

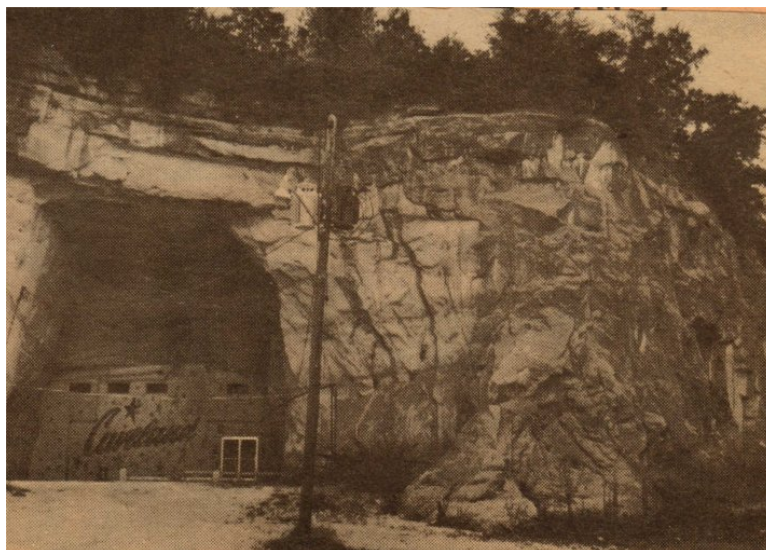
# CAVELAND

By Lisa K. Gendron



In the 1800s, a sandstone mine was built on the side of a bluff located in the city of Festus, Missouri on the "old Lucas family farm" in Section 06, Township 40, Range 6, officially named LUCAS GARDEN TERRACE 2 LOT 19. When the mining operation ceased, a young man named Louis Rothenheber, (1910-1975) of Missouri Silica Sand, and his assistant, drilled twelve foot holes and packed them with dynamite. These blasts were used to create roughly 45' square sections leaving natural pillars at the four corners, creating a 12,000 square foot cavern. Once they had blasted the first eighty feet of rock they had sufficient roof thickness to create a "turn around" or two 45' square rooms side by side. He and his assistant hauled sand away to the local glass factory (Pittsburgh Plate Glass) and to St. Louis. It is said that they transported four truck loads of sand per day. Rothenheber later raised mushrooms and fishing worms in the cool interior of the cave. Eventually, his operation closed and the cave was purchased by a St. Louis group on October 13th 1929. Louis Rothenheber was listed in the 1930 St. Louis Mo. census as a fountain clerk selling dairy products.

In 1948 Sue Chappeau Morris and her husband, Roland purchased the property and laid a 208 foot concrete floor in the cave. In 1958, they turned it into a roller skating rink and concert venue, calling it Caveland. Roland left soon after the rink opened, and Sue spent the next 25 years, along with her five children and a lot of help from friends running it.



As you entered the cave through the double doors, the cashier was on the left, and the stairs leading to the balcony over the cashier and concession area were to the right. The balcony was equipped with velvet covered seats, but was not open to the public. It was usually cordoned off with a rope. The skate rental checkout was directly on the right side wall - several yards into the cave. In front of the skate rental area, and next to the rink were a few rows of long benches. The kitchen area was also to the right. For a while there was a coat and shoe room, but it didn't last too long.

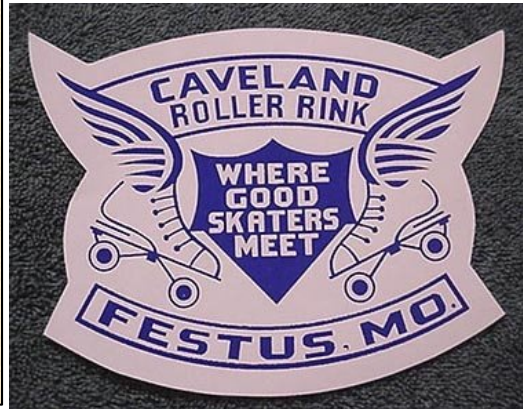
**CAVELAND SKATEPORT**  
(THE RINK IN A CAVE)  
215 CAVE DRIVE, FESTUS, MO. 937-9977 OR 937-4385  
SUE MORRIS, MANAGER, PRESENTS THIS

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**COMPLIMENTARY ADMISSION**  
SPECIAL RATES FOR CHURCHES, SCHOOLS, ALL GROUPS  
63° TEMPERATURE AT ALL TIMES

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Tuesday, Thursday — 7:00 to 9:00 P.M.  
Friday & Saturday — 7:00 to 10:30 P.M.  
Sunday Matinee — 2:00 to 4:30 P.M.  
All other times Private Parties Available



Ron White, of Festus, said that Caveland still holds a special place in his heart. He remembers Sue Morris as being "such a gracious person." He worked there for twenty years starting in the early 1960's, only missing 1968-69 when he was serving in the army in Vietnam. He began his years there by playing the organ for the skate sessions, and also worked as a skate floor guard for free. He gave that up to learn to skate and then became the floor manager. Bill Kirby became the rink organist after Ron. Jerry Mueller was also an organist for the rink.

Tina Vance worked at the skating rink from about 1970 – 1973. As a junior high student, she was the coat-check girl, worked the concession stand, handed out skates, and cleaned the grime off the wheels of the skates on a grinding machine. She also had to sweep up the sand that constantly fell from the walls and ceiling onto the concrete skate floor. She remembers the "bomb/fallout shelter" and the tunnels behind the stage that most people weren't allowed to enter. Her memories also include some stolen kisses in the balcony.

Tina recalls that she didn't receive any wages, but got to skate for free, and was treated to an occasional free soda. She often "led" the Grand March with another skater named Darrell "Dutch" Hewitt, who worked the skate counter. He used to perform dance skating when he was younger, and was the one who taught Tina to skate gracefully. Dutch also helped many of the local girls achieve their Girl Scout skating badge at the cave.



Others that worked there in various capacities through the years were Charles Evans, Gary Haverstick, Janet Lucas, Clarence Watson, Evelyn Hurtgen and Curtis Amalong.

Many of the skaters will remember the hanging lighted sign that announced whether it was an "ALL SKATE" or "COUPLES SKATE", etc. and the songs that were always played --- "The Lion Sleeps Tonight," "Put Your Head On My Shoulder," "Close Your Eyes," "Go Away Little Girl," "The Grand March" and of course "The Hokie Pokie."



Kay Clerc-Fakhar said that "back in the early 70's, my friend and I used to help teach groups of beginning skaters how to skate. On other nights we'd teach groups of kids dance moves, on roller skates of course. The classes were always about two hours prior to the rink being open to the public in the evening. It was pretty breathtaking looking upward at the colored reflections on the damp stone ceiling as the rink lights would just be turned on before the lessons started. We didn't get paid- instead we got to skate free all night. Our skates were also rent free since we already had them on for teaching. We got all the free drinks we wanted. I can't remember the exact name now, but I think it was called a kamikaze or a suicide? - A mix of fountain coke, sprite, & orange colas in one cup."

"The floor guard (the guy w/ the whistle who made sure everything/one was ok) was so fast and so skilled. He would often teach my friend and I new dance moves in the middle of the rink during the public skates while he was monitored the rink. He could do both effortlessly."

"I recall Dutch telling me one evening to practice a triple-spin in between the skate lessons and the opening of public skating. This was something I had never tried before. But that night I had worn a brand new bib overall shorts outfit, complete with sparkly buttons to fasten the straps, and my trepidation was replaced with teenage visions of glittering buttons under the lights. With the rink entirely to myself, I started from the back of the rink, built enough speed as I headed to the front, turned in reverse, got thru the first spin on one leg, and ka-splat! The last thing I recall was the echoing sound of my sparkly buttons ricocheting across the rink and then hearing worried voices telling someone that my eyes had opened. With cold cloths held to my head, and dangling straps bouncing around my legs, they managed to half carry me off the rink. By now, the area was packed with people waiting for skates. I could hear complaining that it was past time for the rink to open, questions about what was happening, and chatting about a young boy unsteady on his skates, running straight into "me." Once I was seated, Sue(?) fastened my straps back up with safety pins, someone brought an ice pack and bandages and a cold drink appeared in my hand. I was so embarrassed to be the center of all the chaos. And, I was really concerned about my missing buttons. Regretfully, those buttons were never found. Maybe they're still there, twinkling somewhere...."

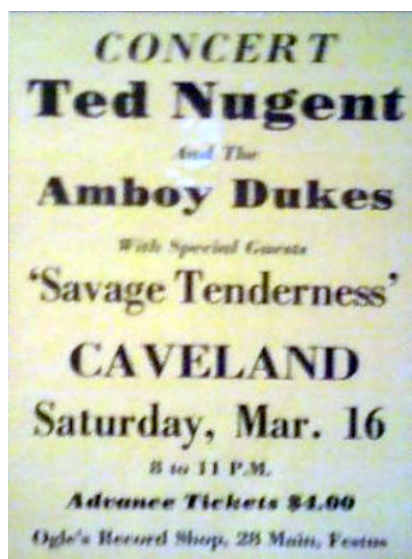


The rink itself was straight ahead in a large long oval shape. At the back end and along the sides of the rink were the exposed cave walls. There were safety railings all around, but it was easy to touch the cold damp walls. The dampness contributed to the unique smell that permeated the cave, which has been described as “the perfect combination of damp air, mold, and skates that have had 1700 pairs of teenage feet in them.”



In a 1995 News Democrat newspaper article about the cave, Sue Morris stated that the cave's electricity bill alone was a staggering expense, and that “the most expensive thing about it was the mechanism to keep the moisture out, because it was always 63 degrees in the cave, winter, and summer.”

Perhaps one of the most remembered things about the cave is the rock concerts that were held there on most weekends. Attendees said that the music was exceptionally loud, however that didn't dampen their enthusiasm. Ted Nugent & The Amboy Dukes played in the cave in 1974 the night before their appearance at Kiel auditorium in St. Louis. At one point during Nugent's set, he pointed his guitar at the disco ball and it shattered because of the noise. The opening act for Nugent was a then somewhat unknown musician named Bob Segar who played "Sue Me, Sue You Blues."

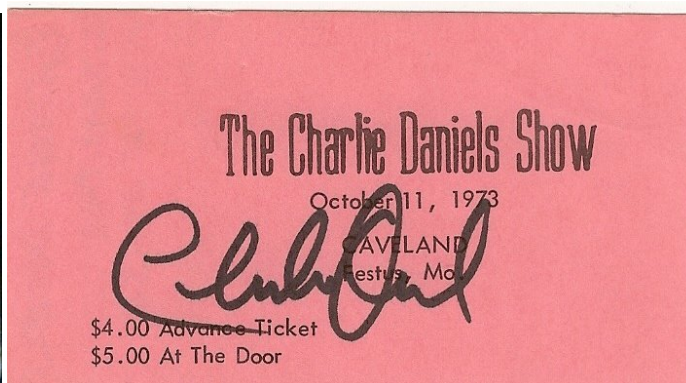
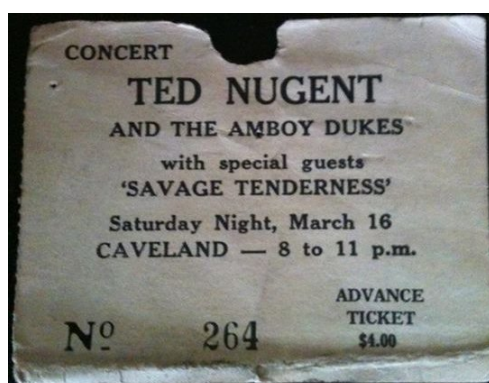


The following **excerpt** credited to Joe Bohnert is a description of a concert experience at the cave.....

*\*graphic language & situations*

*..... A band from St. Louis called RUSH was opening the show. The night of the concert came and I had a place close to the front on the floor with some of my friends. Hours passed and the place filled up with people. The stage was empty and there was no music. It was a good couple of hours past when the concert was supposed to start*

and the crowd was getting edgy. Suddenly, these big burly bearded biker dudes busted through the (only) door of the place carrying these huge RCA W bass bins and giant double driver (JBL) horns and tromped through the crowd of hypnotized hippies. "Outta the way!" It was the RUSH crew. In minutes, they had the huge sound system set up with a wall of Marshall amplifiers lining the stage with the biggest drum set I'd ever seen. I'd only seen Marshalls in pictures before. The leader / guitarist / vocalist of RUSH was Gene Edlen, a notorious wild man. This was my 1st real concert. They came out playing "Crossroads". It was so loud in that cave and professional and bad ass! I was totally overcome, oversaturated, and freaked out. They ended Crossroads and broke into one of Gene's songs called "The Shit's Comin' Down"...a high octane boogie that lasted the better part of an hour. During this song, Gene climbed on top of his Marshall stacks (over 6 feet tall) with his guitar, looked back and saw these fluorescent plastic stars hanging from strings, plucked one and started acting like he was shooting up drugs with it. He built the audience up to such a frenzy that you thought you were rushing off crystal speed with him! Those 2 songs changed my life forever. I knew what I wanted to do. I knew my purpose in life. I was only 15 or 16. MC-5 was good, damn good. But I had been completely blown away by Gene Edlen & RUSH. To this day, nobody remembers many details about the MC-5, but everyone remembers RUSH as the baddest band they'd ever witnessed. After experiencing Gene Edlen & RUSH at Caveland, my whole outlook on life was changed. Not long after the RUSH - MC5 show, another guitar phenomenon came to the Cave. TED NUGENT & THE AMBOY DUKES. A band called Savage Tenderness was opening the show. They had all new Kustom amplifiers (solid state) and a p.a. system. The Cave was packed. Savage Tenderness played their set, then another act came on that wasn't even advertised. Bob Seger! I'd heard their name before, and they were a pretty good rock & roll band from what I remember. This show was far more organized than the MC-5 show I'd seen there. Nugent had a HUGE wall of amplifiers with deer heads on top of them. 4 stacks of Fenders (a 100 watt twin reverb amp on top of a showman dual 15" cabinet X 4 with a 200 watt Marshall stack) and the bass player (Rob Grange) had 2 Sunn Colluseum bass stacks. It all barely fit on the stage. I was ready! Ted came out playing "Hibernation", a long instrumental with a long feedback intro.



Let me try to describe the acoustics of this Cave. If you clapped your hands once, it took at least a minute for the reverb to die down. If you were by the stage and turned around facing the opposite end, the drum echoes would come back at you over a second later, just as loud as the original sound! Truly impossible acoustics. I skated there a lot while I was growing up and the sound of a cave full of kids with wheels on that concrete floor was mind boggling. You can imagine...well, I guess you really can't...what Nugent or RUSH sounded like in there. My mouth was hanging open. Ted was a real guitar virtuoso back then. Not just the wild & crazy guy like today. He did all the vocals and lots of long instrumental jams. They were working on the stuff for the "Call Of The Wild" album and did several off that album like "Pony Express," "Call Of The Wild", "Cannon Balls" as well as "Papa's Will". It would be a long time till "Stranglehold" would even be dreamed of. One of the peaks of the show was when Ted shattered a glass ball (8-9" / dia.) with a note of screeching feedback from his guitar. It was a great show and Ted had a good time, too, even though I read interviews with both him and Seger where they described the show as the low point of their careers.

*RUSH played there several more times as well and every show was balls to the wall. You never knew what to expect. Gene would find a fire extinguisher and spray the crowd holding the hose like he was pissing. Once, at the door where they were taking admission, one of his bearded entourage was asking the girls as they were digging their money out of their purses, "Got any spare make-up?" During their break, they got into some donated clothes for the poor that was stashed somewhere in the cave and got a bunch of dresses and women's clothes. After the break, Gene came out with a goofy dress on and lipstick & make-up all over his face as well as jewelry with his combat boots and long bushy moustache. He was talking in a falsetto voice and said, "Let me introduce you to some of my girlfriends..." He introduced the other members with feminized names (also in drag) then, "And this is Cosmic Starfire." Another guy dressed in drag came out with a microphone and a mile-long cord and they started hammering out a heavy version of some goofy song. There was a big crowd of people standing all the way across the Cave. Cosmo was singing some kinda crazy gobelty gook and dove into the crowd. Everyone spread out. He started running and diving on girls and guys both, humping 'em like a dog in heat. Then he'd get up and dive into some other unsuspecting onlookers. Again & again. he climbed back up on the stage & Gene said, "Cosmo, you've been a bad bad girl!!" It was warped, but heavy. It's all tattooed on my brain.....*



The Caveland Stage



Diane and the Scotsmen

Some of the musicians complained that if you touched the wall with a plugged in electric guitar, you would get shocked because of the dampness in the cave. Ike & Tina Turner, Bob Kuban Charlie Daniels, and KXOK radio personality Johnny Rabbit were some of the other groups that entertained there.

**DANCE CONCERT SERIES**  
**AT**  
**CAVELAND**  
 FESTUS, MISSOURI CAVE DRIVE

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13 Visuals by Lovely Lights  
**MAINLINE & STONED BLUE**  
 \$1.50 7:30 to 11:00

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23 Lights by Circus  
**TOUCH**  
 \$1.50

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 31 Visuals by Circus  
 NEW YORK'S ONE  
**Mainline**  
 \$1.50

SUNDAY, JANUARY 10 Visuals by Lovely Lights  
**TOUCH**  
 \$1.50 7:30 to 11:00

SUNDAY, JANUARY 24 Band to be Announced  
 \$1.50 7:30 to 11:00



Queen Marilyn Kleine



After being in business for over 25 years, Caveland ceased operation as a skating rink and concert venue in 1985 when Sue Morris retired.

After the skating rink closed, the cave was turned into a recycling facility. Al Smith, a DeSoto businessman, who purchased the property in 1997 cleaned out the cave and hoped to find some way to make good use of the property. He received a one-year permit to operate it as a museum or tourist attraction. In 2002, Tom Raniolo, owner of the RampRiders skate park near downtown St. Louis, proposed to open an underground facility known as Fallout Skate Park, featuring skateboarding and trick bicycle riding. But after neighborhood opposition, Festus officials voted to deny the proposal. Mr. Smith then cleared some of the land and obtained a permit from the City to use the land for private parties, picnics, weddings, etc...or as a public parking lot, but that plan never materialized. The cave was purchased by an individual in 2004 is now used as a private residence.

Photos courtesy of Clyde Lucas, Todd Kromer, Brad Vaughn, Ron White, Gary Holdinghausen, William Curtis Sleeper, Wayne Medley, and unknown

