

## THE MERCER COLLECTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

Dr. H. C. Mercer directed several 19th century archaeological and paleontological excavations in Tennessee caves. Most of his collections are now lost. This work relates the quest to rediscover them.

### INTRODUCTION

In 1893, Dr. Henry Chapman Mercer, of the University of Pennsylvania, supervised archaeologically-oriented excavations in two Tennessee caves, Nikajack Cave in Marion County and Lookout Cave in Hamilton County. Both yielded evidence of human habitation and Lookout Cave also contained Pleistocene fossils (Mercer 1894a; 1894b; 1894c). In 1895, Mercer reexcavated Lookout Cave, and in 1896 he returned to Tennessee to systematically collect from Big Bone Cave in Van Buren County (Mercer 1896; 1897).

Each of Mercer's excavations involved the systematic trenching of a cave and submission of animal and plant remains for study by experts. Dr. E. D. Cope identified the larger mammals, Dr. R. W. Shufeldt studied the birds, and a similar pattern was followed with bats, amphibians, and other groups. Despite large-scale field work and expert identifications, very little information appeared in print. The Big Bone Cave biotae was formally described (Mercer 1897) but other biota are only known from preliminary reports (Mercer 1894a; 1894b; 1894c; and 1896).

### SEARCH

Mercer's collections, especially those that were never fully described, should be of considerable interest to Tennessee archaeologists, biologists, and geologists. In 1972, 1973 and 1974

an exhaustive attempt was made to locate these collections. Two specimens from Lookout Cave are preserved in the geological collection of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (Corgan, in press). The remainder of the collections is apparently lost. Mercer's material is not in the following institutions: the Mercer Museum, Doylestown, Pennsylvania; the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia; the University of Pennsylvania Museum; the Departments of Geology and Archaeology at the University of Pennsylvania; the Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; the Pennsylvania State Museum; the New York State Museum; Yale; Harvard; the American Museum of Natural History; the Field Museum; the Smithsonian, or any natural history museum in Tennessee.

### CONCLUSION

A natural scientist can spend valuable time in a fruitless search for ancient collections. Anyone searching for Mercer's collections should know that one unsuccessful search has already been made.

### REFERENCES CITED

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Several Academy members have suggested that a forthcoming JTAS issue be devoted to the Ecological-Environmental Sciences. Any pertinent manuscripts would be welcome at this time.