# JAMES FARM JOURNAL

Newsletter of

"FRIENDS OF THE JAMES FARM"

VOLUME 5 • NUMBER 5 EDITOR — Milt Perry DECEMBER — 1985


## Last Visit of Jesse James With His Mother

Several days before he was killed in his home in St. Joseph, Missouri, Jesse James visited his mother. Accompanying him were Charley Ford and his younger brother, Robert, whom Jesse had recruited to assist robbing the bank at Platte City. Jesse intended on using this money to buy a farm in Nebraska and "retire" permanently.

On the evening before he left, Jesse and his mother sat on the cabin porch and had a long conversation. They discussed his plans, probably his reasons for beginning a new career and why he went into outlawry. Hatred for the Yankees, the banks, railroads, the Pinkertons and seeking adventure all played a role; but now at 34, Jesse was a mature husband and father with 2 children, a boy, "Jesse Jr." age 7 and a daughter, Mary, 3. Zee was pregnant. He was concerned about raising his children, and being home with his wife. In all his years of outlawry, he had not managed to save any money and now had only a couple hundred dollars. Zee was worried about the dangers he was facing and what might happen if he were captured. So, he was going to become a farmer and cattleman in Franklin, Nebraska. Zerelda was pleased at this because, though she never criticized Jesse for what he had done, she feared for him.

During the conversation he mentioned that he was certain she had heard of his ability as a marksman, and, to prove, he drew his pistol and with an uninterupted motion, shot a red headed woodpecker in a tree in the yard, about 90 feet away.

Zerelda told Jesse she didn't like the Fords (who were with him) and didn't trust them. Charlie, she said, seemed to have changed, didn't look her in the eye any more and she felt treachery. She also said she had asked Bob if he was Jesse's friend and that Bob had raised his hand and swore he'd rather die sooner than hurt Jesse — but she still didn't fully believe him.

Jesse said perhaps she might be right, but that he thought he was a good judge of men, and that Charley had lived with him for several months and he had recommended Bob. However, he didn't especially like Bob either, "I think he is a sneak," but Charlie stood by him. Anyway, he said, he only needed them for this one job and that it was very difficult to get reliable men because all of the old gang had been captured, killed or had gone other ways. Even Frank, since the last robbery, had taken his family and moved to Virginia. He promised he would be careful.

When he left he had held her and said, "Ma, if we don't meet again, we'll meet in heaven."

## James Farm Visitors Survey

The University of Missouri recently completed a study of tourists at the Farm. The results were encouraging indeed. The "Quality" of the attraction was given "Good" and "Excellent" grades by 94.73 percent of visitors; our admission fee was thought to be "Good" to "Excellent" by 89.48 percent. The "Quality of Service" was approved as "Good" to "Excellent" by 95.12 percent. You really liked our employees by voting that their courtesy was "Good" to "Excellent" by 97.78 percent and 93.78 percent of you think we run a "clean" attraction. No one voted "Poor" for any of these categories. The remaining small percentages were those who voted "Fair."

We think this is a nice vote of confidence by the public for our efforts.

## British Highwaymen

Ted Yeatman has also sent us material about British highwaymen, with whom Jesse James is often compared — and with whom he compared himself. Readers might remember he signed letters to newspapers with the names of Dick Turpin and Claude Duval. This indicates they too were quite familiar with them. Indeed, contemporary description of those holdups sound a great deal like those perpetuated here a century or two later.

One story is told of Captain James Hind who in 1649 even attempted to hold up a coach bearing none other than Oliver Cromwell himself.

Another story is told that says he found an innkeeper who was arrested for not being able to pay a debt to a moneylender. Hind paid the debt and had the man released, and, later waylaid the moneylender. (Doesn't it sound like the story about Jesse helping the widow, though!) All of this is in a book by Peter Newkirk called *The Crimson Book of Highwaymen.* Get it. It makes for good reading.


## More About Robert James

We were recently sent some interesting information by Ora Lunceford, of the Georgetown College (Kentucky) Library about Robert S. James, the father of Frank and Jesse, and a graduate of that college.

The librarian, Terry Martin, chanced to discover that James is listed as the first initiate of the Tau Theta Kappa Literary Society on May 20, 1839. Members wore a badge described as a silver star with a blue ribbon worn on the left collar of the coat. It was soon changed to a pink rose with a satin streamer a foot long attached to it, and in 1844 a silver star engraved 'T.O.K.' was added.

At meetings the Society discussed such important topics as "Whether a desire to be well received in female society exerts a greater influence upon the minds of men than the love of money" and other subjects that were chosen at the weekly meetings.

## Frank's Migrating Cabin

In 1893 Mrs. Zerelda Samuel, Frank and Jesse's mother, had an add-on room of the old cabin moved to one side of her yard so a nice little two-room Eastlake style cottage could be built in its place, adjoining the old kitchen and bedroom log house. It is now the front part of the house. It was thought she would sell this room to the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago and, indeed, when I began researching the history in 1978 it was thought that this was the case. However, no record of the cabin was found in the catalog of the fair and I began finding pictures of a cabin that she used as a henhouse near the house. The late Lawrence Barr, Jesse's grandson, told me that it was the room from the cabin and that it was not sent to Chicago. However, this cabin disappeared and I often wondered what happened to it. Then the historical society in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, six miles from here, sent me an ad from a 1911 paper announcing that Frank James would appear at a tourist attraction that consisted of this room and the house from Richmond, Missouri, where lived Bob and Charley Ford, who had conspired to shoot Jesse. I also found two post card views of the cabin in the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Allsion of Kansas City who have generously allowed us to copy them. But I lost track of the cabin again, until I found a clipping that noted Frank was moving it to Hot Springs, Arkansas in late 1911. Then, Jack Roberts of Spokane, Washington, who was touring the farm happened to mention that his father had worked as a "barker" with Frank James in Hot Springs! Mr. Roberts even had pictures of it and has kindly copied them for us. He said that his father related that Frank's partner abscounded with the proceeds of the summer of 1911 and Frank and his father had to live in the cabin that winter after which the cabin was dismantled and stored.

I am still tracing its wanderings and wonder if it will show up again. In October I visited Hot Springs. Though the cabin is gone, I did locate where it was exhibited in "Happy Hollow," along with shooting galleries, photo shops and ice cream stands. Though the hotel Frank stayed in and later "held court" in, the Arlington, has been taken down, another Arlington was built across the street.

## Jesse's Civil War Wound

Ted Yeatman, of Nashville, a Board member of the Friends has been researching the incident of Jesse's wounding at the end of the Civil War. The story has been garbled as it passes down. Jesse was shot *after* (not before) he surrendered near Lexington, Missouri in May, 1865. It had been reported he was shot by a Wisconsin Union Cavalryman, but no such name has been found.

Ted has been attempting — and I think he is on the right track — to locate the exact spot this happened and the creek Jesse lay in afterwards. Perhaps next summer we can pinpoint all these locations.

## The Samuel Family

Dr. Till M. Huston of Athens, Georgia, has again found some interesting and valuable material about the Samuel Family. He has identified the mother of Reuben Samuel, Frank and Jesse's stepfather. Poking around the courthouse in Woodford and Gerrard Counties in Kentucky, he has discovered that Fielding Samuel's (Reuben's father) first wife was Louisa Bond of Owen County. She died prior to 1838 by which time Fielding had married again — to Mary White. Huston has also con-

firmed that Reuben's grandfather (also named Reuben) married Mary (Polly) Letcher, sister of one of Kentucky's governors. He has even located Fielding's original farm in Kentucky. Now *that* is good research!

Coincidentally, we found out that Reuben came to Missouri earlier than we had supposed. According to a biography in the Kearney, Missouri *Monitor* in 1893, he said he came to Clay County with his father in 1849. He returned to Kentucky, then attended the Ohio Medical College in Cincinnati in 1850-51. He came back to Clay County in 1852 and practiced in Liberty for two years. In 1854 he moved to Greenville (3 miles from the James Farm) and had his office in a store operated by William James, a brother of the father of Frank and Jesse. It was here he met their mother who "was good looking and quite lively," and subsequently married her in September of 1855. We have found a prenuptial agreement they signed in which she retained ownership of 6 slaves and the 200 acre farm, in the Clay County Court records.

## "The Last Days of Frank & Jesse James"

Details about the latest movie of the Jameses are now available. It will be called "The Last Days of Frank and Jesse James" and is being filmed in Tennessee. It will star Kris Kristofferson as Jesse, Johnny Cash as Frank, Willie Nelson at General Joe Shelby and Ed Bruce as newspaper editor John N. Edwards. The film will be produced by Joseph Cates and it is being directed by William Graham who recently finished the seven hour mini series *Mussolini* staring George C. Scott.

The two hour film will be shown on NBC television in 1986.

The story as we understand it, will concentrate on the latter years of their lives, a good part of which was spent in Nashville, when they tried to "go straight."

Johnny Cash is no stranger to Frank James. He sang the role on a record album called the "Legend of Jesse James" by Paul Kinnerly several years ago.

## Random Notes –

It was reported that, during the recent Summit Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, that the translator for Chairman Mikhail S. Gorbachev got the Rev. Jesse Jackson's name confused and introduced him as the "Rev. Jesse James." (!!)

A burlesque theater in Kansas City is at it again: this time the featured dancer was none other than "Little Jessie James!" We fully expect that in the future they will have someone named "Colley Younger."

### "Wild Bill" Thomason

Thomason was an uncle by marriage of the James boys. He came to Clay County as a lad with his brother, but went west and became a Mountain Man. His brother Robert married their maternal grandmother, Sarah Lindsay Cole Thomason.

During the Mexican War, he was commissioned a Lieutenant and was cited for gallantry in combat. After the war, he returned to the mountains.

In the mid-1850's he returned to Clay County.

He was an imposing figure; nearly six feet tall, sturdily built "with muscles like toughened steel". He dressed in beaded leather buckskins, wore a fur hat and moccasins. His thick black hair hung below his waist and was often tucked under his belt which held a knife and tomahawk. He wore a powder horn slung over his shoulder. He had a thick beard. He slept on the ground and ate with his fingers.

For all his ferocious appearance, Thomason was "mild mannered, gentlemanly and courteous, with a grave respect for the good people of his old home and community."

He taught Frank, Jesse and Jim Cummins to ride and shout like Indians on his locally famous spirited black horse that he had captured wild. He showed them how to ride flat against the horse's neck, to shoot from under his neck; how to shoot a rifle and how to yell like an Indian and to put one's ear to the ground to listen for sounds. He told them of Indian wars, bear hunts, buffalo hunts (how to jump on the back of a buffalo and kill him with a knife – Indian style), danced and sang Indian style for them.

He also equipped them with cornstalk muskets and showed them how to drill army style.

As Jim Cummins said, when the Civil War began no one was better equipped to be a guerilla than they. These skills also served them well when they became outlaws.

## The Skeleton of "Jesse James"

Over the years many ingeneous schemes have been hatched to make money off the James legend. Perhaps the most infamous is the case of the so-called skeleton of Jesse James, a notorious carnival attraction with a motorized jawbone.

Our story begins in the summer of 1938 when a moth-eaten carnival made its way to the small town of Trimble, in West Tennessee. For one thin dime one could gaze upon the "remains" of "Jesse". Though only a skeleton of his former self, the boney right hand still clutched a trusty six-shooter. At this time the jaw would flip open and shut with a cord pulled by an employee of the show. As fate would have it, the owner ended up flat broke and when a truck broke down the Mayor, Will Hamilton Parks, staked the man $20 for repairs, keeping the skeleton as collateral.

"He told me he was going to Halls and would bring the money back on Monday ... but he never told me which Monday it would be, because he hasn't come back yet", commented Parks in a 1974 interview.

In the intervening years the skeleton became a local curiosity, kept in a cabin on Parks' property. It also acquired a motorized jaw in place of the cord. In 1974 "Jesse" once again went on tour, after a 36-year retirement, appearing at the Hickman, Kentucky, Bicentennial celebration and the Kentucky State Fair.

"We don't pretend to say the bones are those of Jesse James", commented Paul Wespheling, Jr., who brought the skeleton to Hickman. "It's no more Jesse than you or I are ... I don't want to be the laughingstock of the county." Nevertheless, that's how it was billed at the fair, bringing in the rubes just like in the good old days.

– Ted Yeatman

## N.O.L.A.

Friends Board Member Phillip Steele and myself attended the National Outlaw and Lawman History Association Annual Rendezvous in Reno, Nevada, July 24-27. Two people came there looking for connections with the James family – having read about the meeting in the local newspapers. They were John James of the University of Nevada - Reno and Dorothy Wilfong of Sparks, Nevada.

At that meeting I was elected to the Board of this national organization and I recommend our members to join. Members get a handsome *Quarterly* which contains well researched articles. (The latest number has a piece by our Phillip Steele about Frank and Jesse's sister, Susan.) Members also get a newsletter and a chance to attend their rendezvous, which in July 1986 will be in Tucson, Wyoming and in Kansas City in 1987.

Dues are $20 a year and can be sent to the NOLA office, Box 1701, Hamilton, MT 39840.

Why not join today!!

**Yes, I wish to join the Friends of the James Farm**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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| | |
|---|---|
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| Family | $30.00 per year |
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