

The Puzzling Mr. Janin and Mammoth Cave Management, 1900-1910

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Abstract

Albert Covington Janin was the key architect of tourism development at Mammoth Cave for two decades at the start of the twentieth century, yet little has been written about his tenure. This paper explores his background and accomplishments for the period 1900 to 1910 as an initial attempt to understand his contributions to Mammoth Cave. Material about his activities in relation to Mammoth Cave is synthesized from primary sources in the archival collections of the Huntington Library (HL) of San Marino, California, and the Historical Society of Washington, DC (HSW).

“...a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma...”

- Winston S. Churchill, October 1, 1939

The purpose of this paper is to flesh out the context of Max Kämper’s visit to Mammoth Cave by providing background on a key figure at the cave at that time, Albert Covington Janin. Although Winston Churchill was referring to Russia in the 1939 radio broadcast that made the enigma quote famous, the epithet equally fits Albert Janin, for he is also a puzzle with a particularly elusive solution. For almost a quarter of a century (1904-1928), Janin served as a trustee of the Mammoth Cave estate. He was resident at the cave for much of the year, making him the chief architect of tourism development there and the main day-to-day decision-maker. His tenure spanned an era of rapid change in American tourism — including the rise of automobile tourism, the democratization of tourism to include the working class and African-Americans, and the movement to create national parks in the eastern United States. Yet for a figure occupying such an important position at this critical juncture for Mammoth Cave, his life and contributions to Mammoth Cave have been little explored, perhaps because he is something of a paradox. This paper will explore three aspects of Albert Janin’s paradoxical character – let us call them a riddle, a mystery, and an enigma.

The Riddle: Who was Albert Janin and what were his qualifications to run Mammoth Cave?

Albert Janin, born in 1844, was the youngest of six brothers, sons of a French immigrant who settled in New Orleans (Fig. 1). His father, Louis Janin, became a successful lawyer with a practice first in Louisiana, and later in Washington, DC. Albert was sent to Germany for his schooling (all of his siblings received some of their education in Europe), and when he returned to the U.S., he moved through a series of positions under the watchful eye of one or another of his brothers. Albert studied law in San Francisco, although not very diligently. According to Laas’s (1998, 51-52) narrative of his young adulthood, Albert provoked his father’s concern over his habits of self-indulgence and financial speculation, which led him to borrow money and amass debts, even as a young man. Louis Janin’s solution was to bring Albert to Washington, DC, to keep an eye on him and hopefully develop his legal career. Albert’s charm and ability to speak multiple languages allowed him to fit easily into Washington society. It was there that he met Violet Blair, daughter of a socially and politically prominent family (their house on Lafayette Square was across the street from the White House), whom he married in 1874. Violet’s mother, Mary Jesup Blair, was one of the nine original heirs who inherited the Mammoth Cave trust under the terms of John Croghan’s will (Fig. 2). So, Albert married into Mammoth Cave. It would not become important in his life, however, for another quarter of a century.

Albert spent most of the first two decades of his married life in Louisiana, where he

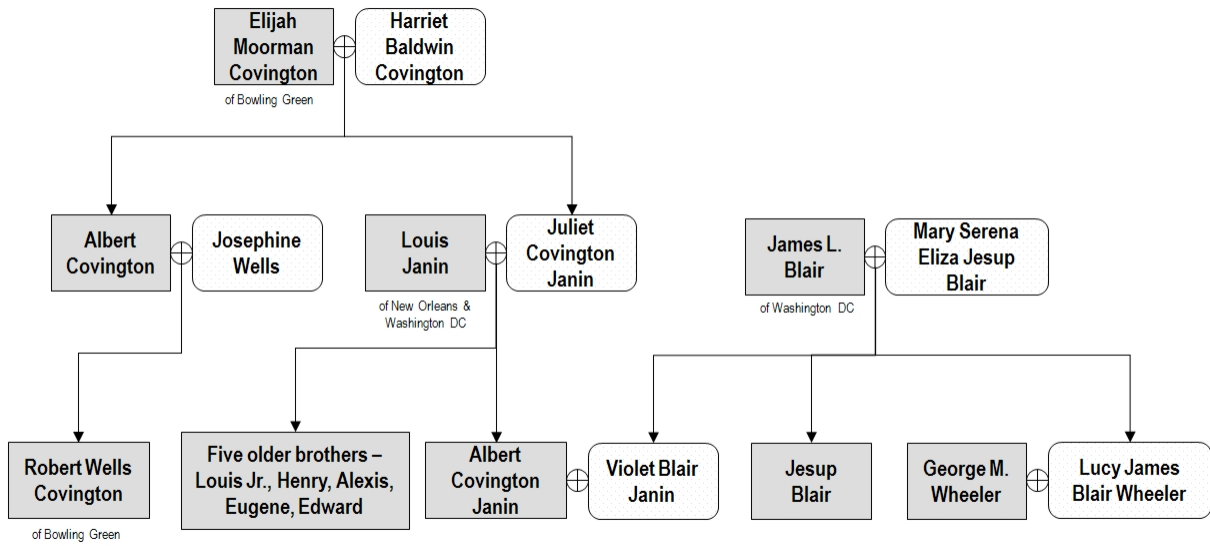


Figure 1. Albert Janin – Critical Family Connections. (Note: Many family members have been omitted from the chart for clarity.)

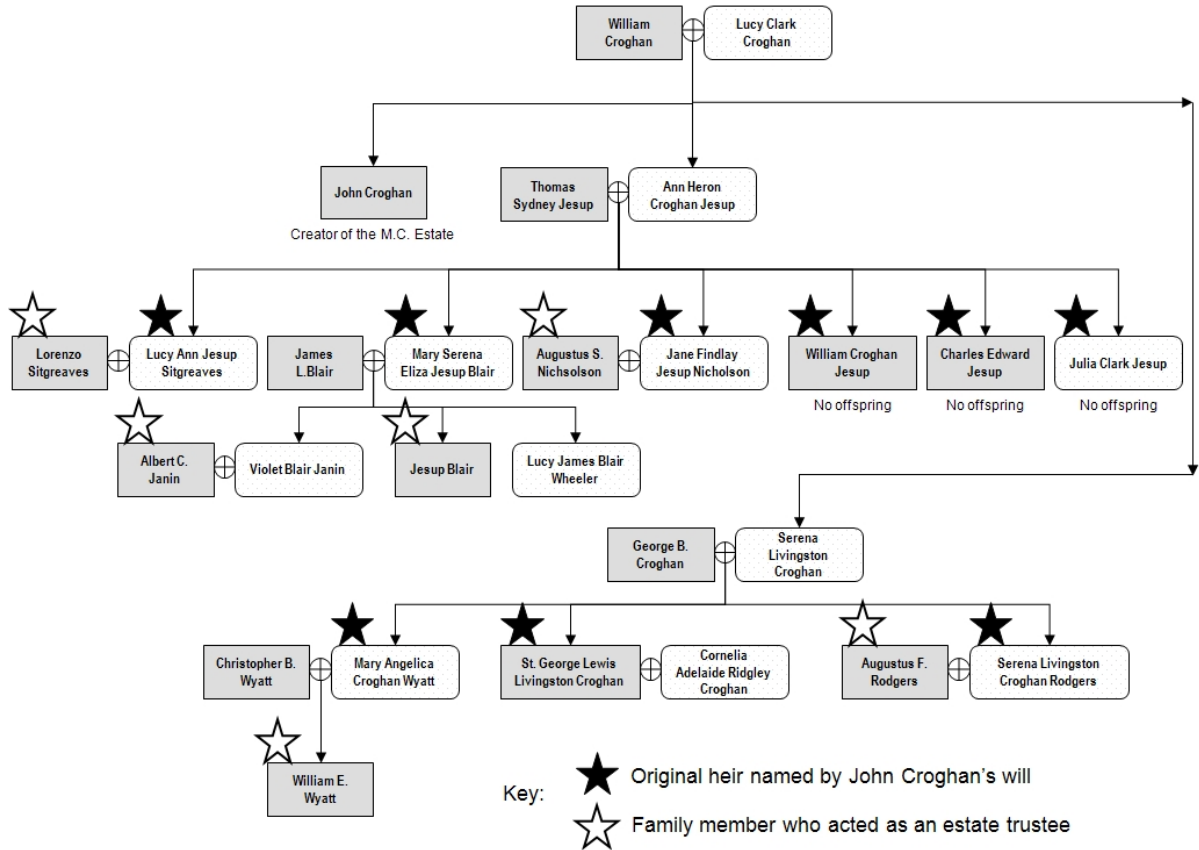


Figure 2. Mammoth Cave Estate – Heirs and Trustees. (Note: Many family members have been omitted from the chart for clarity.)

maintained a law practice, but spent much of his time pursuing one failed business venture after another. His legal work, which was modestly successful, centered on representing plaintiffs before the French and American Claims Commission, which was created in 1880 to resolve individual citizens' claims arising out of the Civil War, the French & Mexican War, and the Franco-Prussian War against various governments (Laas 1998, 78). The scheme that consumed most of his time, energy, and money, however, was the construction of a canal south of New Orleans, between the Mississippi River and Lake Borgne, from which ships could quickly reach the Gulf of Mexico. This canal would cut off the long passage down the crows-foot of the Mississippi delta, reducing travel time and easing passage for deep-draft boats. Money could be made both by charging tolls for ships and by subdividing and selling the land along the canal. Janin did not initiate this project. His legal services were contracted in 1882 to sell what was then called the Mississippi, Mexican & Gulf Canal. By 1884, Janin had formed a partnership with Russel Ralph Pealer to form the St. Louis, New Orleans and Ocean Canal Company, which took over the Lake Borgne canal project. Instead of selling the canal for a client, Janin bought it himself.

A series of letters written by Violet Blair Janin to her husband in 1882 and 1883 reveal her concern about Albert's neglect of his law practice and his propensity for bad investments. Repeatedly she admonishes him not to be lazy, to attend to his law business, and to forget the canal:

"Please don't be lazy but translate LeMore's case [a claim for illegal imprisonment by the army in 1862]. If you lost that case by neglect, I will be ashamed of you. ... I am not disappointed about the canal, as I expected nothing."

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 5 Jan. [no year, but probably 1882 or 1883], HSW

"I want you to pay attention to that paper from the commission. If any of your cases fail from your laziness I will considered [sic] you disgraced & utterly unworthy of respect. Nothing but laziness & novel

reading kept you from translating the LeMore brief long ago. For Heaven's sake don't make me ashamed of you. With your knowledge of French you ought to find no more difficulty in translating it than I find in translating German or Italian into English. I am not joking, I mean every word I say... LeMore has been a good friend to you and you ought to do everything in your power to win his case."

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 19 Jan. [no year, but probably 1882 or 1883], HSW

"... if you had paid attention to what I have advised, you would have managed your affairs with more common sense & would not have them in such a muddle now. I have no patience with a person who is too obstinate to listen to reason, & then wants to be considered a misunderstood martyr... I don't believe you have the remotest chance of selling that canal to Sir E.R. for any sort of price so you might as well turn your attention exclusively to your cases."

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 19 Jan. [no year, but probably 1882 or 1883], HSW

"I am afraid from your letter that you intend to drop the meat for the shadow. Neglect the French cases for a foolish extravagant speculation. For ten years I have been hearing nonsense about the fortune you were going to make in a few months or a year, & I suppose it will continue as long as you can get anything to speculate with. If you were free of debt, had won your cases, & could afford to amuse yourself in that way, I would simply laugh & say nothing, but situated as you are now, I feel much more like having a hard cry over it than a laugh."

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 10 Oct. 1883, HSW

Other speculative ventures in which Albert invested included Minnesota real estate development, dredging shell for paving, a New Orleans newspaper, and ice-making machines. Janin lost money on all of these projects, not only his own money, but also substantial sums borrowed from his mother, his brothers, his

wife, and his mother-in-law. Janin also ran unsuccessfully for a Louisiana congressional seat and saw another attempt to run for office fail when he did not win his party's nomination (Laas 1998, 57). In short, by the end of the nineteenth century, Janin had failed in half a dozen business ventures, amassed large debts, and had seen a political career aborted before it even got started. All of these efforts detracted from a modestly successful law career. The answer, it seems, to the riddle, "What qualifications did Albert Janin have for running Mammoth Cave?" is simple -- none.

Yet the canal *was* a good idea. It was eventually completed, although not by Janin, whose property and equipment were seized and sold to pay his creditors. The Lake Borgne canal was supplanted in the twentieth century by the much larger Mississippi River and Gulf Outlet (MrGo) Canal, but this newer canal was built for the same purpose. Janin's legacy in canal building can be seen in the name of the community at the mouth of the canal, Violet, a name that was later transferred to the canal itself (previously called the Lake Borgne Canal and the Ship Island Canal) (Fig. 3). And, of course,

fortunes have been made in ice-machines, western mines, and real estate development. The problem with Janin's schemes seems to have been not so much in their conceptualization, but in their implementation. Atkins (2001, 60), who developed a psychological profile of Albert Janin as part of a study of family dynamics among siblings, concludes that Janin "was a dreamer. He liked more than anything to speculate." He expressed "continual optimism and fanciful visions of a successful future" (Laas 1998, 46).

Violet's letters are noteworthy and worth quoting at length because they reveal a keen understanding of her husband's character and business failings:

"You refer in your last letter to my want of faith in the canal. I have exactly the same amount of faith in it as I now have in scrip, ice machines, frozen rooms, cod liver oil, Minnesota mine lands, agricultural lands, Va. Railroads, La. Bonds, Wall St. speculations, the N.O. Democrat, Dupre Appleman, Oglesby, Gilmore Hearsey, Hosmer, Edward, & a score of other people

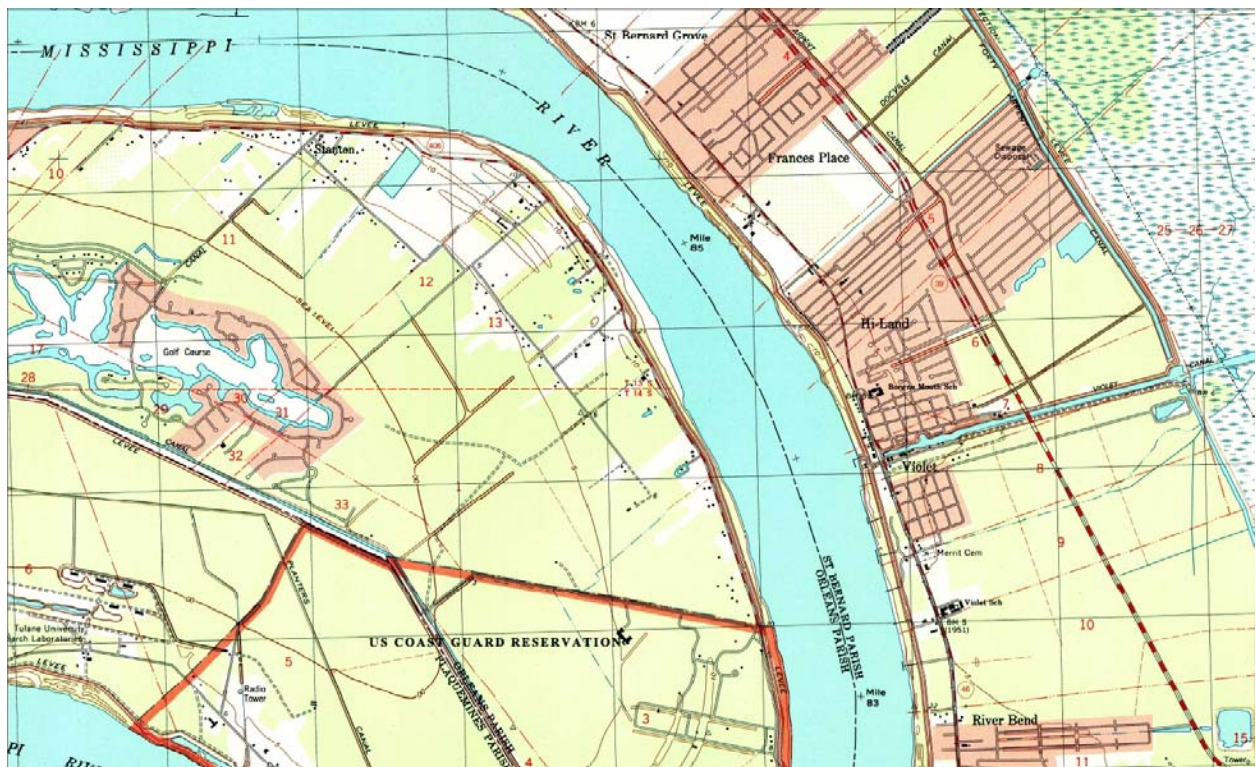


Figure 3. Portion of the 1:24,000 USGS Chalmet, Louisiana, topographic map showing the community of Violet in the center right at the confluence of the Mississippi River and the Violet Canal.

& things you have put faith in – any of the above things might prove successful in the hands of practical business men, but in your hands serve only to lose your own & other people's money in. I don't mean you are not clever, no one can appreciate your intelligence more than I do, but the law is your trade, & you succeed only when you stick to your trade. For Heaven's sake don't be foolish & do anything extravagant at that wretched canal."

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 27 Sept. 1883, HSW

Violet was an astute investor who secured and expanded her own fortune despite her husband's repeatedly demonstrated financial ineptitude (Laas 1998). She became the financial manager of her mother and several aunts and was an advisor in Mammoth Cave matters, as well. Despite her knowledge of her husband's failings and her lack of confidence in Albert's business acumen, Violet, along with her close relatives, moved Albert progressively into a position of authority at Mammoth cave. This leads us to the mystery...

The Mystery: Why was Albert Janin at Mammoth Cave?

The earliest evidence that I have so far found of Albert Janin's involvement with Mammoth Cave is his presence at an October 1900 meeting of the estate trustees. Janin was not a trustee at this point, and it is notable that he was described not as a representative of his mother-in-law, Mary Jesup Blair, but of his mother-in-law's sister, Lucy Jesup Sitgreaves:

"Dear Albert:- Your presence at the meeting of the Trustees of the Mammoth Cave Estate this morning was most agreeable to me, and I wrote Mrs. Sitgreaves to that effect. Now, I want you (as her representative) to write her a detailed account of what took place..."

- Augustus S. Nicholson to Albert C. Janin, 27 Oct. 1900, HSW

The matter of representation was critical, because the extended family had factionalized into several camps with different designs for Mammoth Cave, and each camp wanted representation on the board of trustees. Lucy Sitgreave's husband, Lorenzo Sitgreaves had

been one of a group of five men appointed as trustees by the Edmonson Circuit Court in 1873, but Sitgreaves had resigned in 1882. He was replaced on the board by William E. Wyatt, the son of another original heir, Mary Croghan Wyatt. Wyatt was extremely active as a trustee, and it is probably fair to describe him as the leading decision-maker during the 1880s and 1890s. His work, however, generated animosity and mistrust among the Blair/Sitgreaves camp. Albert Janin's nominal representation of Lucy Sitgreaves was probably the opening move by the Blair/Sitgreaves camp to gain greater control of the board. Janin could not represent his mother-in-law on the board, because she was already represented by her son, Jesup Blair.

Following the board meeting at which Janin was present, he was sent to the cave to investigate the controversy at the heart of the family split – whether the person acting as the estate agent, Henry C. Ganter, was cheating the estate:

"At a meeting last October at the Blairs these facts were spread before them, but they refused to believe; of course you know, Jesup is only a figure-head, & it is Violet who makes the trouble. At this meeting they said they would send an impartial person down to investigate, & whom did they send, but Violet's husband, Mr. Janin, who goes & does nothing but write a report backing up Ganter."

- William E. Wyatt to Lucy Croghan Brown, 30 Nov. 1900, HSW

From 1900 through 1904, multiple law suits, injunctions and petitions were filed in the Edmonson and Warren County Circuit Courts by both sides of the Ganter controversy. The Wyatt/Nicholson faction installed William S. Miller as estate agent in place of Ganter, and the legal wrangling between the factions intensified. Most of the legal briefs for the Blair/Sitgreaves faction were prepared by Albert Janin. He was drawn into Mammoth Cave affairs because he was a competent lawyer; Violet and her mother were helping him "stick to his trade." Albert's role quickly expanded beyond that of family lawyer, however. A December 1900 petition to the Court asked both for the removal of Miller as estate agent and for the appointment of Albert

Janin as a trustee. Neither request was granted at that time, but Janin was ultimately successful in achieving both these aims. Janin had the backing of the Blair/Sitgreaves faction in his quest to become a trustee:

“Following the precedent set by yourself last year in selecting a Mr. Truman to examine the accounts of the manager of the estate, I have selected Mr. Albert C. Janin, to examine the said managers accounts for the period of one year – beginning where Truman’s investigation ended.”

- Jesup Blair to Augustus S. Nicholson, 4 Oct. 1901, HSW

“Do not let the Court adjourn without getting yourself made a trustee and also others that you may think best.”

- Mary Serena Eliza Jesup Blair to Albert C. Janin, 18 Jun. 1902, HL

Violet supports the elevation of her husband to trusteeship, but her support is qualified. She knows too much about Albert’s past business ventures to trust all decision-making to him:

“I do hope that you will be made a trustee but I will never consent to have you made sole trustee.”

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 29 Nov. 1901, HSW

Violet’s letters to her husband from this time period reveal the depth of her concern about his diligence in tending to family business. They express no worries about his competence, only about his willingness to apply himself conscientiously. Violet repeatedly admonishes Albert not to “trot off” to Louisiana before Mammoth Cave affairs have been settled:

“I am scared to death at the idea of having you leave Ky just when the case is coming up. They will think it is your fault if you lose it and that you ought not to have run away from the battle.”

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 29 Nov. 1901, HSW

“I am very much afraid that if you go to New Orleans that you will not get back to Cave in time for G’s [Ganter’s] suit to come up. I do not grudge you the pleasure of going there, but I do not think you are likely to suffer from ‘all work’.”

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 15 May 1903, HSW

“..Something in your last letter made me fear that you were thinking of trotting off to N.O. before Ganter’s case is finished. I hope you will not do so and that I am needlessly alarmed.”

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 12 Oct. 1903, HSW

I hope you will not leave until Rhodes’ papers have been filed in court & decided, much as we want to see you, we are afraid of any hitch in the proceedings and don’t want to have the affair dragging on a year or two longer.

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 19 Feb. 1904, HSW

The April 1902 death of Jesup Blair left an opening on the board of trustees and, critically, left the Blair/Sitgreaves faction without representation. In December 1902, they introduced a petition to the Edmonson Circuit Court to require trustees to be residents of Kentucky, ostensibly for ease of meeting and to ensure greater oversight of cave operations, but this requirement would also have ended the trusteeships of William E. Wyatt and Augustus S. Nicholson, who were regarded as the “enemy.” This same petition asked that three prominent local men be appointed as sole trustees -- Clarence U. McElroy and D. W. Wright of Bowling Green, and Marcellus Lay of Brownsville. Neither of the petition’s propositions were granted (it is possible that the gentlemen named declined to enter so fractious an enterprise, as others are on record of having done). By mid-October 1904, Albert Janin had been appointed a trustee by the Court and was in residence at the cave, overseeing day-to-day operations. His fellow trustees still included William E. Wyatt and Augustus S. Nicholson, but there was another newly appointed trustee --

Robert Wells Covington, a Bowling Green banker and cousin to Albert Janin.

The mystery of why Albert Janin was at Mammoth Cave despite his demonstrated business incompetence seems to have a multifaceted solution. Legal action was desired by the Blair/Sitgreaves faction, and Janin was a capable lawyer, when he applied himself. It is possible that the family also hoped he could draw on family connections on his mother's side. Albert's mother, Juliet Covington Janin, came from an old and prominent Bowling Green family, and some of Albert's cousins were among the town's leading citizens -- lawyers, judges, and bankers. He fell into a pattern of socializing with the Covington family and several others, visiting them in their homes and receiving them at Mammoth Cave. But Albert's selection as a trustee probably hinged on his being the last man standing in the immediate Blair-Sitgreaves circle. This was a time when women rarely took on certain public roles. Through all branches of the extended family that owned Mammoth Cave, although women comprised the majority of the owners, it was usually their close male relatives who took active management roles, as trustees, lawyers, representatives, investigators, etc. Violet's father and brother were dead. Her uncle, Lorenzo Sitgreaves, had resigned the trusteeship, which may have been for health reasons or because of demands of his job, which kept him traveling on the western frontier. Violet's brother-in-law (Mary Jesup Blair's other son-in-law), George Wheeler, had been tapped much earlier for an active role in Mammoth Cave affairs. During the 1880s and 1890s, Wheeler had periodically worked to rationalize Mammoth Cave affairs. Although he wasn't a trustee, he visited the cave, wrote reports, and made recommendations. His efforts were interrupted by bouts of illness and came to an abrupt halt after a falling out with his mother-in-law over financial matters which led Mary and Violet to believe he could no longer be trusted. Although Albert had also acted foolishly in the financial realm, he had not deceived them. Thus, essentially for want of other options, Albert was forwarded as a Mammoth Cave trustee.

The Enigma: How did Albert Janin succeed at Mammoth Cave?

Up to this point, little of this narrative flatters Albert Janin. He was a spectacular failure as a businessman, a non-starter as a politician, and had become a trustee largely by virtue of his gender and a lack of alternatives within the Blair-Sitgreaves camp. So, at the age of 60, having lost a small fortune and succeeded at relatively little in his life, he became a trustee of the Mammoth Cave estate. The enigma is that, in his early years of management, he did remarkably well, particularly given the toxic atmosphere that existed among the two camps of estate owners and the challenges to management occasioned by rapid changes then taking place within the tourism industry.

First, let us consider Janin's role at Mammoth Cave to establish that he actually did exert a large influence. Despite the presence of a "cave agent," a man who managed the cave tour side of the business, and a "hotel agent" or lessee, who nominally ran the hotel, Janin's almost daily letters to his wife make clear that he was, in fact, doing a great deal of the actual managing, promotion, and development of Mammoth Cave tourism. Willis W. Ranshaw, a doctor from Covington, Kentucky, held the hotel lease for two five-year terms from 1902 to 1911. He was, however, an absentee lessee, and during most of this period, Albert Janin managed the hotel as well as overseeing the rest of the estate. Ranshaw was a good friend of Janin's, and it is quite possible that he took the lease as a favor, so that the terms of Croghan's will would be upheld, but Janin would have practical control:

"Marnie was afraid that Dr. Ranshaw might not be willing to renew the lease, but I told her I thought that he would for your sake. She thinks it very important the present status should be continued."

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 12 Aug. 1907, HSW

Janin seems to have found the effort of management more than he had bargained for, because his letters contain repeated complaints about the work load. He made an attempt in the fall of 1907 to turn control of the hotel over to Dr. Ranshaw:

"I am making up my hotel accounts and expect to have a good sum on hand, by

October 1st, to turn over to the Dr. if he wants to 'run' the business. I want to be relieved of the responsibility."

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 27 Sept. 1907, HSW

"I expect to turn the hotel business over to the Doctor Monday evening. He thinks he can manage it successfully. If he can't I shall have to resume partial control again. But I want him, first, to try and learn what a difficult undertaking it is."

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 28 Sept. 1907, HSW

"This being the last day of the month, I am settling all outstanding accounts against the hotel, and expect to turn over the business to the Dr. with more than \$2,500. Doesn't that make a pretty good record for me, who took the hotel with an indebtedness of about \$1,000?"

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 30 Sept. 1907, HSW

The effort was short-lived because Janin discovered that no one was as adept as he was at handling the large tour groups of a hundred or more that arrived often with little notice. Such unanticipated tour groups required prompt, coordinated action on the part of the kitchen and dining staff to feed the visitors and skill on his part to keep everything running smoothly. Others were overwhelmed by the sheer amount of detail entailed in running the hotel:

"I find that nobody here but myself can handle the financial part of the hotel business at this critical time of the year without endangering the credit of the institution. For some time past I have let Martin [Charlet] attend to the settlement of the bills. His other occupations weigh so heavily upon him in busy times that he loses control of the financial... That is what I see I must undertake."

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 19 Jun. 1909, HSW

Willis Ranshaw died in Jan. 1911, and his two sisters inherited his lease of the Mammoth Cave hotel. They visited during the summer, and no doubt helped with management during that time, allowing Janin to get away and visit his

wife in DC, but Albert Janin remained the driving force behind day-to-day affairs:

"I am so sorry to hear of Dr Ranshaw's death, because you were so fond of him. ... If there was only someone capable to taking charge and relieve you of so many journeys out there."

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 2 Jan. 1911, HSW

Now that Janin's key role in Mammoth Cave management has been established, let us consider the results he achieved. Among reforms instituted by Janin at Mammoth Cave was a system of strict account keeping. From 1905 to 1911, he kept detailed books, recording payments for the many items needed to run the estate and dividends paid on a monthly basis to estate heirs. His books (in the Huntington Library's Janin Family Collection) show that he remitted to the heirs most of the cash on hand each month, retaining only a small amount as operating capital. For the first few years, the amount of ready cash he retained was about twenty dollars. By 1907, he seems to have realized that a larger cushion was needed, and increased ready cash to between \$100 and \$200, still by no means extravagant. He also kept a close eye on expenses, working to reduce waste and petty pilfering:

"[I instituted] a new scheme for preventing drinking, loafing and waste in the kitchen."

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 9 May 1907, HSW

The financial result was marked and welcome. The Mammoth Cave business was on a sounder financial footing than it had been for decades:

"Mary & Aunt Lutie are delighted with the way you do business. Mary is going to keep the copy of your letter to the Trustees & also your 'business regulations'. She is going to write to you. Nothing could be clearer or more effective as a check."

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 29 Aug. 1905, HSW

"Mother is anxious that you should take entire charge of the [Mammoth Cave] household as you did last year & have everything as you like it."

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 15 Aug 1905, HSW

"I also added that we had never rec'd so much money from the Cave before."

- Lucy Jesup Sitgreaves to Mary J. Blair, 15 Sept. 1907, HSW

"I am indeed astonished by the M.C. dividend. It is enormous for this month & all the more so, for such times."

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 13 Jul. 1908, HSW

Under Albert's management, the hotel, which had been a perennial money sink, began to make money:

"I have just paid the estate's taxes for 1906 - \$735.00 - not with Cave fees, but with 'Hotel money'. I am glad that you, your mother and Aunt Julia like my management of the property. If I had Carte Blanche to act, I would surprise the owners with the result."

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 11 Oct. 1906, HSW

By the end of the decade, even William E. Wyatt, the "enemy" trustee had been won over by Janin's efforts:

"Wyatt told Aunt Janie that everything was fine at the Cave. He had nothing, but praise for the state of things there, she told mother."

- Violet Blair Janin to Albert C. Janin, 3 May 1910, HSW

Tourism was growing in America at this time, and more people were traveling than ever before. Several advances in transportation brought more visitors to the cave. In 1907, the Corps of Engineers completed the Green River lock and dam system, opening the river to steamboats. River boat excursions to Mammoth Cave from Bowling Green and Evansville, Indiana, became popular. Henry Ford's innovations in automobile manufacture put cars within reach of ordinary households, and by 1914, tourist arrivals by car started to outnumber those who came by train to Mammoth Cave. So, fortuitous circumstances increased travel to Mammoth Cave and contributed to its renewed

profitability, but Albert Janin also worked hard to promote and advertise the cave in new ways, and much of the success must be attributed to his efforts:

"It seems to me my work here is never done. That is, probably, because, in addition to the routine work, I am constantly devising new schemes for creating business and improving conditions here."

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 22 Apr. 1907, HSW

Janin had a knack for marketing and promotion. He designed numerous advertising materials – brochures and flyers, color lantern slides to be used in lectures, and he tried very hard to get a Hollywood film featuring the cave made. He held a beauty contest, which drew contestants and audience from around the western Kentucky region. One marketing innovation was to send a man to expositions and fairs in nearby major cities to staff an information booth. In the past, the estate had relied on the L&N Railroad's excursion agents to work up parties from such gatherings. The direct approach allowed Mammoth Cave to control the message, and it eliminated the cut of the ticket price that the railroad took:

"The Louisville Exposition is quite a success. D. [Dan] C. Ganter is officiating at the Information Bureau."

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 22 Mar. 1907, HSW

"Owing, I think, directly to the manner in which Dan Ganter has been distributing my M.C. [Mammoth Cave] circulars at the State Fair, ...33 of the party, instead of taking only the Short Route & no meals and returning last night in their special coaches, determined to take both routes and remain at the Hotel till this afternoon. .. I shall keep Dan all the week distributing circulars in the Fair building & 'talking Cave'."

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 25 Mar. 1907, HSW

Janin was also savvy in offering free passes to key individuals who could influence travel and in cultivating connections with colleges whose student bodies would become regular patrons:

“My liberality in giving free entertainment to editors of Baptist newspapers, together with the circulation of ‘Cave literature’, bore good fruit. We received many more Baptist visitors than any of us expected, and there were a nice lot of people. Several of the editors will give us good ‘write-ups’.”

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 19 May 1909, HSW

“We are reaping today the first fruits of our liberality last year in donating Cave fees to the fund required for establishing a State Normal School [now WKU] at Bowling Green. Professor Cherry has just brought a big crowd of students. The Cave fees will amount to about \$400.00. He will probably bring another party this year.”

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 6 May 1907, HSW

Janin innovated in other ways, as well. He had an appreciation for technology and the organizational efficiencies it could bring:

“We have now a telephone line into the Cave, which enables the guides to notify us how many visitors have decided to take the Long Route and will want lunches at the dining hall.”

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 24 Jul. 1907, HSW

He oversaw the installation of lighting in the hotel and cave and bought a “utilitator”, a tractor that could plow the estate’s fields and whose engine could power a saw for cutting lumber. Janin also paid attention to the overall visitor experience. He installed Lucy Ganter, wife of sometime hotel manager Henry Ganter, in the hotel kitchen. She was already a good, if traditionally starch-heavy, cook...

“We had a fine dinner yesterday – fricasseed chicken, creamed potatoes, and macaroni cooked by Lucy Ganter... The hotel is acquiring a fine reputation for its good meals.”

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 22 Jul. 1907, HSW

But then Janin sent her to Louisiana to absorb the best of Louisiana French Creole cuisine:

“I am very much interested in Lucy’s proposed Mardi Gras trip to Louisiana. I want her to learn how to prepare a number of dishes – gumbo, [unreadable], fricassee, stewed kidneys, stewed shrimp &c.”

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 28 Jan 1909, HSW

Upon her return...

“Lucy has regaled us with fricassee of chicken, “grillades” and “pain perdue” – all finely cooked – and promises a gumbo tomorrow.”

“We got the promised gumbo yesterday. Lucy would make a splendid chef. She has industry, energy and fine judgment. She learned a great deal at New Orleans, and quickly.”

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 9 & 12 Apr. 1909, HSW

At the conclusion of the first decade of the twentieth century, the Mammoth Cave enterprise was doing better than it had done for decades. It was making more money for the owners, its reputation as a quality attraction had been bolstered among the traveling public, and the new section of cave discovered by Max Kämper and Ed Bishop and named for Janin’s wife, revitalized interest:

“Leaders of parties are saying more and more that the Cave and Hotel are now more attractive than they ever were. Violet City is perceived by many to be the finest thing in the Cave. Bishop says people “go crazy over it”. I wish we had money enough to make it still more attractive to visitors by making the trip easier.”

- Albert C. Janin to Violet Blair Janin, 31 May 1909, HSW

Management of Mammoth Cave became more problematic for Albert Janin in subsequent years. He faced increasing competition from other show caves and hotels, and, as his health declined, he was less able to stay on top of the many details that management of the estate demanded. But for this period of time, 1900

to 1910, Albert Janin's contribution to Mammoth Cave was positive and significant, which leads us back to the enigma – how did this man, who had never succeeded in a business venture in his life, at the age when most are thinking of retirement, make a success of Mammoth Cave? Not only did he put the business on a sound financial footing and oversee a period of expanded tourism, but he managed to quell the vituperous factionalization of the Mammoth Cave heirs. While a definitive answer is elusive, I can suggest a few qualities that contributed to his success. He was honest, and his scrupulousness about keeping accounts of income and expenditures stemmed the leakage of estate goods and services that had been a financial drain. He wanted very much to make a success of the business for the sake of his family members, some of whom were dependent on Mammoth Cave income. He was worldly enough to have traveled widely in America and Europe, giving him an appreciation for what tourists were looking for and allowing him to adapt practices he had observed elsewhere. For instance, he was quick to encourage cook Lucy Ganter to pursue an interest in haute cuisine, allowing her time to travel and study French Creole cooking. He believed that advertising and promotion was a good investment, reversing a long-standing aversion of the trustees to reducing dividends for the sake of advertising. And he was a bit of a dreamer and schemer... which might not have been a bad quality in tourism development. Not all his plans came to fruition (e.g. the Hollywood movie was not made), but enough did to turn the fortunes of the estate around.

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