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Front Cover

"Swallows' Cave, Nahant" from Picturesque America.

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The War of 1812-15 was one of the peak periods in United States history when caves were mined to supply saltpeter, the essential ingredient of gunpowder. During this time of turmoil prices rose substantially and the potential for large profits likewise spiraled upward. Many caves in the frontier regions of Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee were more intensely investigated and worked. The mining mania even extended to the domain of the Cherokee Nation, which for years had permitted whites to utilize large caves such as Nickajack and Sauta, as well as a number of smaller ones. In the part of Mississippi Territory which emerged as Alabama, Sauta was probably the most important cave to be mined during the early nineteenth century. But a flurry of 1812-13 correspondence, much of which has survived and is published here, indicates that the saltpeter cave on the west side of the Elk River a mile north of the Tennessee River must rank at least second. Further, when all the prominent names in these documents are taken into account, perhaps Elk River Cave deserves to be more on a par with Sauta.

Although a very historical site, Elk River Cave is also a mystery. Unlike Sauta and many other saltpeter caves, which have been accurately mapped, it is mostly uncharted. During the mid 1930s the Tennessee Valley Authority flooded its main entrance and much of its passage. No adequate description of the cave is known. In 1873, when it was owned by B. F. Watkins, the length was estimated to be "about two miles" which included "rooms opening on either side of the main entrance." Although this length is probably an exaggeration, there is no easy way to confirm or refute it. Elk River Cave is currently listed on the Alabama Cave Survey under two names, Watkins Saltpeter and Thompson Cave. The bluff or Watkins Saltpeter entrance was flooded by TVA. But in 1988 a grotto on top of the bluff was surveyed by two cavers to a distance of 694 feet. A series of climbdowns totaling some seventy feet led to partially flooded passages. Although submitted to the Alabama Cave Survey as a "new" cave and given the name Thompson, this series of climbs and routes in actuality is a remnant of Elk River or Watkins Saltpeter Cave. More recently, dry passages beyond the lake level have been rediscovered which probably equal the 1988 survey.

Elk River Cave has had a large bat population. In 1873 it was claimed that "in many places" the guano was fifteen feet deep. During summer 1913, Ernest G. Holt, a biologist, and a guide crawled "through very small circular tunnels" before they found the bat chamber, where "thousands and thousands . . . lined the ceiling in a solid sheet." Great amounts of guano remain today, coated with a mineral called Brushite.

When the Civil War began the Tennessee Military and Financial Board solicited information about saltpeter caves in Tennessee, Georgia, Arkansas, and Alabama. The citizens of Alabama most often remembered that Sauta and Elk River Caves had been previously mined. For the latter it was recalled that "a good deal of work [was] done there." It is possible that mining at Elk River Cave was renewed by a contractor to the Confederate Nitre Bureau, but no proof is known.
The War of 1812 documents presented here chronicle the efforts of three groups to mine Elk River Cave which was located on land claimed by both the Cherokees and Chickasaws. These groups or their representatives had to acquire permission from the Indians as well as the United States government via the Secretary of War, the Indian agents, and the commander at Fort Hampton not far from the cave.

On March 23, 1812, Return J. Meigs, the Federal Cherokee agent, was requested by "several Cherokee Chiefs," including presumably John Walker, to have white men assist them in the manufacture of saltpeter. Meigs wrote Secretary of War William Eustis who gave Meigs discretion in encouraging the Cherokees in that activity. Even before then Georgia congressman William W. Bibb had approached Eustis about allowing LeRoy Pope of Huntsville to mine Elk River Cave. By summer 1812, mixed blood Cherokees John Walker and John Lowrey, with Gideon Morgan, Jr., as their superintendent, and John Strother, John Reid, John Davidson, and Jonathan F. Robertson of the Nashville-Franklin, Tennessee, area were also clamoring to mine the same cave.

The Strother party sought and obtained permission from the Chickasaw headmen and the U.S. Chickasaw agent, James Robertson. They also wrote Eustis who on September 12 referred their application to Meigs, the Cherokee agent. Important to all contenders for official favor, Eustis gave Meigs the authority to decide who could work caves on Indian lands, including Elk River Cave. Morgan sought from Tennessee’s governor a letter of introduction to Eustis and apparently did go to Washington, D.C., to try to "adjust" the situation, possibly arguing that his company had the best claim. John Walker did not think, as a member of that Nation, he needed Cherokee permission to mine the cave, but he agreed with Meigs to obtain it anyway.

Between late August and early October 1812, John Reid and Jonathan F. Robertson "went forward & took possession of the caves," but were not "permitted to work them" by the commanding officer at Fort Hampton, although on September 17 a subordinate gave Strother’s company "leave to carry" the Chickasaw "permission into effect until further orders." On October 7 Strother solicited Meigs to permit his company to work the cave, since it had already undergone "considerable expense." Sometime that fall the Chickasaw headmen wrote Eustis and remonstrated against granting permission to any persons to mine caves on the waters of Elk River other than the Strother-Reid company.

By mid-October, with authority to do so from Eustis and reportedly Meigs, Morgan and his agent Theoderick B. Rice "descended the [Tennessee] river with 24 Kettles & some hands to take possession of & work the cave." Over a month earlier Strother, probably hoping his group would not entirely lose the opportunity to work Elk River Cave, suggested to Morgan’s Nashville based brother that "there was plenty of room for both companies to work." Meigs encouraged Strother in the pursuit of a compromise and consequently, on November 6, 1812, Strother and Morgan (through Rice) drew up an agreement. Both companies would have free access to the cave, use twenty-five kettles each, and consider the cave dirt "as a common stock free to the use of both parties."

Also on November 6, LeRoy Pope, who had acquired the okay from five, Cherokee chiefs, was authorized by Eustis to work Elk River Cave "under the direction of Colonel Migs." Lieutenant Colonel George W. Sevier, the commander at Fort Hampton gave Pope the go ahead under this order. Pope promised to "work the cave entirely with negroes, except, one person or two to superintend."

On the last day of 1812 Lieutenant Colonel Sevier reported that the Walker and Pope companies were "preparing to work the same cave" and appeared "to be at a good under-
standing." Pope claimed he had spoken with Walker who agreed both could work Elk River Cave "keeping their work separate." On January 7, 1813, Meigs definitely gave his permission for the Pope and Walker-Morgan-Lowrey groups to mine the cave. The two parties were cautioned "not to employ men of dissolute character as labourers." But a week later Walker informed Meigs that he declined "acting in partnership with Col. Pope," and expressed his opinion that the secretary of war had no power to permit white men "to Occupy our rights."

Strother’s group apparently did not obtain all the necessary permissions. The Chickasaws gave them the right to mine the cave, and then, as mentioned earlier, remonstrated to the secretary of war against any others being given the right. Secretary Eustis did not respond to the Chickasaws. He left office, James Monroe briefly filled in, and in early February 1813 John Armstrong became secretary of war. Soon thereafter, John Reid asked the new secretary to confirm the permission of the Chickasaws. But this seems not to have happened.

The Strother-Reid group continued their efforts to obtain authorization to mine the cave. Sometime before March 1, 1813, the company’s agent, John Henry Eaton, "went to the Cave," but was denied permission to work it by the officer at Fort Hampton. Reid again solicited the Chickasaw agent Robertson for permission, noting his company had "been waiting all . . . winter to get a permission from the secretary at war founded upon the documents which we forwarded to him from you." Complaint was made that "Pope & his associates" were "now working the cave." On March 11, 1813, Robertson did issue a strongly worded permission which declared that if any group other than "John Reid & associates" were found working caves on the Elk River they would be considered intruders and their saltpeter and implements would be confiscated. A few weeks later Strother once more appealed to Meigs for a permit, and on April 30, 1813, Eaton wanted Meigs to supply a "Certificate" which would satisfy Armstrong that the Strother-Morgan compromise of the previous fall "unified" the claims of the two companies. But so far as known, the Strother group never obtained final approval by Armstrong and Meigs.

It is possible that the Strother company was still striving to obtain permission in the summer of 1814, after the Creek War. In July Secretary Armstrong forwarded a letter from Congressman Grundy to Robertson which urged "the wishes of a Company of Gentlemen in Tennessee for authority to work a salt petre Cave in the Chickasaw Country" and asked that they be "indulged." The identity of this company is not definitely known nor the result of their request.

Who actually mined Elk River Cave in 1812-13? The documentary evidence shows conclusively that the Walker group did conduct operations there. In 1827 Morgan went to Washington, D.C., to attempt to collect Walker’s claim of $2,100 for kettles, shovels, and provisions bought to work the cave. He stated that Walker only abandoned the cave, probably in latter 1813, in order "to take up arms against the creek Nation." His property was left "in the hands of a faithless white man by whom & the Set[l]ers or intruders the whole vanished." Some of the early 1813 letters allude to Pope working the cave. The writers were either mistaken or else Walker relented and allowed Pope to work the cave too. The contemporary evidence is not clear. The fact that saltpeter mining during this war period could be unusually profitable probably will account for the great determination of these three parties to try to wrest exclusive permission to mine Elk River Cave.

From William Eustis\(^1\) to Return J. Meigs\(^2\)
Sir,

Your letters of the 20th & 25th Insts: have been received. The claims exhibited in your Report were admitted, except No. 3 & No. 11--. The allowance for horses will in no instance exceed forty dollars agreeably to your letter of December 12th--.

The Expediency of encouraging the Cherokees in the manufacture of salt petre is submitted to your discretion. Your arrangements for paying the Cherokee annuity are approved. The affidavits & original documents are returned.--

[William Eustis]

From Felix Grundy 1 to William Eustis

Knoxville, July 21st 1812--

Dear Sir,

It seems some difficulty has arisen, with regard to the permission given to Mr Gideon Morgan 2 to work the Salt petre cave near the mouth of Elk river, on the Cherokee lands.-- Mr Morgan possesses a character which furnishes ample security for his proper conduct and compliance with any engagement he may make, and the manufacturing Salt petre at this time, being a matter of consequence I am of opinion, it would be advisable to remove every impediment out of M' Morgan's way and let him proceed to work the Cave. The papers which Mr Morgan will furnish you, will shew, that no cause of irritation will be produced as it respects the Indians.

The people here, are much exasperated at the conduct of the Creek Indians--. The Declaration of War meets with unanimous approbation;

I am yr humble ser'

Felix Grundy

Letters Received by the Office of the Secretary of War, October, 1811-December, 1812, File G-128 (6), Record Group 107, National Archives.

1. Grundy (1777-1840) grew up in Kentucky where he became a lawyer, legislator, and associate judge. He moved to Nashville in 1807, and continued his career as congressman (1811-14), legislator (1819-25), U.S. senator (1829-38, 1839-40), and attorney general in President Van Buren's cabinet. DAB.

2. Gideon Morgan, Jr. (1778-c1851), who married a mixed blood descendent of the Cherokee, lived primarily in East Tennessee. During the 1813-14 Creek War he commanded the Cherokee regiment under General Andrew Jackson. Cora B. Sevier and Nancy S. Madden, Sevier Family History (Washington, D.C., 1961), 230, 231, 269.

From William Eustis to Return J. Meigs

Letters Sent by the Secretary of War, Indian Affairs, 1800-1824, Volume C, July 8, 1809-December 31, 1816, p. 127, Record Group 75 (Microcopy 15, Roll 3), National Archives.

1. Eustis (1753-1825), a surgeon during the Revolution, became an anti-Federalist politician, serving as congressman (1801-5, 1820-23), secretary of war (1809-12), minister to Holland (1814-18), and governor of Massachusetts (1823-25). Dictionary of American Biography (DAB).

2. Meigs (1740-1823), a Connecticut native and distinguished Revolutionary War officer, during the late 1780s was a surveyor in the Ohio country. In 1801 he became the Federal agent to the Cherokee Nation and served as such until his death. Ibid.
War Department  
August 11th 1812

Sir

Should no arrangements have been made under the authority in my letter of April 28 to encourage the Cherokees in the manufacture of saltpetre—you will please to ascertain from Wm W Bibb of Georgia, whether he intends immediately to avail his friend of any authority to work the saltpetre Cave which he might have considered sanctioned by me while at the seat of government the last winter, and should no claim be urged, you are at liberty to authorize Mr. Gideon Morgan to manufacture saltpetre as agent to the Cherokees.

[William Eustis]

Letters Sent by the Secretary of War, Indian Affairs, 1800-1824, Volume C, p. 145, RG75 (M15, Roll 3), NA.

1. Bibb (1781-1820), a Virginian, earned a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1801, and moved to Georgia. There he was a legislator, congressman (1805-13), and U.S. senator (1813-16). Later he was governor of the territory and state of Alabama. DAB.


From John Strother, John Reid, and John Davidson to James Robertson

12th Aug: 1812

Dear Sir

We are very desirous to obtain from the Chickasaw nation the privilege of working for a few years, a Salt petre Cave, near the mouth of Elk on the north west side of it. We have for some time past been at considerable trouble to ascertain the situation & are induced to think it of great value if worked to any advantage. In thirty or forty days from this time it will be taken possession of by the Lowrys & some other Chieftains of the Cherokee nation who design working it. Believing that they have no right at all, to the land on which it lies; & at all events, not a better right than the Chickasaws; we conceive it a matter of the utmost moment that we should get the possession of it before they do. It is our wish that your son Jonathan should become jointly interested with us in the Cave should we get it; & we are willing that G. Colbert should also become interested with us, if that should be found necessary to procure for us the privilege of working it. If through your interposition on which we rely with great confidence, we should be able to procure from others this privilege we apprehend no difficulty in obtaining the consent of the general government. But in endeavouring to obtain this your aid will also be very necessary & desirable.

When we consider that if we shall not obtain the privilege we ask, that the Cherokees will in a short time take possession of the Cave & may hereafter use it to very injurious purposes against the U: States, we cannot but believe that you will be disposed to favour our protensions, rather than theirs.

The gentleman who will hand you this (Mr. M'Cown) is a very worthy young man in whom you may place the utmost confidence. he will be the bearer of any intelligence you may think proper to communicate to us; & if the proposition we have submitted to you should be so
fortunate as to meet your approbation we believe it will be highly advantageous to all parties concerned, as well as to this our country.

you will perceive that considerable dispatch will be necessary, if you should think proper to second our pretentions. We shall communicate to your son the result of this application so soon as we shall have obtained it.

With great respect we are,

Yr. Obt. Servants

John Strother
John Reid
John Davidson

P.S. Any reasonable allowance, in powder or cash, we are willing to make the nation, if they should require any.

When this letter was wrote it was intended to be handed to you by M' M'Cown--but on second reflection I thought it more adviseable to get Cap' Davidson to see you on the subject--I can assure you sir that if the cave should turn out as Valuable as at present I calculate on; there will be as much as we all can attend to, for a few years-- There is an other cave about 7 or 8 miles above the one asked for--which we ought to have; but of the Value of this other cave I have no correct information.

John Strother

John Reid Papers, Library of Congress.

1. Strother (d. 1815), originally from Orange County, North Carolina, was a land speculator, surveyor, and lawyer near Nashville. He was also a militia captain and became General Jackson's topographical engineer during the Creek War. Reid (1784-1816), a Campbell County, Virginia, native and lawyer, in 1807 moved to Tennessee, first to Rutherford County and two years later to the town of Franklin, where he married. During the Creek and New Orleans campaigns he was an aide on the staff of General Jackson. Davidson has not been further identified. Harold D. Moser, et al., eds., The Papers of Andrew Jackson (5 vols., Knoxville, 1980- ), 2: 185, 272; John Reid Papers, LC.

2. Robertson (1742-1814), frontiersman, militia general, and Indian fighter, moved from his native Virginia to the Watauga River area of East Tennessee in 1771 and in 1779-80 was the leader of the Cumberland settlement at what became Nashville. He served in the North Carolina assembly (1785, 1787) and Tennessee senate (1798), and during his last years was federal agent to the Chickasaw Nation. DAB.

3. Probably John (c1768-1817) and George Lowrey (1770-1852), sons of a Scotsman trader and a Cherokee woman, who lived on Battle Creek in what became Marion County, Tennessee. John conducted a large stock and cattle business and operated a ferry on the Tennessee River. Both he and George were officers in the Cherokee regiment. George moved to Wills Valley, Alabama, and became assistant principal chief, going west during the removal of 1838. J. Leonard Raulston and James W. Livingood, Sequatchie (Knoxville, 1974), 63-64; Sevier and Maddox, Sevier Family History, 230.


5. George Colbert (c1764-1839), also son of a Scotsman, was the richest man in the Chickasaw Nation. He owned a ferry and store along the Natchez Trace at the Tennessee River, a large number of slaves, and a farm in Mississippi. In 1837 he sold out and went to the Indian Territory near Fort Towson. *A History of Lauderdale County, Alabama,* The Journal of Muscle Shoals History, Vol. 4 (1976), 92; Guy B. Braden, *The Colberts and the Chickasaw Nation,* Tennessee Historical Quarterly, Vol. 17 (September, 1958), 229-31.

6. Not identified.

From William Eustis to Return J. Meigs

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Sir

Since writing to you on the 11th Instant, the authority given to the Hon’l M’ Bibb for LeRoy Pope to work the saltpetre Cave with the consent of the Indians has been recognized & probably will defeat the wishes of M’ Morgan. You will please to communicate this circumstance to him as soon as practicable.--

[William Eustis]

Letters Sent by the Secretary of War, Indian Affairs, 1800-1824, Volume C, p. 146, RG75 (M15, Roll 3), NA.

Chickasaw Permission

We the King, Headmen, and Warriors of the Chickasaw nation do hereby appoint & employ John Strother, John Davidson, John Ried, & Jonathan F Robertson & employ as many hands as they may think necessary for us & in our behalf to take possession of & work all the salt petre caves which they may find on Elk River within the Chickasaw Boundary line, & make such necessary Buildings, improvements, & works, for carrying the Manufacture of saltpetre fully into effect, without Molestation During our pleasure.

Given under our hands & seals in behalf of the Chicksaw nation & for ourselves this 22nd day of August 1812

Chinumbee Mingo (King)1 his X mark
Tanumpinchutbbee2 his X mark
Tissu a Mingo3 his X mark

I hereby Certify that the above John strother, John Davidson, John Ried, & Jonathan F Robertson have this day been employed & appointed to work the above named saltpetre caves as above written & they are hereby permitted to Carry the same into effect without molestation.

Given under my hand in the Chickasaw agency this 22nd day of August 1812

Ja’ Robertson
U S agent of the Chickasaws

John Reid Papers, LC, and Letters Received by the Office of the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, 1800-1823, Record Group 75 (Microcopy 271, Roll 1), National Archives.

1. Chinumbee Mingo (c1744/50-1820), king of the Chickasaws since July 1792, actually exerted little power during his reign. Don Martini, Southeastern Indian Notebook (Ripley, Miss., 1986), 36.
2. Not identified.
3. Tissu a Mingo or Tishomingo (c1763-1841), war chief of the Chickasaws from c1799, was a private under George Colbert during the Creek War and a district chief (1815-37). Ibid., 132.

From John Strother, John Reid, and Jonathan F. Robertson to William Eustis

The Honb1. William Eustis

Franklin, Tennessee Augs1. 31’ 1812

Sir,

Having obtained from the King and some of the principal chiefs of the chickasaw nation the privileg of working certain salt petre Caves on the north west side of Elk River near its
mouth (& will appear by the attached certified copy of that permission) we solicit of you the privilege of carrying it into execution.

Believing that an extensive manufacture of Salt Petre will at this time be particularly serviceable to the United States, we are induced to believe that your consent will not be withheld, if by any means it can be extended consistently, with a sense of propriety.

We are aware that similar applications have on this subject been made to you, 'tho doubtless without authority-- To ward off the Suspicion of our acting without the consent of the nation previously obtained, we have tho' proper to annex to the permit granted us such evidence of its authenticity & it has been in our power to procure

We are Respectfully
Yr. Mo. Obt
John Strother
John Reid
Jon. F. Robertson

PS--

We solicit you to give us an answer immediately. Should your consent be given we suggest the propriety of addressing inclosed to us a letter to the Commanding officer at Fort Hampton who might feel an unwillingness to act except on instructions addressed immediately to him-- Your answer addressed to Jno. Reid Town of Franklin Ten. will find us.

Letters Received by the Office of the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, 1800-1823, RG75 (M271, Roll 1), NA.
1. The August 22, 1812, Chickasaw permission.
2. George W. Sevier (1782-1849), a son of former Tennessee governor John Sevier, had been an officer in the U.S. army since 1804. He was at this time lieutenant colonel of a rifle regiment, of which he became colonel in 1814. After leaving the military he lived in Overton and Davidson counties, Tennessee. Fort Hampton was a few miles northeast of the Elk River saltpeter cave. Sevier and Madden, Sevier Family History, 226, 248.

From Felix Grundy to William Eustis
To the Honorable, Secretary at War, Aug 31 1812--

I have examined the papers of which the foregoing purport to be copies, and know that general James Robertson has in his own handwriting certified as therein set forth. I am also well acquainted with all the gentlemen to whom the permission to work the Salt petre Caves has been granted, and my knowledge of them authorises me to say that perfect reliance may be placed by the govm't in them, and not only will they in my opinion comply with any undertaking they may make with the United States, but there would be no danger of their occasioning any misunderstanding with the Indians

Felix Grundy

Letters Received by the Office of the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, 1800-1823, RG75 (M271, Roll 1), NA.
1. The August 22, 1812, Chickasaw permission and the August 31, 1812, letter from Strother, Reid, and J. F. Robertson.

From James Robertson to William Eustis
Sir

The King & head men of the chickasaws have prepared a petition to you naming that they have authorised Jn° Ried, Jn° F Robertson, & Jn° Davidson to work some salt petre caves on Elk River & its waters, within their boundary line on the north side of Tennessee River: The intention of their petition is to solicit Goverm° to sanction & strengthen their authority to the above named persons to work said caves. If Gov° will not sanction their petition they say they will still continue to have the caves worked for their own use & benefit & under their own authority. They consider it will be of great benefit to themselves & the Goverm°. They have not given permission to any other man or set of men than the above named persons, & have that and are informed that some other persons might have represented to you that they had their approbation to work s'd. caves, & thereby have imposed on you. If any other company comes authorised by Govn° they will not suffer them to work it & they consider themselves the sole proprietors of the soil, & therefore have the best right to imploy whom they please to work s'd. caves--

They would not have troubled you but thinking it necessary to have the approbation of Govn° to their measures, & they do not wish to do any thing against the consent of Govn°. They have requested me to solicit you strongly if you have given permission to any other man or set of men to countermand it. I have agreeably to their request given permission to J. Ried Jn° Strother Jn° Davidson & Jn° Robertson, on which they can continue to work s'd. caves if you forbid it not. The signatures to the petition are all those that have a voice in their Counsels--

I am resp'y--
Yo M°. Obt Svt
Jas Robertson

The Hon'b
W. Eustis
Secy at War

John Reid Papers, LC.

John Strother to William B. Lewis

Nashville Septr 9th 1812

Sir

I arrived here on T° 7th Int, and yesterday received your favor of the 31st Utl. and was highly gratified with the success of Capt. Davidson-- I went immediately to his excellency for a letter to Cap't. Sevier on my application the Gov° informed me that M° Morgan of Knoxville had through him applied (previous to his leaving Knoxville) for a letter of recommendation to the Secretary of War, the object of which was to obtain his consent to work the same cave, that he Morgan had obtained the Liberty of the cherokees through the agent, to work it &c on this information I went to a brother of M° Morgans at this place & stated to him what we had done, not knowing that his brother was in pursuit of the same object--& proposed, as the title to the land wherein the cave is situate was disputed by the Cherokees & Chickasaws, and in as much as his brother had got the consent of the one party, & we had got the consent of the other--that I conceived it our interest to accommodate & understand each other on this point, & thereby present any complaints of either of the nations, which might ultimately terminate in such manner

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as to defeat both our parties—observing that there was plenty of room for both companies to
work (not as partners) amicably at the same time— M' Morgan of this plan seemed to think with
me, & to this affect, wrote to his brother by yesterdays mail— It is my wish that such an
accommodation take place & know it will be to all our advantages—

Should this accommodation take place which you must try to facilitate—let me know as
soon as possible to the end I may lay in kettles sufficient to carry on the project— you had
better attend to the arrangement, & if possible effect it— I would see you immediately but some
d_mn pecunary embarresments of my friend J.G.B^6—property—makes my attention to it
indispensable and immediate—

Yours sincerely
John Strother

John Reid Papers, LC.

1. The envelope was addressed "M' John Reid attention Mr Lewis[,] Franklin." Lewis (1784-1866), originally
from Loudoun County, Virginia, moved to Nashville, where he became a planter and close friend of Andrew
Jackson. He was the General's quartermaster 1812-14, and went to Washington as the second auditor of the
treasury when Jackson became president. He lived in the White House and was part of the group called the
"Kitchen Cabinet." He returned to Tennessee in 1845. DAB.

2. George W. Sevier.

3. Willie Blount (c1768-1835) had served as private secretary during the 1790s to his half-brother, William
Blount, governor of the Southwest Territory. He subsequently became a legislator (1807-09) from Montgomery
County and governor of Tennessee (1809-15). Ibid.

4. Gideon Morgan, Jr.

5. Not identified.

6. John Gray Blount (1752-1833), a Washington, North Carolina, merchant, plantation owner, and land
speculator. Strother was his attorney regarding a large tract of land in Tennessee. The National Union Catalog

William Eustis to Felix Grundy

War Dept
Sept 12 1812

Sir

Your letter of August 31st inclosing a copy of an agreement between the headmen of the
chickesaws and John Strother & others has been received and is refered to Colonel Meigs to
whom all similar applications have been transmitted.

very respectfully Sir
Your Ob't. Servant

Honorable

Felix Grundy
Nashville

John Reid Papers, LC.

William Eustis to Return J. Meigs

War Department
Sir,

Your letter of August 12th has been received. It seems advisable to suspend the establishing of a factory at Arkansas, until the Disposition of the Indians in that Quarter shall be more fully ascertained—much however depends on your judgement in relation to arrangements for the Cherokees.— Herewith inclosed you will receive a communication, stating an arrangement entered into between the Head men of the Chickasaws & John Strother & others to manufacture saltpetre.— As similar applications have been referred to you, Mr Grundy will be informed of the Order which has been taken in this case.—

[William Eustis]

Letters Sent by the Secretary of War, Indian Affairs, 1800-1824, Volume C, p. 150, RG75 (M15, Roll 3), NA.

Military Permission to John Strother et al.

Application being made to me at Fort Hampton by Jn°. Strother Jn°. Reed Jn°. Davidson & Jn° F Robertson, for leave to work a certain salt petre cave on Elk River, within the Chickasaw boundary line, and s°. applicants having produced to me a written permit signed by the King and certain chiefs of the chickasaw nation attested by James Robertson agent thereto, to work s°. cave during their pleasure, I do grant them leave to carry said permission into effect until further orders—

Fort Hampton
Sep', 17th 1812

Jas Mc'Donald
Cap'. R R Comg

John Reid Papers, LC.

1. McDonald (d. 1830), a Virginian by birth, was appointed to the U.S. army from Ohio. Between 1808 and 1814 he rose from captain to lieutenant colonel of the 1st Rifle Regiment. Later he was colonel of the 4th Rifle Regiment and the 7th U.S. Infantry, resigning in 1817. While this document indicates he commanded Fort Hampton, he probably was merely filling in during an absence of Lieutenant Colonel George W. Sevier. Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army (2 vols., Washington, D.C., 1903), 1: 662; Sevier and Madden, Sevier Family History, 248.

Permission to John Strother et al. from the U.S. Chickasaw Agent

The bearers hereof John Reid, John Strother, Jonathan F. Robertson, & John Davidson, are hereby permitted to work any salt petre caves they may find on Elk River, and the waters of Elk unless prohibited by government

given under my hand at the Chickasaw agency house this 18th day of Sept'. 1812

Jas Robertson
U S agent to the Chickasaws

John Reid Papers, LC.

John Walker to Return J. Meigs

Walkers Ferry Oct' 1 1812

The Journal of Spelean History
Dr Sir:

In Consequence of a Bad Cold and a slight fever I am unable at this time of paying you a personal Visit which I had intended to have done. Some time Since the Subject of the Cave is to me an interesting one believing the Right of it belongs to the Cherokees I know of no authority which any man can have to work it without their approbation I am one of that Nation have a Right to do so, but when the approbation of the whole nation is possessed by me for that purpose. No man Even a Cherokee himself--could not occupy the Cave without obtaining a permit from me to that purpose. I was at the Green Corn dance the subject was Named to all the Chiefs who approved and applauded the measure. I did not obtain their written Cosent believing it unnecessary. this however will be done in 8 or 10 days M'. Hicks² attends the talk at Hightower for that purpose and will most assuredly obtain their names to a grant to the Cave in Consequence of the encouragement given by yourself in Conformity to the Letter of the Secretary of war, there has been incurred an Expence of as Least 2,000 dollars. Had not there been Just grounds to believe that the Cave Could have been occupied this Expence would not have heaped upon me and my associates a load of debt (too much induced as without the possession of the Cave). I shall be unable to discharge without particular inconvenience.

I am willing Should Col. pope possess a better title to the Cave that what I do that he shall possess it. I will Claim no previleged from being a Cherokee which I might with propriety urge. M'. Morgan is now on his way down. I have to Request you to give him some authority to work the Cave until some other person shall produce a Better Claim whin I assure you the works shall leav until the Right shall be determind. I am

Dear Sir your obt. Ser'.

John Walker

Records of the Cherokee Indian Agency in Tennessee, 1801-1835, Record Group 75 (Microcopy 208, Roll 5), National Archives.

1. Walker (111827), a prominent half blood Cherokee and Hiwassee River ferry operator, was major of the Cherokee regiment during the Creek War. Recipient of a 640 acre reservation in the treaty of 1817-19, he established the town of Calhoun on it, and in 1820 was a McMinn County justice. Sevier and Madden, Sevier Family History, 230-31; Goodspeed's History of Tennessee (Nashville, 1972 [1887]), 811, 813.

2. Probably Charles R. Hicks (1767-1827), son of a white trader and a Cherokee woman, who was the Cherokee Nation interpreter for about thirty years. By 1817 he was the Nation's second in authority, and lived at Red Clay east of present day Chattanooga. Robert Sparks Walker, Torchlights to the Cherokees: The Brainerd Mission (New York, 1931), 27, 37, 63, 113.

From Chickasaw Leaders to William Eustis [ca. Fall, 1812]

We the King head men & warriors of the Chickasaws would hereby[?] represent to your honor that there are some Salt Petre Caves on Elk River and the tributary streams thereof which we have authorised In° Reed John Strother Jonathan F Robertson & John Davidson, to work any which may be found on s° river & its tributary streams within our limits, for us and in our names, as we may agree or, from time to time, we are of the opinion that no claim can be put in by the Cherokees for any part of Elk River after the convention held with the s° Cherokees by Gen Dearborne¹ at the City of Washington on the 7th January 1806, the boundary was fixed on and agreed to by the Cherokee King & four other Cherokees commissioned by their nation to meet commissioners from the chickesaw nation & Col° Meigs & Gen Robertson commissioners of the U.S. which boundary was agreed on & marked by s° commissioners, from the
creek and Chickasaw nations, in presence of Col. Meigs & Gen. Robertson & Major Freeman, United States Surveyor and a number of others. The place agreed on and marked is on the north bank of Tennessee River on a large sycamore forty miles above the mouth of Elk River. We presumed the above named Col. Meigs and Gen. Robertson did make the return to your office, of the upper boundary being fixed on at the upper named large Sycamore a little below the mouth of Chicksaw Creek—which is now called by the white people Flint River. This is to put you in mind of what has been done by the two nations, Cherokee & Chickasaw, so that if the Cherokees do pretend to claim any land below that boundary that their claim is not valid that we have been informed that another Company have applied to obtain permission from your Excellency to work said caves without any consent previously obtained of us. That conceiving ourselves to have the only right of working the caves, or to delegate to others the right to work them under the authority of the Gen. Government, and considering ourselves under the same, would humbly remonstrate with your excellency against granting permission to work said caves to any other persons than those above named; we solicit the sanction of your excellency to the permission we have given to the above named John Strother, John Reid, Jonathan P. Robertson, and John Davidson that they go on to make experiments & work said caves for us & in our behalf, we presume that if those caves are valuable they ought not to lie dead: and that no other nation but the true owners of the soil & the United States ought in right to be benefitted by said caves.

Chenumbe Mingo king his X mark
Themproststre(?), young king his X mark
Anoshemeco(?), his X mark
Emillabonne(?), his X mark
George Colbert(?), his X mark
Tanumsinchtubbee(?), his X mark
Tissu a mingo his X mark
William McGillery(?), his X mark
George Pettigrew(?), his X mark
Pacemuchtubbe(?), his X mark
Levi Colbert his X mark
James Underwood(?), his X mark
William Glaser(?), his X mark

Jas Colbert
Interpreter for the Chickasaw Nation

John Reid Papers, LC; Letter Book, pp. 213-14, Mississippi Archives, Jackson.

1. Henry Dearborn (1751-1829) was an active participant in the Revolutionary War and a member of Washington's staff. He settled in Maine (then Massachusetts), and the positions he held included militia general, U.S. marshal, congressman, secretary of war (1801-9), senior major general of the U.S. army during the War of 1812, and minister to Portugal (1822-24). DAB.

2. Thomas Freeman (d. 1821), an Irishman who came to America in 1784, was a noted surveyor. During the 1790s he surveyed the northern part of the planned Washington City. In 1806 he explored and mapped the lower Red River and the next year he mapped part of the boundary between Tennessee and what became Alabama. His last position (1811-21) was surveyor of public lands of the United States south of Tennessee. Ibid.

3. Most of the signatures of this document are virtually illegible. Only five of the Chickasaw leaders have been identified, three of whom have already been noted. The others are McGillivray/McGillivray/McGillivray (c1754-c1844), a district chief, and Levi Colbert (c1759-1834), a full brother of George, who lived much of his life in
Mississippi. Late in life he had considerable influence and in 1829 he was described as "to the Chickasaws what the soul is to the body." Martini, *Southeastern Indian Notebook*, 38-39; Guy B. Braden, "The Colberts and the Chickasaw Nation," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 17 (September, 1958), 231-35.


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**John Strother to Return J. Meigs**

*Head of Elk Octo\(^{9}\) 1812*

*Sir__*

In August last Cap' John Davidson John Reed Esq' Jonathan Robertson & myself--through the Chickasaw agency of ________ Cheifs of that Nation work two salt Peter the mouth of the ________ miles above ________ through the ________ Felix Grundy solicited the approbation ________ the secretary of war to our agreement ________ answer to M' Grundy is herewith inclosed. In the meantime Mess" Reed & Robertson went forward & took possession of the caves, but was not permitted to work them, by the officer commanding at Fort Hampton.

You will perceive that the object of this address, is through you, to get a permit work the caves. Through M'Ri\(^{2}\) ________ informed that a M' Morgan in ________ work one of the said Caves, as ________ med by the off ________ Hampton--but ________ known to the offic ________ Garrison it appeare ________ not be a very agreeable neighbour.--

The Cheifs of the chickasaw nation was since informed that M' Morgan and some Cherokee chiefs intended to work the said caves, claiming them as their right to this information. They replied, That they had long since been induced to believe, that the right to that section of country had been well understood, not only by the two nations, but by the Genl. government ________ aid and friendly ________ siness and we are ________ Chickasaw nation ________ compliance on our ________ th them through ________ agency. It ________ doubtful with me ________ ther or not the caves are worth much tho this fact, is hereafter to be ascertained. We have already put ourselves to considerable expense & I feel very anxious to know what will be the result and we shall anxiously await your answer by the bearer. Please reinclose to me the inclosed ________. I am Sir with sentiments of ______pect & esteem your M"

*Obt Servant*

John Strother

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1. Large portions of this letter have been torn or damaged, leaving numerous gaps in the text.
2. Theodorick B. Rice (c1780/90-c1840), a Knoxville attorney, soon moved to Sparta, Tennessee, where a mile south of town he conducted an iron forge on the Calskiller River, as well as grist mills. During the 1830s he was a town merchant. Byron Sistler, trans., *1830 Census Middle Tennessee* (Evanston, Ill., 1971), 172; *Goodspeed's Tennessee*, 798-800, 810; WPA, *White County Court of Pleas & Quarter Session 1835-1841* (Nashville, December, 1941), 110, 389.
3. Not identified.
Gideon Morgan, Jr., to John Strother

Huntsville. Oct 16. 1812

Sir

I had intended to have had the pleasure of seeing you and the other gentlemen interested in working the Cave at the mouth of Elk. an open Letter from Col. Meigs to yourself will place that Business properly before you. Any arrangements entered into between yourself and the Bearer M’. Rice will meet with my approbation.

I am Sir Resp’y

your obt.

G. Morgan

John Strother Esq.

John Reid Papers, LC.

John Strother and William B. Lewis to John Reid

Nashville. October 22d. 1812

D’ Jack

On the receipt of the inclosed letter to Mr Grundy I forwarded it inclosed in the inclosed letter to Colº Meigs—my messenger returned yesterday but did not see Colº Meigs he being from home and not expected for some weeks to return—. My messenger, by instructions, returned by Lowreys, at which place he learned that Mr Morgan & some of that party had descended the river with 24 Kettles & some hands to take possession of & work the cave—that they had authority so to do from the secretary of war & from Colº Meigs also—Lowery observed, that he had been informed, that myself & others had got the consent of the chickasaw chiefs to work the said cave, and he did suppose that the two companies would agree amicably, & work the cave— I am still of opinion that it will be best to enter into such an agreement—at the same time it is well for us to examine the upper cave;¹ a Mr. Ragsdale² on Bradshaws Creek can shew this upper cave.— a few days past a man applied to Gen¹ Roberson for a permit to work an other cave on the Waters of Sugar Creek,³ which his in the Vicinity of our upper cave—the Gen¹ informed the applicant that our company had permission from the chickasaws to work all the caves on Elk & its waters, & all in that vicinity— Thus far you perceive we have a preference & it will be well for examination to be made without dalay— I am compelled to go on to Montgomery Stewart, Humphreys, Dixon, Hickman, Maury, Giles, & Lincoln Countys, immediately, on business in itself indispensable— Mº Lewis will on my part attend to the Salt Peter caves, & you may be well assured that delays will create daingers, in the mean time we are consuming day light in a manner almost unpardonable.

I am sincerly yº &c

John Strother

I expect to be on to Franklin in a day or two, perhaps on Friday—make such arrange­ments as may be necessary by that time

yours &c

John Reid Papers, LC.

W. B. Lewis

1. This unidentified cave presumably is the one “about 7 or 8 miles above” the cave near the mouth of Elk River.

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2. Probably William H. Ragsdale (fl.1824), who in 1813-15 owned forty acres of land on the west fork of Bradshaw Creek in Giles County, Tennessee. Later, he acquired land in Limestone County, Alabama. WPA, Giles County Tennessee County Court Minutes 1813-1815 (May 6, 1936), 8, 191; Probate Minute Index Volume 1: Limestone County, Alabama (n.p., n.d.), 152; Margaret M. Cowart, Old Land Records of Limestone County, Alabama (Huntsville, Ala., 1984), 33.

3. The whereabouts of this cave is also unknown. Sugar Creek is in Giles County, Tennessee, and Limestone County, Alabama. In the latter county, on the Salem topo map, is AL230, Kendall Saltpeter Cave.

**Agreement Between the Strother and Morgan Parties**

Articles of agreement made and entered into this 6th day of November in the year 1812--

Between John Strother of the County of Davidson and state of Tennessee on his own behalf and in behalf of John Reid, Jonathan F. Robertson and John Davidson of the one part, and Gideon Morgan Jr by his attorney Theoderick B. Rice of the County of Knox and state aforesaid of the other part Witnesseth that the said John Strother for himself and others agrees with the aforesaid Gideon Morgan Jun' by his attorney Theoderick B. Rice that the aforesaid Gideon Morgan Jun' shall have free ingress, egress & regress to to a certain Salt Petre Cave at or near the mouth of Elk River so fare as he the said Strother for himself & others hath or may have the power so to do, and that the said Gideon Morgan Jun' or any person acting for him shall be at liberty to work in Manufacturing Salt Petre at said Cave twenty five kettles, the profits of which he the said Gideon Morgan Jun' shall be entitled to receive. And the said Gideon Morgan Jun' by his attorney Theoderick B. Rice, doth on his part agree with the aforesaid John Strother and those for whom he is acting or either of them, or any person under their directions shall have free ingress, egress and regress to a certain Salt Petre Cave at or near the mouth of Elk river so far as he the said Gideon Morgan Jun' for himself and others hath or may have the power so to do and that the said John Strother and those for whom he is acting or any person acting for him or them shall be at liberty to work in manufacturing salt petre at said Cave twenty five kettles the profits of which he the said Strother and those for whom he is acting shall be entitled to receive.

The said Strother for himself and others and the said Gideon Morgan Jun' by his attorney Theoderick B. Rice do agree each with the other that all the expence which may be necessarily incurred in opening the mouth of said Cave shall be defrayed jointly by the parties to these presents, it is further agreed by the parties aforesaid that the price of provisions, ashes labour and all other things necessary to conduct the manufacturing of Salt Petre at the said Cave shall be fixed on by the parties who will be concerned in working the aforesaid Cave at a fair price, which price neither of the parties Shall exceed under the penalty of one thousand Dollars it is understood that the price of kettles is not to be considered in this item. And lastly it is agreed by the parties to these presents to the end that no dispute may arise with respect to a preference or choice to any particular part or parts of the earth contained within said cave, that the same shall be held and deemed as a common stock free to the use of both parties and that neither of the parties to this agreement shall be exclusively entitled to occupy more than a Moiety of any scite convenient to the mouth of the cave in the manufacturing of Salt Petre-- In witness whereof we have here unto set our Hands and affixed our seals.

Witness

W. G. Blount

Edwin E. Booth

John Strother for himself John Reid, Jon' F Robertson & John Davidson Gideon Morgan Jr By his attorney

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The Journal of Spelean History
T B Rice as attorney has in his possession a copy of the foregoing

John Reid Papers, LC.
1. William G. Blount (1784-1827), son of William Blount and half nephew of Willie Blount, was a Knox County lawyer, legislator (1811), Tennessee secretary of state (1811-15), and congressman (1815-19). He moved to Henry County, Tennessee, the year before his death. Booth (1774-1824), also a Knox County resident, was a state representative (1811-12) and militia officer. Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989 (Washington, D.C., 1989) [BDUSC], 635-36; Robert M. McBride and Dan M. Robison, Biographical Directory of the Tennessee General Assembly (6 vols., Nashville, 1975-91) [BDTA], 1: 61.

John Strother to Felix Grundy

Nashville Nov 6th, 1812

Sir

Inclosed is a copy of an agreement this day entered into between M' Gideon Morgan Jun and myself with respects to working a saltpetre cave at or near the mouth of Elk river.

You will be so good as to observe that the cave is situate in a tract of country claimed both by the Cherokee & Chickasaw Nations of Indians-- That M' Morgan has been by the Cherokee national priviledged to work this cave and that myself & others have been priviledged to work the said cave by the Chickasaw Nation-- The secretary of war having authorised Col Meigs to determine which of the companies should have the preferance of working said cave & Col Meigs having advised or recommended that a compromise take place between myself & M'. Morgan; it has been made.--

The country being now engaged in a war1--the article of salt Petre being absolutely necessary--I would submit the propriety & policy that the government should adopt such measures relative to the manufacturing Petre at this cave & those in its vicinity on Elk river & its waters as will quit in possession those persons who may attempt the manufacture. The officer commanding the Garison at Fort Hampton will require special instructions from the Secretary of War--not only to permit the working said cave or caves--but to protect those who may be engaged in it, before we will be permited to make the attempt.

The parties have been at considerable expence in procuring kettles, potash &c &c. Hence the propriety of there being enabled to take possession of the cave & proceed to work as soon as possible--to facilitate which, I rely much on your friendly aid & attention

I am respectfully
Yr & Ob' Serv'
John Strother

John Reid Papers, LC.

Gideon Morgan, Jr., to Return J. Meigs

Knoxville Nov 24th, 1812

Dear Sir

The Journal of Spelean History
I am Happy to have it in my power to inform you that agreeable to your friendly advice an arrangement took place between M'. John Strather and others and myself in behalf of the Cherokee indians which I trust will with the Sanction of the Sec'y of war place the Salt petre Cave at the mouth of Elk in the possession of and mutual benefit of Both parties. I would take it kind of you would you on Recieving an answer from the Sec'y of war Communicate the same to me. I am Sir Respec'y your Obt Hon'. Ser'.

G. Morgan jr

Col. R. J. Meigs Esq'.

Records of the Cherokee Indian Agency in Tennessee, 1801-1835, RG75 (M208, Roll 5), NA.

LeRoy Pope to Return J. Meigs

Huntsville 26th December 1812

Sir

During of the last session of Congress I made application through my friend the Honb'. William W Bibb to the secretary at war for permission to work a Salt Peter Cave on Elk river, on what is understood to be double heads reservation.¹ in november I received a Permit from the secretary, Permiting of me to work a Salt Peter Cave on the Indian lands, under your directions, I immediately applied to Col² Sevier who have granted me the liberty of proceeding, who has the permit, feel perfectly satisf'd to grant me one from under y'. hand. I shall work the cave entirely with negroes, except, one person or two to superintend, which will be necessary, and shall strictly conform to what ever rules the officer commanding at Fort Hampton shall deem proper. The secretaries permits does not state what cave, but I never applied to work any other but the one neare the mouth of Elk river on the reservation. The bearer hereof M'. Cox,² and Cap¹ Rob't Batey³ is concerned with me in the working of this cave. Cap¹ Batey obtained leave from five of the Principal Chiefs of the Cherokees down neare there[?], for leave to work this cave, which he has in writing, for which we were to give them two hundred Pounds of Gun Powder p Annum Cap¹ Batey being from home, I have it not in my Power to send you the names of the Chiefs, I recollect the names of two only which is Dick Brown & W[M?]assancy⁴

I am Sir, with great respect your ob & Humb. Servant

LeRoy Pope⁵

1. Doublehead (d. 1807) was an especially hostile and vicious chief of the Chickamauga contingent of the Cherokees, who led a number of bloody raids against white settlements during the 1790s. He was the father-in-law of the Chickasaw George Colbert and lived on the south side of the Tennessee River at Muscle Shoals. In 1805 he signed the Treaty of Tellico ceding Cherokee lands and obtained a square mile reservation for himself on the north bank of the Tennessee River. He also signed the January 7, 1806, treaty by which the Cherokees gave up their claim to the territory between the Duck and Tennessee Rivers. For these acts other Cherokees killed him during the summer of 1807. Albert V. Goodpasture, "Indian Wars and Warriors of the Old Southwest," Tennessee Historical Magazine, 4 (1918), 204-5, 208, 262-70.

2. Unidentified, although there were several men of this surname in Madison County, Mississippi Territory, including Peyton, George, Henry, Benjamin, and Zachariah Cox. Thomas Jones Taylor, A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama 1732-1840, Edited by W. Stanley and Addie S. Hoole (University, Ala.,
3. Not identified.

4. Of these Cherokee leaders only Richard Brown (1772-1818), a principal chief at Sauta in present day Jackson County, Alabama, has been determined. He was a captain in the Cherokee regiment during the Creek War and died at Rogersville en route to Washington, D.C. McCown and Burns, Soldiers of the War of 1812 Buried in Tennessee, 13; Dorothy W. Potter, Passports of Southeastern Pioneers 1770-1823 (Baltimore, 1982), 365.

5. On the envelope was written the following memo: "Walker's 1st permit dated 5 Feby 1812. the 2nd permit dated 5th July 1812. LeRoy Pope's permit dated 7th January 1813[.]"

**George W. Sevier to Return J. Meigs**

Highwassee Decr 31st 1812

Sir,

I arrived here yesterday evening (on my way to join the northern Army) & should have have been glad to have seen you. Col Pope received a short time since a permit to work a Salt petre cave in the Indian County (from the Sec'y of war directed to the comg officer, under your instructions, I had therefore nothing more to say in the affair[]). Mr. Cox, who is one of the company, has come up to receive your instructions. John Walker & Col Pope's company are preparing to work the same cave, & appears to be at a good understanding; As Pope will work entirely with negroes who are directed not to interfere with the other party; I presume that no misunderstanding will take place unless Walker shall employ disorderly white men; which he says he will not do Knowingly.

I am Sir with great respect & Esteem y'r. ob't Hble Servt.

G. W. Sevier

Col R. J. Meigs

Records of the Cherokee Indian Agency in Tennessee, 1801-1835, RG75 (M208, Roll 5), NA.

**Permission to LeRoy Pope from the U.S. Cherokee Agent**

LeRoy Pope esq' of madison County M. Territory having had accorded to him by the Secretary of war the right to work a Salt Petre Cave situate on the land at muscle shoals Known by the the general appellation of Doubleheads Reserve--and it appearing that John Walker & John Lowrey Cherokees have procured the Consent of the Cherokee nation to work the same Cave, And it appears that John Strother & Others have also procured the Consent of the Chickasaw nation to work the same Cave, and altho, the United States have not yet extinguished the Chickasaw title to that part of the Country which covers the said Cave; which tract has been formerly claimed by the Cherokee nation & occupied by them as they say by a right prior to the claim of the Chickasaws and in addition to the occupancy--the United States did on the 7th January 1806 at the City Washington by solemn convention stipulate with the Cherokees to settle the Conflicting claims of those two tribes in "such manner as will be equitable, and will secure to the Cherokees the title to the said Reservation." The Cherokees as before observed were left in the quiet occupancy & possession of the said land, & have as good right to make salt Petre thereon as to raise corn or kill the game--and it is proper to observe here that the Chickasaw title is in no way impaired by the Cherokees remaining on the land & making such use of the soil.
as they may think proper, either by raising Corn; making salt Petre, or taking the wild animals in the forest. I think on this occasion it is not improper again to observe that the title or claim of the Chickasaws is by no means impaired by any of these transactions: their title has in every instance when called in question been, and is, at all times acknowledg'd & recognized by the United States, who will do them justice & eventually settle the rights to them & the Cherokees perfectly satisfactorily to each party: But until this shall be done there can be no partial alteration in the present state of things relating to the sd. reserve. It follows of course that LeRoy Pope esq'r. & John Walker and John Lowrey have a right to work the said Cave: both having obtained the good will & consent of the Cherokees and the approbation of the Secretary of war--and I hereby add my permission having derived it from the war department--&--have only to enjoin on the Heads of the parties that they be careful not to employ men of dissolute character as labourers, that the peace & quietness of the Indians be not disturbed. Done at Highwassee garrison the 7th. day of January 1813----

Return J. Meigs

Records of the Cherokee Indian Agency in Tennessee, 1801-1835, RG75 (M208, Roll 6), NA.

John Walker to Return J. Meigs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sir</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highwassee River</td>
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<td>January 14th 1813</td>
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After my best Respects to you I drop this note as a mark of that Esteem which has ever warmed by breast towards you With Respect to your Clemency in your office This to inform you that that I decline acting in partnership with Col. Pope in respects to my Cave as it is my opinion that the Honourable The secretary at war, has no power, as to permitting White men to Occupy our rights or a purtainence: it is most likely that Col. Pope stated to, His honour, that he had the approbation of the Chiefs to work the Cave, which was a wrong statement if so stated; more over I Have mor confidence in the clemency of the United states Government; & hate to suppose that they would tend the wrights of freemen from thier Lands and bestow it on another with out any kind of contract or bargain it would be as reasonable for the Secretary to permit Col. Pope to Take my House and plantation as to take my Cave. I am of opinion that I had better loose the Cave entirely than to brook such seeming injustice & if I cannot have Justice done me I shall drop the permit. But I think the government will admit me to make use of my own to the benefit of my self & nation do me the Justice, sir, to believe me sincere in my vindication of the wrights of my nation And a real frien to the united states and Thier Government I am yours &c

John Walker

Records of the Cherokee Indian Agency in Tennessee, 1801-1835, RG75 (M208, Roll 6), NA.

1. On February 27, 1813, John Lowrey at Battle Creek, Tennessee, wrote Meigs on matters other than the saltpeter cave and added this P.S.: "Tell John Walker that I am ready to send provisions to the cave only I am lacking a perogue." Records of the Cherokee Indian Agency in Tennessee, 1801-1835, RG75 (M208, Roll 6), NA.

Return J. Meigs to Unknown

Highwassee Garrison
Sir

4th. February 1813

Having been requested on the 23rd. March 1812 by several Cherokee Chiefs, I wrote to the Secretary of war requesting that the Cherokees might employ white men to assist them in the manufacture of Salt Petre— On the 28th. of April the Secretary answered my letter in the following viz'. "The expediency of encouraging the Cherokees with the manufacture of Salt Petre is submitted to your descretion." Some time after receiving the letter of the Secretary of war I proceeded to give permission to John Walker and John Lowrey two very influential Cherokee Chiefs to employ Gideon Morgan to superintend salt Petre works for them. On the 11th August the Secretary of war wrote me as follows viz'. "should no arrangement have been made under the authority in my letter of the 28th. April to encourage the Cherokees in the manufacture of Salt Petre— you will be pleased to ascertain from Dr. Wm. Bibb of Georgia whether he intends immediately to avail his friend of my authority to work the salt Petre Cave, which he might have considered sanctioned by me while at the seat of government last winter; and should no claim be urged you are at liberty to authorize M'. Gideon Morgan to manufacture Salt Petre as agent to the Cherokees." very respectfully

Coln. R J Meigs
Cherokee agent

On the 13th. August the Secretary of war wrote me again as follows viz'. "Since writing to you on 11th. instant, the authority given to the honorable M'. Bibb for LeRoy Pope to work the salt Petre cave with consent of the Indians has been recognized, and probably will defeat the wishes of M'. Morgan— you will please to communicate this circumstance to him as soon as practicable. Respectfully sir your obi. servant

Return J Meigs esq'.

W. Eustis.

It would seem sir from comparing the dates of the fore going letters that, at the time the Secretary of war submitted the business in question to my descretion that, he probably did not at the time recollect that he had given to LeRoy Pope permission to work the salt Petre cave at the instance of the honorable M'. Bibb. This made it difficult for me to act in decding the right. I wished to have the authority of the secretary of war accorded to M'. Pope through his friend M'. Bibb respected--and on application to me by M'. Pope to work at the same Cave with Jn'. walker & Jn'. Lowrey he having informed me that he had conversed with Walker who was willing that he should work at the same Cave Keeping their work separate, and receiving a letter from L'. Coln'. Sevier at Fort Hampton near the S. Cave confirming to me the information received from M'. Pope. I gave him permission to work at the cave keeping their work separate. At the time I gave permission to M'. Pope Walker was at the cave. he has returned home & objects to M'. Pope's working at all at the Cave as will be seen by his letter to me on his return which letter I enclose.

Walker & Lowrey are young Chiefs men of property & enterprize. They made a proposal last spring on the approach of war with the English—to raise each a body of young Cherokees & offer them to the United States; of which I informed the war department at the time.— There seems to be almost a rage or passion pervading this Country & it has caught the Indians—to manufacture salt Petre. They all anticipate to become rich or at laest to make great profits by it.

Records of the Cherokee Indian Agency in Tennessee, 1801-1835, RG75 (M208, Roll 6), NA.

John Reid to John Armstrong [ca. February, 1813]

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Sometime in the month of August last we obtained from the king & some of the principal Chiefs of the Chickasaw nation permission to work a certain Salt-petre Cave at the mouth of Elk together [with] any others which might be found on the waters of that stream, within their limits. Wishing to procure the approbation & sanction of the General Government to the measure, we immediately wrote the then Secretary of War \(^1\) on the subject; forwarding at the same time the vouchers of this permission, attested & approved by Genl. Robertson, the agent for that nation, together with a Certificate from our member Mr Grundy. The Secretary in answer informed Mr. Grundy that he had referred our application to Col Meigs, the Cherokee agent. On receiving this power from the Secretary, Col Meigs advised us that inasmuch as there was an adverse claim set up by a Mr. Morgan & others, derived from the Cherokee nation, it would be expedient to make a compromise with that company, lest we might otherwise be the occasion of reviving unfriendly sentiments between the two nations. Impressed by his representations, we accordingly entered into an arrangement with the Cherokee Company--altho we well knew at the time, that if that nation ever had a well-founded claim to the land on which this Cave is situated, they had formally surrendered it, by the treaty of the 7th January 1806 entered into by the King & other commissioners from that Nation, with Commissioners on the part of the U States. The line of Separation between the two nations then agreed on, was marked by those Indian commissioners, & run by Maj'. Freeman the U States: surveyor, in the presence of Col Meigs & General Robertson; & a return thereof made to the Secretary's office. This line commences on the North bank of the Tennessee river, at the upper end of Chickasaw Island, & a little below Chickasaw Creek (called by the whites Flint river) forty miles above the mouth of Elk. So that the Cherokee nation, whatever they might once have pretended, can now have no claim to any part of the Country watered by Elk or its tributary streams. And indeed the general government has so far recognised the Chickasaw title to this district, as to drive from it, at their request, all those who had intruded upon it, without their consent.

Previous however to our entering into this arrangment with the Cherokee Company, the Chickasaws had gotten intimation that such a one existed; & in September last forwarded to Mr. Eustis a remonstrance signed by every chief who has a voice in their councils setting forth the nature of their own claim--recognising & confirming the permission which had been granted to us, & earnestly soliciting that it might be sanctioned by the government. This remonstrance, together the other vouchers we have referred to you will find in the office. As they arrived there at a time when Mr. Eustis must have been engaged by more important concerns, it is probable they were not sufficiently attended to by him; and Mr. Monroe\(^4\) perhaps was not advised of their existence. Will your Excellency be good enough to look over them, & confirm to us the permission we have received from the only nation authorised to grant it? Without such a confirmation from your Excellency the commanding officer at Fort Hampton, altho disposed, does not feel himself at liberty to let us take possession of the Caves. A written permission from the Indian agent he thinks will not be sufficient to authorise him. We beg that you will let us hear from you as soon as the nature of your engagements will permit you. Having already incurred considerable expences in preparatory measures, procrastination is really a very serious evil to us--

P.S.

We have undersood that the Cave at the mouth of Elk (the only valuable one on its waters) has lately been taken possession of by Leroy Pope & others. By what authority this has been done we have not learnt; but surely if permission has been granted them upon an imperfect & improper view of their pretensions no hesitation will be felt in revoking it in favour of a better
claim. Ours we are convinced is so, without knowing what theirs is. A few Cherokee Chiefs cannot convey a right which does not pertain to their nation; & we know they had not the permission of any portion of the Chickasaws authorised to grant it.

Be good enough to forward any communication you may think proper to make, to John Reid Esq Franklin Town Williamson County Tenn

John Reid Papers, LC.
1. Armstrong (1758-1843), a staff officer during the Revolutionary War, was U.S. senator (1801-2, 1803-4), minister to France (1804-10), and secretary of war (February 5, 1813-September 3, 1814). DAB.
2. Another draft of this letter is in the John Reid Papers. The approximate date is derived from the March 1, 1813, communication from Reid to James Robertson.
4. James Monroe (1758-1831), who became the fifth president of the United States (1817-25), was secretary of state as well as ad interim secretary of war (January 1-February 4, 1813) under President James Madison. DAB; BDUSC.

John Reid to James Robertson
Franklin 1st March 1813

Sir

You will be surprised to learn that Leroy Pope, under a Cherokee title, has gotten possession of the Cave at the mouth of Elk. -- When his permission was obtained from the Secretary of War, as upon what suggestion, I have not been able to learn; but I imagine it to be old one clogged with some conditions, which he obtained, winter before last, through the interposition of Mr. Bibb from Kentucky. This had been presented to the Commanding officer at Fort Hampton before, who then refused to let him have possession under it: but has since, I presume, thought proper to change his opinion.

Since you were here, Mr. Eaton went to the Cave, & was then told by the officer at the garrison that if you would grant us a permission, saying therein that you were authorised to grant it, he would regard it, & suffer us to take possession under it. If you do feel yourself authorised to make such a statement in your permission--as I myself believe you to be--we will thank you to send us such a one as soon as may be practicable.

We have been waiting all this winter, to get a permission from the secretary at war founded upon the documents which we forwarded to him from you; but he I imagine, was so perplexed by the war which he found himself unable to manage; that he had no other thoughts but how to extricate himself in the best manner possible from a situation in which his vanity had placed him, but which Nature had not qualified him to fill. Be the cause what it may, he entirely neglected us, & what is still more strange, Mr. Grundy has not thought proper to return an answer to several letters we have written him on the subject.

By the last mail but one, I wrote to the present secretary, Mr. Armstrong, informing him of the nature of our Claim, & referring him to the documents that had been forwarded to his predecessor He perhaps may condescend to attend to us; but such a certificate from you, as I have above suggested, if you feel yourself at liberty to grant it, would probably supersede the necessity of any permission from him. But whether you think proper to grant it or not, or to attend any farther to our Claims which we have so negligently prosecuted ourselves, it seems to me to be absolutely due to the nation for whom you are the agent, to have removed, as speedily as possible, those who have intruded upon Chickasaw rights, under a spurious Cherokee

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Claim. Surely a letter from you to the commanding officer at Fort Hampton would be sufficient for this purpose; but if that should not, a solemn appeal from you & the Cheifs of that nation, to the government of our Country would undoubtedly be listened to & regarded. -- Pope & his associates are now working the cave without paying rent to either nation; & if government will tolerate this, in spite of the remonstrances of the rightful owner, it is not perhaps too hazardous to say, that it ought not to be tolerated itself. These observations I respectfully submit to you, knowing that you will fearlessly proceed there upon as to you may seem right.

I beg that you will write me by next mail informing me of the course you intend to pursue, & of that which you would recommend us to pursue. Delay may prove dangerous; for in a little while Pope will render the object for which we are contending, not worth a contention.

Very Respectfully

John Reid

John Reid Papers, LC.

1. John Henry Eaton (1790-1856), a lawyer living in Franklin. He became a brother-in-law of William B. Lewis, as well as a close associate of Andrew Jackson. His offices included U.S. senator (1818-21, 1821-29), secretary of war (1829-31), governor of Florida Territory (1834-36), and minister to Spain (1836-40). DAB.

Permission to John Reid et al. from the U.S. Chickasaw Agent

To All whom it may concern Know ye that Mr. John Reid of Franklin, State of Tennessee, and his associates, having Contracted with the King and Headmen of the Chickasaw Nation to work all the saltpetre caves on Elk River lying & being within the Chickasaw Boundary, the said John reid & his associates & no others, are hereby permitted, and authorised fully by these presents to work for their sole use & benefit the said saltpetre caves; any person or persons other than the sd. John Reid & associates working sd. caves are considered as intruders, & should said John Reid & his associates find any person or persons working sd. caves to their the sd. Reid & Cm. injury, they will take what saltpetre the may find & any implements they may find at sd. caves for making saltpetre, & the men they may find there making saltpetre they will have taken as intruders, & have them dealt with as the law directs, as no nation or Nations have any right whatever to grant permission to work said caves but the Chickasaws, who are the sole proprietors of the soil, & it is by & with their advice & consent this permission is given.

Given under my hand at the Chickasaw agency house this 11th Day of March 1813
Ja'. Robertson
U.S. agent to the Chickasaws

N.B if the late sec' of war has given any other Company permission to work sd. caves, it is unknown to the chickasaws & he must have been deceived or otherwise not in the line of his dututy, as no other people could give full authority but the chickasaws

John Reid Papers, LC.

James McDonald to John Reid

Fort Hampton
March 12th 1813

Sir,

The following is a copy of the Secretary of War's order, to the commanding officer at Highwassee, under which Lt Col' Sevier the commanding officer of F' Hampton permitted Co' LeRoy Pope to work the Salt Petre cave at the mouth of Elk.

(Copy)

Sir

M' LeRoy Pope is authorized to work a Salt Petre Cave in the Indian Country under the direction of Colonel Migs, and should not be interrupted unless the public Interest should require it, in which case you will consult Colonel Meigs.—

Respectfully

W. Eustis

Jas M'Donald

John Reid Papers, LC.

John Strother to Return J. Meigs

Nashville March 29th 1813

Col'o Meigs

Sir

My being confined the principal part of the Winter with an attact of the Rheumatism, has prevented me from paying any attention to the salt Petre cave at the mouth of Elk. After the compromise entered into with M'o. Morgan & his company. I did think at that time, there existed no further obstacles from proceeding immediately, to take possission & work so soon after a conferance between you & M'o Morgan took place, as we could prepare ourselves to to do.--- M'o Morgans total silence on the subject of his conferance with you, if any he had, on this subject; after his compromise with me & Co have compelled me, once more, to trouble you with enquieries relative thereto.--- Has M'o Morgan since his compromise with me, applied to you for a permit; & what was the result of that application.--- Whether he has, or not, can myself & company be permitted to work the cave under the chickasaw claim, subject to the claim of the cherokees agreeable to the compromise entered into between M'o Morgan & myself, and on be half of our companies; If we can--please inclose me that permit, so far as you are authorised to do so.--- Be so good as to answer this Letter as early as may be--and so far as you have the power be pleased to put us out of suspence, about the cave.--- I am well advised of several recent attempts to get a new grant from the chickasaws to work the cave, but so far they have proved ineffectual. I am respectfully your Most Ob' Servant

John Strother

Records of the Cherokee Indian Agency in Tennessee, 1801-1835, RG75 (M208, Roll 6), NA.

John Henry Eaton to Return J. Meigs

Nashville Ten. April 30. 1813--

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D' Sir--

You have been heretofore informed of our wishes & intentions relative to working a salt Petre Cave at the mouth of Elk river: Much doubt was felt on the subject from an apprehension that our Government at a time like the present would feel no disposition to cause a collision between the chicsaw & cherokee tribes. sensible of this we availed ourselves of the admonity contained in your letter of last winter & entered into a compromise with M'. Morgan who claims from that nation: For Sir let our interest be involved as it may at a time like this when dangers & difficulty are gathering every where around our country, we would feel no disposition to further that interest by destroying the good understanding we have ben so fortunate to maintain with our Indian Brethren

That the Government may then understand that all apprehension of jerrings between the two tribes will cease, it will be necessary to inform the Secretary at war that the claims are united: But before this can be done we must satisfy the Govm'. that M'. Morgan realy has the Cherokee permission: To this end we solicite you to give such a Certificate as may satisfy the Secretary at war that such is the fact: We solicite therefore Sir that you will be good enough to give us a voucher to this effect

Yo M° Obt
Jn°. H. Eaton
agent for the Chics°. Compy

Records of the Cherokee Indian Agency in Tennessee, 1801-1835, RG75 (M208, Roll 6), NA.
1. Meigs's notation was "my letter to John Strother will perhaps be an answer to this letter. however I will write[.]"

George Colbert to John Walker

Colberts Ferry Tennessee River
4th May 1813

Sir

Your Talk on paper of the 30th last month has been duly received-- I should have been extremely rejoiced to have seen you & M'. Lowrey had it been convenient for you to have come as you first contemplated_ As to Colonel Popes having permission from the Secretary at war to work the salt Petre Cave I believe is right--he came to my house for me to sign the permission but I told him I could not sign it Individually as it would do him no good but told him to go to the Headmen of the nation & it would then be of some use to him, I believe he did not go as I requested him.

The Creeks I believe are determined to Breed some disturbance & I have been very cautious of them in having my nation to order them off when they come in it. If I hear of them coming into my nation I drive them off as soon as possible, and will not let them stay int his nation--they make it a practice whenever they commit any depredation on the whites of passing through this nation--as that the Chickasaws might be blamed_ I am extremely sorry to hear of your loseing some of your people. I never heard of it before_ I shall be glad to see you when you come--I have no news to inform you. In great haste I remain your friend & Brother.

M' John Walker. (Copy)
John Armstrong to James Robertson

War Department
July 28th 1814

Sir,

Herewith enclosed you will receive a letter from the Hon'ble Mr. Grundy urging the wishes of a Company of Gentlemen in Tennessee for authority to work a salt petre Cave in the Chickasaw Country. If they can be indulged without prejudicing the Interests of the Government or the Indians you will make the necessary arrangements on the part of the Indians and communicate the same to Mr. Grundy who is referred to you for further information.

Letters Sent by the Secretary of War, Indian Affairs, 1800-1824, Volume C, p. 175, RG75 (M15, Roll 3), NA.

Gideon Morgan, Jr.'s Statement in Behalf of John Walker

Washington City Feb'ry 24th 1827.

Sir,

Major John Walker of the Cherokee Nation of Indians has accompanied me to this place for adjusting some claims against the United States which he believes to be well founded. An intimacy for 20 years with him has enabled me to know more of his business than any other living man, consequently he has requested me to make out a General Statement of the different claims which he wishes submitted to you for your decision.

Major Walker in 1810 or 11 had procured from the Cherokee Nation the privilege of working a salt petre Cave near the mouth of Elk River on what was termed Double Heads Reserve. Some difficulty arose between him and some gentlemen I think of Nashville relative to its occupation. His determination of submitting the Subject to the Secretary of War was known to Col' Henry Pope of Huntsville who pursued Walker's plan & through a member of Congress of Georgia Mr. Bibb I think Application was made to & Granted to Col' Pope by the then Secretary of War Doctor Eustis. This was however unknown to Walker who requested me to come to this place for the purpose of adjusting the business relative to its occupation which I did in Company with the Hon'ble John McKee 2 of the House of Representatives who no doubt recollects the occurrence. I had previously however purchased a large quantity of potash from Armstrong & drosse. Say from 800 to 1000 dollars worth Major Francis W. Armstrong one of the firm now in the city can vouch for the fact and possibly is knowing to a boat load of Kettles Spades—shovels & provisions having been taken down the river by Teodorick B. Rice for the use of the Cave in all amounting to upwards of 2000 dollars. Major Walker's stay there became hazardous and being requested by Col' Meigs forthwith to take up arms against the Creek Nation he abandoned the Cave and left his property in the hands of a faithless white man by whom & the setters or intruders the whole vanished before the close of the campaign nor has he ever since been able to regain any part thereof.

During the whole Creek war Major Walker acted the part of a Hero he brought into the field more strength and acted with more firmness than any other Cherokee I can I believe say than all others. The Hon'ble John Cocke 4 of the House of Representatives the Hon'ble John
Williams' late of the Senate and all others connected with the Tennessee army will I think support the truth of this Statement. Major walker has executed his note to me for 2100 dollars in the collection of which I feel perfectly Safe nor am I in any way interested. . . .

very Resp'y your Obt
Gideon Morgan jr

Special Files of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1807-1904, File 131, Record Group 75 (M574, Roll 25), National Archives.

1. Possibly Thomas L. McKenney (1785-1859), head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (1824-30), and author of the three volume History of the Indian Tribes of North America (1836-44). DAB.
2. McKee (1771-1832), U.S. agent to the Choctaw Indians (1802-16) and Alabama congressman (1823-29), was later associated with the land office at Tuscaloosa. BDUSC.
3. Francis W. Armstrong (1783-1835) and possibly William Drosse (fl.1816). Armstrong, a native Virginian, was a Tennessee resident when he became an officer in the regular army (1812-17). In 1831 he became agent to the Choctaws. Moser, The Papers of Andrew Jackson, 4: 311; William H. Powell, comp., List of Officers of the Army of the United States from 1779 to 1900 (Detroit, 1967 [1900]), 165; WPA. Knox County Court Minute Book Number 8, 1813-1816 (October, 1940), 212.
4. Cocke (1772-1854), a lawyer, was a Tennessee legislator, congressman (1819-27), and major general of state volunteers during the Creek War. BDUSC.
5. Williams (1778-1837), a Knoxville lawyer, was colonel of the 39th U.S. Infantry during the Creek War, U.S. senator (1817-23), and chargé d'affaires to the Federation of Central America (1825). DAB.

Statement by Francis W. Armstrong in Support of Walker's Claim

Washington City. 27 Feby 1827

I have seen the statement of John Walker-by-Gideon Morgan upon which he founds his claim against the United States for certain losses in relation to the working of a salt peter Cave at the mouth of Elk River [illegible] with Col Morgan [illegible] Tennessee, to the said Cave. my belief was that the nation had granted the Cave [to] Walker-- The Reference to me [making] the purchase of the pot ash is true. the firm of Armstrong & Drosse--made--the potash and sold it to Morgan for the purpose as we were informed of its being sent to said Cave_ I have since Understood from Rice that he descended the river with a boat of [it] as stated by Col Morgan

F. W. Armstrong

Special Files of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1807-1904, File 131, RG75 (M574, Roll 25), NA.