

BIRMINGHAM GROTTA

NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2007

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BGN Calendar

JUN 7	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road.
JUN 7	NSS Pre-Convention in Orange County, Indiana, hosted by the St. Joseph Valley Grotto. See the website at www.caves.org/grotto/sjvg/preconvention/Default.htm for details and registration. For more details contact Mark Deebel, deebel@insightbb.com (812-275-3740) or Jake Morris, snake50cal@hotmail.com (574-271-9004).
JUN 9	Housewarming party for Martha and Glenn Mills. See Announcement on the facing page.
JUN 21	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.
JUN 22 JUN 24	The 2007 Karst-O-Rama hosted by the Greater Cincinnati Grotto will be held June 22-24, at the Great Saltpetre Cave Preserve in Mount Vernon, Kentucky. Visit www.karstorama.com for registration forms or information.
JUN 28	The Birmingham Grotto Meeting begins at 7:00 PM, at the Home-wood Library, 1721 Oxmoor Road. Note: This is the July Grotto Meeting.
JUL 14	The annual Huntsville Cave Rescue Unit Tyrolean Traverse will be held on Saturday, July 14, 2007, at DeSoto Falls. This is officially a training event for the HCRU. A donation of \$10 per person is required to participate. See http://HCRU.org/HCRU-tyrolean.html for gear requirements & details. Send questions to info@HCRU.org
JUL 18 JUL 21	The St. Joseph Valley Grotto will host an NSS Convention Pre-Camp 2007 in Orange County, Indiana on July 18-21, 2007. All NSS members are invited to attend. Primitive camping will be available with running water, toilets, and a shower for use by Pre-Convention participants. There will be a banquet held Saturday evening to mark the end of Pre-Convention activities. See the website at NSS Convention Pre-Camp 2007 for details and registration or contact Mark Deebel, deebel@insightbb.com (812-275-3740) or Jake Morris, snake50cal@hotmail.com (574-271-9004) for questions.
JUL 19	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.
JUL 23 JUL 27	The 2007 NSS Convention will be held in Marengo, Indiana. See the web site at http://www.nss2007.com/ for more information or the registration page http://www.nss2007.com/paper%20registration.html has downloadable registration forms available.
JUN 21	GROBS starts at 7:30 pm. Ask a grotto officer for the current hot spot.

Thanks to Sharon Faulkner for assistance in maintaining the BGN Calendar.

Disclaimer

Caving trips posted are led by volunteers. No grotto committee reviews any trip leaders' qualifications. New cavers should inquire about the nature of the trip and the experience of the leader in advance. Those participating in the trips should be aware of their limits. On vertical trips all participants are expected to supply their own gear and be knowledgeable about rigging and safe practices.

The *Birmingham Grotto Newsletter* is published twelve times a year by the Birmingham Grotto, Inc. of the National Speleological Society, Inc. Other NSS Internal Organizations may reprint material provided credit is given to this publication and the author.

Annual dues are \$15.00 per individual and \$20.00 per family which is payable on October 1st. Dues are prorated for anyone joining during the year. The subscription rate is \$15.00 per year. The Birmingham Grotto will exchange publications with other NSS Grottos. Exchange newsletters should be sent to:

Birmingham Grotto
PO Box 55102
Birmingham, AL 35255

Articles, Trip Reports, Graphics, Poetry, and any other speleo-related material should be sent to the Editor via email at the address noted below. Naturally, the Editor will accept typed text in practically any form; however, electronic submission reduces the risk of typographical errors. Submissions via e-mail should be directed to: editor@bhamgrotto.org. The deadline for publication is the 20th of the month; however, the Newsletter is limited to 12 pages and often fills up quickly.



On the cover...

Anton Tomasello (TPH) and daughter Misty at the entrance to Lost Creek Cave.

(Jeff Harrod)

Announcements

Invitation to attend Martha and Glenn Mills' *The House is Finished Party*

June 9, 2007

All Day and All Night
400 Stagecoach Road
Sewanee TN 37375

Come help us celebrate the fact that we have finally finished the house. Well, no house is actually ever finished but we have passed our final inspection and as far as the county building inspector and tax assessor are concerned the house is finished. Passing the inspection means the house meets the standards required by the building codes of Marion County Tennessee (which are stricter than you might think).

We have plenty of room for camping so come on up and plan to camp. The official party is on Saturday and Saturday night but you are welcome to show up Friday night if you wish.

Please bring your own beverages and some munchies to share. We will have some food for munching but since we have no idea how many folks will show up donations of food will help.

Come early and plan to go caving. The area is a paradise for vertical cavers but there are some caving options for those who prefer horizontal caving. Shower facilities are available to clean up after caving but bring a towel if you plan to shower because we don't have an endless supply of towels.

We will be glad to send detailed driving directions to anyone by e-mail and will be sure someone has some copies to distribute at the June grotto meeting for those who want them. If you need assistance on directions and don't have e-mail, call 423-718-3970 (that is Martha's cell phone and the best way to reach us).

Hope to see you at the party,
Martha and Glenn Mills

July Meeting Reminder!!

The July Grotto Meeting will take place on June 28, 2007. Mark your calendars, put a note on the fridge and make the necessary arrangements to attend!

Unfinished Business

We still have FOUR outstanding debts from the Gunter'sville Getaway. Please contact Scott Fee if you are one of them.
Partial payments accepted!

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SLOANS VALLEY

Daniel Wood

In early March, I was fortunate to accompany Jerry Saulsberry and Steve Pitts on a trip to the Sloans Valley Cave System in Pulaski County, Kentucky. The level of Lake Cumberland was at 687' during our visit. The damn dam is being repaired, again, so the lake is to remain at 680' or lower through the summer, versus the normal summer pool of about 720'. This will not only expose more cave than has been seen in decades, but will greatly extend the season for viewing. Jerry has made many trips to this fine cave and many of those on the occasion of Dr. Gary Barnes' annual visit over Fall daylight savings weekend, I believe now 30 years or so and running.

Jerry and I got an early start Friday morning and met Steve on the way north. Fueled with an obligatory Mexican luncheon we arrived at Tom Crockett's house by mid-afternoon. He wasn't home but we enjoyed an interesting conversation with a houseguest, she an ordained former African missionary and journeywoman, now consoling herself (after the Kentucky Wildcats' elimination in OT from the SEC tourney) with another beer, another cigarette, and chatter with three Cats basketball-oblivious cavers. Eventually we returned to the vehicles and got ready to go underground.



Under the remaining daylight, we hoofed it back up the hill, along it and around to the Minton Hollow entrances, thinking we might try to through trip back to the Garbage Pit entrance adjacent to where we would camp. The cave's first lesson: it can change, from trip to trip and year to year. This time there were formerly dry passages now mud filled and slimed, standing water where it had not been before and seemingly should not be, and the sobering reminder in almost every passage of outside debris imbedded in the ceiling and huge thick shoals of sticks and leaves. If I remember correctly there was debris at the "Duck Under" about 10 feet up the wall.

Lesson two: this part of the cave moves some serious water and when it does, you wouldn't want to be there. We walked, but mostly crawled, around in here struggling somewhat with the route finding and, after a couple of circles going as far as the slot to Middle Cave and passages somewhere near Right Cave, gave up on making the connection and routed.

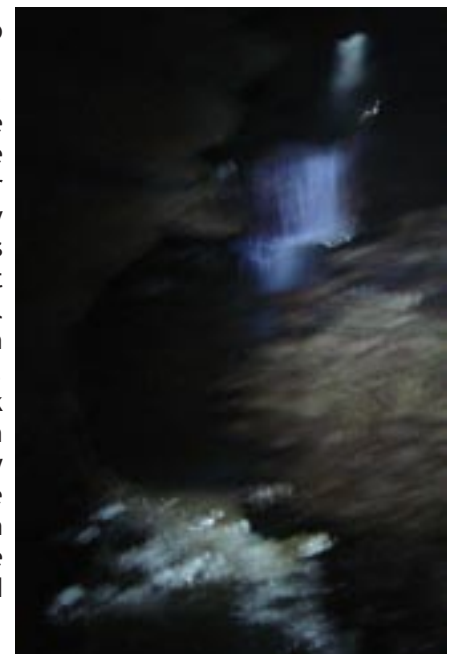
Next, we hoofed it back down the mountain in the dark to the Garbage Pit entrance. This open pit, accessible by ladder, has been sectioned off vertically with a plywood wall which ducts air to Mr. Tom's greenhouse. Big space and multiple cave levels become apparent almost immediately.

Lesson three - you must respect a cave when five minutes in you're already mumbling about whether the level and direction you're on is the one you want. I cannot now identify all the landmarks but we made our way through the X Corner and to the Scowling Tom junction. After this point, the trip was mostly low, beautiful clean wet passage over cobbles. A crawler's delight.

There was some complexity nearing the exit, but we successfully climbed from Scowling Tom's wet and hungry and made our way back to camp. (And to think I had voted at the X Corner to route, shameful).

We ate and drank and eventually crashed under clear skies. It was cloudy come Saturday morning and a few drops of rain fell, but that was

it, which was superb considering a "40%" forecast days before. We fueled on some very-high-octane coffee and whatever edibles we had worthy of our ambitious plans: we would start at the Railroad Tunnel entrance and through trip somewhere, maybe try to back into the connection to the Minton Hollow entrance, bail at the Garbage Pit, push on to the Post Office entrance, we would just see how it went.



It's not a bad walk to the Railroad Tunnel entrances. After a stoop in, a short walk, and a crawl over a slab, the cave becomes canyon and continues like that for a long time - sometimes the route is high, sometimes low, you walk, you crawl, you guess and sometimes guess again. There's probably 1000 feet of crawling/duckwalking in there and some tight floorless canyon. Seems like after something really tight, it becomes the Railroad River passage - clean-washed, scalloped and just gorgeous - which you follow downstream.

On down, there is a high lead up to the left, above and out of the river passage. After some dry crawling it put us out at the top ledge of a 40-50' deep, wide canyon with stream running at the bottom, the big sound of falling water somewhere out of sight (but very close by), and a vista into an adjacent dome.

Not entirely sure that the canyon floor was the way on, and/or not entirely sure that all wanted to make the climb down here, this was a moment of decision. One which I surely complicated because I was being drawn down by mysterious cave forces and was about half way before a short debate at full shout and perturbed body language persuaded me to come back up. I confess I was reluctant to retreat, but it was short-lived, because it just meant we would take the river passage, which of course led to the top of the waterfall!

It was about 35' and had four levels I think. We studied it carefully, set some webbing as a handline, and I negotiated it first. My mission was to get down, cross the pool, and scout the low passage which followed down stream to make sure it wasn't sumped. I executed the mission - it was grim, but it was not sumped - and returned to shout up a brief report.

Now this scene is etched pretty well in my memory: the constant roar,

the lights from above alternately illuminating the falling water, the pool, and the surrounding canyon, the anticipation as the next climber made the cold wet motions from which I knew he'd soon be committed. I know I'm preaching to the choir, but man, I love that stuff.

Of course the next section of nasty wet crawling in visibly flood-prone passage could sure beat the love out of a person, but it opened up eventually and boy howdy that river passage is pretty. The next sections - which Jerry described to me post-trip as "pretty much all crawling" through Grand Central Spaghetti - are vague to me, but it seems like there was constantly changing passage, and some interesting route-finding. All I really remember though, is singing that Jon Hartford song with the chorus "it's too thick to navigate, and it's too thin to plow, let him go on Mama, don't put him down for it now."

Eventually we made it back through the now-familiar X-Corner and to the base of the slope up to Garbage Pit. Well, we weren't quite beat yet, so discussed what to do. I voted to exit, eat, and return, but fearing a loss of momentum, we opted to continue on and try for the Post Office. Great choice, again, as the nature of the cave would soon change. What I remember of the transition was being in something pretty small one minute and emerging into something utterly huge the next. I don't know how huge, but a guess of passage 100' tall by 100' wide could not be too far off. The echos of our delighted hoots were incredible.

Lesson four: this cave is awesome! We walked this monster void to a colossal breakdown mound called the Hog Back and then labored to find the route on through the floor beyond it. Eventually we found the connection passage to the Big Room and made our way through to a Lake Room, in which a slip would send you zooming down

a 45 degree mud slope into watery depths far below. That didn't happen so we made our way to an Extension of the Big Room and spent some time there scratching our helmets as to the route on. In the process we got to see a nice balcony overlook back into the Big Room and some of the more remote heights of its Extension.

Eventually we got it right and moved quickly through nice passage up a big flow stone slope with small rim stone dams, past a really nice waterfall pit and then the Fountain of Youth formation and on to big passage that leads toward the Post Office entrance.

We continued through a room with a well pipe running vertically through it, made some more route-finding decisions and were soon in some smaller passages which led to the Post Office entrance. Now this is a 25' wet vertical shaft, which is narrow, but not narrow enough to comfortably free climb after an epic trip. Thank goodness a rope was hung there. Jerry climbed out first and confirmed to my relief that the rigging and rope were solid.

Once all out, we started the long walk overland back to camp. Wet, muddy, tired, helmet in hand, strolling along some Kentucky back road, it slowly sunk in: man, that was a hell of a trip. I started to hum Jon Lee Hooker's "Mr. Lucky."



Birmingham Grotto Meeting Minutes May 3, 2007

President Caudle called the Birmingham Grotto of the National Speleological Society to order at 7:02 P.M.

New Members and Visitors

Terrill Thornton, a member for some time, was present and welcomed.

Treasurer's Report

According to Scott Fee, Treasurer, the balance is \$8,678.20. \$300 is yet to be paid for the oft-mentioned smoker, as is \$68.64 for postage to mail the newsletter.

Four members owe balances from the auction at Guntersville; this is much better than previous years. One debt remains from 2006; Andy Zerbe, designated liason, recounted that Milo Washington refused the \$15 settlement offer. A motion that all deadbeat bills from Guntersville be forgiven carried, but nonunanimously. A request was made that we "not tell Milo" that his debt has been expunged.

Announcements

The Buffalo River canoeing trip will be next weekend.

On May 19th and 20th, Dave Howell will lead his excursion to the Walls of Jericho. All should meet in the car park off Highway 79 on the Alabama side at 11:00am with departure scheduled for a half hour later. This location is north of Skyline and Scottsboro; the nearest town is Hytop. Folks even are encouraged to hike in later if it suits them.

The Kentucky Speleofest will begin Friday, May 25th and run through the weekend. Pup, former grotto member, recommends this event. Andy Zerbe has been impressed by its "nice small congenial groups." Scott Fee recollects the free beverages.

The SERA Cave Carnival will run from May 31st until June 3rd.

The NSS convention in Indiana will be only 6 ½ hrs on I-65. Scott Fee says that pre-registration ends soon. This year the campground will be directly across from meeting locations. Although there are lots of caves, there's no need for a rope more than 200'. David Caudle recommends the NSS conventions as worthwhile excursions; he particularly enjoys the sessions on international and American expeditions and the

photo salon. Scott Fee points out the parties.

Review of Minutes

The April minutes were distributed in printed form and were approved as corrected. Due to Toby Kemp's convalescence, the remainder of the newsletter will have to wait a bit.

Old Business

The vertical training session was not discussed as neither Dave McRae or Jason Wall were present. Nikky and TinY invited all to their above-ground vertical sessions at their home, most Wednesdays at about six o'clock.

With respect to the previously mentioned youth caving camp, David Caudle plans to show one of the organizers some caves in Blount County to ascertain what's reasonable and appropriate. This excursion will occur during the week and help is requested. It probably would be tax-deductible.

To discuss the plans for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the grotto, President Caudle wants a Grobs-style meeting of committee heads in a restaurant on a Thursday night. He will make all necessary arrangements.

Scott Fee reported that the right wall of the Graves's gate was raised successfully with the help of thirteen on a Friday night and even more on Saturday. Dave McRae intends to complete the project in a single weekend, yet to be announced.

At the Earth Day event, Dave McRae also was helpful in getting folks on rope at the Caudles'. Children in particular were observed enjoying themselves.

New Business

Can Jason Wall buy meat to cook at SERA? A motion to allot \$100 carried almost unanimously.

Trip Reports

Joel McGuire thanked everyone who helped with the Scout trip to Tumbling Rock. A total of twenty-three, including eighteen minors, made it in, all reaching the King's Shower and two seeing the Christmas Tree. For a bunch of pre-teens, this was not shabby.

Daniel Wood went to Neversink. "So

cool." He also went to the bottom of the Diggings (140') twice, the final time being to retrieve Scott Fee's rack that had been carefully placed there. On the same day, they went to Bluff River. Thunder threatened during the day and the bottom fell out while Wood was half way up Neversink; at that point he thought, "This is stupid. But I can only go up or down."

Nikky LaBranche made it to three caving events, was on rope twice, but never made it underground. With a group from Kentucky, she went to Weaver Point. A trip was made to Little River Canyon. They intended to do Ramshead by the New River Gorge, but the weather was bad so they played on a climbing wall. The weekend after the massacre, she went to VPI for the caving club's picnic; they enjoyed the reunion and the fine weather despite the pall so recently cast over the campus.

Hazard Bryant described the May Apple through-trip at Payne's Cove. It is pre-rigged for 2 drops. There not being much cave, the entire trip occupied only an hour and a quarter. He also visited Attashelter Cave near the magnificent great buckeye.

Inspired by his own enthusiasm, Daniel Wood recalled another excursion with Scott Fee. They went to Dinky Pit and Graham's Pit, despite difficulties in finding them. Unfortunately and despite Scott's geocaching skills, Snakes 200 Pit eluded them.

The Earth Day Clean-up did a "pretty good job" removing 860 pounds of refuse from Bryant's Mountain to the dump. No one entered the Water Cave; David Caudle described the lake level as being low enough, but he saw a chockstone that had fallen under the irrigation pump platform. The owner is willing to allow us to remove the rock (1,500 pounds or so). Methods of so doing were bandied about.

A certain member wanted to recount his geocaching adventures for our vicarious enjoyment. His offer was declined.

Although not present at the meeting, Donna Cobb reported via email a trip to Fern Cave. As she described the trip with three cavers from Valdosta, Georgia and Kelly Norwood, "The Bone Dome" is a closed, archaeological and paleontologically interesting area with

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a 200'+ off set pit and an oft-criticized rebelay. The three guys and Kelly did the drop while I surveyed the areas of archaeological interest in and around the West Passage area of the Dome. While in the cave, I saw a white bat and a piece of stone tool not seen on the many previous trips into the area. Everyone but Kelly tumbled rather ungracefully in the Guano Room, but other than our pride, weren't hurt. Eric split his coveralls right at the crotch and had to do the cave flapping in the breeze (I have photo documentation!).

May 3rd, 2007 will be remembered as a red-letter day because the Guffey movie was shown. After the build-up, I must admit that it still managed to deliver. We saw the physical reel in the can. Larry Money described that it was well preserved despite being nearly forty years old. As previously mentioned, there was no sound.

[Secretary's note: The following random comments were overheard in the darkness as the movie played.]

Walter Anderson has been called, but hasn't called back. The movie was filmed around 1961. As will be obvious to all who have been there, Guffey's cave is not the only location. The endeavor originally was to be underwritten by the telephone company, and a couple of folks almost were electrocuted by the lighting it provided.

It was shown on television with narration; unfortunately, this has been lost. In fact, it is not certain that it ever was recorded from the broadcast. In any event, neither PBS nor the local station have it.

David Caudle remembered that the movie just about broke the grotto up due to the time and effort it consumed.

We have the opportunity to watch the adventurers enter the cave by cable ladder, body rappel, and carabiner abseil.

Today, David Caudle spoke with Wayne

Snyder, son of the early president Charles Snyder. He has another film copy that can be checked for sound. Wayne Snyder also has offered to give a slide show on the grotto's early days. Jim McDowell told Larry Money that the lights produced moisture and when they were tinkered with, they discharged to ground; observing this and fearing for his safety, the Bell technician left.

The grotto was sodisgusted with the project at its end that wiring remained in the cave for about ten years. It took forty years to retrieve the film; Larry Money doesn't want to wait another forty to hear the sound.

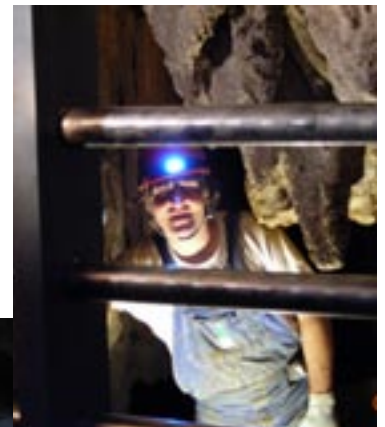
A DVD will be produced.

Gary Barnes thought that Louis Kline was the president of the NSS for a while. No one knew a Herbst.

After a short break, the Discovery Planet Earth Caves DVD was shown.

Images of Conservation: Gating Project at Graves Cave

Photos by Anton "TPH" Tomasello



News & Notes Dave Howell

*** At last! Grotto trips that work with my BGN deadline! Between the BUFFALO RIVER and the WALLS of JERICHO hike, we've had some excellent trips this past month. Refer to the trip reports elsewhere in this Newsletter. And turning the Q-beam ahead, we have SERA May 31-June 3, and the SINKING COVE CAMPOUT the weekend of July 6. Happy times. Heavy times. "The 60s. Yeah, the 60s. Happy times. Heavy times." Can you identify that quote from a movie of the same era? Hint: It's the very first line of the movie. (If you remember the 60s, you weren't there.)

*** Big news this month: a management agreement for ANDERSON CAVE, AL 357, one of our old Birmingham favorites, has been negotiated between the Birmingham Water Works Board, owners of the Lake Purdy Caves and the SCCi! The managed area will include both Anderson and LAKE PURDY CORKSCREW, AL 168, as well as lesser-known SNAKE CAVE, AL 1423. The caves will of course be closed during bat hibernation, but "off" season access might be arranged. How much would *you* pay for all this? But wait, there's more! JOEL MCGUIRE is named as Property Manager! Congrats and a tip of the Grotto helmet to both the Southeastern Cave Conservancy and Joel! This development is the result of several years of work by the Southeastern Cave Conservancy. Good job, y'all!

*** And now, the X-rated part of this column. A sculpted and polished phallus, one of the earliest known expressions of male

sexuality, was found in a German cave in midsummer 2005. The object in question is stone, highly polished, and is about lifesize (20cm x 3cm). It was found in HOHE FELS CAVE near Ulm in the Swabian Jura, an area of southwestern Germany. Hohe Fels ("High Field") is a remarkable paleological dig site, having produced thousands of Upper Paleolithic items, among them a 30,000-year-old avian figurine crafted from mammoth ivory. The German team working the site found 13 fractured pieces of the phallus, but it was not until a 14th was found that the "jigsaw puzzle" was assembled. Professor Nicholas Conrad of the Department of Early Prehistory and Quaternary Ecology at Tübingen University said, "Female representations with highly accentuated sexual attributes are very well documented at many sites, but male representations from this time period are highly unusual." The object's life size may suggest that it may well have been used as a sex aid by its Ice Age makers, but it may also have been used as a tool to split flints. However, the object's distinctive form and etched rings around one end leave little doubt as to its symbolic nature. The imagination runs wild, yes? (This was originally reported by the BBC on July 25, 2005. Your BGN News & Notes reports the news while it's hot!)

*** Here's a bit of cave-related esoterica from the news: the Vietnamese government has made the PHONG NHA-KE BANG CAVE AREA in Quang Binh Province a 150,000-hectare National Park. The area includes 18

caves with a total surveyed length of 64,385 meters, containing much significantly sized (63 m high) passage, underground rivers, beautiful formations, etc. The National Park also includes a large area of primitive forest with unique biological diversity and probably some unique species. The Phong Nha caves are also the home of the Ruc tribe, a primitive, cave-dwelling, hunter-gatherer people. In addition to being made a Vietnamese National Park, the Phong Nha area has also been nominated to become a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site. Want to plan your next caving vacation to beautiful, scenic Vietnam?

*** "Once in a blue moon..." A common, everyday expression, but did you ever stop to think what a "blue moon" is? If not, it is a month in which there are 2 full moons. We have a blue moon coming up in the Grotto in the month of June: 2 Grotto meetings in the same month. That's right, the JULY GROTTTO MEETING is scheduled for the evening of Thursday, June 28 to not conflict with the 4th of July holiday. (The 4th is on a Wednesday this year.) Call your calendar and mark your friends. See you then!

*** Some very bad news came to us in early May when CLAY HOLLAND's Dad died. SHERMAN HOLLAND was a pillar in the Alabaster and Hoover communities; remember Sherman Holland Ford? His passing was noted and mourned by a great many people. The Grotto's thoughts are with you, Clay.

Birmingham Grotto Newsletter
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