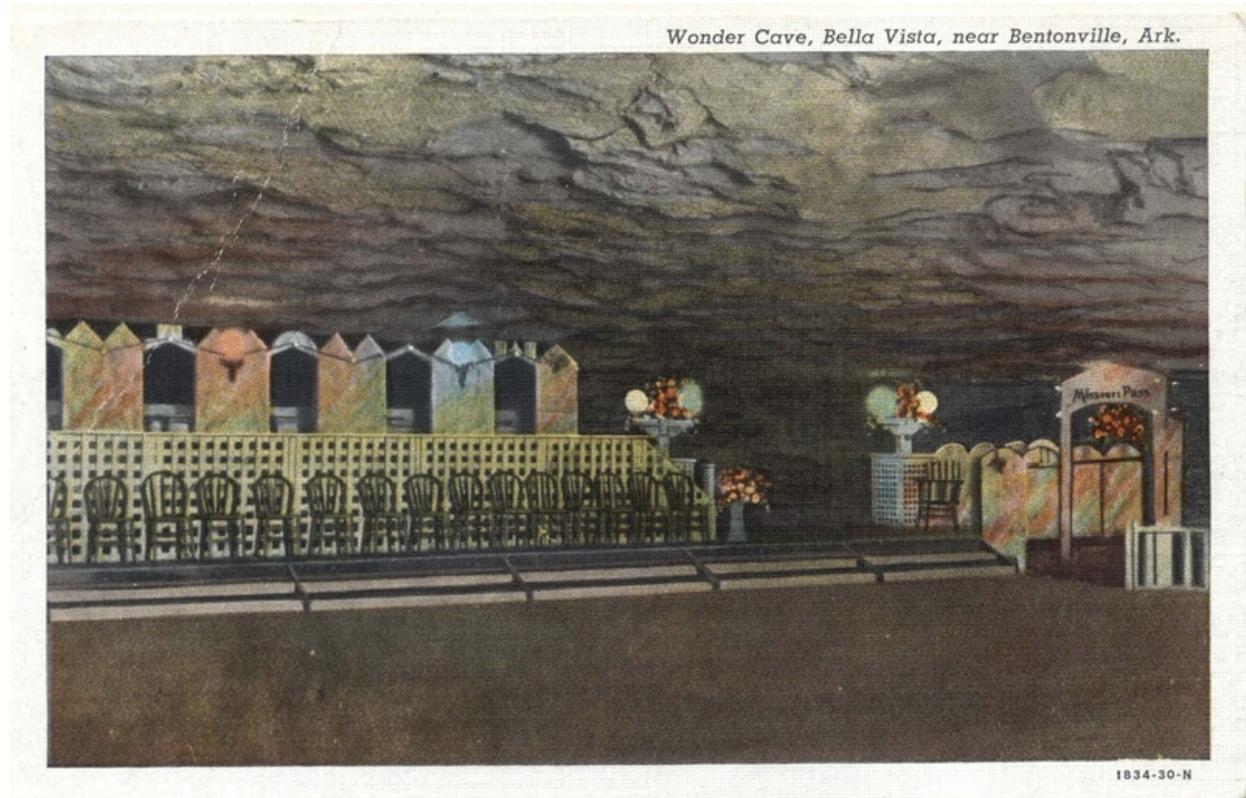


Photo of the Month

Wonderland Cave in Bella Vista



Cool Caves and Cold War

When you think of Wonderland Cave in Bella Vista, what comes to mind is an earlier time of big bands and dances held in a natural underground ballroom. Locally known as "The Big Cave", the property was developed as a nightclub by C.A. Linebarger. Mr. Linebarger had seen clubs built in caves in Paris while visiting there in 1929. He felt that the cave on his property would serve very well that same purpose. Wonderland Cave opened to the public on February 28, 1930. For almost thirty years the cave hosted political and social events and featured popular regional bands performing big-band style music.

By the early 1960s Wonderland Cave was no longer a nightclub, but the public could tour it for a small fee. During this same time, international tensions made places such as Wonderland Cave a different kind of attraction. With the Cold War heating up because of the Berlin Crisis of 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis, Civil Defense officials scrambled to find and create public fallout shelters across the country. In 1962, Benton County Civil Defense leaders struck on the novel idea of turning the area's numerous caves and caverns into emergency fallout shelters. The rationale behind this was that many people would be away from town centers in the event of an attack and the caves would provide alternate places of refuge. Three of the better-known caves that were stocked as fallout shelters were Spanish Treasure Cave near Gravette, Wonderland Cave near Bella Vista and Civil War Cave near Centerton. It is probable that the thought of spending two weeks or more in a dank cavern had little appeal to most people.

Sources:

"Wonderland Cave at Bella Vista", Allyn Lord, 3/29/04, RHM Research Library files.

"Community Shelter Plan", Benton County Civil Defense Director. Undated pamphlet in RHM Collections.

