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Missouri Speleological Survey - President's Message January 2026 by Dan Lamping

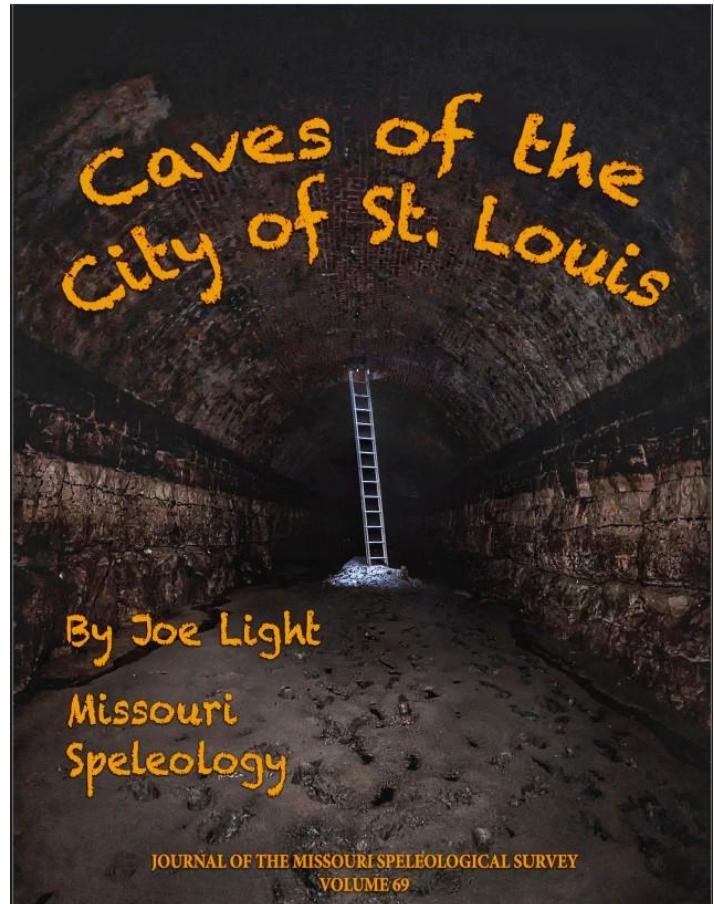
Happy New Year to the Missouri caving community. As we embark upon 2026, I'd like to offer a reminder of the stated goals of the MSS.

- A. To locate, record, conserve, and research the caves, of the state of Missouri.
- B. To provide a permanent, non-profit non-sectarian, cooperative organization for the pursuit of speleology.
- C. To disseminate knowledge of caves of Missouri through publications, conducting public forums, lectures and other similar programs.
- D. To establish and nurture a professional atmosphere among Missouri's speleologists.
- E. To cooperate with all individuals and organizations consistent with the forgoing purpose.

While there's always room for improvement, I'd say we do a pretty good job at living up to these goals now that we've arrived at the 70th anniversary of the founding of the MSS. I encourage you, as an individual caver, to do your part by documenting your trips and explorations through maps, reports, entrance coordinate improvements, bio records, etc. You never know, but it may be that some seemingly insignificant observation you make now, could be of relative importance in the future. It's all about carrying the ball a little further so that the next generation can do the same.

In keeping with that mission, we're excited by the publication of the most recent issue of Missouri Speleology. Building and expanding upon the work of past cavers, Joe Light's manuscript on the Caves of the City of St. Louis is a great read, rich in history and filled with color images. One need not be from St. Louis to enjoy this awesome publication.

The next MSS meeting has been scheduled for the weekend of March 20 – 22. We will be holding at the farm of MSS Vice President Kohl Mitchell near the town of Laddonia, Missouri. More details will be sent out as the date gets closer.



Report of the Treasurer - December 31, 2025. ACCOUNTS: General Fund \$15828.51; *Missouri Speleology* \$5009.99; Research Fund \$15579.18; Anne Johnson Data Fund \$14503.89; Affiliation fees \$630.00; *Liaison* \$0.00; **\$51551.57. ASSETS:** Interest Checking \$8551.57; Certificates of Deposit \$43000. **\$51551.57. Income Statement for the year ending December 31, 2025. INCOME:** *Missouri Speleology* Subscriptions \$0.00; *Missouri Speleology* Sales \$2448.50; Organizational Affiliation Fees \$350.00; *Liaison* Subscriptions \$60.00; Bank Interest \$30.49; CD Interest \$7000.00; Total \$9888.99. **EXPENSES:** *Missouri Speleology* \$3988.16; *Liaison* 200.00; Anne Johnson Fund \$413.88; Bank Fees \$60.00; General Fund \$0.00. Total \$4662.04. Net Gain \$5226.95. – Don Dunham, MSS Treasurer.

Files Report for January 1, 2026 - By Ken Grush. Here's the annual look back over the past year, 2025, in summary; let's start with a comparison with the end of 2024. At the end of 2024, the database had 4629 monitoring forms, 6834 map records, 29583 reports, 47079 faunal records. Today at the end of 2025, the database has 4967 monitoring forms (7.3% increase over 2024), 7078 map records (3.6% increase), 32133 reports (8.6% increase), 50440 faunal records (7.1% increase). Historically **monitoring** forms have been used to track agency work (like MTNF, ONSR, MDC, DNR, LAD), but it is the simplest form to track **every cave trip** and yet describe the “health” of the cave and impact of visitation. **Map records** include tracking of all plates and versions of maps, so there are more than the number of caves surveyed. Fully half of our **reports** predate 1990, arguably more digital input was to come with time, but these records had to be transcribed! My earliest runtime from 2012 had 2300 reports. Today we have 25000 reports that predate 2013. Faunal records were not in the original runtime that I have, but they were in place in my first full Filemaker software database dated 12/7/14, we had 21637 **Faunal** records at that time. -For those looking for a current cave count for the state, let's first consider that our count numbers can go up or down over the year! We occasionally “downgrade” a cave that has limited documentation. We do still track some of these as leads; we have almost 350 cave leads now (that aren't in our cave count and) that need someone to simply go and document them better. In some cases, a map will be needed to document a cave; generally, caves on state or federal agency property. And we are still averaging about 100 new caves every year. Taking all into consideration, I feel we are safely over **8000 caves** for the state, at year's end. -Considering that **survey is in “our” name**, one might take notice that we just went over **500 miles of surveyed** cave passage. This is quite a jump from previous reports of surveyed length. Although much resurveying some of our longest caves has occurred, much new, additional footage was also been added to the longer caves. Now keep in mind, just over half of our caves have been surveyed (roughly 4800 of our 8000, 60%). Of those that have been surveyed, only 79 caves go over a mile in distance. The longest caves are still Crevice, Berome Moore, Carroll, Mystery and Rimstone; together they accumulate about 107 miles of survey. Generally, we add about 100 maps every year, but, somewhat a record for the MSS, we added 178 cave maps to the database in 2025. Special notice, our recent Lang Brod Certificate of Recognition awardee **Kohl Mitchell** added 55 maps this year alone, about half were for I-70 Highway project in Boone, Cooper and Howard Counties, many easily accessible from the Katy Trail. Kohl is also the most recent cartographer to have over 100 different caves map; not saying anything about their footage. Two of our high-mileage cartographers with over 20 miles (see above caves) to their credit (and their survey teams) are next in line to join the 100-caves mapped group. -If you have **new information** on any Missouri caves, my email address is slak@grush.org. We need your help to improve the database and make it more complete. I can and do work with Facebook entries, but for information or photos to be incorporated I need to be “private messaged” with the cave name and county.

Matt Beeson sent: -Map of Straight and Narrow Cave (CL=91 ft) in Christian Co. -Report on ongoing survey at Mary Lawson, looks like a new map is wrapping up soon. He also sent Fauna reports for the cave. **Martin Carmichael sent:** -Map of Charley Cave (CL=71) in Boone Co. Another first- time cartographer for Missouri, Welcome! see below. He has contributed reporting before this and served on survey teams, just new to MSS

cartography. **Karamea Christofferson sent:** -23 Faunal records for Indian Creek Caverns in Perry Co. **Jim Cooley sent:** -Maps of Walnut Hollow (CL=427 ft) and Point Lookout (CL=67) Caves in St. Clair and Benton Counties, respectively. -Map of Honey Hole Cave (CL=58, VR=27) in Carter Co. -A new cave for Sherrys Spring Cave in Greene Co. (see Candace Kovacs.) -Maps of Whitebeard Shelter (CL=66) and Shelter Bluff Shelter (CL=43) in Camden Co. -Map of Optimistic Beaver (CL=27) and Windbreak (CL=30) Caves in St. Clair Co. -4 Use Monitoring forms and 54 Faunal records; primarily for work in Camden Co. at Lake of the Ozarks State Park, but Fauna included 3 Shannon Co. Caves, too. -Final map of Goose Tunnel (CL=72) in Camden Co. **Josh Cooper sent:** -52 Faunal records by reporting on Tom Moore, Crevice, Indian Creek and Streiler City Cave. He also sent photos and videos of some of the caves. -16 Faunal records for 3 caves in Perry Co.: Deer Stand, 76, Split Level Caves. **Nathan Curran sent:** -A report, map, 7 faunal records and photos for George Paugh Cave (CL=67) in St. Louis Co.; cave seems to be imperiled by a housing development. -New reporting on caves in St. Charles, St. Louis and Shannon Co. caves: Clutch, Heinecke, George Paugh and Colbert (new cave) in St. Louis; and Dingledine in St. Charles. Dingledine needs a gate instead of a cement plug; anyone want a restoration project? -Map and database records for new cave, Blind Skull Cave (CL=34), in St. Louis Co. **Derik Holtman sent:** -A datum dump of all the caves he visited on the one work day of the MSS weekend on the Katy Trail: 17 caves mentioned; 5 of them unreachable from below but were photographed; 86 files, most were photos, but included 7 Monitoring forms and 7 biology data sheets with 41 Faunal records for the known caves. He also included 3 new caves: Railroad Tunnel in Howard Co.; Railroad Shelter and Below Redbud Caves. He also had 2 new leads that just weren't reachable from below. Oh, and two caves were surveyed (see Kohl Mitchell). **Scott House sent:** -From the operative database and over 2 weekends in Winona a collection of 118 new Faunal records, 19 new cave Narratives, 31 Use forms (read cave visits), 1 new cave, 1 new map. (See Mark Jones for his component of the collection.). He also spent time auditing the Main table of the database and made almost 300 modifications: some were minor tweaks, but the most were additions to the Biology field in the database where he described the potential for wildlife in many caves. -New map was for Roadside Cave (CL=47) and Annex in Oregon Co. **Mark Jones sent:** -From the Winona field office, 80 Faunal records, 18 cave Narratives and Use Forms. **Candace Kovacs sent:** -Over 100 photos of Sherrys Spring Cave in Greene Co., a new cave for MO. (See Jim Cooley.) -59 photos of Blind Fish Cave and 149 photos of Bright Hollow Blowing Cave, both in Christian Co. She also sent 15 Faunal records via email. **Mike Kovacs sent:** -Update on the length of his Stalactite Cave map, now 173 ft long. -A location for Sherrys Spring Cave. -2 Use forms and 11 Faunal records for Blind Fish Cave and Bright Hollow Blowing Cave. Mike is using exports from his runtime of the database to report on his trip; huge help for Files Committee to just import files. **Alex Litsch sent:** -A sad note on a landowner filling in Shattered Rift's entrance. **Corey Maize sent:** -Map of Columbine Cave (CL=33) in Ozark Co.; his first cartography, although he has been on a few other survey crews in MO. Welcome! **Chad McCain sent:** -A map of Big Rock Bluff Cave (CL=1011 ft) in Shannon Co. A survey Trip Report for 2 adjacent caves, Pendulum and Ca-Cawk Cave, on same bluff in Shannon. Ca-Cawk is a new cave found high on the bluff while the birds were calling all around them. -A map of Eagle Eye Cave (CL=105), which happens to be on same bluff as the above Big Rock Bluff Cave. A second version of Eagle Eye was sent that composited the 2 caves on the same document. **Ben Miller sent:** -Maps of Laxton (CL=160) and Cross Joint (CL=404) Caves in Shannon and McDonald Counties, respectively. -Map of Cave of the Troll (CL=158) in McDonald Co. -Map of Bear Sled Cave (CL=40) in Taney Co. **Kohl Mitchell sent:** -2 new maps for recently found caves in Montgomery Co.: Narrow Tunnel (CL=23) and Dry Dock (CL=23) Cave. -2 new maps from the MSS meeting weekend on the Katy Trail: Whitetail (CL=15) and Below Redbud (CL=45) Caves that Derik Holtman submitted sketches on (see above). -A trip narrative for a survey trip to Shannon Co. **Maria Rodriguez sent:** -2 maps for Riverhills (CL=26) and Breakdown (CL=36) Caves, in Cooper and Howard Counties respectively. Another new cartographer joins

the ranks. In this case, she was drawing from Kohl Mitchell's sketches. Maria is another new cartographer for the past year, Welcome! **Marissa Schorr sent:** -A map of Smelly Belly Cave (CL=114) in Texas Co. **Mick Sutton sent:** -2 new Species Numbers (spnums) and 17 Faunal records; at least half of these were for Rocheport Cave, which were noted on the MSS Weekend on the Katy Trail, bulk of rest for Rogers Cave in Phelps Co. -A Use Monitoring form for a visit to Rogers Cave in Phelps Co.

REMEMBERING TOM ALEY: 1938-2025. Tom Aley, widely known hydrogeologist, speleologist, and founder of both the Ozark Underground Laboratory and the Tumbling Creek Cave Foundation, died after a two-year battle with pancreatic cancer. He is survived by wife Cathy, son Dave, and daughter Anna. Tom received BS (1960) and MS (1962) degrees in forestry from the University of California at Berkeley. Additional education focused on hydrology and geology was completed at UC Berkeley (1963-1964), University of Arizona in Tucson (1963-1964), and at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale (1972-1973). Tom was licensed as a Professional Geologist in Missouri, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Alabama, and held national certification as a Professional Hydrogeologist and was a Certified Forester. Tom's introduction to caves occurred in 1956 and included caving with Art Lange, Ray deSaussure, and other highly respected cave scientists of the period. This helped shape his passion for caves and karst. He was co-discoverer of Cave of the Quills and the River of Towers cave system (later rediscovered and called Bigfoot Cave) in California, and Silent River and Abyss River Caves in Arizona. In 1963, Tom had a grant from the Office of Naval Research to study caves and karst hydrology in Jamaica; most of the work (including caving) was done solo in the jungles of the Cockpit Country. For over 60 years, Tom has been involved with groundwater traces in both karst and non-karst settings on every continent except Antarctica. He was senior author of the 227-page book "Practical Groundwater Tracing with Fluorescent Dyes," published in 2025 by The Groundwater Project and available for free download from gw-project.org. His longest groundwater trace was 39.5 miles from the Middle Fork of the Eleven Point River to Big Spring in the Current River Basin in Missouri. First arrival of the tracing agents was between 5 and 14 days after tracer introduction; the mean flow rate of Big Spring during this period was 321 cubic feet per second. Such rapid travel demonstrates an incredible cave system! In 1965, Tom spent 9 months in a full-time search for a suitable cave for an underground laboratory. With his own funds and all he could borrow, he purchased 125 acres overlying Tumbling Creek Cave and established the Ozark Underground Laboratory. From 1966 to 1973, Tom directed the Hurricane Creek Barometer Watershed study for the US Forest Service. This was the national type-example study area for water resource management on karstlands managed by the US Forest Service. Tom resigned from the Forest Service in 1973 and began full-time operation of the OUL. In 1988, Tom authored a feasibility study for an American Cave and Karst Center. This document was important in establishing the American Cave Conservation Association (ACCA) museum and other facilities at Horse Cave, Kentucky. Tom was a past President of the ACCA. In 1993, Tom chaired an advisory panel funded by the US Forest Service to assess the significance of cave and karst resources on the Ketchikan Area of the Tongass National Forest and to make resource management recommendations as warranted. Much of the best temperate rainforest on earth is on National Forest land in the panel's study area. The panel's report resulted in better land management on high-vulnerability karstlands on the Tongass National Forest. In many cases, timber cutting on highly vulnerable karstlands ended. Tom often commented that public ignorance was the largest single threat to caves and their delicate features and fauna. Public education about caves and their fauna has long been a major component of OUL operations. Tom personally led over 40,000 people on full-day educational field trips through Tumbling Creek Cave and its recharge area. Tom often used his expertise on caves and karst groundwater in testimony at public hearings and in testimony in local, state, and federal court cases. Tom was a good communicator and led a hectic schedule. He once testified before a US Senate subcommittee at the request of Senator Danforth of Missouri, quickly changed clothes in an airport restroom, and then flew to Minnesota in time to give the NSS annual convention banquet speech. An article in Audubon magazine called Tom the Jacques Cousteau of

caves. His efforts to prevent extinction of the Federally Endangered Tumbling Creek Cave snail were featured on the front page of the Los Angeles Times and on editorial pages of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Feature stories on the cave conservation efforts of the Aleys appeared in the magazines *On Earth* and *Sports Illustrated*. *Michael Ray Taylor* wrote an article titled “*The environmental legacy of Tom and Cathy Aley and the Ozark Underground Laboratory*” in the NSS News for April 2025. Tom was the recipient of the Lester B. Dill Award in 1973 from the Mississippi Valley Ozark Region (MVOR) of the NSS for significant contributions to speleology in Missouri; the J Harlen Bretz Award in 1979 from the Missouri Speleological Society for outstanding contributions to speleology; and the award of NSS Fellow in 1981. In 2012, Tom and Cathy received the Barry Commoner award for science in environmental service from the Missouri Coalition for the Environment. In 2019, they were honored with the Master Conservationist Award jointly presented by the Missouri Conservation Commission and the Missouri Department of Conservation. In 2020, they received the Lee Redmond Citizen’s Award from the Missouri Chapter of the American Fisheries Society in recognition and appreciation of substantial contributions to protecting Missouri’s aquatic resources. In 2020, the US Fish and Wildlife Service recognized Tom and Cathy as Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Champions. Both the OUL and TCCF will continue to exist and protect Tumbling Creek Cave and the associated 3,440 acres of karst they own. Tom leaves behind family, admirers, and a National Natural Landmark site that provides habitat for more cave species than any other American cave west of the Mississippi River.--Jonathan Beard

Kansas City Area Grotto (KCAG). **Nov 2nd:** Jim Cooley led a team consisting of Peter Schnegelberger, Marxe Altman-Orban, Dillon Bond and Dani Leonard to a privately owned cave to collect fungal and fecal samples for the thesis of a master’s degree candidate at University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, as well as doing some map quality control checking. **Nov 5th:** Jim Cooley continued with a reduced team consisting of Peter Schnegelberger and Marxe Altman-Orban to another cave to collect more fungal and fecal samples for the same Illinois master’s degree candidate, and do map quality control. This trip completed our sample collection efforts for this researcher. **Dec 9th:** Jim Cooley led a team consisting of Peter Schnegelberger and Dillon Bond to do quality control checking on two cave maps and to survey a third cave, 51-foot-long cave at Lake of the Ozarks State Park. A 16-foot jon boat (and a state park research permit) were required to access the caves. Plans to continue the project for two more days had to be canceled, due to plunging temperatures and unacceptably high winds. **Dec 20th-22nd:** Jim Cooley led a team consisting of Bill Gee, Kohl Mitchell, Jack Rufener, Shane McCurdy and Peter Schnegelberger to continue large-extent surveys in three caves in southern Missouri. The high point of the trip came on the third day, when well back into one of these caves, Bill and Peter pushed a crawl to discover a hitherto unknown and unexpected 57.5-foot-high dome, with several blowing leads including a large, going borehole.-- Jim Cooley

Chouteau Grotto: **Dec 13-14** - Kohl Mitchell, Jerel Waters and Jack Rufener spent 2 days surveying in Shannon County's Marvel Cave, adding 1304ft of complex lower-level passage between the large Marvel Cave section and the lower Blair Creek Cave entrance, stopping short of finishing the connection due to the presence of multiple bats. **Dec 29** - Rita Worden helped surveyed several hundred feet with Andrew Mayer and Rick Ihnat in a section of Helm Cave in Wayne County as part of a project with MDC and other survey teams. This CA can only be accessed through private property with permission, so while MDC's Shelly Colatski and Jarred Costephens checked for bats in part of the cave, several survey teams worked in tandem to complete the project in the hours we had. --Rita Worden

Lake Ozarks Grotto. **Sept. 14th** – LOG members attended a grotto picnic & workday at Stark Caverns. The LOG Memorial bench & arch were re-stained. In attendance: Dillon bond, Buzz Caldwell, Christen Easter, Ken & Monica Long, Rosie & Karen Weaver, Travis, Kathy & Brandon Zumwalt, Gary & Alberta Zumwalt. **Oct. –**

Reported at our meeting – Klaus Leidenfrost, Jean Knoll, Ken & Monica Long and two others checked out Goodwin Sinkhole. Programs shown at our meetings included: Old slides by Gary Zumwalt; Old pictures to identify by Karen Weaver and Cave trips to Fiery Fork & Toby Cave with KCAG by Dillon Bond. **Dec. 7th** – LOG Xmas party at the home of Burke & Christen Easter (Vice Chairman of LOG) and got to meet their new little daughter, Sydney Wren. Christen was proud to tell everyone that she was having a little bat baby. And that little baby was born late night on Oct. 30th! -Alberta Zumwalt

Dec. 3-- Alicia and Jon Beard were led by Eric Hertzler on a "farewell tour" of Bridal Cave before Alicia and Jon move to New Mexico.--Content by Jonathan Beard - Report by Max White. **Dec. 6**--Kenny Akers, Treavor Bussard, Charlotte Boehme, Riannon Colton, Ashley Mitchell, Heather Pyle and Max



Heather Pyle in first watercrawl – photo by Ashley Mitchell

White monitored CHR003 (Christian Co.). Due to low water levels, the team had to do more crawling and less floating crawling. Treavor took the lead so he could count brisklys before the water was muddy. Ashley took several pictures along the way and said the helictite forest was magical. The team made their way to Three Rivers (the spot most trips turn around). After a short discussion about what was ahead and how everyone was feeling, everyone was up for going to the end of North Creek. So, the bio-count continued. By the end of North Creek, Treavor had counted 95 Brickly Crayfish, mostly past Three Rivers, the old record was 92. Ashley, Charlotte, Heather, Treavor and Riannon crawled to the sump and gravel blockage to make sure it had not opened up, while Max and Kenny waited to see if it had opened up. Well, that is still the end of the cave, in that passage!!! We were hoping to find some more passage!

But, maybe someday. The team exited the cave after about 9 1/2 hours, much more tired than when they had gone in. Riannon, Charlotte, Treavor, Kenny and Max headed to Waffle House for a late-night Breakfast. --Max White



Ashley Mitchell & Heather in the first watercrawl. Max said they were having way too much fun! Photo by Ashley

Remembering Dr. David Ashley – July 4th, 1949 – August 3rd, 2025. Dr. Ashley taught at University of New Hampshire and Missouri Western State University in St. Joseph. He taught biology, ecology, cave biology, caving, invertebrate zoology, parasitology, medical entomology and principles of organismal biology. He taught a summer cave ecology course for St. Louis University at Reis Biological Station, as well as Mammoth Cave National Park. He did research on the Tumbling Creek cave snail, the invasive gapped-ringed crayfish, the bristly cave crayfish in Small Cave. He was involved with the Missouri Speleological Survey, serving on the MSS Research Council; The Missouri Caves & Karst Conservancy and Springfield Plateau Grotto.—Alberta Zumwalt

Remembering Arthur Kasey. Mr. Kasey passed away on October 21st, 2024 at the age of 84. He taught at Fox High School for 44 years, the longest term of any teacher there. He grew up in Kentucky, planned to be a geologist, working on a doctorate in geology at the Univ. of MO – Columbia but was led into teaching instead. Fox High named a section of a hallway “Art Kasey Avenue” and renamed his former classroom “Kasey’s Korner.” I had been emailing him to renew his *Missouri Speleology* subscription with no answer back from him when Don Dunham alerted me to his death. My records show that he was on the *Missouri Speleology* list since Vol.

30, was a member of the MSS from 1989-2016 and was still getting *Missouri Speleology* and *MSS Liaison*.— Alberta Zumwalt

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Cave Files Committee: Scott House (Chairman), Ken Grush, Mick Sutton, Dan Lamping, and Jeffrey (Spike) Crews.

CALENDAR:

March 1st – Next Liaison deadline.

March 21st – 22nd - MSS Weekend at the farm of MSS Vice-President Mitchell Kohl near Laddonia, MO with the MSS meeting on Sunday, the 22nd. More details later.

NOTE: MSS Affiliate organization fees are due in January each year. Please plan on paying them at the March MSS meeting or send a check or money order for \$25 to: MSS Treasurer, Don Dunham, 6104 Valley Creek Ct., Imperial, MO 63052.

Organizations that have not yet paid for 2026: CAIRN, Chouteau, Daedalus, KCAG, LEG, MCKC, MSM, OHG, PEG, SEMO, Stygian.