

# **Majestic Caverns**

## **A Federally Documented Historic Site in Continuous Family Stewardship Since 1912**

Located in Childersburg, Alabama, Majestic Caverns is one of the earliest federally documented natural landmarks in the United States and remains among the few historic cave sites still open to the public under continuous private stewardship.

The cavern was officially recorded in 1796 by Benjamin Hawkins, U.S. Superintendent of Indian Affairs during the Washington administration. His correspondence provides one of the first federal references to the site, placing Majestic Caverns among the earliest documented natural features in American records.

Archaeological research identifies the cave as a Woodland-period Indigenous site, including documented Copena burial traditions. These findings place human activity in the cavern centuries before European settlement.

During the Civil War, the cave was mined for saltpeter, a critical ingredient in gunpowder. Original trenches, wells, and mining features remain visible inside the cavern today, offering rare physical evidence of wartime industry.

In 1912, Ida Elizabeth Brandon Mathis purchased the property with the intention of mining onyx. Though the mining venture proved unsuccessful, her family preserved the cave. In 1965, her son Allen W. Mathis opened the cavern to the public as a show cave, beginning a tradition of education and heritage tourism that continues today.

Listed on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage in 1976, Majestic Caverns now serves approximately 80,000 to 100,000 guests annually through guided tours, field trips, and historical interpretation.

More than two centuries after its first federal documentation, Majestic Caverns remains a living historic landscape where geological, Indigenous, Civil War, and family preservation histories intersect in one place.