. We did find routes leading away from the falls room, but explored only one, and that one for but a mile.

To the lover of caves, Fitton's is a paradise. To one who fears to leave the earth's surface, it could become a long nightmare. To any who venture in, each yard of progress will present new and thrilling adventure. In Fitton's, Mother Nature presents her handiwork of untold centuries. Will you ever wander down its trails?

Student Has Narrow Escape While Exploring Cave.

3-19-40

Special to the Gazette.

Clarksville, March 18.—John Paynter, a College of the Ozarks freshman from Walters, Okla., suffered shock and bruises when he was trapped in a cave at Wolf's Glen, five miles north of here, yesterday. Paynter, one of a group of about 25 students who were hiking and exploring in the glen, entered the narrow cave, at 3 p. m. and was not released until 8. To keep the opening in sight, the youth crawled backward into the cave. When he had gone about 30 feet, his foot caught in a crevice. In attempting to release his foot, he dislodged a stone which fell into the cleft, fastening his foot, in tighter.

When the explorer failed to return to the opening in the time set by the other youths, one of the boys, small enough to enter the opening, wormed his way to where Paynter was caught. He attempted to pry the stone off the youth's foot, but the closeness of the cave would not permit. Several of the boys returned to Clarksville to obtain hammers. Another boy, who could enter the cave, went in to help the first rescuer. Working in shifts, they finally released their companion. Paynter was unconscious when brought out.

He was removed to the college dormitory, and was reported out of danger today.

Exploring a Cave in 1834

Gazette 2-9-41

Diamond Cave, near Jasper in the Arkansas Ozarks, is known throughout the country as one of the nation's largest natural caverns, and at home as one of Newton county's principal institutions and sources of tourist income, but its early history is not so widely known.

Extensively improved in recent years, the cave now attracts more than 10,000 tourists annually. Its location four miles west of Jasper and 25 miles south of Harrison a short distance from state Highway 7, a scenic route of exceptional beauty, has made it easy of access for these visitors who increase in number each year. A spur road leading from Jasper to the cave has been rebuilt and cement bridges and culverts have been added. Current for lighting the cave is supplied by the Carroll County REA Co-operative Association, and a Delco plant which was used before the formation of the co-operative rural electric association has been kept in reserve for emergency use.

Discovery of the cave is part of the first history of Newton county. The most widely credited story of the discovery of the cave is that of Sam and Andy Hudson, who came from Tennessee in 1832 and settled on Buffalo river, between Jasper and Parthenon, about two miles east of the cave entrance. The brothers were hunters. Sam and Andy were hunting with their dogs in the winter of 1834-35. The dogs chased a bear into the cave mouth, and the men trailed the dogs there. Dogs were valuable then because the family's supply of wild meat depended upon the hunting dogs. So the men followed their dogs into the cave. About a half-mile from the entrance, they found the dogs battling with two bears. One dog had been killed. The other dogs were rescued and the bears killed by the two hunters.

The brothers explored the cave for three miles and their markings still are to be seen in the remoter parts of the cave—a capital letter A, pointing inward. They hunted bears in the cave and afterward Sammie Hudson's son, Andy, became the first guide. He did not attempt to exploit the place, for it was not then valuable because of its inaccessible location.

Moore's School History of Arkansas says the cave was discovered by mineral prospectors, but the Hudson story is the generally accepted one.

The entrance to the cave is about 510 feet upon the mountain side. A modern tourist camp, a hotel, skating rink, museum, covered pavilion used as a kitchen for campers in rainy weather, two log buildings and a curio shop have been constructed in a well-shaded park below the cave entrance. One of the log buildings is the old Hudson log house, more than 100 years old, and the other building is from the logs of the old double log barn. These log buildings were moved from the Hudson homestead to the park for their historical value, as well as for their usefulness to house antiques. One of the buildings contains a walnut post bed more than 100 years old. It first was used in the home of Jimmie Burnett, a Baptist preacher of near Compton. The bed was given to Wash Taylor and was obtained a few years ago from Wash's son, Marion Taylor. Also the family's century-old spinning wheel, loom and other cloth-making tools are in the museum. A number of old shotguns and rifles, some of them used in the Revolutionary War, are exhibited.

Panther creek, the bed of which is smooth rock, flows near the cave entrance. Another legend is told of how Panther creek received its name. Once when felling a bee tree, Sam Hudson was attacked by a panther. He threw his ax and missed. The panther was on him. He fought it with his fists and the panther seized one hand in its mouth, and was clawing Sam with its hind legs. His little son, who was with him, rushed up and placed a bowie

Bu Clude Greenhaw.



Andy Hudson, son of Sam Hudson, who is credited with being one of the discoverers of Diamond Cave, is shown above in the entrance to the cave as it appeared before improvements of recent years were made. He is holding an old-fashioned lantern preparatory to guiding a party of visitors through the cave.

knife in his free hand. The father stabbed the panther to death. Panther creek was named to commemorate the incident, and also Panther Inn at the cave was named in this way.

Later Hudson represented Newton county in the legislature and a fellow member sneered at his uncouth manners and finally asked: "You're the man who fought a panther with your fists?" "Yes," replied Hudson. "I did. I can fight a man with my fists, too." He didn't have to prove his claim.

Newton county was formed in 1842. The first county site was Parthenon. It now is Jasper.

Another legend says that Sam and Andy were Confederate partisans during the War Between the States. Pursued by the Federals they fled into the cave and took the "mud route" from the Red Room. The "mud route" is not used now. They traveled this route for two days, until they reached a great waterfall—"pour off" they called it. They could not pass it and turned back. A battle was fought and a man killed in front of the old Hudson cabin. A heavy rifle ball still is lodged in the door jamb.

Although the Diamond Cave park and cavern entrance are near the old Hudson homesteads, they are not part of the original Hudson property. The records show the land was patented to James White, August 24, 1891. W. J. Pruitt bought the land from the White heirs in 1922. He sold the property to the Diamond Cave Corporation in 1925 and is one of the largest stockholders in the corporation.

The Hudsons were a hardy set of pioneers. Many of their children and their children's children live in the north Arkansas Ozarks today. Mrs. Nancy Blackwood Hudson, widow of Columbus Hudson, youngest son of Sam Hudson, is the nearest relative living, she believes. Her mother married Sam Hudson after her husband was killed in the Civil war, making her a stepdaughter as well as a daughter-in-law. She lives at Valley Springs with a grand daughter, Mrs. Merrill Cole, and will celebrate her eightieth birthday December 15. Among some old pictures, Mrs. Hudson found one showing Andy Hudson, son of Sam, standing in the cave entrance carrying an old lantern, preparatory to guiding a group through the cave. It is published with this article.

Diamond Cave is one of the best known scenic attractions in the north Arkansas Ozarks and tourists have come 1,000 miles to view the cave, the management says. The cave is second

in size, so far as is known, to the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky and Carlsbad Cavern in New Mexico. The temperature is 65 degrees throughout the year. Formations for the first two miles before reaching the "Fat Man's Squeeze" are dark colored, then they become brighter, intermingled with delicate shades of white and pink. Old timers believe prehistoric Indians dwelt in the cave and that the smoke from their pine fires blackened the walls for the first two miles. One formation is similar to a slab of smoked bacon. At a point a mile from the entrance there is a "divide," water on one side flowing in an opposite direction from that on the other side.

An author of a standard "History of Arkansas" terms it one of the "Seven Wonders of Arkansas."

Archeologist Again Probes Famous Cave

Special to the Gazette 3-9-41

Harrison, March 8.—Powder-like deposits in the famous Nathan Slay Cave, near Snowball in Searcy county are being excavated and run through a sieve by a group headed by Col. Howard Williams, Chicago archeologist. Findings are boxed and shipped weekly to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. The cave is in the face of a bluff overlooking Cave creek.

Human bones and pieces of Indian pottery and cooking utensils have been uncovered. Some bones and teeth believed to be from prehistoric animals also have been sifted from the debris while two large fangs looking much like ivory and resembling those of a large bear were excavated this week.

Huge Skeleton Found.

Excavation work was conducted three years ago by Colonel Williams and considerable publicity resulted when some of the bones of a skeleton found were judged to belong to a prehistoric human being, seven feet or more tall. Colonel Williams visited here this week with Ross McDaniel, formerly of Snowball. The cave overlooks Mr. McDaniel's farm. Colonel Williams will continue his research for about 60 days.

Records kept by old families in the area reveal that salt was extracted from the cave deposits during the Civil war.

While the cave was in possession of Nathan Slay for 50 years no excavations were allowed. He died three years ago.

An element believed to be wood ashes of considerable age covers a large section of the cave floor and in places is 30 feet or more deep. The cave floor covers less than a half acre. The sheltered amphitheater may, in prehistoric times, have been used for both a dwelling place and a burying ground, members of the party said. The ashes, cooking pottery and stone utensils indicate it was used as a habitation, while the large number of human bones indicate it also was used as a burying ground.

Had Civil War Value.

The cave also is floored with large deposits of bat guano 10 to 15 feet deep. The guano contains nitrogenous matter in sufficient quantity to produce niter or saltpeter, lime, ammonia, potash and other elements, which makes it valuable for explosives and one of the best fertilizers known.

It is one of the North Arkansas Ozarks' many famous bat caves which supplied saltpeter for Confederate powder plants.

Archeologist Sells Deposits In Cave for Fertilizer.

Special to the Gazette. 3-23-41

Harrison, March 22.—Excavations in the Nathan Slay cave at Snowball in Searcy county, of which Col. C. H. Williams of Chicago is field director, have proceeded so far that Colonel Williams is offering sifted deposits of wood ashes, bat guano and disintegrated bones for sale at the cave.

Many of the shells, flints and bones found in sifting the deposits on the cave floor have been shipped to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, while many of the specimens remain in Colonel Williams' possession. They will be brought to Harrison and placed on exhibition at the Daily Times office next week.

Relics From Slay Cave on Display.

Special to the Gazette. 3-28-41

Harrison, March 27.—Col. C. H. Williams of Chicago, United States Army officer, who is conducting an archeological research of the Nathan Slay cave in Searcy county, near Snowball, placed a collection of relics on display in Harrison this week.

Many of the relics on display have been sent to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington and to a museum in Chicago. A large force is employed in sifting the deposit of wood ashes and bat guano for flints, parts of skeletons and rock utensils. Colonel Williams attracted attention to the Slay cave in 1937 by taking from the deposits on the cave's floor the skeleton of a pre-historic woman.

Colonel Williams believes inhabitants of the cave were of a race of dwellers who lived here 30,000 years ago, and that successive generations lived in the cave over a period of 12,000 to 14,000 years. He says that on the floor of the cave the mass of wood ash is 200 feet by 100 feet and 31 feet deep. The skeletons and relics are found in the ashes. Human bones are from the feasts of the cave dwellers, who were cannibals, Colonel Williams believes.

The Slay cave is perhaps the oldest habitation of cave dwellers found on the American continent, Colonel Williams believes, antedating the cliff dwellers and mound builders.

Museum To House Relics From Cave

Special to the Gazette. 6-6-41

Harrison, June 5.—Col. C. H. Williams, retired army officer of Chicago, has bought a 10-acre tract bordering Highway 65 on historic Silver hill, a mile south of the Buffalo river bridge in Searcy county, and will erect a museum, modeled after an army fort or block house, he announced while on a visit here.

Colonel Williams has attracted attention by his investigations in the Nathan Slay cave in Searcy county. Four years ago, while on a vacation he began digging in the Slay cave near Snowball. He has excavated in the floor of wood ashes and bat guano to a depth of more than 30 feet and from the

sifted ashes obtained parts of skeletons, stone weapons and instruments, and the hunting tools of prehistoric peoples. Many specimens have been sent to the Smithsonian Institution and the Chicago Museum. Colonel Williams' museum will be of rough stone, 43 by 31 feet. It will house exhibits of timber native to the hills, specimens of rock formations, agricultural products and objects taken from the cave. Samples of handiwork of Ozark hill people also will be displayed.

About three years ago Colonel Williams unearthed a seven-foot skeleton from the Slay cave. He believes the dwellers in the Slay cave were among the first men on the American continent.