

TENNESSEE MULTIPLE PROPERTY FORM

TITLE: Historic Resources of Grundy County

COUNTY: Grundy

SITE: 10

HISTORIC NAME: Wonder Cave Historic District

COMMON NAME: Wonder Cave

ADDRESS: Wonder Cave Road
Monteagle Vicinity, Tennessee

OWNER: Glenda and Celeste Raulston

ADDRESS: General Delivery
Monteagle, Tennessee

HISTORIC USE: Tourism

CURRENT USE: Tourism

CATEGORY/BUILDING TYPE: Various

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: Various

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Unknown

ORIGINAL SITE: yes **MOVED:** N/A **DATE:** N/A

ORIGINAL OWNER/SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUALS: R. M. Payne, J. J. Raulston

HAS THIS PROPERTY BEEN DETERMINED ELIGIBLE? no **DATE:** N/A

CONTRIBUTING:

NON-CONTRIBUTING:

buildings 2

buildings 1

structures 0

structures 0

sites 1

sites 0

objects 1

objects 0

TOTAL 4

TOTAL 1

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION:

Parcel #18.01. See Map #10. The boundaries of the Wonder Cave Historic District contain sufficient property to convey the natural and historical setting of the recreational facility. Boundaries for the cave include the opening and one mile of the cave. This include the tourist portion of the cave.

ACREAGE: 16 acres and one mile of cave

UTM REFERENCE: Burrow Cove, Tennessee 93SE

A: 16/604680/3904000 C: 16/604740/3903540

B: 16/604920/3903870 D: 16/604510/3903670

Mouth of Cave: 16/604600/3903750

SUPPLEMENTAL BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES:

Barr, Thomas C., Jr. Caves of Tennessee, 1961.

Grundy County Herald. 2 September 1976.

PREPARED BY: Elizabeth A. Straw, Historic Preservation Specialist

ADDRESS: Tennessee Historical Commission
701 Broadway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219

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DESCRIPTION:

The Wonder Cave Historic District located on Wonder Cave Road east of U.S. Highway 41 includes two buildings, one site, and one object. Included in the district are the J. J. Raulston House, the Wonder Cave Entrance Building, the tourist portion of the cave, and an advertising sign. The landscaped grounds around the Wonder Cave complex include rock walls, paved walkways, and the remains of a landscaped rock garden that tie all the components of the historic district together.

1.) The J. J. Raulston House built in 1907 served as both a residence and as the ticket office/gift shop until circa 1960 when a new gift shop was built. The house is a one-and-a-half story Craftsman style log house on a raised stone foundation and is located on a hill above the cave's entrance. The Raulston House is constructed of round logs with saddle notching and concrete chinking. The main or southwest facade is composed of a projecting cross-gable section flanked by open porches with rustic log posts and twig balustrades. The gable ends and the gable dormers are faced with board and batten siding. The majority of the windows in the house are 8/1 double hung sash on the first story and 6/1 double hung sash on the second story. The raised basement, which now serves as storage space, is prominent on the southwest facade and has four multi-light windows and a center single four panel door.

On the southeast facade of the house is an entrance to the eastern front porch. A single leaf entrance is located on the western wall of the projecting gable portion of the house. An exterior stone chimney is located near the northern end of the southeast facade. A small weatherboard shed roof addition has been added to the northern end of the southeast facade and partially covers the exterior stone chimney. The rear or northeast facade of the house is simple in form and contains only window openings. A large shed roof dormer is located in the center of the roof on the northeast facade. The northwest facade of the house contains a large stone stairway to the western porch which is closest to the cave entrance. Two twig gates are located at the top of the stairs so the porch can be shut off from visitors. Alterations to the exterior of the house have been minor.

The interior of the house has been remodeled in recent years. However, the original room configurations remain along with many of the original features including the original hardwood floors, fireplaces, built-in bookcases and the open stairway. The house still serves as a residence for the manager of the cave.

There is one outbuilding associated with the house, a small non-contributing barn/garage located near the road south of the house.

2.) The Wonder Cave Entrance Building is a small one room uncoursed stone, gable roof building built into a crevice in front of the cave's entrance. The main or west facade of the entrance building has

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a round arched single leaf entrance flanked by round arched, multi-light casement windows. The windows and the door are surmounted by fanlight transoms. The rear or east facade of the building contains a single leaf door that leads to the mouth of the cave and a round arched window. The north facade of the entrance building abuts the stone wall of the hillside and the south facade is built adjacent to the raised walkway from the house. This facade contains a round arched window on the west end and a rectangular opening on the east end.

The interior of the entrance building is very simple with a concrete floor and a fireplace on the south wall. The fireplace may have always been a non-functioning decorative feature since there is no evidence of a chimney on the building.

3.) Wonder Cave is located approximately 40 feet from the rear doorway of the entrance building. Wonder Cave was discovered in 1897 and explorations of the cave have shown the width to range between 30 to 100 feet with ceiling heights between six and sixty feet. The tourist route through the cave extends approximately one mile into the cave in a south-southeasterly direction. The path into the cave follows a stream and goes through onyx formations. Around 1,100 feet back into the cave the cavern enlarges to a 45 foot ceiling height and has an upper and lower level with extensive dripstone deposits. The upper level colonnade, which is thirty feet above the stream, is the end of the visitors tour. The large colonnade is divided into two rooms, "Statuary Hall" and "Cathedral Hall". Beyond the tour route the ceiling height diminishes and the passage splits and becomes narrower.

4.) An advertising sign spelling out C-A-V-E in individual letters is located northeast of the J. J. Raulston House on the hillside. The letters, approximately thirty feet high, are painted white and are located on a level section of the hillside that appears to have once been a landscaped rock garden with stone steps leading from the walkway near the house up to the garden area.

The four major components of the Wonder Cave Historic District are all linked together by the landscape features of the grounds. Leading from the Entrance Building to the J. J. Raulston House is a flagstone walkway and steps flanked by a stone retaining wall. This similar stone wall is located south of the house near the driveway. Surrounding the house and extending up the hillside to the advertising sign are the overgrown remnants of a formal rock garden.

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SIGNIFICANCE:

CRITERIA: A, C

CONSIDERATION: N/A

AREA OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture, Recreation/Entertainment

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE/SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1898-1937

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: Local

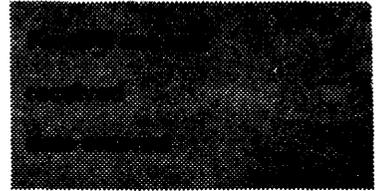
The Wonder Cave Historic District is being nominated to the National Register under criteria A and C for its significance in architecture and tourism in Grundy County. Wonder Cave was discovered in 1897 by three Vanderbilt students: Robert A. Nelson, Melville Anderson, and Will Fitzgerald. In 1898 the cave was purchased by R. M. Payne who enlarged the small natural opening, constructed trails, and lighted the cave with acetylene gas lights. Around the turn of the century the cave was purchased by J. J. Raulston who built both the residence and entrance building and developed the tourism trade.

At its peak Wonder Cave attracted approximately 40,000 visitors a year, and was the largest tourist attraction in Grundy County. In 1962 when Interstate 24 opened, Wonder Cave experienced a 90% drop in the tourist trade. Through extensive advertising on the interstate, Raulston was the only business on U.S. Highway 41 to regain a portion of his trade.

The Wonder Cave Historic District is an excellent example of an early twentieth century tourist attraction. The complex includes the cave noted for its onyx formations, an entrance building, a residence that is an excellent example of early twentieth century rustic craftsman style architecture, and an advertising sign and landscaped grounds that were typical features of large early twentieth century tourist attractions.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form



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