Cave Post Offices in Alabama, Arkansas, and Florida

by Thomas Lera

American Spelean History Association
Special Publication Number Four

May 2018
The American Spelean History Association

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May, 2018

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Cover

Upper image: Circular, 28.5 mm, date postmark with target killer dated Jan 10, 1895.

CAVE POST OFFICES IN ALABAMA, ARKANSAS, and FLORIDA

Thomas Lera

When reorganizing my collection of United States cave postmarks, I was inspired to research the history of the existing and discontinued cave post offices, which included, those in Alabama, Arkansas and Florida. This is one of the monographs which updates and expands on my 2011 book Cave Post Offices, published by Cave Books.

The major source of information regarding the postmasters and post offices can be found at:

- Reports of Site Locations, 1837 – 1950, from Records Group 28 - Alabama, Arkansas and Florida


Historical maps were found at the University of Texas Libraries, Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/topo/virginia/. Red arrows point to the location of the post office.

I would like to thank Robert Hoke of the American Spelean History Association, who provided comments on the organization and layout, and posted it on their website (http://www.cavehistory.org), Baasil Wilder, NPM Librarian, for his research on Arkansas Post Offices, and Sandy Fitzgerald who edited the article. I appreciate all their help.

If after reading this monograph, if you have postmarks of these caves, natural bridge, and/or grotto in your collection, I would appreciate a scan sent to me at: frontier2@erols.com.
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CAVE SPRING, ALABAMA POST OFFICE
(09/11/1856 – 07/20/1866; 06/12/1871 – 10/27/1887; 04/24/1888 – 07/25/1894)

Figure 1. Portion of the 1881 Postal Route Map of East Alabama, West Georgia and Northwest Florida.
The yellow line indicates twice weekly mail delivery. 1

POSTMASTERS 2
CAVE SPRING POST OFFICE
FAYETTE COUNTY, ALABAMA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date Appointed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Richardson</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>09/11/1856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simeon Hamil</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>02/22/1861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Richardson</td>
<td>Confederate Postmaster</td>
<td>10/09/1861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simeon Hamil</td>
<td>Confederate Postmaster</td>
<td>07/01/1862 – 06/30/1865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discontinued 07/20/1866 by U. S. P. O. D.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel Ashcraft</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>06/12/1871 - 1879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac N. Ashcraft</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>1879 – 1881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel N. Ashcraft</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>1881- 10/27/1887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discontinued 10/27/1887 with mail to Pilgrim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reestablished 04/24/1888</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George W. Ashcraft</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>04/24/1888 – 06/27/1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William. H. Brown</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>06/28/1893 – 01/21/1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discontinued 01/31/1894 with mail to Pilgrim</td>
<td>where Joel N. Ashcraft was now postmaster</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first Cave Spring post office was in the Ashcraft Mercantile Store. Alabama historians did not specifically mention the springs for which the town is named, and there are no caves listed in the Alabama Cave Survey in Fayette County. The rock formations are gravel, mudstone and
shale which do not support caves. Joel Ashcraft’s site survey of 04/10/1871 stated the post office would serve 73 residents, however, when proposed postmaster George W. Ashcraft completed his site survey on 03/22/1888, he certified the post office would serve only 55 residents.

Currently the author does not know of any postmarks from the Cave Spring, Alabama Post Office (fig. 1).

Researching postmasters is challenging since both Union and Confederate post offices did not always keep accurate records. Case in point, Simeon Hamil was postmaster at Cave Springs, Georgia from October 9, 1861 to July 1, 1862, when he resigned. The Official Register shows a Samuel Hamil as postmaster for Cave Spring, Alabama, from July 1, 1862 to July 1, 1865. On March 2, 1866, S. Hamil returns as Cave Spring, Georgia postmaster. Was this the same person who moved between Cave Spring, Georgia, and Cave Spring, Alabama? Father and Son?? Post Office error??? Drop me a line if someone knows or discovers the answer.

NATURAL BRIDGE, ALABAMA POST OFFICE
(07/19/1890 – open)

Figure 2. Left, Portion of the 1881 Postal Route Map of East Alabama, West Georgia and Northwest Florida, showing Larissa, later Natural Bridge. The yellow line indicates twice weekly mail delivery. Right, Portion of the State of Alabama 1928 Post Route Map showing Natural Bridge post office.

The town of Natural Bridge, in southwest Winston County located in the northwest part of the state, is named after the distinctive sandstone bridge located in Natural Bridge Park to the west.
Located east of the Mississippi River, this is the longest natural bridge at approximately 145 feet long and 60 feet high at its highest point.

Prior to 1885, the Natural Bridge area was originally known as Larissa. The name Natural Bridge was later settled on when the railroad began construction (fig. 2 left). A post office, with John L. Cagle as postmaster was established 07/19/1890 on mail route 124011, about 100 feet from the Natural Bridge station on the North Alabama Railway line (fig. 2 right).

**POSTMASTERS 5**
**NATURAL BRIDGE POST OFFICE**
**WINSTON COUNTY, ALABAMA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date Appointed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John L. Cagle</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>07/17/1890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry A. McNutt</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>09/29/1891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel A. King</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>04/19/1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah E. Denton</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>05/21/1905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah E. Johnson (Married)</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>06/05/1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Ida F. Burbank</td>
<td>Acting Postmaster</td>
<td>11/01/1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>02/13/1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgie Thomason</td>
<td>Acting Postmaster</td>
<td>01/14/1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>04/15/1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Lille West</td>
<td>Officer-in-Charge</td>
<td>03/31/1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>12/16/1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lester E. Hilton</td>
<td>Acting Postmaster</td>
<td>01/05/1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>08/17/1961</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Currently the author does not have of any postmarks from the Natural Bridge, Alabama Post Office.
CAVE CITY, ARKANSAS POST OFFICE
(12/16/1892 – open)

Figure 3. Portions of the 1891 and 1895 Arkansas Postal Routes showing Loyal on the left and Cave City on the right. Yellow line indicates twice weekly mail delivery, blue line three times a week. 6

Cave City is a small community straddling the northern Independence and southern Sharp County border in north-central Arkansas, which occurred in 1879 when a three-mile strip of Independence County was transferred to Sharp County.

The town takes its name from the large multi-room Crystal River Cave, which is located directly beneath the city. For many years a city well drilled through the cave to Crystal River was the major source of water for the entire area. There was a fascination with an “endless” source of water that remained a constant fifty-seven degrees.

In the early 1800s, the cave was known as “Horn Cave,” after the family that owned the land above it. Its name was changed to Crystal River Cave and it became one of the first caverns in Arkansas to be opened for tourists.

In 1891, brothers James and Jack Laman announced the establishment of the town of Cave City. The post office was renamed Cave City on December 16, 1892.

In the 1890s, the Loyal (named because it remained loyal to the Union in the 1860s) post office was moved to the present location of Cave City. By 1896, the town had five general stores, a drug store, a physician, two blacksmith shops, a bakery, a hotel, a jeweler, and twenty-two mail deliveries a week.

In 1905, a stagecoach ran daily from Batesville to Evening Shade; the base fare was sixty cents. The town was incorporated approximately sixteen years later on April 29, 1907. The present town incorporates the previous communities of Cedar Grove, Loyal, and Flat Rock.
named in 1858 for the large exposed sandstone outcropping located near the cave’s entrance (fig. 3).

In 1980, the city began its yearly Watermelon Festival, which is a popular summer event for Cave City that boasts the sweetest watermelons in Arkansas. The post office has a temporary station cancellation promoting the festival (fig. 8, right). Figures 4 – 8 show the different postmarks used at Cave City Post Office.

**POSTMASTERS**

**CAVE CITY POST OFFICE**

**SHARP COUNTY, ARKANSAS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Name</strong></th>
<th><strong>Date Appointed</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loyal Post Office (1880 – 1892)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William H. Stewart</td>
<td>03/29/1880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas J. Woodridge</td>
<td>06/06/1890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name changed to Cave City 12/16/1892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin G. Barnett</td>
<td>09/29/1893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William T. Horn</td>
<td>06/11/1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John J. Jones</td>
<td>06/08/1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph J. Carpenter</td>
<td>05/06/1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarence W. Bruce</td>
<td>12/01/1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth A. Neely</td>
<td>03/15/1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Ruthel Johnson</td>
<td>05/04/1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William E. Carpenter</td>
<td>02/18/1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen H. Wilkerson</td>
<td>06/28/1968</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Circular, 28.5 mm, date postmark with target killer dated Jan 10, 1895.
Figure 5. The postmark is a 31.5mm, type A/2 4-bar killer dated Feb 12, 1910.

Figure 6. Machine cancellation with 7-wavy lines from Cave City, AR

Figure 7. Two 4-bar killer cancellations, the right a 35mm and type F/2, the left a 34mm, also type F/2a with extended zip code.
Figure 8. Temporary Stations pictorial postmarks. Left, showing 100 Years of Rural Free Delivery 1896-1996, the right showing the 25th anniversary of the Watermelon Festival, August 14, 2004.

CAVE CREEK (CAVECREEK), ARKANSAS POST OFFICE
(1855 – 05/28/1894; 05/28/1894 - 1973)

Figure 9. Portions of the 1891 and 1895 Arkansas Postal Routes showing Cave Creek on the left map and Cavencreek on the right map. Redline indicates once a week mail delivery, yellow line indicates twice a week, and blue line three times a week.9
Not much is known about the Cave Creek post office (figs. 9 & 10). The 1902 site survey stated it served 50 residents and was located on the eastern-most road of the county. The fact it was open 118 years supports the importance of the post office.

Figure 10. Site Survey Map by James M. York, 02/13/1913.

POSTMASTERS
CAVE CREEK (CAVECREEK) POST OFFICE
NEWTON COUNTY, ARKANSAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date Appointed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah Dodson</td>
<td>1855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Garner</td>
<td>10/14/1961 (CSA Postmaster)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George H. T. Garner</td>
<td>1869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. C. Dickey</td>
<td>1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. W. Thompson</td>
<td>1891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph A. Salmon</td>
<td>1894</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name changed to Cavecreek 05/28/1894

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date Appointed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joseph A. Salmon</td>
<td>06/19/1894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James W. Salmon</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. R. Salmon</td>
<td>05/08/1899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granville W. Thompson</td>
<td>05/25/1900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elonzo C. Stone</td>
<td>10/16/1901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denton M. G. Frailey</td>
<td>01/15/1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James M. York</td>
<td>04/20/1912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvin C. Thompson</td>
<td>03/03/1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Floy McCutcheon</td>
<td>04/08/1940</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figures 11 shows different postmarks used at Cavecreek Post Office.

Figure 11. The cancellations are 4-bars. The left is 28mm type B dated Jan 1, 1912 and the right is a 32mm type F/1 postmark dated Apr 8, 1951.

Currently the author does not know of any postmarks from the Cave Creek, Arkansas Post Office.

CAVE SPRINGS, ARKANSAS POST OFFICE
(03/02/1908 – open)

Figure 12. Cave Springs site survey map, image M1126-023-0400, from the Map of Benton County compiled by the Tucker Title and Abstract Co. of Bentonville, dated Apr 3, 1945.11

Cave Springs is named for the water source that flows from the northernmost of two caves (fig.12). The north cave, which has been closed to the public since the 1980s, is said to consist of several rooms with two waterfalls. It is home to many bats and to the largest known
population of the rare and threatened Ozark cavefish. The spring emits six million gallons of water per day, which flows from the cave year-round at a constant temperature of fifty-four degrees.

The region remained sparsely settled until 1906, when the Kansas City and Memphis Railroad (KC & M) built a line between Cave Springs (Benton County) and Fayetteville, which largely duplicated the established Frisco Central Division main line between Rogers and Fayetteville to the west. A new post office, Cave Springs, was established in 1908, and the city was incorporated in 1910.12

**POSTMASTERS**

**CAVE SPRINGS POST OFFICE**

**BENTON COUNTY, ARKANSAS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date Appointed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hugh C. Stroud</td>
<td>03/02/1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac W. Chastain</td>
<td>05/02/1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John P. Allison</td>
<td>01/07/1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyril Flack</td>
<td>01/08/1920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George A. Stroud</td>
<td>11/10/1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin H. Fagala</td>
<td>12/10/1926</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures 13 and 14 show postmarks used at the Cave Springs post office.

![Figure 13](image-url)

**Figure 13.** The cancellation is a 31mm, type A/1 4-bar killer dated May 16, 1910.
Figure 14. Two more 4-Bar cancellations, 37mm, type F/1 dated Sep 29, 1947, and on the right 32mm, type F/2, dated Apr 23, 1982.

ECONFINA (NATURAL BRIDGE), FLORIDA POST OFFICE
(05/29/1855 – 03/29/1867; 06/07/1871 - 07/15/1919)

Figure 15. Portion of the 1876 Preliminary post route map of the state of Florida showing the location of Econfina before the postal routes were added. 1876 Florida Post Route Map
William Gainer, a surveyor and mathematician, came to the Econfina area in 1824 or 1825 and established his homestead on a large ranch on the west side of Econfina Creek. The Gainer homestead reportedly served as a church, school, and the area “post office” until 1855 when the U.S. post office was established (fig 15). Figure 16 is a manuscript postmark from 1856.

The village of Econfina was located in Washington County, north of St. Andrews near a creek of the same name. The name derives from the Creek Indian “ekana” (earth) and “feno” (bridge) or in other words, “Natural Bridge”. Gainer family members served as postmasters between 1874 and 1919 when the post office was discontinued, and mail was then handled by the post office at Bennett. 15

Econfina Natural Bridge was along Econfina Creek which was created from the discharge of several springs in the area. Because it was primarily a transportation route of the many logging operations who used the creek to float logs in early Florida history, it disappeared around 1830.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postmaster</th>
<th>Date Appointed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daniel B. Coleman</td>
<td>05/29/1855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Howard</td>
<td>05/14/1856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Howard</td>
<td>08/27/1857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discontinued 03/29/1867; Reestablished 06/07/1871</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann M. Vickery</td>
<td>06/07/1871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. B. Brown</td>
<td>11/27/1872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John W. Gainer</td>
<td>12/28/1874</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Catherine Evans 11/16/1875
William B. Gainer 02/01/1877
William A. Gainer 03/21/1877
Mrs. Martha J. Porter 12/15/1879
James M. Matthews 01/09/1883
Mary J. Gainer 02/11/1884
Florida C. Gainer 08/20/1892
Sarah A. Gainer 11/23/1892

Post Office now located in Bay County
Sarah A. Garner 1893-1913
Florida C. Gainer 04/24/1913
Robert L. Gainer 04/04/1919
Discontinued 07/15/1919 with mail to Bennett

Figure 17 shows the post routes of mail delivery to and from Econfina. In 1897, a direct route connected St. Andrews Bay and Chipley. In 1911, the Atlanta and St. Andrews Bay Railroad dropped the mail off at the Fountain Station, which then delivered it six times a week to Econfina, 7 ½ miles away.

Figure 17. Left: Portion of the 1897 Florida Post Route Map. Right: Portion of the 1911 Florida Post Route Map with the Atlanta and St. Andrews Bay Railroad (A. & STA. B.) which carried the mail from Panama City.
Natural Bridge, in the extreme north central part of Walton County near the Alabama state line, is named after a spring that flows into a pool, then under a road forming a natural bridge, then out to the creek. The spring and adjacent land is privately owned.

Figure 18. Portion of the 1897 Post route map of the state of Florida showing Natural Bridge post office 1897 Florida Postal Route Map, accessed April 02, 2018. ¹⁸

POSTMASTERS ¹⁹

NATURAL BRIDGE POST OFFICE
WALTON COUNTY, FLORIDA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date Appointed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jas. M. Williams</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>11/11/1878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse W. Tucker</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>12/06/1882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George W. Kierce</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>10/25/1887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles H. Kelley</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>02/26/1890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George W. Miller</td>
<td>Postmaster</td>
<td>10/03/1894</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Yellow River Railroad line was completed around 1892, and in April 1899, a train made up of both freight cars and a combination baggage-mail-express-passenger coach was in operation. Drawn by the small wood-burning locomotive, the Old No. 2 it carried mail to and from Florala, Alabama, where it was sorted and delivered to Natural Bridge twice a week (fig. 18).

The post office opened in late 1878 when James M. Williams was appointed postmaster. It was discontinued in 1908. The author has not seen any postmarks from this post office.
4 State of Alabama 1928 Post Route Map showing post offices with intermediate distances on mail routes in operation on the 1st of January, Post Office Department. Alabama Department of Archives and History. 1928 Alabama Post Route Map, Accessed April 10, 2018.
6 Roeser, C. (Charles), and United States. Post Office Dept. "1891 Post route map of the State of Arkansas and of Indian and Oklahoma territories with adjacent portions of Mississippi, Tennessee, Missouri, Kansas, Texas and Louisiana." *Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, 1891 Arkansas Postal Route map* (accessed May 02, 2018); Von Haake, A., and United States. Post Office Dept. “1903 Post route map of the state of Arkansas showing post offices with the intermediate distances on mail routes in operation on the 1st of December 1903.” *Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, 1903 Arkansas Postal Route Map* (accessed May 02, 2018).
10 Postmaster Appointments. Accessed April 12, 2018; month dates are from the *Official Register*; month, day, and year dates are from *U.S. Postal Bulletin and U.S. Postal Laws and Regulations*.
14 United States Post Office Department. 1876 Preliminary post route map of the state of Florida, with adjacent parts of South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama, and the neighboring West India Islands; [Washington]. (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth298380/): accessed April 23, 2018.
18 Von Haake, A., and United States. Post Office Dept. “1897 Post route map of the state of Florida showing post offices with the intermediate distances and mail routes in operation.”