

THE RED-EYED RAVEN GAZETTE

The Official Newsletter of Author Tim Ritter



WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

When I Need a Break from Writing... I Write Other Stuff

Deciding When It's Best to *Not* Write

Bonus Short Story - The Night of the Clown

Presentation Update

WELCOME!



[Author Tim Ritter](#)



[authortimritter](#)



[@TimothyLRitter](#)

www.timritter.net

Happy New Year and welcome to the January 2025 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 tritterman@gmail.com.

There seems to be no shortage of things to talk about. In this issue, I'll give you a behind-the-scenes look at what I do when I have to come up for air and take a break while working on my latest book project. Also, I'll share about a decision I made recently to *not* write about a particular subject. And to start the new year off right, I'm offering up a short story about something spooky that actually happened when I was a boy. Lastly The Presentation Update page has all the latest info on when I will be giving talks which are open to the public. This time I have listed dates through June, but of course I am already scheduling well into the Fall.

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

WHEN I NEED A BREAK FROM WRITING... I WRITE OTHER STUFF

Ok, I'll admit it: my brain requires a lot of playtime...

I noted in this newsletter's previous issue that I find myself falling into many rabbit holes as I continue to research historical details while piecing together the story of the Chadwick Railroad. I'm also tossing around book title ideas because I don't believe my original title, *Chasing the Chadwick Line*, is really appropriate for how this will ultimately turn out. While all that is going on in my head, I find that I have to step away from all of it from time to time and delve into other subject matter.

My monthly creation of presentations helps with that "stepping away" activity. Due to my current talk schedule, I write two new presentations each month, so for four or five days, I set aside the train project and work on the Powerpoint presentations for whatever topics I'm scheduled to give. That's a nice diversion and often clears my head enough that I can return to the train story a bit refreshed. But sometimes it takes a little more. Because the Chadwick Railroad book is taking so long to research, I've got other writing projects that help give me a break from all the heady stuff.

One such diversion is a collection of short stories and poems that I'm putting together that was originally planned to be a tribute to my literary hero Edgar Allan Poe. It may still be a tribute to him when it's all done, but for now I'm not letting that be a limiting factor in what or how I write. The stories include adventure, gothic horror, and humor, much like how Poe wrote (yes, Poe wrote humorous stories as well). But I also love the irony in so many of the works by writer Ambrose Bierce, and I keep his stories in mind while I write.

Most recently I completed the first draft of a story which basically solves the question of who Jack the Ripper was. Naturally it's complete fiction, but after reading a comprehensive history of the White Chapel Murders, I had an idea of who he might have been, and how he might have met his demise. So naturally I had to write about it. For now that's all I'm going to tell you about that story, but stay tuned.

So far, that collection of stories and poems will be entitled *The Screamer Down the Hall, and Other Tales*. At this point there's no official release date on that, but it may happen shortly after the release of the Chadwick Line book.



Left, Glen "Pete" Franklin and his wife Dora (Ritter) in 1955. Right, Glen in his uniform during the Second World War.

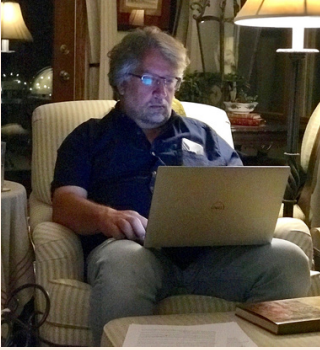
Future possible writing projects probably take up too much space in my head, but nonetheless, they are there, too, and keep me entertained.

One idea grew out of the writing of my most recent book ***Sarah and Orville***. You may recall that included examination of letters that Sarah wrote prior to The Fire that was depicted in ***Sarah Burning***. I also have a stack of letters written during the Second World War by my great uncle Glen "Pete" Franklin while he was serving as a POW guard stateside. Reportedly because of a blood disorder, he was not considered for the frontline infantry, and his draft number had been deferred several times because he was taking care of his ailing parents. But eventually the deferment ended, and he had to serve as a guard of German prisoners of war.

I have his letters, but unfortunately none from his wife, my great aunt Dora. It is unknown why they don't exist. Perhaps he couldn't save them due to space restrictions, although I doubt that. Perhaps they got lost. Or maybe good ole Glen just didn't think to keep them. Whatever the reason, they are lost. His letters to her, however, are interesting and filled with details of his service activities, as well as responses he makes to unknown comments or questions that were in her letters.

While the Second World War book market is heavily saturated these days, it would be interesting to at least explore this idea, and perhaps study these letters like Sarah Ritter's letters were examined in ***Sarah and Orville***, dissecting paragraphs and comments, perhaps with additional research to clarify his writings. I think ***Letters from Glen*** might perhaps turn out to be an interesting read. We'll see.

In the meantime, I look forward to making major headway in the writing on the book about the Chadwick Railroad.



DECIDING WHEN IT'S BEST TO NOT WRITE

When I started on this writing journey so many years ago, I wondered how I would decide which topics I should explore to consider writing about. And as you might expect, a decision process continues to this day, pertaining to either writing a book or short story about something or creating a presentation on a subject. I recently had to make an unusual writing decision, to *NOT* write a book about an interesting event. Let me tell you about it - -

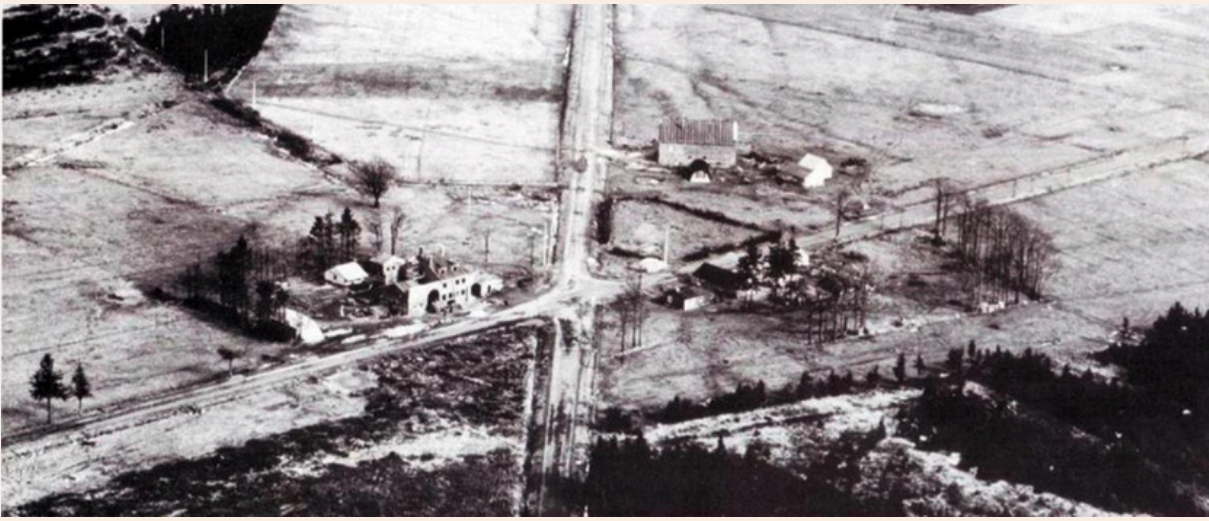
Last year I took a return trip to Belgium, for another Second World War tour around sites pertaining to the Battle of the Bulge. Originating from the famous town of Bastogne, the two-day bus tour took us to places that were off the beaten path, locations where important action took place but they were relatively unknown, and several of these spots really had an effect on me. One of those places was a little nondescript intersection of two roads. Thousands of people pass through the traffic circle at this location, not knowing what took place there in December 1944. It's a place called Parker's Crossroads.

If you look up Parker's Crossroads, you might at first be confused. Not only was there a Second World War action in Belgium by that name, but there was also a Battle of Parker's Crossroads during the American Civil War in the state of Tennessee, about halfway between Memphis and Nashville. Obviously that's not the place I'm talking about.



Battle of the Bulge map from historynet.com.

The arrow indicates the approximate location of Parker's Crossroads.



Braque de Fraiture in 1945. From the Netherlands website bensavelkoul.nl

The location is actually known as Braque de Fraiture, and ended up being an important crossroads for the Germans as they fought to gain the upper hand in what would be their last major offensive of the war. From this location their tanks to go just about anywhere, and for their offensive to work, they had to move quickly and decisively to shock and terrify the Allies into surrender.

Despite the Allied confusion in the opening hours of the Battle of the Bulge, reinforcements were sent to this crossroads, eventually receiving an order directly from General James Gavin to “hold at all costs”. And hold they did. When it was all said and done, about 300 American soldiers held off two German panzer divisions for three days, causing a major delay in the German strategy and ultimately contributing to the failure of the offensive.

What an amazing topic, right? To get to stand there, where it happened, and to hear about the heroic efforts of the men who held their ground was so very moving. Upon returning home, I began to research the battle further, realizing that I wanted to create a presentation on the subject, but also seriously considering whether I wanted to commit the time and resources needed to properly research and then write about such a fight.

I was happy to complete a 45-minute presentation on this topic, and gave this talk at the local American Legion Post during the Fair Grove Christmas Festival last month. However, upon doing a quick search online for books on this topic, I discovered that a book does indeed exist on this topic, and it is a doozy.

Parker's Crossroads was written by James Cooley and published in 2014. The fact that someone else has already written about it does not deter me, but this does: James Cooley wrote it based on the memories from a man who was ***there***. It's not some collection of research from official reports. It's based on the recollections of John P. Abbott, a medic who was in the middle of it all.

There may never be a better account of what happened there. Official reports are cold and full of numbers. John Abbott's recollections are full of heart. That's the type of account that matters. So I'm happy to back away from such a project and let that account stand on its own.

BONUS SHORT STORY - THE NIGHT OF THE CLOWN

As I've mentioned previously in some of my social media posts, between 1967 and 1970 my parents were singers in a country music show that broadcast over a local radio station from the Four Star Theater (no longer standing) on Commercial Street in Springfield. During the first hour of the show, Mom and Dad were among several singers who stepped onstage and sang two or three songs. Then in the second hour, after Mom and Dad sang one song, my two older siblings and I were brought onto the stage.

My father had long pursued a career as a famous country music star, and when he and Mom married, they became a singing duo. Considering his love of music, he was lucky to have married a woman with a beautiful singing voice. When they began to have kids, the dream of becoming a star never faded for him, and as time went on, my siblings and I learned to sing as well. So during those nights at the Four Star Opry, we were prepared to sing a song with Mom and Dad, and then sing some songs of our own.

The show started when I was three years old and ended when I was five, so I have a few scant memories, might I add *good* memories, of that time, including singing on stage. But I also have clear memory of one very unpleasant night.

On this particular night, though I do not know the specific date, a man dressed as a clown wandered in from Commercial Street and circulated amongst the crowd of people waiting for the show to start. I never knew if he was there to promote something, or if there happened to be a carnival going on that same night, perhaps nearby. Whatever the reason, he was there.

It was common for us kids to walk around the lobby by ourselves, despite being so young. I was perfectly comfortable being there - until that night.



These are two of just a handful of photos known to exist from when my family was involved in the Four Star Opry. They were taken during the summer of 1969 by my maternal grandmother. Mom, in the yellow dress, is pregnant with my younger sister Kathy. Mom sings with Dad in the left photo, and my older siblings and I are in the photo on the right. That's Debbie, who was eight years old, then me at age four, then my brother Doug at age seven.

I did not have my brother or sister with me that night in the crowded lobby. Knowing me, I was probably looking at the candy in the concession stand. Then at some point in those moments before the show started, the clown and I became aware of each other. At that time I was rather afraid of clowns, and to make matters worse, I had no one nearby to protect me. Thinking quickly, I made a run for it into the theater, which was beginning to fill up with the night's patrons. In that building, you entered the theater from its rear left corner, and there were two sections of seats with an aisle on either side and up the middle.

Once I was through the doors, I turned left and headed for the front of the theater with the clown pursuing, though not closely behind. I got to the front and saw him coming down the outer aisle. I waited a moment then walked a few feet up the middle aisle and stopped to see the clown coming around the front and starting up the middle aisle after me. I high-tailed it to the back aisle and ran into the lobby. Most people who saw this pursuit happening thought it was amusing, and I watched several people laugh. I knew I had to get to someone I knew. The men in the house band were like secondary parents to me, so I knew they would protect me if I couldn't find Mom, Dad, or my siblings.

Once I got to the lobby, I turned right toward the dressing rooms, where I hoped to find someone. Nearly in tears, I found my brother Doug and told him a clown was chasing me. He put his arm around me, said "I'll protect you" and led me into the dressing room where all the men on the show, including Dad, were warming up and doing some last-minute rehearsal. In reality, I should have run there first, instead of into the theater. I have no idea why I chose the theater instead of backstage first.

I didn't know until later that when he heard about me being chased by the clown, the emcee of the show, a great man by the name of Fred Livingston, approached the producer of the show, local politician Ralph Hunt.

"Looks like we've got a problem tonight, Ralph," Fred said quietly as he put his arm around him.

"What kind of problem?"

"Some guy is in here in a clown outfit, and he just scared the daylights out of little Timmy Ritter, and chased him through the theater."

Ralph scowled, said "I'll take care of it" and went stomping off to find the clown. He got in the clown's face, almost nose to nose, and said, "You weren't invited here and you are scaring little kids! Get out now and don't come back!" He followed him out the door to make certain the situation was resolved.

After hearing that story, Ralph Hunt was my hero.

Nowadays, as a parent, remembering the event gives me the creeps. Had that clown been the kind of guy with harm on his mind, and if he had gotten hold of me, I shudder to think of what could have happened. Naturally I'm not generalizing, as many of my dear friends are Shrine clowns, but to a 4-year-old who's alone, they're all scary. It took a few years before I was ok with being near a clown.

PRESENTATION UPDATE

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



January:

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

February:

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:

As of right now, nothing extra schedule.

April:

13th: “The April 1880 Tornado Outbreak” I will be at the Webster County Historical Society in Marshfield, which meets at the Marshfield Senior Center, 427 W. Washington Street.

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.

May:

As of right now, nothing extra scheduled.

June:

7th - 8th: I won't be speaking but will be participating in the annual Between the Pages Writers' Conference in Springfield. If you're a writer and interested in this conference, stay tuned to my Facebook page for future posts with information about this great annual event.

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, Elfindale Manor, and now Mission Ridge.