

THE RED-EYED RAVEN GAZETTE

The Official Newsletter of Author Tim Ritter



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WELCOME!



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

Many thanks to all of you who have taken the time to subscribe to this newsletter! I enjoy putting it together, and I hope you enjoy reading it. Feel free to email any questions you have to titterman@gmail.com.

There seems to be no shortage of things to talk about. In this issue, I drag you down into some rabbit holes with me as I research for my next book about the Chadwick Railroad. Then we will talk a bit about how presentations come together. Lastly I have revised my Presentation Update, and I will be anxious to hear what you think about the revised format.

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

RESEARCH - JUST ONE RABBIT HOLE AFTER ANOTHER

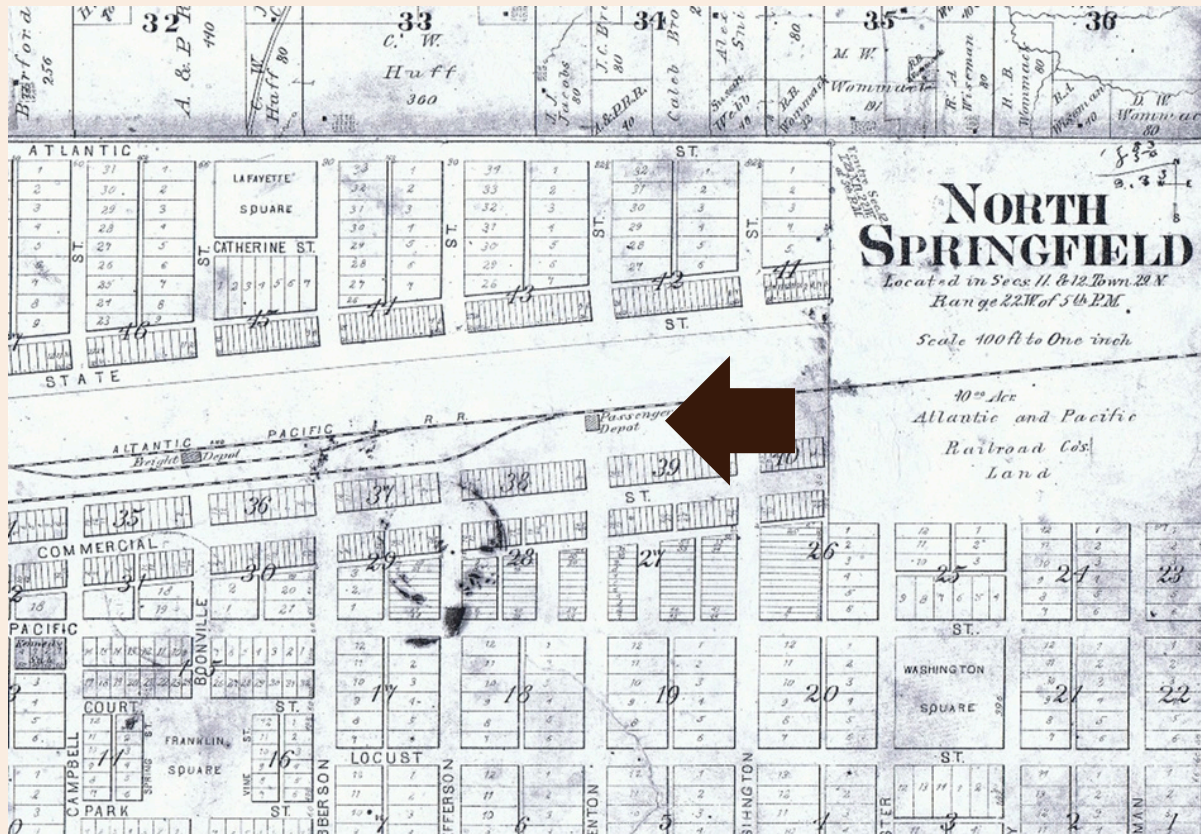
As you may recall, my current book project is the story of the old Chadwick Railroad, a train that ran between Springfield and Chadwick from about 1882 to 1932. It is a fascinating tale, and one which finds relevance in today's world, as the train's original roadbed is currently being transformed into a walking/biking trail.

To properly tell the tale, I am first researching how railroad traffic first came to the Springfield area. That alone is an intriguing story by itself, so I am enjoying figuring it out. But I have discovered it is easy to find myself sliding down a rabbit hole as details bubble up to the surface. Sometimes it makes me sit back and ask "What the heck?" I'm accessing old Springfield newspaper articles on Newspapers.com, and it is yielding many such rabbit holes. Here's an example:

The first tracks laid in the area were just north of what we now know as Commercial Street. Merchants in downtown Springfield were angry that the trains stopped in an area that was so far away (1-1/2 miles) from the public square. This was in 1870, so 1-1/2 miles was a big deal. I found an article from February 24, 1870, which indicates that a "street railroad", which became known eventually as streetcars, was planned to be built to carry passengers and freight from the trains to somewhere near the square. It mentions that the route was supposed to run on Jefferson Street from the depot.

That seems fairly innocuous until you look at the 1876 plat maps of the area. It clearly shows that the depot was at the intersection of Commercial and *Benton*, not Jefferson. Furthermore, all the information I have seen indicates that a streetcar ran along Boonville Avenue rather than Washington or Jefferson.

So what exactly happened? Was the passenger depot really built originally at the end of Jefferson Street and later moved to the end of Benton? And if so, did the "street railroad" get built along Jefferson and then relocate to Boonville? Or is the detail about the Boonville streetcar line incorrect?



The 1876 plat map of North Springfield, the town that developed near the tracks. The arrow shows the location of the passenger depot, which is at the end of Benton Street. Jefferson Street is one block west.

I know that in the grand scheme of things, it does not really matter to my particular story, but if I am going to tell how train service developed in the town, I need to make sure I get the details right.

On the plat map, note that there is a siding that comes south and then curves parallel to the other tracks at Jefferson Street. Could it be that the depot was originally located there, and then when they realized they needed to put another siding in, perhaps they moved the depot to make room? And if so, did they also move the street railroad or did it really continue to run on Jefferson?

Another side rabbit hole pertaining to the street railroad: in the February 24, 1870, article, it was mentioned that the service would stop at the bottom of the hill upon which the public square sits. I can only guess that this plan developed over concern about the horses pulling the car and whether or not they could make it up the hill. The problem was that this plan would require passengers to walk an additional two blocks uphill, possibly heavy laden with luggage or other personal possessions. So what happened? Did they end up running the streetcar line to the square?

Again, I know that this is not hugely important to the overall story. However, it is interesting and fairly entertaining to follow the antics of the townspeople and city leaders as everyone clamored for more business and better opportunities with the railroad.

Another little rabbit hole has to do with when certain tracks were laid in town. At one point, there were the original tracks north of Commercial, then another railroad company's tracks along Mill Street. We know that by about 1900, the Chadwick Railroad started its day at the passenger depot on Commercial Street, then made its way down to Mill Street to pick up passengers and freight at the depot there. But how exactly did it make it to Mill Street?

Today there exists two railroad "belts" on the east and west side of town, which serve as a link between the different tracks on Commercial and Mill. But when were those belts put in, and how exactly did the train wind its way through those belts to get to each depot?

So far I have been able to figure out the answer to everything except when the belts were put in. But I think I may be close to figuring that one out too.

As you can imagine, all of this takes a tremendous amount of time. I have discovered that the search engine on Newspapers.com works best with a subject this big if you just take it one month at a time. Currently I am studying all the articles from July 1870. Next, I will go to August and see what I can learn there, and so on. The amazing thing is that each month, when I type in a search for "railroad", almost every day has at least one article about something pertaining to train service.

So overall the research requirements are a bit more than I originally expected, but as I mentioned before, some of it is quite entertaining. My hope is that when it is all done, I can create an interesting book with some great area history taken from an exciting time.





LET'S TALK ABOUT PRESENTATIONS

In each issue of the gazette on the last page, I provide you with a synopsis of one of my presentations and list my speaking appearances. But I thought I should spend a little time discussing these talks and how they come about.

Each month, I present at several senior living facilities in Springfield. At three of those facilities, I show up twice, each time with a new talk. That means a minimum of two new presentations each month, or at least twenty-four new talks each year.

Honestly, sometimes these presentations are simply a case of "Here is what we saw on our trip to England last month". Those are fairly simple to put together and I strive to keep them entertaining and interesting, usually taking a day or two to put such a talk together. However, such travel talks are not the type that I would give to a Rotary Club meeting, or an historical society meeting, so most of the time once I've given such a presentation, it goes to the archive, and I don't usually give that talk ever again.

Then there are the other presentations, the ones about something historical, and those require considerably more time to create. For those, I spend a lot of time looking for photographs (if applicable), maps, and various sources from which to draw information. Sources can include online information, books (if available), newspaper articles, etc.

Putting together a 50-minute presentation on something historical can take as long as three to five full days of work. I use Powerpoint for my talks and tend to fill each slide with mostly imagery rather than words. If you're sitting in the audience for one of my talks, you do not need a bunch of words on the screen with me reading them to you. You want to see images, maps, and so on. I keep the words off the screen, and when needed, I use the Notes function in Powerpoint. I can see the notes on my laptop, but you can't see the notes on the screen. It helps me remember what I wanted to say about that particular slide, and if dates and names are important, they are in the notes as well so that I don't have to memorize them.

One thing that is particularly exciting: Right now I'm working on a new talk about Parker's Crossroads, a Second World War battle that took place outside Bastogne. I'll give the talk at our local American Legion post when our town has its Christmas festival (because this December is the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge and the encirclement of Bastogne). If this talk goes well, I will enhance it a bit, and will submit an application to present at an international Second World War festival in England in 2026. After that, I may decide to turn it into a book!

So that's a little peak into my world as I work up my various talks.

PRESENTATION UPDATE

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



I am changing this section to give a bit more info about when and where I am speaking.

December 2024:

9th: I will be on the local Fox station's morning show called "Unscripted" to talk about Fair Grove's Christmas festival. Exact time is unknown, but I have to be at the station at 7:15a.m., so presumably between 7:15 and 7:30.

11th: I will be on local radio station KTTS to talk about the Fair Grove Christmas festival. Again, time uncertain, but I have to get there at 8:00a.m., so sometime after that.

14th: *"The Battle of the Bulge and the Fight for Parker's Crossroads"* This is the day of the Fair Grove Christmas festival. The event lasts all day, but I will be giving this presentation at the American Legion post at 86 S. Main Street, which is on the northeastern corner of the square. I will speak at 1:30p.m. and then again at 4:30p.m.

January 2025:

As of this moment, I have nothing extra scheduled, other than my regular talks at the senior living facilities.

February 2025:

25th: *"The Battle of Springfield"* On this evening I will return to Monroe Coffee Co. at 71 S. Main Street in Fair Grove for an evening presentation. I cannot believe I have not done this talk before at Monroe! Plan to get there around 6:30p.m., and I will start talking at 7:00.

March 2025:

As of right now, nothing extra schedule.

April 2025:

13th: *"The April 1880 Tornado Outbreak"* I will be at the Webster County Historical Society in Marshfield, which I believe meets still at the Marshfield Senior Center. Will update this in the next issue.

15th: *"The Hunt for John Wilkes Booth"* This will be held at Monroe Coffee Co. in Fair Grove. As always, I start talking at 7:00p.m.

19th: *"The April 1880 Tornado Outbreak"* This time I will be giving this talk at the Republic Library, and will start at 10:30a.m.

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.