

Gerard Fowke in the Ozarks

Gerard Fowke (1855-1933) was an early 20th century geologist and archaeologist, although it does not appear that he had a great deal of formal training in either field. He taught school (1876-1878) and was an elementary school principal (1879-1881) in Ohio but found teaching monotonous. He took a course at Ohio State University in geology and archaeology and found his life's interests.

Fowke began his Native American investigations in the eastern United States, particularly mounds in Ohio. His search for prehistoric cultural sites took him from Guatemala to Siberia. He worked for the Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of Ethnology, from 1885-1889. From 1911 to 1916, Fowke was employed by the Missouri Historical Society, where he studied the geology of the St Louis area and river basins. He curated the Society's first collection of Native American artifacts in 1913 in its quarters in the Jefferson Memorial.

Part of Fowke's methodology was to walk the region under study. He often walked 30 miles per day and is reputed to have walked 100,000 miles during his lifetime. He was described by a St. Louis Post-Dispatch reporter present at a lecture to the historical society in 1926 as "...a striking figure

on the platform. He wore a long black coat and, a habit of years in the field, leather boots, their tall tops concealed by his trouser legs. His tanned face peeped from a patriarchal thicket of silver hair and beard, keen and aristocratic. At 71, his eyes glitter, his voice rings and his stride is quick and sure."

The fieldwork for Fowke's report, titled "Cave Explorations in the Ozark Region of Central Missouri," occurred from 1917-1919. Exploration was done in 11 Ozark counties. He identified at least 98 sites worth examining for prehistoric occupation. Of these, 77 were caves. Of the 77 caves, 13 were in Phelps County and 32 caves were in Pulaski County. Quite a few of the caves named were dismissed with a sentence or two describing them as uninhabitable.

Using the rough metric of the number of pages devoted to the description of excavation and objects found as an indication of a productive habitation site, Gourd Creek Cave and Goat Bluff Cave in Phelps County received six and five pages of text respectively. The excavation in Sell Cave, just south of Waynesville, received a six page account. Miller's Cave (now known as Miller Cave) was afforded a 24 page long account.

Fowke sent artifacts from Miller

Cave to the Smithsonian. He reported that

Without attempting to make a detailed list, there may be given a summary of the objects shipped to the National Museum:

- 12 skulls
- 10 partial skeletons, most of them more or less broken
- 8 fragments of skulls from different individuals not included in the above
- 74 objects of shell
- 711 worked flint objects; knives, scrapers, cores, etc.
- 10 grooved axes, tomahawks, and flint hammers
- 10 mortars
- 40 pestles, stone hammers, rubbing stones, etc.
- 413 wrought objects of bone and stag horn
- 2 clay pipes
- 1 box of pottery fragments
- A number of small objects, not classified.

...There were left in the cavern several hundred broken flints; more than 60 mortars; probably 200 stones used as pestles, hammers, etc., and several large wagonloads of shell, bone, and broken pottery.

However, it was not the number of artifacts found or the length of prehistoric occupation that made news in 1921. It was a simple sentence written in reference to several bone fragments: "They plainly indicated cannibalism, as they were broken when thrown here." The article that we reprinted from the *Springfield Leader* on pages 10-11 was reprinted in our county newspapers.

We did not want to leave the notion that cannibals once roamed the Old Pulaski landscape. The *Gazette* contacted Stephanie Nutt, archaeologist at Fort Leonard Wood, where Miller Cave is located. Stephanie forwarded a modern perspective of Fowke's assertion written by office colleague Andrew Phillips, Archaeological Technician, Texas State University. Andrew informs us that

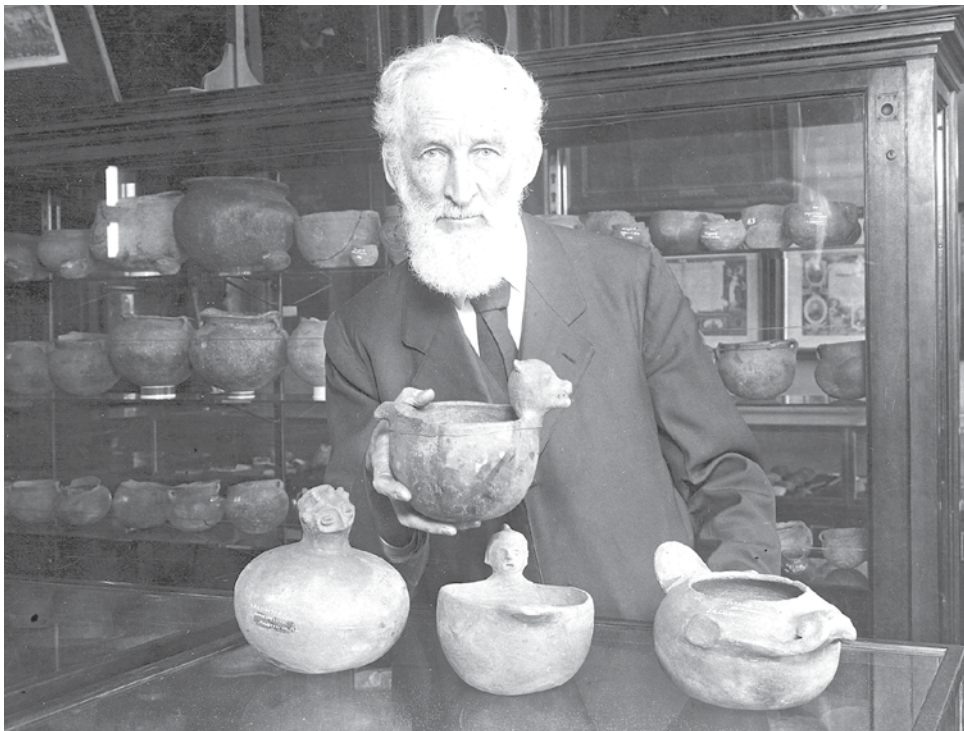
Fowke's interpretation of the inhabitants of Miller Cave being cannibals does not hold up to modern archaeological viewpoints or science. During the early 20th century archaeologists and other scientists typically viewed

Native Americans as being less evolved or a more primitive people. This belief was prevalent even at the highest of levels of society at the time. For example, Native Americans did not become U.S. citizens until 1924, two years after Fowke completed his fieldwork at Miller Cave.

Fowke concluded the inhabitants of Miller Cave were cannibals for a couple different reasons. First, many of the human remains recovered from Miller Cave were found buried within an area of mixed materials such as mussel shell, burned animal bone, and charcoal deposits. Second, it appeared the mixed materials were buried at the same time. Fowke's conclusions would have been heavily influenced by the belief popular at the time of Native Americans being a "primitive culture".

Modern-day archaeologists would not support the idea of the inhabitants of Miller Cave being cannibals. Miller Cave has long periods of occupation dating back to the Early Archaic (7800-5000 B.C.) through the Late Woodland (A.D. 450-950). With the continued use of Miller Cave over such an extended period of time, the ground floor in the cave was constantly being disturbed. The continued ground disturbance would have caused artifacts and human remains to be moved and become out of context from their original settings. The continued use of Miller Cave during the prehistoric time period isn't the only cause of disturbance. Fowke noted the cave showed signs of looter pits even in the 1920s. It was common for looters to dig holes throughout the cave, remove the cultural materials, and discard the rest, often times burying the unwanted items in the same hole and covering it back up. By doing this, the context of the stratification of cultural materials is heavily impacted.

Thus, the modern-day interpretation of the placement of the human remains in Miller Cave would not support the theory that the inhabitants were cannibals. Rather, it would be that for thousands of years the ground in Miller Cave was constantly being disturbed and reused, causing the cultural materials, including human remains, to be mixed up.



Gerard Fowke, 1931. Courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.