

# THE RED-EYED RAVEN GAZETTE

The Official Newsletter of the Author Tim Ritter



## WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Why Does This Exist? - A journey into genealogical discovery

Other News - A Follow-Up on the Recent Spooky Podcast

Presentation Update

## WELCOME!



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

When I began this writing journey 50+ years ago, I knew I wanted to be a published author with several books in my catalog. And I have to admit that by the age of twelve I knew that the two adventure books I had just written were NOT going to help get me there. LOL

Now with *Soul Sketches*, *Sarah Burning*, and *Sarah and Orville* published, I feel like I'm getting there. Several writing projects still linger in my head, including the book about the Chadwick Railroad; a collection of poems and short stories leaning toward gothic horror, tentatively titled "The Screamer Down the Hall and other Tales"; and at least two Second World War books. So you might say there's plenty left to do.

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



[Author Tim Ritter](#)



[authortimritter](#)



[@TimothyLRitter](#)

[www.timritter.net](http://www.timritter.net)

# WHY DOES THIS EXIST?

Note: My first version of this article appeared in a newsletter for the Ozarks Genealogical Society. I thought it appropriate to share with you here.

After the funeral for my great aunt and genealogical mentor, Dora (Ritter) Franklin of Ava, Missouri back in 1998, the family agreed that we all should descend quickly upon her house to clean out the plethora of family heirlooms. She had no children, so all of us nieces and nephews were her closest next of kin. Being the family historian at that time, she possessed many wonderful relics as well as original genealogical documents, so we knew we needed to get in there to save as much as we could before anything happened to the house and contents.

In the years leading up to her passing, it had become clear that I was going to eventually take over the reins as the family historian. So that day, as we sorted through everything, my relatives kept coming up to me, handing things to me, saying, "Here, you need this." My little car began to fill up quickly.



*Dora (left) with her husband Glen "Pete" Franklin at their home near Ava, Missouri, during the summer of 1955.*

In the storage room behind her garage, I found two large trash bags. Appearing to be filled with paper items, I opened the bags to examine the contents. I discovered each bag was filled with letters and cards she had received over the years.

Let me just stop for a moment and say that my dear Auntie never threw anything away. Never. She kept *everything*.

So looking inside these two bags of letters and cards, my first inclination was to throw it all away. But I stood there staring into the bag, and a little voice inside my head asked, "Why does all this exist? Why have these been saved? Yes, she was a packrat. But there must be a reason why all this is here." So with a heavy sigh, I lugged both bags to the back seat of my car and stuffed them in, to be sorted through later at home.

I was also given the World War II wooden army trunk that belonged to her husband, Glen Ray "Pete" Franklin. I managed to get it in the trunk of the car, again to be sorted through later at home. By the time the raid on the house was over, there was just enough room in my car for me to drive.

The bags and trunk sat in my basement for a couple of weeks, as I awaited the opportunity to spend several hours going through everything, expecting most of it to be trivial items destined for the trash can.

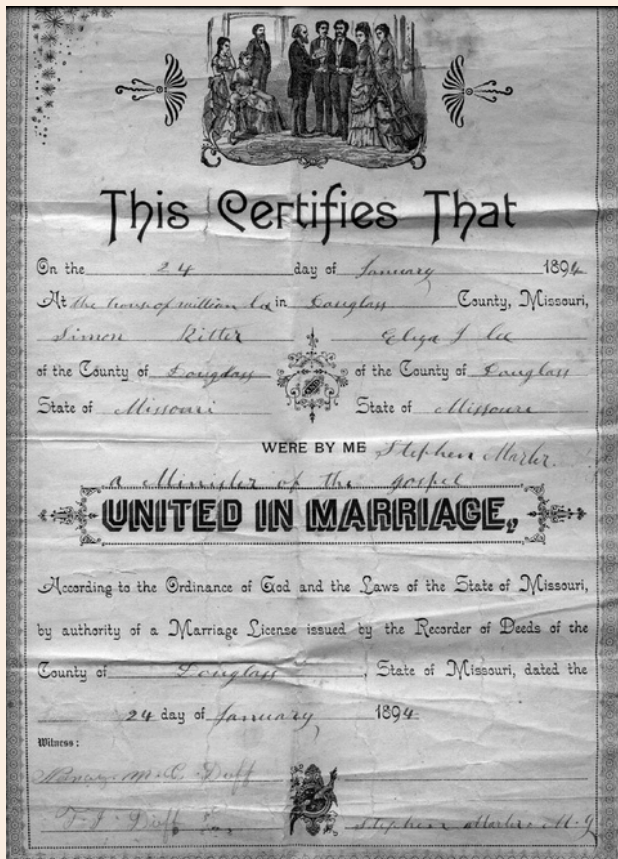
Starting with the first bag of letters and cards, I dove in and discovered exactly as expected: Christmas and birthday cards from every niece, nephew, and distant cousin with which she corresponded. There were a few letters here, school pictures of grand-nieces and nephews there, and after quick review most were deemed of no genealogical significance and went into the trash.

Then I came across one unmarked envelope. It had been folded in half at some point, but had something stiff in it, stiffer than the school photos, stiffer than a thick letter of many pages. So I quizzically opened the envelope...

What I found inside nearly knocked me off my chair.

There, in this tiny little envelope, was the folded original 1894 marriage certificate of my great-grandparents, Dora's parents, Simon and Eliza Jane (Lee) Ritter. As I unfolded the certificate, out fell something that made a metal sound when it hit the floor. I leaned over and brought up a small tintype of a couple, who I eventually learned was none other than Simon and Eliza.

It took a few seconds for me to start breathing again.



I had never before seen a photograph of these great-grandparents. Now I held not only a photo, but also their marriage certificate! With trembling hands I read the document, which not only indicated that they were married at the home of her brother William, but also the fact that her cousin Stephen Marler performed the ceremony and other cousins of the Duff family served as witnesses on that chilly January day.

Side note: Since it was stored with their marriage certificate, I couldn't help but wonder if the photo I held was their wedding picture. Some years later I would learn that it was not, and the precise date upon which this image was taken remains a mystery.

After carefully setting aside these new treasures, I immediately went back to the trash can and re-examined everything I had thrown away so far, to make sure I didn't miss something else. I then used the same care as I went through the remaining contents of the two trash bags, which yielded a few interesting letters, but nothing as important as the marriage certificate and tintype.

I was so thankful to not have just thrown all of it away. To me, those two bags existed so that I could find the certificate and tintype.

I didn't have time to go through the WWII wooden footlocker that day, so I set it aside for another day.

Several weeks later, when I had some time to open the box, I discovered another treasure trove, with many of Glen's personal effects, some items that belonged to his parents, as well as keepsakes that belonged to Dora. Included in Dora's items was a small desk calendar dated 1945. As I flipped through the tiny pages, I noticed writing on each page, with daily information such as weather and notable events.

I wondered why that single calendar existed, and whose handwriting was on it. Did it belong to Dora? The handwriting didn't seem to match hers, which I had seen on the outside of many envelopes in the bags I had previously examined.

Looking deeper into the footlocker, I noticed there was no 1944 calendar, no 1946 calendar, only 1945. I decided to take the time to transcribe each page, in hopes that studying the daily writings would reveal who owned the calendar and why it existed. As I continued to read, it became clear that this calendar belonged to Dora's mother, my great grandmother, Eliza Jane (Lee) Ritter. That's right, the same lady whose photo and marriage certificate I had discovered among the letters and cards in the bag. As I continued to transcribe the calendar entries, I was thrilled to discover such an amazing source to her thoughts and observations.



But the question lingered, why did this one calendar exist? Why just 1945? The answer became clear once I went back to my genealogical data: Eliza's husband, my great-grandfather Simon Ritter, and Eliza's mother-in-law, Susan (Geary) Ritter, both died in 1945. On this tiny calendar, Eliza chronicled the days leading up to her mother-in-law's death, as well as the onset of Simon's ailments and then ultimately his passing. After he died, she did not write in the calendar as often, and some entries are even from later years. So this was actually the last calendar she used to record daily events.

Absolutely fascinating.



Left photo, Eliza with Simon, c.1940. Right photo, Dora with Glen, 1973.

All that information about what she did, what she thought about things, how important it was to share the mundane planting and picking details alongside Simon's ailments are stunning. And to think all that was packed into a tiny little desk calendar that otherwise would have been so easy to toss aside.

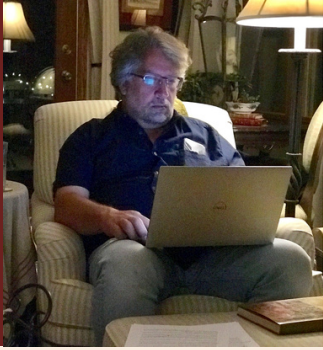
Today, I still have that wooden footlocker, and it's still full of Glen and Dora's mementos, as well as some of my own. I still rummage through it from time to time, and after all these years, I still find something that previously escaped my notice.

One more thing: After digging through all the treasures, I began to wonder if there were any other trash bags full of treasures that escaped my notice. Could there be another bag with other tintypes and marriage licenses that is now buried in a landfill somewhere? I shuddered at the thought. One day I mentioned that thought to Jack Ritter in Ava. His eyes lit up and he said, "Come to the barn with me. I've been holding on to something for you." At the barn, he showed me two more wooden trunks that Pete built that were full of more photos, documents, and mementoes. He said "Your car was full that day so I just stored these here for you, and forgot to tell you about it."

I'm happy to say I got to dig around some more, and I found more treasures, and more mysteries.

So when you have the opportunity to rummage through a relative's belongings, and something looks insignificant and you are tempted to throw it away, stop for a moment. Remember my story of treasures found. Then look at that item you want to throw away and ask:

Why does this exist?



## OTHER NEWS

### FOLLOWING UP ON THE SPOOKY PODCAST

As mentioned in the previous issue of the Gazette, my gothic horror story “Marked” was featured on the podcast **“Chilling Tales for Dark Nights”**. It aired on August 21 and was received well by the listeners. As of this writing, it has been listened to nearly 5,300 times and has received nearly 400 Likes.

If you would like to listen to it, just click on the image below from that episode and it will take you there.

And an exclusive side note: the location in the story is based on a real place...

**SINISTER SELECTION**  
Audio Horror Podcast  
Episode # 292  
271 episodes

 Chilling Tales for Dark Nights: A Horror Anthology and Scary Stories Series Podcast  
Chilling Tales for Dark Nights · Podcast · Updated 2 day...

**MORE EXCITING NEWS COMING!**

# PRESENTATION UPDATE

If anyone you know belongs 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:

## What Really Happened at the Gunfight at the OK Corral?

On October 25, 1881, two warring factions squared off against each other in the rough and rowdy town of Tombstone, Arizona. The precise order of events, who shot first, and even the question of which side, if either, was right has been debated up to the current day.

On one side, the Earp brothers, who represented the law and their own business interests, stood with their friend the irascible and ailing John Henry "Doc" Holliday. On the other side stood members of the criminal gang The Cowboys, including brothers Ike and Billy Clanton, brothers Tom and Frank McLaury, and Billy Claiborne.

This talk examines what led to the confrontation, the general outcome, and the myths surrounding the wildest thirty seconds of the Old West.

## SCHEDULE OF APPEARANCES

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

October 13, 2024 - 2:00p.m.  
Christian County Museum  
100 E. Elm, Ozark, MO  
Presentation: *The Fire on the Springfield Square*

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

October 19, 2024 - 10:00a.m.  
Daughters of Union Veterans Meeting  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Springfield, MO  
Presentation: *Baldknobbers: Terror in the Hills*

October 31, 2024 - 12:30p.m.  
Republic Area Retired School Personnel Assoc.  
Republic, MO  
Presentation: *Haunted Springfield*

November 16, 2024 - 10:00a.m.  
Republic Library, Republic, Missouri  
Presentation: *The Coffeyville Bank Robbery*

*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.*