

# JAMES FARM JOURNAL

Newsletter of  
"FRIENDS OF THE JAMES FARM"



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EDITOR — Milt Perry

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## Meeting Experiences

"You're going to a *what?*" and "That sounds great! Wish I could go." Those were the two reactions I got from friends who learned that I was attending the Friends of the James Farm annual meeting. It had all started a few years ago when I watched *The Long Riders* on my VCR. When I explored the historical background of the story it turned out, as is so often the case, that the reality was far more fascinating than Hollywood's fictions. When I first heard of the convention I didn't think I'd be able to make it, but then decided to fly out for the Saturday meetings and banquet. It fit in well with my long-range plans to relocate to the Kansas City area early in 1988.

I didn't make the tour but had already seen most of the sites. I wondered if other people had the same reactions that I did: amusement, for example, that the Liberty bank's vault was always left open — nobody would be crazy enough to rob a bank in broad daylight. And were they, I wondered, as surprised to find the James Farm still in a rural setting? I'd lived for 28 years in Atlanta, a once beautiful city turned sterile megalopolis, where the house in which *Gone with the Wind* was written will soon be demolished in the name of "progress". The difference was heartening.

The first person I met at the Park Place Hotel was Ruth Corder Fitzgerald, who'd given a talk earlier on Clell and Ed Miller. We emphasized together about the pitfalls of doing research at the Library of Congress (let one clerk misplace a book and it might not be seen again for 50 years!); and she told me about how she'd devoted whole vacation trips to research. At the booksellers' tables I browsed through books whose titles I'd seen in bibliographies but had never been able to find.

Some of my reactions, I suspect, were typical of new members. Jesse James and his cohorts have by now moved into the realm of myth; and meeting family members seemed unreal. Before I'd left Atlanta, friends had predicted jokingly that "Jesse James grandson would be a banker." They were close: a great-grandson turned out to be a superior court judge. And I met Ethel Rupe Owen, Jesse's granddaughter, who remembered having met Cole Younger in her childhood. History is that close to us, I thought.

At the Friends of the James Farm annual meeting I learned for the first time of the new museum at the farm. Milt Perry mentioned stolen items and an anonymous caller who'd offered to sell them back; and I tried to think of a "sting" operation to catch the thieves. I also found an answer to critics who'd objected to my interest in the subject on the grounds of "glorifying crime"; the revelation that Jesse James is among the American historical figures most often associated with historical preservation. (He's number three: George Washington and Abraham Lincoln are numbers one and two.) Later, at the banquet, I became acquainted with one of Doc Holliday's descendants and met Wilbur Zink, who gave me an autographed copy of his book when I told him about my particular interest in the Younger family.

There was little that was dramatic that weekend; but I have a different perspective on history now. I know many people who brag about "living in the now" and having no interest in history. I used to be irritated by such people; now I only pity them. They don't know what they're missing.

— Marcia Elvidge, Atlanta, Georgia

## Our 1988 Annual Meeting

The Friends of the James Farm will have its annual meeting on August 4 and 5, 1988. Though we don't have our program and the events all lined up yet, we can tell you about some of them and you can put these dates on your calendar.

August 4 will be the "V.I. P. Night" of the outdoor historical drama *The Life and Times of Jesse James* and you will all be invited to attend. This will coincide with press night and, as last year, those of you who attend may well be interviewed by the reporters. We will have his-

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## Jesse James III Arrested

Self Styled Grandson of Outlaw  
Admits Illinois Auto Theft

CARLINVILLE, ILL., August 29, 1928 —

Jesse James, Jr., of Los Angeles, who declared himself the grandson of the outlaw of that name, today cleared himself of complicity in wholesale automobile thievery, but confessed stealing one machine in Brimfield, Ind.

He declared that his father, a lawyer in Los Angeles, was the son of the Jesse James of reconstruction days: James Jr. happened along as Sheriff Stubblefield was making a number of arrests to clear up a reputed automobile theft ring.

Jesse James had picked up two men on the road and amazed them at Gillespie, Ill., by giving them the automobile he was driving. He

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## JIM TIBBS

Dear Jim:

I have great difficulty accepting the permanent loss of good friends and I don't really know how to reconcile my sense of loss. I don't show open emotion very much as I tend to keep it bottled up inside, a trait I must have learned from my mother. But, I do grieve and I do keep the thoughts of departed friends and loved ones alive inside.

I think I have two feelings: one a great sense of loss and of knowing we will never visit and exchange thoughts and ideas and hopes again; and the other is a form of anger, anger that you have been taken away, not only from me, but from all of us, and we can never really know how far your abilities and genius would have taken you. I think you would have become one of the outstanding drama directors in the country, for as I have worked with you and watched you for the last four years, I have seen you come to the forefront of the Kansas City drama scene as a director, playwright and actor. All those awards your peers have given you were not just for show. You deserved them, and there are many more you would have received that will never be given.

I simply cannot read the script of a play or a film and visualize action. To me, they are just words without descriptions and adjectives one finds in novels and other writings. I will remember my admiration at how you put life in the words of *The Life and Times of Jesse James*. I thrill at the scene of the detective raid in which you have the attackers creep up on the house from various directions, coming through the audience, carrying torches in the darkness. It was overwhelming. I remember Kathleen Kennedy as Zerelda Samuel, bending over the blood-smeared body of her eight-year-old boy, actually crying (not acting) because she was so moved by the fact that the real mother had shed tears for the boy on that very spot. I enjoy so much the way you "blocked" (a theatre word I didn't know until I met you) the train robbery scene with all those actors bouncing around in chairs as if they were on a train. And the widow whose mortgage Jesse pays, which you did in a melodrama. I can watch it (and I do on video) over and over.

Remember our long conversations last season about the burial scene of Jesse? Your changes, to my mind made it meaningful. I believe the dichotomy between Frank and his mother over it — (what did it all mean?) — has great depth and poignancy. Both of us never for a second had any idea we might have been talking about our own ideas about death and remembrance and contribution. I now think you might have been giving us in that scene something about how you want to be remembered and what life meant to you. At least I will always think of it that way.

I remember when we sat there last summer, watching the sun set as a big orange ball, the sky and the world bathed in a warm copper glow, expounding our philosophy of life and what we wanted to do. You could have been a lawyer; you could have been a "captain of industry"; you could have been a stockbroker; and you would have been a success in any of them. You could have been making great amounts of money, but you told me you thought what you were doing was more important. I remember your words, "I want to make a contribution," you said. "I want to make people laugh and cry; I want to bring a little love and cheer into their lives, and I hope I can."

Don't worry old friend. You have.

Affectionately — Milt

Jim Tibbs died at Baptist Medical Center, Kansas City, February 1, 1988. He directed our outdoor historical drama *The Life and Times of Jesse James* the three years we have produced it. He was the director of the Coterie Theatre, sponsored by Hallmark's, at Crown Center in Kansas City, and had received numerous awards for his acting, writing and direction. He received excellent reviews for his appearance in *The Kiss of the Spider Woman* last fall and directed the world premiere of *Dragons* which, ironically, had its preview performance only hours after his death. Jim was 34 years old.

"The Friends of the James Farm" has made a donation to the Coterie in his memory.

## ACQUISITION OF MORE LAND AT CLAYBROOK

The owners of land surrounding Claybrook House, the home of Mary James Barr, daughter of Jesse James, across the road from the James Farm, have generously donated to Clay County more than 18 acres of the original plantation. This acreage is behind and to the east of the magnificent house and will provide a buffer zone to protect the house against intrusion from housing developments that are now being built in the area.

The donors, Eileen and Loyd Kelly, gave Claybrook to the county several years ago, together with a fund which is being used for its restoration. It is open to visitors each summer. We now have several events at Claybrook, including activities of the "Centerville Guard", a Civil War Re-enactment group patterned after the original Centerville Guard, two members of which were Frank James and George Claybrook, and which drilled at Claybrook House. The new "Centerville Guard" (the original name for the town of Kearney) establish a living history encampment, and cook, sleep and conduct cavalry drills for the public. One of the most interesting events is when they charge balloons on posts and attempt to cut them with their sabres. These encampments have been popular with the public and these activities can be expanded onto the newly acquired land. This land may also be used for historic farming, growing the kinds of crops that were grown there in the mid 19th century.

## Letter --

Dear Mr. Perry:

I was surprised to find the genealogical column in the first issue of my subscription to your publication. Perhaps some of your readers can help.

Rena (Michael) Borgialli, deceased since April 21, 1970, said she and Jesse James were fifth cousins (maybe third or fourth). On occasion she would describe this relationship in detail. After her death it was discovered there was no written record and on one was able to recall the story.

Rena Ann Michael was married to Charley Borgialli at Kirksville, (Adair County) Missouri, on November 29, 1904. Rena's folks lived in the mining town of Stahl, Missouri, and possibly Novinger and Bethany as she was growing up. Rena had a twin - Lena Sara Michael - and they were born July 9, 1889, in Breckenridge, (Caldwell County) Missouri. Their parents were John Michael (September 14, 1833 - November 8, 1890) and Sadie Jane Bennet (October 7, 1860 - February 6, 1913). The twins were about a year and four months old when their father died and Sadie Jane remarried several times: Luke Stevenson, Dill Stevens and (?) Riley. Sadie Jane's parents were Jesse Bennet and Sarah Davis (? - not known if this was her maiden name or a name from a previous marriage) Bennet. There were other children supposedly but Samuel Bennet is the only one we have turned up so far. Sarah Davis Bennet was visited often by Jesse James according to

stories passed down in the family. We believe Sarah Davis Bennet lived to be about 101 years old. She died in Bethany, (Caldwell County) Missouri, on September 24, 1927.

The only documents we have are the wedding license of Rena Michael and Charley Borgialli and the death certificate for Sarah Davis Bennet. I'd be most grateful if any of your readers could supply any facts that would shed any light on this relationship or if you could direct me to anyone knowledgeable on the James family genealogy who might be able to assist.

Sincerely, Carol Borgialli  
921 Driftwood Drive  
Lincoln, NE 68510  
(402) 489-4459

## Jesse Arrested --

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boarded a traction system car and was arrested in Edwardsville.

The only son the outlaw Jesse James had was the one who was in the next room with his mother and sister when James was shot down by a former partner. The young man under arrest says that his father, then a child, was one of those in the adjoining room.

(Note: Jesse James, Jr., had no sons so we have a case of another imposter, this time an imposter grandson!)

## Annual Meeting --

(Continued from Front Page)

torical programs at the lovely Park Place Hotel in Kansas City, as we did in 1987. Our banquet will be on Friday night, August 5, at which some very important and significant historical artifacts relating to Frank and Jesse James will be presented to the new historical museum we are building at the Farm.

All of you, of course, will be given tours of the museum and home and of Claybrook, the home

of Mary James Barr, Jesse's daughter, across the road from the James Farm itself.

At least part of the program will deal with the surrender of Frank James to the Governor of Missouri, and we encourage those of you who wish to set up a genealogy section to get in touch with us. Each year we find out more about family history and of those who were associated with the James family.

## Mrs. Jesse James Devout Worker in Revival

*Widow of Bandit Leader in  
Camp Meetings for Years,  
Her Identity Concealed*

New York, Sept. 6, 1908 - Mrs. Jesse James, widow of the notorious Missouri bandit, has been one of the most religious attendants at the annual evangelistic camp meeting at Ocean Grove, N. J.

This fact became known when an ardent woman evangelist dropped dead before the audience of 2,000 persons, while leading the prayer. Among those who went to the stricken woman's assistance, for the first time it became known that the aged but enthusiastic little woman, who had worked so conscientiously for the success of the camp meeting during the last few years, was the widow of the much-dreaded Jesse James.

Mrs. James has been living quietly at the religious resort and daily has led the large meeting in song and prayer. At the "Love Feast" which is a regular part of the daily program, Mrs. James has recited her personal testimony, telling of the great relief which her religious belief has brought her.

(Zee James, Jesse's widow, died in Kansas City in 1899. This is the first time we have seen accounts of an imposter of her!)

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

#### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY:

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