

MAY 2024 | ISSUE 13

THE RED-EYED RAVEN GAZETTE

The Official Newsletter of the Author Tim Ritter



WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Sarah & Orville Special Issue!

Presentation Update

WELCOME!



Welcome to the May issue of the Red-Eyed Raven Gazette!

This issue of The Red-Eyed Raven Gazette is very special, because it's all about my new book, ***Sarah & Orville***! We are so close to publication, I wanted to get out some important information, and share some behind-the-scenes glimpses into the research that went into the book.

As always, thanks for your encouraging messages sent when these newsletters are released. Your support is very much appreciated.



[Author Tim Ritter](#)

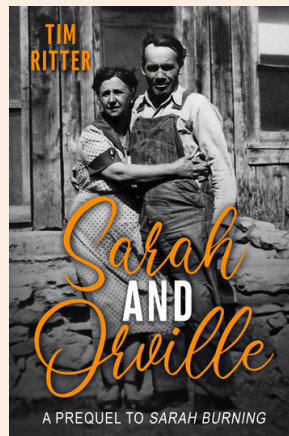


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“SARAH & ORVILLE” UPDATE!

Well friends, ***Sarah & Orville*** has been through several rounds of edits and proofing, and I am happy to say it is now at the publisher for final formatting. The feedback has been positive from test readers, so I’m pleased with the results.

Here’s the official blurb:

*When **Sarah Burning** was released in 2021, readers fell in love with Sarah Ritter and her family. The struggles, setbacks, and ultimate victories of the three survivors of The Fire made people want to know more about the family. Readers especially requested additional information about Orville, Sarah’s husband who died within a few days after The Fire. He was severely burned, but his demise stemmed ultimately from the smoke inhaled when he lingered too long in the burning house before jumping from the second story window.*

*Indeed, Orville and the people from whom he came were the topic of hours of conversations and interviews during the author’s research for **Sarah Burning**. Unable to fit all that information into the original book, author Tim Ritter now takes the reader into a deep look into Orville, the stories about him, and tales of his ancestors, along with many old family photographs. Additionally, more backstory about Sarah and her parents is included, as well as an in-depth examination of six letters that she wrote to her twin sons during the spring and summer of 1959, just months before The Fire. Those letters paint a vivid portrait of Orville and Sarah’s lives on their own in the old farmhouse after all their children moved on.*

*Lastly, stunning film footage from 1959 was discovered during the writing of **Sarah & Orville**, and stills from that footage, which relate directly to The Fire, are examined. See why this footage matters, and why oldest son Norman Ritter, grieving silently after The Fire, wanted it destroyed.*

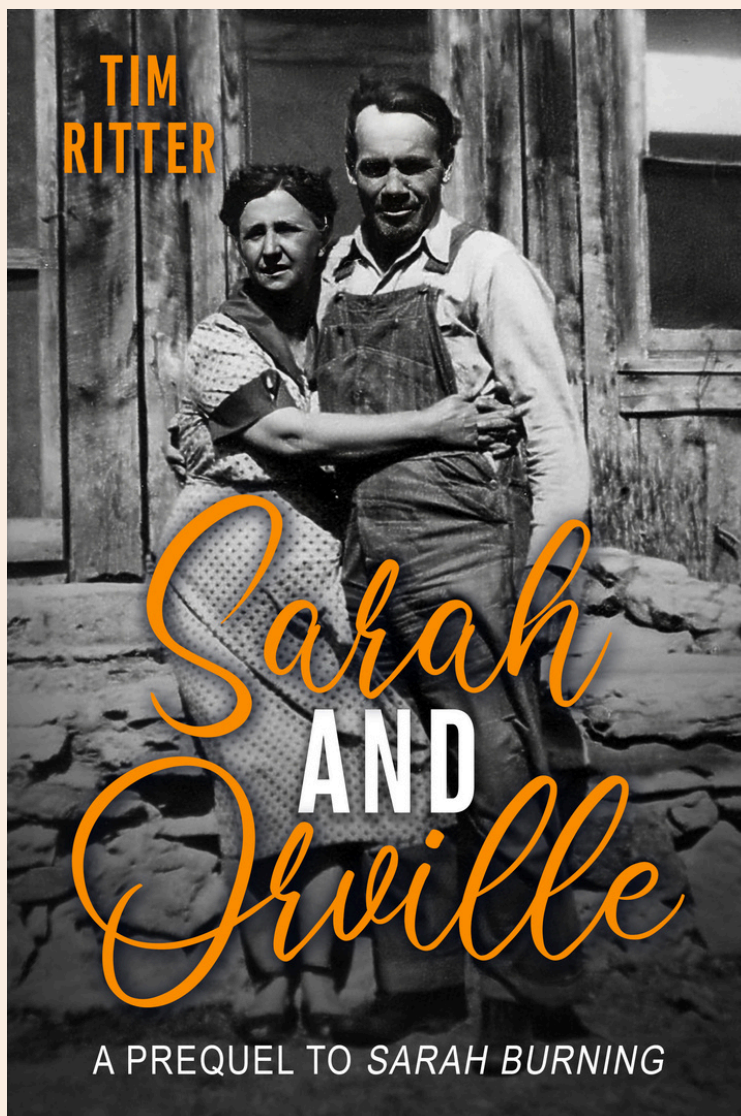
*It’s time to take a deeper look into **Sarah & Orville**.*

Now for the really big news:

***Sarah & Orville* Presale!**

The presale for ***Sarah & Orville*** starts this coming Wednesday, May 22nd but as a subscriber to my newsletter, you can order now! All you have to do is contact me via email or message me through my page on Facebook or Instagram. Please include your shipping address with your message. I will then email you an invoice via Square, which is a secure encrypted link. I never see your card number. Signed books will begin shipping around mid-June. The price for ***Sarah & Orville*** is \$15 plus shipping and handling (and sales tax if you are in Missouri).

Since ***Sarah & Orville*** is the backstory before ***Sarah Burning***, if you have not read ***Sarah Burning*** yet, you should before tackling ***Sarah & Orville***. I've got a special deal for you on that, too. ***Sarah Burning*** sells for \$15 by itself, but you can order both books for just \$25 plus shipping, handling, tax in Missouri, etc., etc., etc. I'm so excited to bring this part of the family saga to you.



Continuing a Special Look into *Sarah & Orville*

As a subscriber to my email list, you deserve some special content that no one else will get. And in past issues you've gotten some early glimpses at stories I'm working on for future projects. But at this point, you deserve to get to read something exclusive pertaining to ***Sarah & Orville***, something not included in the book.

This story will horrify you, but stay with me afterwards so you can learn why I disqualified it from being included in the book.

That Damn Horse

The Ritters owned several horses which performed various duties around the farm. Always used for hauling hay, a couple of horses in particular stood out in memory, although their names have long since been forgotten. One horse was a fairly even-tempered animal, with good strength and behavior. The other was a big black draft horse, strong as an ox, but stubborn. The story of the two horses, as recalled by Delmas, goes like this:

When time to haul hay arrived, the boys took the two horses leading a flatbed iron-wheeled wagon up a tall hill. With the horses tied to a tree, Delbert and Neil gathered the hay then threw it up to Delmas in the cart. Delmas' job was to spread the hay evenly across the cart and stamp it down. When the hay was piled fairly high, Delmas positioned himself atop the stack to drive the horses as Delbert and Neil walked alongside. Before starting down the hill, however, the boys always chained up the back wheels so that they would drag, to help keep the cart from gathering too much speed as the horses guided it down the hill to the barn. Upon arriving at the barn, the boys hauled the hay into the loft, then started up the hill again for another load.

One day, as the cart started down the hill with Delmas at the reins, the black horse started to act up. Both boys on the ground crew yelled at the horse, while Delmas, terrified that the beast would break into a gallop, held back on the reins. Because of this one misbehaving, the other horse ended up holding the entire load as they went down the hill, fortunately without incident.

As they threw that load of hay into the barn, the boys told Orville about the problems they had with the big black horse. Orville told them that he would go up with the boys on the next trip.

So on that round, while the boys worked, Orville piddled around the area, checking out the nearby woods and such. When it was time to start down the hill, after the wheels had been chained, Orville walked alongside the ornery equine. Sure enough, as the load got heavy, the horse started to act up.

Orville was a man of many talents, one of which was his ability to talk to animals to get them to do what he wanted. He had a certain way of talking to a horse, and he started telling this one to "straighten up there" and "hold that load". His talent didn't work well that day, and the stubborn beast continued to misbehave as the other horse held the entire load as before.

Along the way down the hill was a fairly flat spot, so Orville told Delmas to pull over and stop. "I'll be back in a minute," he called as he disappeared into the nearby woods. Gone for just a moment or two, Orville returned with a stick about four feet long and two inches in diameter. Delmas said he was scared enough, but now he thought, "Oh, lord, what in the world is he going to do with that!" Orville told him to start down the hill again, as he walked alongside. Once again, the horse acted up.

Orville told Delmas to stop, right there on the hill. He walked around in front of the ornery beast, took a swing with his stick, and knocked him on the right side of his face, bringing the horse to one knee. After a minute, the troublesome beast stood back up and shook his head around. Orville grabbed the horse by the reins, pulled his face to him, looked him square in the eyes and said, "I told you to hold that load, you son of a bitch," and not necessarily in the calmest voice.

That horse held the load all the way down the rest of the hill, and never acted up again while hauling hay.

It's an awful story, right? A stubborn horse gets horribly whacked across the face for resisting the workload with which he has been tasked. And to make matters worse, it's Orville hand that issues the punishment.

There are several problems with this tale which led me to leave it out of the book. The biggest problem with it is the fact that it was told by Delmas. One of Orville & Sarah's twin boys, Delmas eventually earned a reputation for stretching the truth when telling family stories. Sometimes he simply added material to ordinary tales, presumably to make them more interesting. Other times he took a story about someone else and injected himself in it, rather than the person who actually experienced the event. Then other stories were discovered to be complete fabrications, including one whopper in which he said that his brother Dewey, who died in The Fire as depicted in ***Sarah Burning***, was mean spirited and tried to choke Sarah on at least one occasion. His brothers, sisters and father would have never allowed such behavior. Therefore all the stories Delmas told were questioned and if any seemed plausible, additional investigation was required to verify their content.

This story about the horse is probably a half-truth. The process by which the twins and Neil gathered hay and stored it in the barn is entirely believable, including the fact that they chained up the back wheels to add a bit of drag so that the cart was more controllable. Also the idea that Orville could have had a talent for talking to an animal is believable as well, since he spent his entire life on farms and working with horses, cows, and any other farm critter. However the idea of Orville being abusive to this horse became the subject of intense scrutiny.

The immediate question is why would Orville hit one of his horses, especially so violently? He, and really the entire family, depended on these horses to help them with their work. They deserved care and proper treatment. To hit a horse like that could have broken its jaw, or certainly knocked loose at least one tooth, which could have easily caused infection. There would be no logical reason why Orville would treat an animal in this manner. Orville's father Simon loved horses, and would have never tolerated any rough treatment of animals from his offspring.

This story was told to Jack Ritter, Delmas' surviving cousin and the source of volumes of credible information, and he could only shake his head when he heard it.

"I never, ever saw or heard of Uncle Orville abusing any animal," Jack said during one interview. Could Orville get a little irritated with them? Probably so; anyone could. But as Jack confirmed, the notion that Orville would willingly harm an animal, especially for such a minor offense, is ludicrous.

Oddly enough, in his adult life Delmas was known to be harsh toward pets. More than once he was seen kicking his dog with the toe of his shoe, causing the animal to yelp in pain. So perhaps his indifference to such treatment of an animal led him to include a detail like this and think nothing of it.

Since Delmas spent the final two decades of his life suffering from a form of dementia and passed away in 2023, there was no way at any time over the last several years of research to discuss this story further with him to question the details.

Each story you will read in ***Sarah & Orville*** that was part of the family's oral history received this kind of intense scrutiny. The story of the horse was not the only one to be deemed unreliable and thus not included in the book. Some were found to be questionable and a few were discovered to be completely false. That's just how it is when you start digging deeply into family lore.

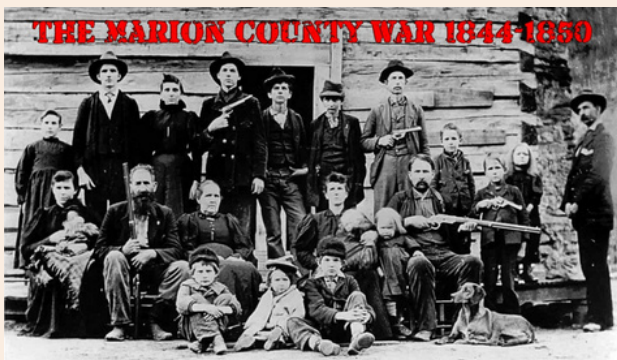
I hope you have found this behind-the-scenes look interesting. While it was a challenge to question the validity of each story, it was an enjoyable effort, and always yielded additional information and understanding of the people involved.



I found this photo amongst other old family pics. It is the only image of a horse to be found within my collection of family photos, and was most definitely taken at the Ritter farmhouse property on Hunter Road outside Ava. This very well could be the big black horse that Delmas used to concoct the story of Orville.

PRESENTATION UPDATE

If you or anyone you know or belong to a group needing speakers, please give them my contact info!



Every month in this section I highlight one of my current presentations. I'm really excited about this newest one:

The Marion County War

We've heard about feuds through the ages, right? They can be based on family issues, political issues, fights over money and power, etc. The most famous, or perhaps infamous, is the thirty-year feud between the Hatfields and McCoys, which took place in the hills of the Kentucky - West Virginia border from 1863 to 1891.

Yet Marion County, Arkansas, experienced a violent feud nearly twenty years before the Hatfields and McCoys went after each other. It lasted only seven years but resulted in significantly more deaths and violence than the Hatfields and McCoys could imagine.

This talk examines the families involved in the feud, the crazy timeline of events that unfolded, and the extreme measures required to quell the violence.

SCHEDULE OF APPEARANCES

June 4, 2024 - 12:00p.m.
Fair Grove Chamber of Commerce
Fair Grove Fire Station
Presentation: *The 80th Anniversary of D-Day*

June 6, 2024 - 7:00p.m.
Polk County Genealogical Society
120 E Jackson Street, Bolivar, MO
Presentation: *The Tornado Outbreak of April 1880*

June 8, 2024 - Time TBD
Between the Pages Writers Conference
Springfield, MO
Presentation: *Publishing Poetry with a Spoonful of Prose*

September 10, 2024 - 7:00p.m.
Monroe Coffee Co.
71 S. Main Street, Fair Grove, MO
Presentation: *The Coffeyville Bank Robbery*

October 5, 2024 - 9:00a.m.
Discover The Ozarks Festival
Ava, MO
Ava History Tour - Host

October 15, 2024 - 7:00p.m.
Monroe Coffee Co.
71 S. Main Street, Fair Grove, MO
Presentation: *The New Madrid Earthquakes*

My regular speaking engagements, twice each month, continue at the three Elfindale senior living facilities in Springfield. Also, I present monthly at The Preston Senior Living Facility, as well as Elfindale Manor.