

# JAMES FARM JOURNAL

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EDITOR — Milt Perry

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## "Life and Times of Jesse James a Success"



*Frank Higgins, Author*

The outdoor historical drama, "The Life and Times of Jesse James", was a success in spite of uncooperative weather. About 1200 persons saw it and all have said they enjoyed it and encourage its production during the summer of 1986.

The play was written by Frank Higgins, a Kansas City playwright who has written several plays that have been produced in New York and California. It was directed by Jim Tibbs, who directs Hallmark's Crown Center Coterie Theater in Kansas City. Tibbs' previous play, "Charlotte's Web", received rave reviews. The main roles were all played by professional actors. The play was produced by Clay County.

The play is set at the James Farm in the summer of 1901. The audience actually plays the role of tourists who visit the historic site one evening that summer. They are greeted by Frank James and his mother, Zerelda Samuel, who begin to talk about events that occurred there in the past. Frank tells their visitors that they have hired some actors (whom he introduces) to play some of their roles. These actors have been strolling through the audience previously visiting with individuals while a troubadour, Chris Edwards, sings several songs associated with Jesse James.



*Dr. Samuel with Mrs. Samuel*

The porch of the old cabin and the yard in front of it is the stage and props are some furniture and chairs. The audience sat on bleachers erected outside the fence.

This is a most unique way to interpret an historic site ... to enact the actual events on the exact spot they really happened.

Frank and Zerelda tell about the young Reverend Robert S. James and Zerelda acquiring the farm, the birth of Jesse; Robert's departure to California; Zerelda's marriages; the sibling rivalry between Frank and Jesse; Frank's love for Shakespeare; and their training in the ways of stalking and riding and shooting by their Mountain Man great-uncle, "Wild Bill" Thomason.

Frank joins the Confederate Army and is captured

after the Battle of Wilson's Creek. Paroled home, he is eventually ordered to join the Home Guards. He refuses and joins Quantrill's raiders. A gripping scene is when a group of Union militia riders attack the home and hang Dr. Reuben Samuel, Jesse and Frank's stepfather to make him tell where Frank was.

The play takes up the early outlaw years in Act II — dwelling on the complicated reasons why they began — after Jesse's surrender and his being severely wounded, which is followed by Zee Mimm's tender care and their courtship.

Pathos and comedy are mixed, with the audience hugely enjoying the recreation of a train robbery as seen by "the boys" who follow an outlandish description



*James family after bomb exploded in cabin*



*Mrs. Samuel, Dr. Samuel and Chris Edwards, musician*



*Zee James caring for wounded Jesse*

written by John N. Edwards of the *Kansas City Times*, or the melodramatic presentation of the famous Jesse and the widow story with Frank playing the wicked banker — complete with sneers, mincing grins and nasty chuckles. People (including the actress who played Zerelda) cried when little Archie Samuel was killed by a bomb thrown into the kitchen by raiding detectives. The special effects of the explosion were especially startling, prefaced by detectives with flaming torches surrounding the house, passing through the audience prior to tossing the device in the kitchen. The resulting explosion, sound, flash and smoke were quite violent. Little Archie dies exactly where the real boy perished in 1875.

The play ends with the funeral of Jesse in the yard after Zerelda tried to warn him of her misgivings about Bob and Charlie Ford who had accompanied Jesse on what was to be his last visit to his mother. Earlier are scenes depicting the fears of the wives of Frank and Jesse, the horror of the escape from the Northfield Raid, and the wives' demands for a life without constant fear.

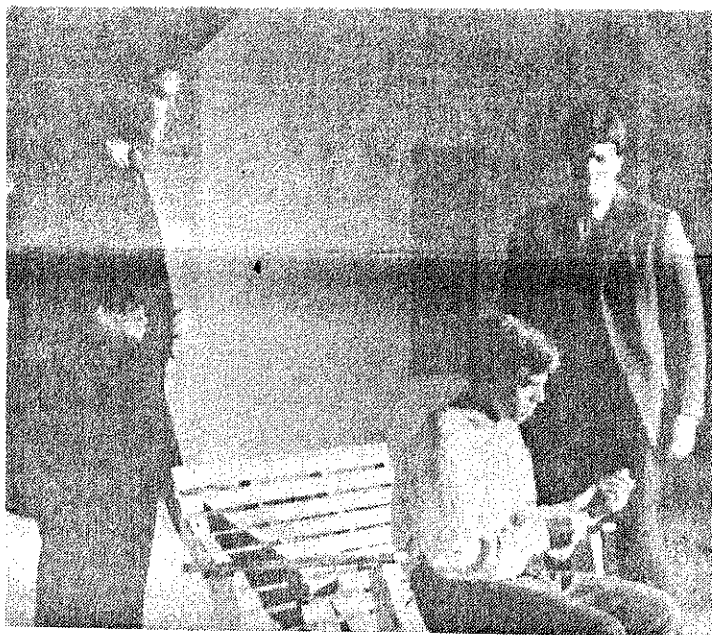
I was able to appear on a dozen radio and TV talk shows about the production and we received generous publicity in the Kansas City area press. Unfortunately, the rain dampened attendance.

The play was planned for September 20, 21 and 22. A dress rehearsal for invited guests was held September 19. Two performances were rained out that weekend and the single one was a sell-out in spite of continually threatening rain, thunder and lightning. We decided to extend the run to the next weekend, September 27, 28 and 29. Again it rained. Only the Friday night performance was

in beautiful weather. Saturday night, with 200 people there, the play was stopped because of rain, then started again after the shower. The people in the audience sat through it and were enthusiastic with their applause. Sunday night was rained out!

If we had had decent weather, we would have had sell-outs each night.

Now we are considering whether to show the play for several weekends next summer.



*Scene with Frank, Jesse and Cole Younger*

**JESSE JAMES PLAYBILL**

Enclosed with this issue is one of the playbills that were given to playgoers at the drama "*The Life and Times of Jesse James*". We chose to print it on the reverse of copies of the famous wanted poster issued by the State of Missouri. It will surely become a collector's item, which is why we decided to give each member a copy. The reminder is being sold over the counter here for 50 cents each. If you wish more, send 50 cents for each. We also have several posters advertising the play and a few unused tickets in three colors — one for each proposed night. If you wish a copy of each for your collection (free) let us know.

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

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- Student ..... \$15.00 per year
- Supporting ..... \$50.00 per year
- Benefactor ..... \$100.00 or more per year
- Corporate ..... \$100.00 or more per year

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