

# Max Kämper's Explorations at Mammoth Cave

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## Abstract

German engineer Max Kämper arrived at Mammoth Cave on February 24, 1908 after spending 8 ½ months in New York. He had been studying American manufacturing techniques and improving his knowledge of the English language. It was not a random act that brought Max to Mammoth Cave as was first believed. There was another famous German engineer, also named Max that had mapped Mammoth Cave in 1866. Max Eyth was the inspiration for all young German engineers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and his writings, painting, and map surely inspired Max Kämper to see Mammoth Cave for himself.

Kämper started his cave journey as a typical visitor. He acquired a book about Mammoth Cave and purchased tickets for the Short and Long routes. Max went rowing on the Green River and took time to visit other area caves including Ganter's Cave and White's Cave. The rugged landscape and remoteness of the Kentucky country-side must have been a stark contrast to his view in New York.

Max kept a detailed journal of his daily expenditures accompanied by a brief entry of the day's activities. Evidence that Max's stay was going to be longer than originally planned is indicated by the journal entry for March 6 – Max was "exploring" Gerta's Grotto. This brand new discovery was proudly named after Max's cousin Gerta Luyken. Two days later, on March 8, Max records that he is now "mapping" Gerta's Grotto with the assistance of Ed Bishop.

Max Kämper's visit to Mammoth Cave had now turned into an obsession and he began to systematically map the cave paying for the services of cave guides, mainly Ed Bishop. Word of the fixated German had made its way back to Judge Albert Covington Janin, trustee of the Mammoth Cave Estate. Janin realized that Kämper was the perfect man to produce a new map of the cave for personal use of the trustees. An agreement was secured for Max to map the cave in exchange for free lodging, meals, and caving. With the guarantee of unlimited exploration and the services of Ed Bishop, Max Kämper was now equipped to create the greatest cave map for its time.

In addition to his many hours spent working in Mammoth Cave, Max found ample time to enjoy the social aspects of staying at a world-renowned tourist attraction. He escorted lovely young ladies into the cave, such as Becky Wilkins and Lida Flenniken – who would have "Becky's Alley" and "Lida's Pass" named after them. There was an evening porch party at the Mammoth Cave Hotel at which Max played violin accompanied by the tall and lovely Mayme Depp on piano. Max would name Mammoth Cave's "Mayme's Stoop" in her honor. His days were filled with cave exploration, but his nights were devoted to music, parties, and charming the young ladies.

Max wrote Judge Janin from Cincinnati that the map was finished on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. He went to Washington, D.C. and turned the map over to Janin personally and then sailed back to Germany on the Prince Freidrich Wilhelm. In the wake of his efforts, a legacy of intrigue and mystery surrounded the man and his map.

Little was heard from Max after he left the United States. Through the years, rumors began to circulate that he had been killed in World War I – but no one at Mammoth Cave could confirm or deny. After extensive research, German caver and journalist Bernd Kliebhan found himself sitting at a table with the family of Max Kämper – his son, Hans, daughter-in-law, Gerlinde, and several grandchildren. The search for Max was finally over.