

## PUBLISHED IN:

*C.O.G. Squeaks* (April 2019), n.p. Central Ohio Grotto, NSS

*RKC Newsletter* (Spring 2019), 7. Rockcastle Karst Conservancy

### **William H. Russell (1937-2019): A Rockcastle Pioneer** — By Gary A. O'Dell

It is with considerable regret that I report on the passing of William Hart Russell of Austin, Texas, on March 21, 2019; an extraordinary and distinguished caver who pioneered the systematic exploration of Rockcastle County caves in 1960. Born in 1937 in Houston, Texas, to a professional librarian, Leonore Schuppert Russell, and a geologist, William Low Russell, Bill grew up in Bryan, Texas, with his brother, Philip, where his father taught at Texas A&M University for several decades. Their father took them on fieldwork trips, including some visits to Kentucky caves, which inspired Bill's very early engagement with caves and cave science. After graduating high school, Bill moved to Austin and attended the University of Texas, joining the UT student grotto and the NSS (#4357), becoming a very active caver. During summers, he worked for Carson Oil in Kentucky and heard rumors about large caves to be found in Rockcastle County.

After serving a hitch in the Army in Europe, Bill came back to the US in the summer of 1960 with an Army buddy, Thomas R. Costello. Wanting to do something special to mark their return to civilian life, the two decided to follow up on those cave rumors and took the bus from New York to Rockcastle County. Inquiring about caves, they ran into John Lair and Richard Mullins, who told them where to look. They spent the next two weeks hiking and camping in the wilderness, moving from cave to cave, exploring and surveying. Among the major caves they visited were Pine Hill, Sinks of the Roundstone, Great Saltpetre Cave, Mullins Spring Cave, Teamers Cave, and Crooked Creek Ice Cave, making surveys of the first three. Their Great Saltpetre map was the first survey of the cave that had been made since the original made by John James Dufour in 1805. They made note of more than a dozen minor caves, and also visited Pulaski County.

After this, Bill came home to Austin, and immediately plunged back into an ambitious program of mapping and describing Texas caves, producing several regional reports for the Texas Speleological Survey which, in 1962, released *A Preliminary Report of the Caves of the Mt. Vernon and Livingston Quadrangles Kentucky*, by Russell and Costello. In the years that followed, Bill continued to publish numerous articles, book chapters, and reports on caves in Texas

and Mexico, building a stellar reputation among the Texas caving community to the point where one of his peers considered him, in 1985, to have earned the title, "Mr. Texas Caver." For those of us who caved in Rockcastle County, Bill was here first, a true pioneer. I consider myself fortunate that, in the months just prior to his passing, I took the trouble to contact him in order to learn exactly why a Texas caver had come to Kentucky, all the way down to Rockcastle County.



*Bill Russell in 1982. Photo by Steven Pumphrey, originally published in Third Coast, September 1982.*