



Pris Nancarrow

Zanoni Mill
Ozark County, Missouri

The Old Mill Run

Quarterly Newsletter of the Ozark County Genealogical & Historical Society August 2010, Vol 22, No 2



Back row L to R: Oscar Morrison, Clifford-Luna, Tom Loftis, _____Shanks, Alton Hunt.

Middle row: Morton Morrison, A. P. Morrison, Jim Huffman, Ed Newton (manager)

Front row: Afton Morrison and Vasco Newton.

From the photo album of Pearl Hunt Luna, wife of Clifford Luna.

Zanoni baseball team circa 1910

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Times Past

Ozark County News
July 7, 1898

Samuel Burks of this place recently had a letter from his brother who is at Tampa, Fla., with Roosevelt's Rough Riders, who are ready to embark for Santiago.

Aug. 4, 1898

Thornfield – We understand by reading the papers that the 2nd Missouri regiment has gone to Porto Rico. If that be the case, Ozark County has one man, Thomas Norris, in the Porto Rican expedition.

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Dora Theatre

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Bakersfield's July 4th extravaganza was a highlight of the summer, as well as the big annual picnics at Tecumseh and Dora. The Famous Talkie Show always visited southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas during the cotton-picking season. The migrant workers packed the tent to see Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, and Tarzan serials. The Glasses lived in a small travel trailer that was pulled by one of the equipment trucks. They jokingly called it "the covered wagon."

In the early days, the Glass family showed movies in a tent behind Roy's Store in Dora. According to Marty Cropper Uhlmann, loud, recorded music announced the arrival of the show.

"It was a very exciting time," she said. "It was quite a deal to have a movie that close."

As a young girl, Mrs. Uhlmann played a part in the presentations because she sold popcorn in little paper bags to movie patrons. Between the two features, folks got up and stretched during an intermission, but there were no bathrooms.

After the start of World War II, shortages of gasoline and rubber for tires made Forrest Glass' traveling shows too expensive so he established permanent movie houses. In downtown Dora, he converted an old building that had been a cannery and a mechanic's garage into The Glass Theatre.

According to Dick Deupree, the "picture show" boasted proper theater seats and an elevated floor that had been constructed over the garage's grease pit. Ina Shipley Downen remembers that the theatre was plain but comfortable with a lobby where folks bought tickets and a showing room with wooden, folding movie seats. Just inside the entrance, a popcorn machine boosted snack sales with its tantalizing aromas.

Friday and Saturday were the big movie nights, and patrons purchased their tickets in the lobby then passed through a curtain into the theatre where a canvas screen hung on the wall. Mr. Glass operated a Holmes 35-millimeter projector from a separate room at the back of the building.

Ron Decker recalls the cost for the showings was about 25 cents; although, Mrs. Glass told Jim Cox that they often accepted fruits or vegetables in payment.

While Forrest Glass maintained and operated the pro-

jection equipment, Oneta handled public relations. She hired children to distribute handbills announcing the movie schedule, sold tickets and handled popcorn sales. As in her in-law's business, she was also responsible for keeping order.

Ron Decker remembers Mrs. Glass as being "a little on the gruff side," and Ina Downen, who regularly attended films with her older brother, Elbert Shipley, described her as "nice and friendly" but also as a woman "who kept order."



Forest and Oneta Glass in 1958.
Photo from the West Plains Gazette No. 13

One of the methods the Glasses used to maintain civility was to give the local law enforcement people free tickets for their families to attend presentations. Despite the calming presence of the law, Marty Uhlmann remembers regular fights between patrons of the Dora theatre.

Mrs. Uhlmann recalled one argument that began with a derogatory comment by one fellow about another fellow or his girl. The scrap began inside the theatre and continued outside after the combatants were ejected from the movie. Young Marty Cropper fled the scene to watch the fight from the porch of her family's general

store across the street from the theatre. Her mother did not deem the events fit for a young girl's eyes because she ordered her into the house and away from the excitement.

Ron Decker remembered an argument that escalated into a fistfight that knocked down the stovepipe on the wood-burning stove. Clifton Luna, Ina Downen and Noel Shipley all recalled similar sporadic disputes between patrons.

They observed that many of the young men attending the movies grew up wild on isolated farms, and their ideas of diplomacy frequently involved their fists.

Occasional violence failed to dim the romantic aura associated with the movies. When she was about 14 years old, Marty Uhlmann agreed to sit next to a boy from school during a show. To her surprise, when the lights came up, her father was sitting right behind her, sternly chaperoning his daughter's first date.

Rural electrification in the 1950s brought radios and even television into Dora homes, and the traveling movie theatre business suffered in a changing society. The last curtain came down on The Glass Theatre in 1957 when Forrest Glass sold the building to the Dora Assembly of God Church. Today, the old building looks much the same as it did when old-time movies thrilled the rural families of Dora, and it remains a touchstone to the rich history of entertainment in the Ozarks.

The Old Mill Run

*Quarterly newsletter
of the Ozark County, Mo.,
Genealogical &
Historical Society*

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One-room school book to be available in Sept.

The OCGHS's one-room school book should be finished in time for sale at Hootin and Hollarin this year, and maybe even sooner.

Editors Susan Ault and Janet Taber hope the book might even be finished in time for sale at Gainesville's All School Reunion Sept. 4, 2010.

Watch the *Ozark County Times* for details and for an opportunity to pre-buy the book at a reduced cost. As the *Old Mill Run* goes to press, the price and the title of the book have not been determined. See pages 11-12 for some excerpts from the book.

Fundraising for the Historium at mid point

Since our society approved the purchase of the old McDonald building in February, much has happened! The building has been acquired and completely emptied, down to its bare bones, and work has begun on renovation.

Our building's best feature, the original tin ceiling, once hidden by a dropped ceiling, is the first thing you will notice when you visit. It will be repaired and painted soon. New doors and windows in the back are installed, and work has begun to repair the walls prior to painting. Windows in front will also be replaced, and a new heating/AC system, wiring, lighting, bathroom and storage room, and floor repair are all scheduled in the next couple of months, with a goal of having the doors open for Hootin and Hollarin.

All these tasks are easy compared to our biggest hurdle: *fundraising!* We've sent out brochures to all members and other friends, made phone calls and have personally spoken with some potential donors. And many donations have come in! To date, we've received more than \$56,000, and for these gifts we are most grateful. In fact, though, we will need at least another \$50,000 to finish the building and outfit it.

Thank you for the generous support that you've already shown for this ambitious project. And please continue to find ways to support it, as we move ahead. Anything and everything you do to help is much needed and greatly appreciated.

Please contact any of the OCGHS officers listed to the left if you have questions about ways to help with the Historium. If you're on Facebook, see our page at <http://www.facebook.com/#!/group.php?gid=115211201844959>. And be sure to come visit your Historium at Hootin and Hollarin--we know you'll like what you see!

Janet Taber, president, Ozark County Historium, Inc.

Minutes of the April meeting in Springfield

The OCGHS met April 29, 2010 at the Springfield Greene County Library with 19 members and guests present.

The minutes of the Feb. 11, 2010, meeting were approved as printed in the *Old Mill Run*.

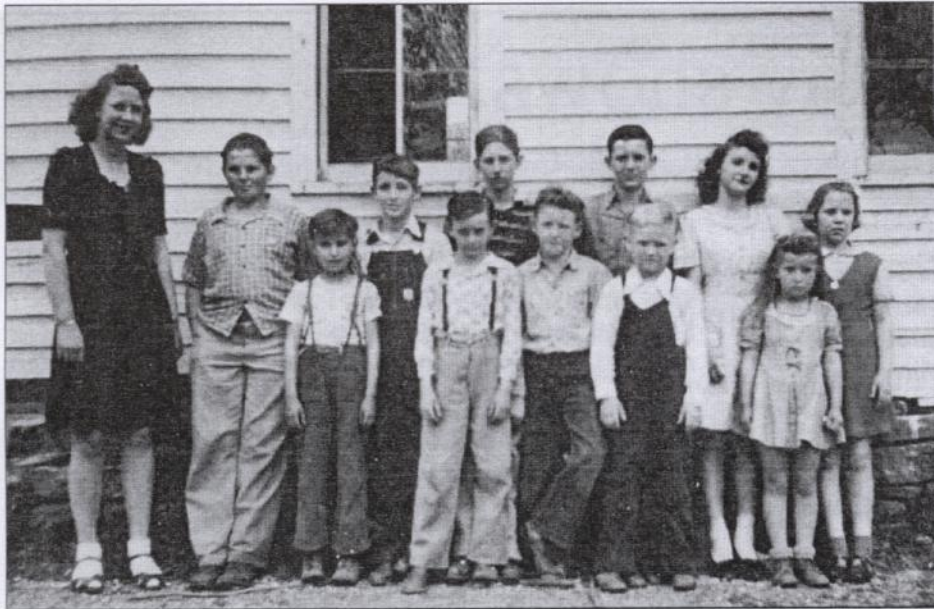
The treasurer's report shows a beginning checking account balance of \$16,098.50. Total disbursements of \$8,529.71 and total receipts of \$1,481.47 for an ending check book balance of \$9,050.26. The two CD's have a current balance of \$8,057.14 and \$5,098.44 for a total of \$13,155.58. Total value of all assets as of April 27, 2010, is \$22,205.84.

There are currently 244 members, 44 of whom are life members.

Under old business Janet Taber reported that remodeling has begun on the A.D. McDonald building. She reminded everyone that OCGHS members are also Ozark County Historium members.

A motion was made by John Harlin and seconded by Eldon Russell to pay the bills.

(Continued on page 3)



True Vine School 1945-46

Front: Eldon Billingsly, Harold Griffith, Billie Sallee, Carl Evans, Wilda Sue Billingsly. **Back:** Hildred Wallace Knight, teacher, Estel Eugene (Dick) Welch, Bob Sallee, Matt Stone, Max Griffith, Maxine Clarkson, Kathleen Evans. Also see page 11. (Photo courtesy of Hildred Wallace Knight).

Minutes

(Continued from page 2)

The one-room school book will hopefully be ready to sell by Sept. 4th at the Gainesville High School reunion.

A handheld paper fan from the A.D. McDonald store was given to the Historium by Glenda Upton McCullough, daughter of Stella Upton

There was no new business.

An interesting program was given by David Richards, department head of Library Special Collections at Missouri State University.

The next OCGHS meeting will be July 22, 2010, in the Century Bank Training Room at 10 a.m.

Susan Ault, Secretary

Letters

Gila County Historical Society
P.O. Box 2891
Globe, AZ 85502

We received a copy of your newsletter which contains the story on the Uptons in Arizona.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and members of the Gila County Historical Society, thank you for your thoughtfulness. This will be catalogued and entered into our museum archives.

The Uptons are a significant part of the history of Globe and Miami. Many peo-

ple remember fondly their business establishments in the area.

Next year we will be hosting a traveling Smithsonian exhibit about the history of America. I intend to include the Upton story in our part of the program.

Sincerely,
Bill Haak, Museum Director

Just received my copy of the *Old Mill Run*. Boy, did that bring back memories. Carylon Sue Bushong and I used to play hopscotch in the feed room of McDonalds store. I still have a blanket that came from there which was a gift for our wedding shower. I think I bought my first pair of high heels in there for graduation. We would get lunch meat and crackers and a bottle of pop, usually Grapette, or ice cream after school. Also, I enjoyed the article about the Ledbetters.

Sherrill (Harlin) Hardcastle

We are planning a commemorative event for the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Fredericktown, that took place on Oct. 21, 1861.

We are trying to locate descendents of soldiers who fought here. However, we do not have the names of the soldiers, but do have their various units on both

sides. Could you please post this email, include it in your newsletter or announce it at your meetings?

USA

1st Indiana Cavalry, 11th Missouri, 20th Illinois, 21st Illinois, 8th Wisconsin, 33rd Illinois, 17th Illinois

CSA

1st Cavalry, MO State Guard, 3rd Cavalry, 2nd Cavalry, Units under the command of Thompson, Lowe, Waugh, Farmer and Brown

We are planning a "gathering" to take place on a portion of the actual battlefield Oct. 21, 2011.

Carole Magnus

Foundation for Historic Preservation,
Fredericktown, Mo
magnus@fhphistory.org

Times Past

(Continued from page 1)

H. C. Feemster of Noble was in town today and ordered some bills printed announcing a big picnic at Noble Aug. 20.

Aug. 1, 1902

Bakersfield - We are informed that Miss Kitty Maxey of Mammoth Springs, Ark., as accepted a position in the store of J. W. Pumphrey and will shortly begin dispensing twine and wrapping paper. Miss Kitty is one of Mammoth Springs' most charming and accomplished ladies.

**Ozark County Times
June 19, 1903**

Geo. McDonald started Tuesday morning with a load of wire which he will distribute along the route of the new telephone line of Hogard & Son. They will begin stretching wire Monday.

July 28, 1905

The Gainesville band under the instruction of Prof. Force has advanced far enough to give open air concerts on the street, and to tell the truth, they play several pieces of music real well.

S. T. Edmonds of Theodosia moved to town this week and occupies the residence owned by J. E. Wood on the south side of High street. Mr. Edmonds has

(Continued on page 8)

Toby shows

provided early entertainment in Ozark County and elsewhere

By Larry Clark

Editor's note: Larry Clark grew up in the Tecumseh area and graduated from Gainesville High School. He developed an interest in the Toby Shows and researched the topic for his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Illinois.

"The tent show's a-comin'! The tent show's a-comin'!"

Even though telephones were few and far between in the 1920s, this exciting news traveled fast, spread by youngsters who had been promised a quarter by the "advance man" from the troupe of players who was in Gainesville to "paper" the town with advertising posters. Each kid would collect a quarter when the show arrived IF they showed up to help raise the tent.

Folks got excited over these annual visits. The performer's mission was to bring live drama to a community that was too small to sustain a permanent theatre structure. Borrowing from the circus the idea to use a tent, the company's vehicles hauled everything they would need to bring their shows to places like Ozark County. The actors usually set up their tent in a vacant field as close to town as possible and remained up to a week performing a different play each night. Gainesville ordinarily merited only a split-week visit, probably three days.

Hundreds of shows travelled America's dirt roads and highways bringing entertainment to the people. In addition to the play, the eager audience would enjoy vaudeville performances, musical interludes, humorously treated sales of boxes of candy with "a prize in every box"—one of which supposedly contained a "gen-ye-wine diamond ring." Following most performances, they could also remain for a "concert" but that would cost an extra admission fee.

More often than not folks in the rural audiences would see what was called a "Toby Show," named for a character that reappeared year after year in virtually every play the tent shows performed,

thus allowing the actors who performed the role of Toby to maintain a special relationship with the audience. Many people called the person who played Toby by his stage name in his offstage life as well as in his stage role. They saw him as a friend as well as a performer. Onstage, he was the stalwart (if sometimes bashfully reluctant) hero of the proceedings who—usually with a female partner named Susie—uncovered the villain and brought true love to the altar. It was as if the audience imagined that Toby was speaking for them in the struggle between good and evil that was portrayed on the stage, and they could depend on Toby to see that everything turned out for the best—to provide the happy ending that was often missing in their everyday lives.

The traveling tent shows dated back to the first decade of the twentieth century, but their heyday was in the 1920s before radio and the motion pictures muscled into their territory. The Great Depression also caused a lot of these travelling troupes to go under, although a handful continued to operate throughout the 1930s and even into the 40s and 50s. They might perform at a few of the choice spots on their old routes, but many concentrated on county fairs where they were more apt to encounter a built-in, ready-made audience. The Schaffner Players, a well-known and highly regarded Toby troupe that included some Missouri communities in their regular route, were even invited by the Smithsonian Institute to perform in Washington, D.C.

Often the plays did not contain a character anything like Toby. No problem. Toby would just ad lib it—wandering on and off the stage at will, in and out of the action, engaging in by-play with the actors, commenting on the play and the performance whenever he felt like it. Often the plays would be rewritten to include current problems, events and circumstances. No matter what the subject matter, Toby always managed to land in the middle of funny situations and to spout a healthy dose of homespun "cracker barrel" philosophy.

Some Toby actors became famous for their individual interpretations of the standard role, but because he was in every play, they were pushed into fixing much of his character by tradition. Actors followed a

(Continued on page 5)



Right: Fred Wilson, the first to assume the name of Toby. The picture was made about 1907 before the traditional costume and make up had been set.

Photo courtesy of Larry Clark.

(Continued from page 4)

standard approach to Toby's makeup: a red "scratch" wig; overemphasized, painted-on freckles; and blacked out front teeth. Still, they tried to play him as the typical rural character from the area in which their show traveled: he was a Midwest farm boy in the central plains, a hillbilly in the mountains of Tennessee and Kentucky and a cowboy in the West and Southwest, for examples.

But where the Toby actors really wowed their audience was in their ability to add their own special visual tricks to the slapstick humor that already filled the scripts. Any



Left: Ozark Countian Orr Hill joined the Toby Show for a season.

Orr had a great sense of humor, loved telling stories and could jig and tap dance.

Photo courtesy of Judy Ford Lyons.

Toby worth his salt was a master of mugging, rubber legs, bizarre glides and pratfalls. Remember, he often directed lines to the audience as well as the acting company,

so everyone on both sides of the footlights became his straight man. He also was skilled in quieting things down if the banter got out of hand.

The Toby plays usually dealt with a rural-city conflict in which—naturally—the rural values and characters came out best in the end. The actors and the company managers were always on the lookout for tidbits from the local community that could be ad-libbed into the dialogue and used as the basis for a joke or as an illustration of a point from the play. Orr Hill, an Ozark County lad who joined the troupe of a company that came through Gainesville and played out the season as an actor, told me that a local well-known citizen of the community took umbrage at a joke he thought was about him and sued the Toby show for defamation of character. As far as he knew, the suit never came to trial.

It is impossible today to sense more than a small part of the amusement, excitement and entertainment that Toby gave his audience. His peculiar off-stage role of bosom friend to the townspeople carried over into the dramatic performance, helping the audience identify themselves with the people and situations of the drama. The audience, literally, became a part of the play.

What happened to the Toby Shows? They made a half-hearted comeback after the Depression, but most were a hollow shell of their former selves. They failed to recognize that the complexion of the rural audience was changing and con-

tinued to seek an audience that would like to see Toby as he had appeared in his prime. As that group grew older and fewer in number, Toby comedians grew older and fewer in number. Some old timers, such as Cyp Brasfield who appeared on the Ozark Jubilee show filmed for national broadcast from Springfield, found a way to continue to entertain audiences. Alas, there were not many so lucky. And the shows, even in their heyday, suffered from poor acting in the supporting roles.

Rural communities were not totally without dramatic performances when the tent shows disappeared. There were always the class plays at the high schools and Christmas pageants at the elementary schools. Sometimes performers would visit from nearby communities: I recall seeing a minstrel show in the 1940s, put on by the Ava Lions Club, I believe, in what passed for the auditorium at the old Gainesville High School—a stage that folded up and stored on the wall at the west end of the gym.

Although I know of no attempts in Ozark County to form community theatre groups, I am aware of instances in which a "home talent" play would be prepared and performed for the community. In March 1948 I performed in such a play presented for a one-night run at the Banner schoolhouse in the Tecumseh area. I believe there was a raised platform at one end of the schoolhouse that we used for a stage, and some of the ladies rigged a curtain out of bed sheets. The names of the actors are on an accompanying notice taken from the *Ozark County Times*.

All who helped produce the show were from the Tecumseh area, save one. That was Paul Finley, one of my good friends at high school, who heard me talking about how we needed somebody to assist Audrian Garrett who was trying to handle all the technical needs—lights, props, sound effects (I recall an offstage gunshot), etc. Even though Paul lived in the western part of the county, he volunteered to come to our assistance. In fact, his association with us could only be described as whirlwind-like. He came home with me on the school bus on Friday, attended a rehearsal Friday night, met with Audrian on Saturday to go over responsibilities, worked the show Saturday night and returned on the school bus on Monday morning. What a trouper!!

It would be interesting to hear about other local efforts to bring live drama to communities in the county.

But, back to Toby. Even looking from today's vantage point, I believe the Toby shows were, as theatre scholar Norris Houghton labeled them, "a good show by any unprejudiced standard." And of this I am certain: While Toby lived, the theatre lived in rural America.

Left: Ozark County Times Feb. 26,

"A POOR MARRIED MAN"

Fri., March 5, at Banner School, near Tecumseh

WHO'S WHO

Professor John B. Wise.....	A poor married man.....	Larry Clark
Dr. Matthew Graham.....	A country Physician.....	Clendon Endicott
Billy Blake.....	A popular college boy.....	Clifford Garner
Jupiter Jackson.....	A black tramp.....	Jimmie Keener
Mrs. John Ford.....	Some mother-in-law.....	Velma Endicott
Zuie.....	Her charming daughter.....	Marie Garrett
Funa Graham.....	A little Freshman.....	Bonnie Lee Garner
Rosalind Wilson.....	A college Reporter.....	Zella Daugherty

**A 3-ACT PLAY STARTING PROMPTLY AT 7:00 P.M. ALSO
PIE SUPPER. Everyone Invited.**

Movies at the Glass Theatre in Dora

From a tent behind Roy's store to a building with 'proper theatre seats'

By Lin Waterhouse

The Famous Talkie Tent Show evokes happy memories for long-time Dora residents. From 1939 until 1957, the theatre provided entertainment to rural families that brightened their days of farm routine and expanded their vision of the world outside the Ozarks.

Ron Decker remembers himself as a 6-year-old boy enthralled by the movies shown in the town's only commercial entertainment venue in then-bustling Dora. The theatre closed when he was just 12 years old, but the years of its operation burn bright in his memory.

"It was great for the time," he said. "I don't know what people would have done without it."

Dora folks of all ages shared Decker's love of the movies. Entire families flocked to the showings by vehicle, in mule-drawn wagons, on horseback or on foot.

The history of traveling movie shows in south-central Missouri began in the 1920s when the productions offered amusement to the people who lived in the small communities that dotted the isolated hills and hollows of the Ozarks. Sawmill operator, Clifton Luna remembers that church and school halls often hosted movies that were well-attended by local residents.

Mr. and Mrs. Howard Glass offered one of the earliest introductions of rural folks to the talents of big-name actors like Randolph Scott, Tom Mix, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and John Wayne with their traveling tent show. The couple, along with their son Forrest, traveled what was called the "Gasoline Circuit," a regular route of stops at tiny towns throughout southern Missouri.

In 1981, Jim Cox described the theatre's set-up process in a *West Plains Gazette* article entitled "The Famous Talkie Tent Show." When the Glasses arrived in a small community, they first set up a calliope, a type of player piano operated with organ pipes that produced the distinctive, perky music often associated with circuses. A small gasoline motor powered the instrument that played popular songs, marches and waltzes. The music was played at a deafening level that reverberated throughout the countryside, announcing to the populace that the movies were in town.

As local people gathered to watch, a crew of workers erected a tent and hooked-up the gasoline generator that powered the production. Raising the tent and setting up the shows involved hard physical labor that would be repeated again and again at various locations throughout the warm weather months. Most of the Glasses' movie runs lasted a week in each community. After the final showing, the tent was struck, the equipment loaded onto trucks and the show moved on to its next stop.

The physically-demanding job of setting up and striking the movie tent required the Glass family to hire a series of helpers who were not always loyal or trustworthy. Some of their employees skimmed funds from the proceeds of popcorn sales and allowed friends to crawl under the tent for a fee smaller than the few cents formally charged for admission.

Forrest met Oneta Warner, a school teacher, at a picnic at Grand Gulch, and they married in 1928. With an eye toward the future, Howard Glass recruited his daughter-in-law to work in the business during her summer vacations.

"My job was to sell popcorn and tickets," Oneta told Jim Cox in 1981, "and to keep kids from crawling under the tent."

In April of 1939, Forrest and Oneta Glass decided to start their own business. After purchasing a tent, music makers and trucks, the young couple, along with Oneta's younger brother, Hubert Warner, launched the traveling movie caravan they named The Famous Talkie Show.

The Glasses' yearly cycle began with shows in Dora during the last week of April. Then, the caravan moved onto a week in Bakersfield and a week in Alton. The final week of the month was spent in smaller towns like Summersville, Hartshorn and Edgar Springs. Eager patrons lined up for tickets at every stop.

(Continued on page 10)

The building that once housed the Glass Theatre in Dora. Photo by Lin Waterhouse.

