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The Drama, "Life and Times of Jesse James"

At 8:00 P.M., on September 20, 21, and 22, Clay County, Missouri, will unveil a new outdoor historical drama based on events that actually occurred at the old James Farm, near Kearney, in the northern suburbs of Kansas City.

More than three dozen movies and many plays based on Jesse James have been performed, but none of them has placed a premium on historical accuracy. Jesse has been portrayed as an all-around nice guy by Tyrone Power, a pathological killer, and all shades in between. There have even also been musicals based upon his career.

For the first time, this is a play that will use established facts and events, and the characters will be as they were, based on historical research. Most prominent of them besides Jesse, will be his mother Zerelda James Samuel; Frank; Jesse's wife, Zee; Annie, Frank's wife; and Dr. Ruben Samuel, their stepfather.

Events portrayed will include the hanging of Dr. Samuel by Federal militia; the explosion in the cabin of an incendiary device thrown by raiding detectives; Jesse's marriage, posse raids, Jesse's funeral and other events that took place here.

The script is being written by Frank Higgins, of Kansas City, who has written several fine plays. The director is Jim Tibbs a talented director whose plays have received rave reviews.

Production of this drama by Clay County is an unique way to interpret events that took place at an historic site, and, it is believed, this will be the first such play to be presented on the exact spot where they happened.

The porch of the old cabin and the yard in front will be the stage and Frank and his mother will greet the audience as if they were visitors who came to the farm in 1902 — as they actually did. The events they will tell the tourists will then be enacted for them by professional actors. Horses and wagons will be used during the performances. Much of the play will be centered on how the family reacted to the events of which they became a part. The script will leave it to the audience to decide whether Jesse was bad or good — it will not pass judgement, but his reasons for doing what he and Frank did will be presented.

If we are satisfied with these performances, we plan to present the drama weekends next summer and following years. Admission will be \$3.00 for all seats.

Rev. Robert S. James' California Grave

Baptist minister Robert S. James, father of Frank and Jesse left for the California gold fields in the late spring of 1850. He intended to remain there a year. Historians have long speculated over his reasons for going. In Clay County, he was very successful, having a large farm, a young wife and three young children (Frank 7, Jesse 3 and Susan an infant); he was pastor of several churches, and a member of the founding board of William Jewell College in Liberty. Yet he planned to be gone for a year.

Some historians think he wanted to bring religion to the gold fields; others think he would join his brother, Drury, selling cattle to the miners; or that he wanted to find gold for his churches and family, and still others think the relationship between he and his wife, Zerelda, was such that he needed "to get away" for a while.

Perhaps it was all of these.

In any case, he died of a fever on August 18, 1850, at Hangtown, a few days after his arrival.

In 1868, Frank and Jesse tried to find his grave but could not, nor has anyone else done so. The courthouse there burned many years ago destroying all records and there was no newspaper.

Evidently, the graves were marked with wood headstones and a terrible fire in 1856 destroyed the town — and the markers.

A recent visit to Placerville — the town's modern name — by myself resulted in finding some interesting information. There are two old cemeteries, both with large plots without markers. In the City Cemetery, is the headstone of C. W. Coy who died on Sept. 5, 1850, not long after James — so it is evident that the deceased of that time were buried here. It is possible Robert James lies in one of the now unmarked plots.

A new Jesse movie? We hear that CBS Television may film a new film about Jesse James to be released next year.

Watch for announcements.

A New Jesse James Motel

A new Best Western motel is being built at the Kearney, Missouri, exit off of I-35, only 3 miles from the James Farm. Fittingly, it will be called the "Jesse James Motel". It will have 40 rooms, swimming pool and will be adjacent to several restaurants. It will open later this year. We welcome this facility which we are certain will be used by visitors to the James Farm.

James Farm Visitors

We have been visited by many interesting people this summer. Among them were the Thompsons of Russellville, Kentucky, who have purchased and restored the beautiful house of Nimrod Long, whose bank was robbed by the James gang in 1868. It is a lovely brick house, adjacent to the town square, and the bank. The bank, as you may remember, was restored a short time ago.

Price Brandenburg of Witter, Arkansas, was here recently and told us that it was his grandfather, Joe Brandenburg, who was the Union soldier that shot Frank James during the Civil War.

Fred Ross, of Independence, Missouri, told us about attending reunions of veterans of Quantrill's raiders in 1912. He remembered Frank James especially — who demonstrated the fast draw. Fred was attending the old Benjamin Harrison School nearby and slipped over to visit the reunion. He told of the high spirits of these old timers and how they would argue and sometimes fight. The last such reunion was in 1916.

FOR TRIVIA COLLECTORS

It used to be that discussing trivia was a pleasant little tease between acquaintances. Now, its big business and has invaded the desk calendar world — but be careful. The 1985 calendar told us on June 16, 1985, that the first person to play Jesse was his son, Jesse Jr., in "Jesse James Under the Black Flag" in 1921. That's correct. Where the calendar erred is that the sequel to this film evidently was never finished, as Jesse Jr., and his family and friends lost so much money on the first picture they never made the second one, to be called "Jesse James as the Outlaw." (The calendar said the film was made.)

1985 Reunion

We will host the 1985 James Reunion at the James Farm at 2 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 21st.

There will not be a formal program this year. In the past, members have asked for more time to visit and exchange information. This time all the members are encouraged to bring family material and "show and tell" it together. They may complete lineage charts, identify relatives and locate cousins.

We will have picnic tables available for "meeting and eating". Members will be able to tour the James home and the beautiful restored pre-Civil War Claybrook plantation nearby. Bring your own food for a picnic. Your membership card will admit you free of charge.

If members wish to attend the Jesse James historical drama at 8 p.m., that night, they can do so by purchasing tickets that afternoon. Admission will be \$3.00 per person.

You may wish to attend the huge Jesse James Festival Parade in Kearney that morning at 11 a.m., visit the craft fair there, and go to the United Rodeo Association performances that weekend.

On Sunday afternoon at 2 p.m., you might want to watch the annual Frank and Jesse James Pistol Shooting Contest at the farm.

Jesse James Scrip

Scripophiles are a peculiar breed of collectors who shell out hundreds of dollars for stocks and bonds issued by companies that no longer exist because of the securities' historical or aesthetic appeal. One of the leading sources of scripophilic material is Antique Stocks and Bonds of Williamsburg, VA, headed by G. H. Garrison.

One of the documents that Garrison offers for sale, at \$55, is the \$1,000 Chicago & Alton Railroad Company bond that carries an image of the last train ever robbed by Jesse James. Legend has it that James was so impressed by the courage the train engineer showed in resisting him that he gave him two silver dollars and said, "Have a drink on Jesse at the next stop." In a similarly generous mood, Garrison sends each purchaser of the bonds a replica of a Jesse James "wanted" poster.

— from *Moneysworth*, Summer 1985

N.O.L.A.

Friends board member Phillip Steele and myself attended the rendezvous of the National Association of Lawman and Outlaw History in Reno, Nevada, July 24-27, and I was elected to serve on the board of that organization. We will have a joint meeting with them in Kansas City in July 1987.

An indication of the interest in Jesse James was shown by newspapers in Reno and Carson City, which published interviews with me about him.

Also, two persons, one from Reno and another from Sparks, Nevada, sought us out. They think they may be relatives of the Jameses.

1986 HISTORICAL MEETING

An historical conference will be held in the summer of 1986 by the "Friends" at a date and place to be announced later. The Executive Committee is presently working on plans.

The 1987 historical conference will be in Kansas City together with the annual meeting of the National Association for the Study of Outlaws and Lawman History, the last weekend in July.

Details will be announced later.

"The James Boys Were the Robin Hoods of Mo."

(Tom Bodine in the Paris [Mo.] Mercury 1915)

Looking back now it is not so difficult to understand the attitude of mind Missourians held toward the James boys and the band of outlaws gathered about them forty years ago. Most of these men were former Confederate soldiers, had seen service under Anderson and Quantrell, the most daring and desperate of guerrillas, and later had been with the dauntless Shelby in his daring and jaunty ride across the border into Mexico.

They were among the "unsurrendered" and were the incarnation of the heroic ideals of a conquered people to whom bloodshed had become a matter of the commonplace through four years of civil strife relentlessly waged. There was scarcely a county north of the river in the homes of whose people they could not find sympathy and refuge when hard pressed by the servants of the law. Until pride had healed and some of the resentment at least left by the war had subsided and a sense of law and order had reasserted itself, hostility to them was accounted treason.

Their right to rob and kill was not questioned until, with the advent of the younger members who had not been soldiers, but were mere desperados and wanton in the desire to murder, it was exercised indiscriminately.

From that moment, sympathy for them began to wane. The most unpopular incident connected with Crittenden's term as governor was the immunity granted Bob Ford following his assassination of Jesse James at St. Joseph. We recall clearly a group of school boys on a green sward at Paris and the heroic indignation they expressed when one of their number, a youthful *avant coureur*, came running toward them at the noon period, shouting excitedly at the top of his boyish voice, that Bob Ford had killed Jesse James. The news had just been flashed over the wire to every hamlet in the state and the covenant of hatred the boys bound themselves to was indicative of the mental attitude taken in a majority of rebel homes in Missouri at that time.

Other peoples, not having gone through the cruel stress of border warfare, could not of course understand this feeling and the state suffered as a result. Yet the psychology of it was natural.

Following the Norman conquest, Robin Hood and his merry men were the heroes of Saxon England — largely because they preyed upon and at the same time eluded the conqueror and defied his law, which in itself was a symbol of oppression. Robin robbed only the rich Norman, which he had a perfect right to do; was a benefactor to widow and orphan, and a friend to all Saxons. The Thane sheltered him, the swine herdsman hid and protected him. Around him in myth and story was built a fabric of imperishable romance, and it is astonishing with what fidelity to type both have been preserved around the James boys in the unwritten literature of Missouri.

Here, too, were the Little Johns, the Friar Tucks and the Allan Dales. Here were mystery and romance and grim humor at the expense of the law — the sudden sally, the hair breadth escape, the hidden refuge. The usurer held up along the roadside and a pot of gold at the widow's door; unique meetings in the open ways, shooting tournaments showing marvelous skill, and resourcefulness in the

face of peril little short of wonderful — legends in replica the originals of which were built around the dauntless and daring outlaw of Sherwood Forest centuries ago, into the warp of each woven the scarlet thread by a people grown accustomed to the shedding of blood.

Last week an old and broken man, (Frank James), one of two survivors of the Nation's most noted outlaw band died, having outlived the glamour that hedged him about in his early years, and now it is all understandable. He, like his comrades, was a man of iron grit, schooled as a boy to reprisal and murder, and romance had passed years before. Even his dramatic entry into Governor Crittenden's office, the delivery of his pistols, the voluntary surrender and the subsequent trial are but dimly remembered incidents. The stress of newer and bigger things has almost obliterated the consciousness of the fact that this man was among the greatest outlaws in history, that for twenty years in the midst of an encroaching civilization, he defied the power and outwitted the intelligence of half a dozen populous states.

Devil's Gulch —

A persistent story claims that during his escape after the Northfield, Minnesota, robbery, Jesse James jumped his horse across a 20-foot wide chasm near Garretson, South Dakota, known as "Devil's Gulch". The gulch just west of the Minnesota state line, was recently visited by Friends President, Marty McGrane, who sent us a photo of it.

The chasm can now be crossed on a foot bridge and thus has been preserved as a park. A river flows through it, 50 feet beneath the bridge.

Garretson is only a few miles northeast of Sioux Falls.

ZEE JAMES' HOUSE

Last summer, we were called by a reporter from the Kansas City *Star* who informed us that he was investigating a possibility that the house Zerelda James (Jesse's widow) had lived in was still standing. We had thought it had been demolished years ago, because a vacant

lot is at the old address. However, according to our new source, it was moved a couple of lots down the street and received a new address. A visit with the current owner confirmed their stories and we think we are on the right track. At this writing it does appear that it was her house. It is in an area of the city that has seen much demolition for land clearance. We hope this house will survive.

A New Jesse James Museum

At dusk on July 21, 1873, a Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad express train was derailed on a blind curve near Adair, Iowa. A gang of men had loosened a rail, tied a rope to it and pulled it free. The train engineer was killed when the locomotive fell on its side. The express company safe and some passengers were robbed. Then, shouting their farewell, the gang rode off waving their hats. Though pursued into Missouri, they were never caught. Descriptions matched those of the James and Younger brothers. According to William A. Settle's fine book, *Jesse James Was His Name*, it was the first time public opinion accused Jesse of being head of the gang.

A new museum has been opened in Adair. It is called the "Jesse James Section House Railroad Museum" and is in a house built in 1869 to house engineers who surveyed the railroad.

It then became the home of the section foreman. The gang evidently ate there before the robbery. Among exhibits are sections of rail taken from the site of the robbery.

Adair is on I-80, between Des Moines and Omaha.

BOOKS

(1) <i>Jesse James Was His Name</i> by William Settle	\$7.50
(2) <i>Background of a Bandit</i> by Joan Beamis & William E. Pullen (genealogy)	\$6.00
(3) <i>Goodbye Jesse James</i> (collection of newspaper articles)	\$4.50
(4) <i>40 Years of History at the James Farm</i> by Martin McGrane	\$4.50
(5) <i>Jesse James and Bill Ryan at Nashville</i> by Ted Yeatman	\$3.00

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

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MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY:

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