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# THE RED-EYED RAVEN GAZETTE

The Official Newsletter of the Author Tim Ritter



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## WELCOME!



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

Here we are, the day before Thanksgiving. It's such a special time of year, as the holiday season officially kicks in. Some people like the hustle and bustle of the crowds, while others, like me, avoid it at all costs. Whatever your preference, as the husband of a small business owner, I'd be remiss if I didn't remind that you to shop local whenever possible.



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

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



## LET'S TALK CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

Well friends, it's that time of year when Timmy's mind is fully engulfed in holiday decorating. Yes, I'm talking about the blowmold kind...

Immediately after Halloween, I spent a full day putting away all the spooky decorations across our 660-foot frontage. It's actually a fairly intensive process, removing 136 blowmold figures, 53 resin jack-o-lanterns, 10 skeletons and one hearse. It was a monster of my own creation, you might say. As I've mentioned before on Facebook, I maintain a spreadsheet with every piece having its own individual inventory number. I learned this idea while working in the maintenance department of a chemical plant. At that facility, every motor, pump, tank, etc., had its own unique traceable number, and any maintenance or repair was connected to that inventory number. So, I adapted the idea to keep track of each decoration, what wattage of bulb it used, whether it was blowmold or resin, etc. That way I keep a running tally on how much power I'm using and the number of blowmolds in the display. For any item in the yard, the inventory number in my spreadsheet is permanently written with a Sharpie on the bottom of that piece. If one is damaged, it gets recorded. If one breaks beyond repair, it is recorded and then the following year it is deleted from the inventory.

One other aspect of how I handle this: I don't keep the light socket installed in each unit while it's stored over the course of the year. Light kits are not cheap (at least the ones of good quality aren't cheap). So instead of needing one for each figure and leaving the kit in when it's put away at the end of the season, I remove each one, remove the bulb, and put everything away. That keeps the number of light kits required down to a minimum, since the ones I use for Halloween can be used on most figures for Christmas and Easter. Yes, it adds work each season, but I don't mind, because it allows me to check each kit to make sure it's still in good working order. Sometimes the wires get nicked, or something gets cracked, and I wouldn't necessarily notice it if I wasn't putting one in each time.

For each item removed from the yard, there's also a fiberglass rod to remove as well. These rods keep the figure in place. Originally, I had an array of metal rods when I owned only a dozen or so figures. But as the collection grew, I needed more rods, so I went to the local farm supply store to see what they had in stock. When I told the guy at the service desk what I needed, he took me back to the warehouse to show me something else they had: fiberglass rods, four feet long and about 3/8" diameter. He said they were for electric fences but thought I should consider using them to keep blowmolds in place. It made sense, especially since I could easily cut one shorter as needed for smaller figures. So, I bought a bundle of twenty. Then went back for another bundle. Then another. Needless to say, over the last few years I've bought several bundles, and they are absolutely perfect for this. They hold up well in the wind as long as you drive them down at least six inches (depending on your ground, of course). And they are not as harsh on a light bulb as the metal rods are.

Back to the yard, after removing all the figures, rods, extension cords and countless power stakes, I spent an entire day cleaning up the yard. The Halloween decorations went out in late August. That means the last time the yard was mowed was late August. It looked a little rough, to say the least.

And then there were the leaves. They were everywhere. Yes, I know, I live in the woods. So there will be leaves. I get that. And I realize that after I mow and mulch up leaves, within 24 hours the yard will be covered with leaves again. But I have to at least try to keep it under control.

So my normal mowing time of 2 hours became 4 hours, but the yard got cleaned up. After that, it was time to start putting out the menagerie of Christmas and Thanksgiving decorations. And yes, I have a spreadsheet for that too.

When it comes to the details of laying out figures in the yard, I arrange figures usually in groups of odd numbers: threes, fives, and sevens. I was told several years ago that arranging things in odd numbers is more pleasing to the eye and follows the ideals of feng shui. Now I'll be the first to admit that I don't know diddly-squat about feng shui, but hey if it looks good and people like it, I'm in.

Naturally over the course of this year, I found a few new-to-me treasures that had to be added to the display. So, they got their own inventory number, a new light kit if needed, and made their way out to the yard. Plus, I discovered I needed more LED bulbs, extension cords, and power stakes. It's all part of the annual fun of keeping everything running.

I even put lights on the house this year. I haven't done that in a while, mainly because I hate crawling onto the roof, and nowadays I'm more breakable than I was when I was younger.

When it was all said and done, here's how the numbers ended up:

Number of Blowmold Figures: 235

Number of Power Stakes: 98

Number of Extension Cords: Not a clue

Wattage: 1004

Estimated cost per month to operate dusk to dawn every night: \$34.38

My mother-in-law once asked me if I put out a tip jar so that anyone who drives by can contribute to help pay for the cost to operate it. I told her no. First, because our little dead-end gravel road could never handle the heavy traffic if lots of people knew where to find us, so the spectators are limited. Secondly, since we use LED bulbs, the operating cost is minimal. So, no tip jar.

By the way, if you haven't already, please give my Author Tim Ritter Facebook page a Like, because within the next week or so I will announce the date and time for my Frog Acres Christmas Facebook Live broadcast. I'll take you on an evening stroll in the yard to look at this year's display.

Some scoffers look at the time and effort that goes into all of this and shake their heads. I get it. It's not for everyone. But these blowmold figures, and Christmas decorations in general, have been a deep passion of mine since I was a kid. So, to get to do this now, and to this extent is a genuine pleasure. The greatest reward is when we see the headlights of cars slowly driving by and hear children and adults alike marveling over what I have created. That makes it all worthwhile.

# Chasing the Chadwick Line Update



Work on *Chasing the Chadwick Line* continues, but as I've alluded before, writing nonfiction requires much research, and it never fails, new information, new sources, and new questions always arise.

I'm currently wading through some details about the railroad line's inception, how it came to be, and where the funding came from. It might not be considered a major detail in the overall scheme of things, but there may be a bigger story in it if I can verify some of the info I've seen. So that is becoming an interesting rabbit hole to slide down.

Additionally, I've come across some personal recollections of people who saw the train, were regular passengers, or marveled as it steamed into Chadwick. Some of them talk about the enormity of the iron beast, or remember fondly the crew members. Each of those recollections add to the personal, human side of the story, and I want to make sure each voice is heard.

And then two weeks ago I met a guy who claims to have a piece of the old Chadwick turntable. I told him we need to get together. He also told me that an elderly lady in Chadwick still has a stash of photographs from the train's heyday. So I've got to make contact with her if possible. And in the back of my mind remains the fact that there's an area in Ozark where I haven't walked yet (it's on private land), where I believe the train made its eastward climb out of the river valley. I want to see if the old roadbed remains, as I suspect it does. So efforts to try to get permission to walk the land continue.

So you can see there's plenty more to do. And it will all be worth it. Stay tuned!



# PRESENTATION UPDATE

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



Every month in this section I highlight one of my current presentations. Here's another one:

## **The Story of The Liberty Bell**

You know, sometimes when I begin work on a new presentation, I have the idea in my head that this will be a simple talk about something history, like in this case, the simple story of a bell that cracked that became a national treasure.

Oh heck no. There's no simple story here. Patriotic, yes. Interesting, absolutely. Simple? Cut-and-dry? Guess again.

The story about the Liberty Bell is fascinating. Its origins, the crack, the legends behind its use, and what became of it in the years after the Revolution are a twisting, winding tale of intrigue, errors, and rescues. This national treasure is much more than a big bell with a crack in it.

## SCHEDULE OF APPEARANCES

**January 17, 2024 - 12:00p.m.**  
**Marshfield Rotary Club**  
**Lions Club Building**  
**Marshfield, MO**  
**Presentation: *Tornado Outbreak of April 1880***

**April 20, 2024 - 10:30a.m.**  
**Republic Library**  
**Republic, MO**  
**Presentation: *Wild Bill Hickok and Davis Tutt: A Big Bucket of Ugly***

**June 8, 2024 - Time TBD**  
**Between the Pages Writers Conference**  
**Springfield, MO**  
**Presentation on Research. Title TBD.**

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

**Also TBD, another special evening presentation at Monroe Coffee Co in Fair Grove, MO.**

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