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**Between the First Blind Cave Fish and  
the Last of the Mohicans: The Scientific  
Romanticism of James E. DeKay**

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James DeKay (b. Lisbon, Portugal, 12 October 1792; d. Oyster Bay, Long Island, New York, 21 November 1851) was the first to describe a species of blind cave fish for science. He was an unlikely hero in the history of biospeleology because:

- He was a physician by training, not a natural historian.
- He was closer to the romantic literary writers of his time than to any group of scientists.
- There is no evidence that he ever visited any cave.
- The cave fish he described was collected by someone else in Kentucky, far away from New York State, his area of research.

Yet his name is indelibly tied to the beginning of biospeleology in the United States. To understand why and how he described the Mammoth Cave blind cave fish, we need to look not only at his scientific career, but also at the literary environment he frequented.