

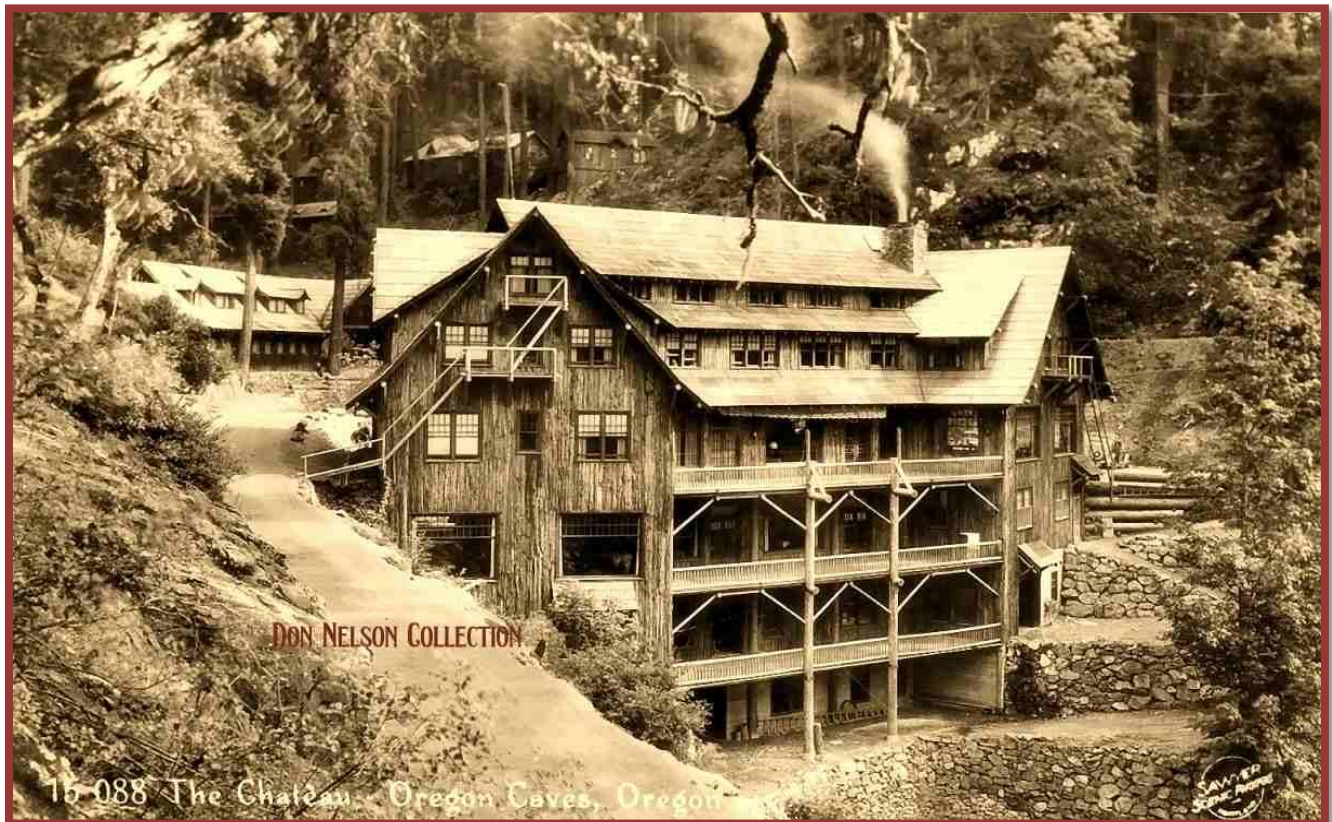


# WEBFOOTER EXTRA

## DECEMBER 2023

### REMEMBERING THE OREGON CAVES AND WORKERS AT THE CAVES IN THE 1940S

BY DONALD R. NELSON



Sawyers real photo postcard of the Chateau with the original Chalet and cabins in the background, circa 1940.

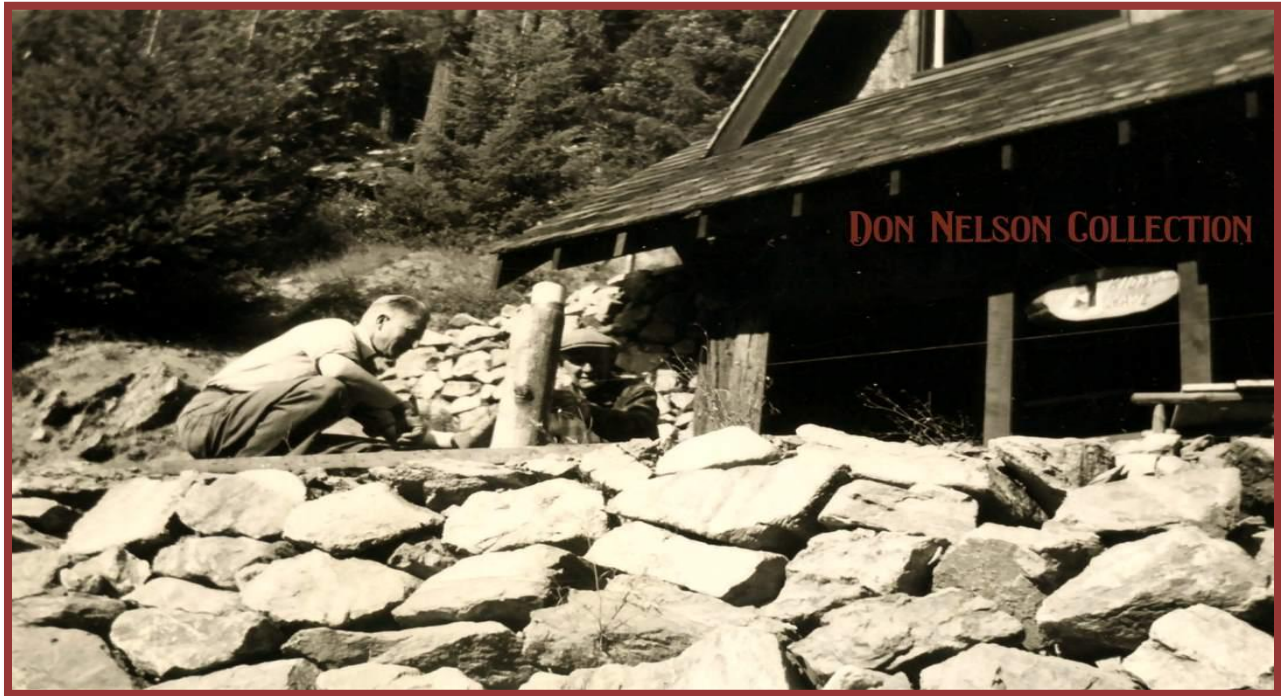


Photo of longtime guide, Dick Rowley, (the one with the driver's cap) and another man are shown building a fence for the new Kiddy Kave, circa 1946.

Construction on a new Chalet began in 1941 and it was completed by the end of the 1942 tourist season, before closure due to World War II. It also had a nursery for patron's children, "Kiddy Kaves," which replaced an earlier one. The Chalet also had a gift shop and storage for tourist coveralls that were worn by tourists when being led though the Oregon Caves.

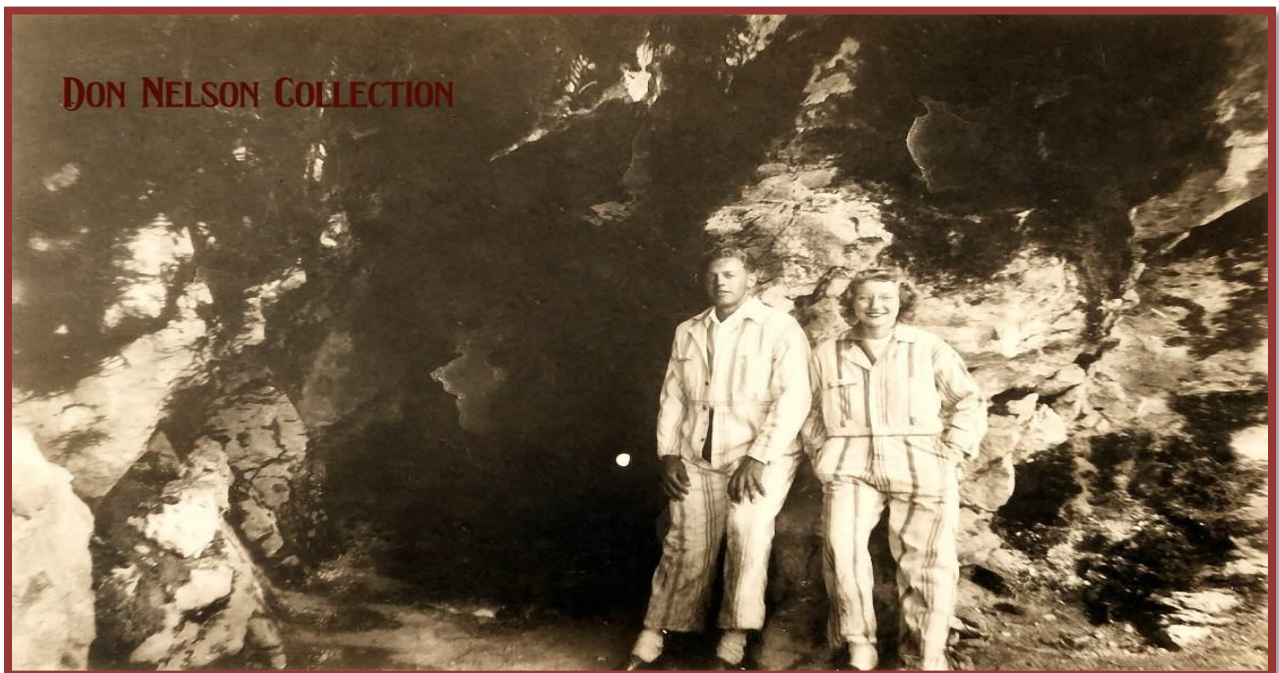


Photo of Bea Bridenstine and an unidentified friend in coveralls at the cave entrance, circa 1947.

The Oregon Caves Chateau reopened in 1946 after WWII was over. Although tourist housing had been closed, the caves had been open for tours during that time period.



Workers at The Oregon Caves, circa 1946 or 1947.



Sawyers real photo postcard of the Stream through the Dining Room at the Chateau, circa 1940.

Former Navy WWII veteran, and Oregon Department of Transportation advertising manager, Harold B. Say became manager of Oregon Caves in March 1946. Workers were recruited from students at Oregon State College, University of Oregon, and Willamette University and other places. Among the qualifications required for workers was the ability to sing and entertain at the evening campfires, which were optional activities for the guests.

The women performed a variety of domestic tasks. Bea Bridenstine, originally from McMinnville, had been attending Oregon State and was chosen to work at Oregon Caves. Grace, her sister, who was just out of McMinnville High School also worked at The Oregon Caves.

Grace wrote to her parents in June 1946, "So far, I have dried dishes, cleaned rooms, made salads and sandwiches and was a waitress in the coffee shop." Bea also performed the same tasks. Men were hired to be guides, hotel clerk helpers, and for other tasks.

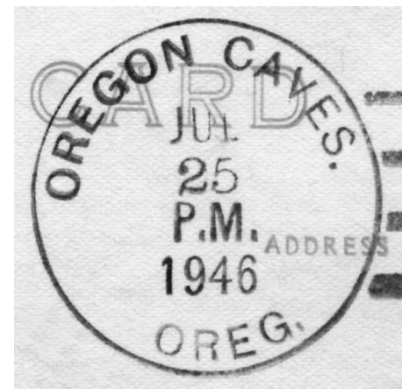


Photo of Grace Bridenstine and an unidentified cook, circa 1947. Oregon Caves postmark. Both images: Don Nelson Collection.

According to *Oregon Geographic Names*, Oregon Caves had a post office from July 10, 1924 until September 1, 1977.

Grace also described the scenery and housing for the guests and the workers in a postcard to her parents. "It is a very beautiful place around these parts and the caves are very interesting, but cold. We stay in the Chalet directly behind the Chateau and up some steps.

The cottages in the background are for guests, as is the Chateau. The deer and the chipmunks will come up and eat out of your hand."

Bea, in a 2021 interview, said that a stream that came through the caves went through a culvert under the road to a pool next to the Chateau and then flowed through the dining room.

From Wikipedia, "In 1987, the Chateau was declared a National Historic Landmark. In 1992, 60 acres, including the Chateau and other rustic structures, were listed as the Oregon Caves Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places."

#### Sources:

- 1946 Postcard correspondence from Grace Bridenstine Nelson (my mother)
- Phone interview April 2, 2021 with Beatrice Bridenstine Bachelor (my aunt)
- Oregon Caves National Register nomination
- Newspaper articles from Illinois Valley News (Cave Junction, Oregon) and others



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