

JAMES FARM JOURNAL

Newsletter of
"FRIENDS OF THE JAMES FARM"



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EDITOR - MILT PERRY

JUNE - 1989

Screenwriter researching new James film

By TIM ENGLE, Staff writer

He's been writing TV show scripts for 20 years, but Bill Stratton is about as much Hollywood as Jesse James was an upstanding citizen.

The parallel is not without reason.

Stratton, who was born and raised in Kansas City but eventually moved himself and his Midwestern values to Tinseltown, wrote the tele-play for what some consider the most honest portrayal of Northland folk heroes Frank and Jesse James. That made-for-TV movie - *The Last Days of Frank and Jesse James*, starring Kris Kristofferson and Johnny Cash - has run twice on the tube.

Now Stratton's ready to do it again.

This time, he wants to write and produce a movie - preferably a *real, pay-five-bucks-to-see-it* movie - that will probe Jesse and Frank as young men. Because not much information exists about the two in their younger days, Stratton could have his work cut out for him.

He's accomplishing some of it now. He arrived last week and will spend a couple of weeks researching the James family - development, as they say in Hollywood - at places like the Jesse James Farm in Kearney.

Dressed in a short-sleeved rugby shirt, gray jeans and tennis shoes, Stratton, 58, wouldn't pass for the let's-do-sushi type. ("You're looking at one of the few writers from California who doesn't own a blow dryer," he jokes.) But after all, he believes that a certain Midwest morality helps hold the country together - and it can't hurt in a

place like Hollywood.

Not that he can complain. He's written scripts for a number of television shows - extensively for the long-running "Hawaii Five-O," for instance - and TV movies, including two Mike Hammer detective movies and, most recently, "Street of Dreams," which starred Morgan Fairchild.

Other projects are in the hopper, but Stratton hopes he can get a script written for his second James movie within a year. Given his druthers, he'd like to film it here.

Stratton expects the film to focus on Frank and Jesse in their mid-to-late teens and early 20's. "What we're going to develop here is personalities - first of all, what took them into the guerrillas? Then what took them into ban-

*Reprint from the
Liberty, Mo., Tribune
May 3, 1989*

ditory and why were they so successful?" he said.

By the time he was 16 or 17, Jesse had "gone into the brush" as a pro-Confederacy guerrilla fighter in the Civil War, probably spurred by the rough treatment his family received from Union militiamen. Frank, four years older, was already a guerilla fighter. By the time the war ended in 1865, many of the "bushwhackers" had become little more than bands of outlaws.

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A New "Jesse James" Story

A number of years ago, while Dr. J. R. Kearney was still practicing his profession at New Point, Missouri, he started out one day on a collecting trip, relates the Holt County Sentinel. After making a round of several miles he headed back to New Point, and while riding along the road between Forest City and Oregon, a stranger overtook him. Dr. Kearney was somewhat of a horse fancier in those days - in fact, some of the old settlers say that he was pretty near as good a horse trader as he was doctor, and he was no slouch of a doctor either.

So he noticed at once that the stranger rode a splendid animal, a great big rangy, handsome single footer, speed and strength showing in every line. Kearney struck him for a trade, but he laughed at the idea; the horse wasn't for trade or sale. But he said: "That's a pretty good colt of yours, all right; how would you like to trade him for a good gold watch?"

Well, it wasn't long until they made a deal, Kearney's horse for the stranger's watch. But Kearney says: "I'll have to ride my horse home." "That's all right," said the stranger, "you take the horse on home. I'm going over to Jesse Cole's, over in Clay County, and I'll be back in about a week and get the horse."

They rode on some distance, chatting, and before their roads parted, Kearney asked the stranger his name. The stranger looked at him a moment, and then, with a peculiar smile, said:

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Dan Askew

By Pat Eskew

Daniel H. Askew, who at this time I believe was a brother or a cousin to my grandfather Richard H. Askew, was born Feb. 28, 1828 in Kentucky. In 1860 (Census Mo. Clay County, page 790) he was 33 years old, had \$85 personal property, worked as a farmer, his wife was named Adaline and she was 20 years old and born in Missouri. His 3-year-old daughter was named Maurie. Dan was assassinated April 12, 1875, presumably by allies of the James gang. He is buried in the New Hope Baptist Church Cemetery, Washington Township (Kearney) Missouri. The New Hope Baptist Church was reorganized in 1844 by Robert James, father of Jesse and Frank. Also buried there beside Daniel H. Askew is a Daniel N. Askew who died Sept. 3, 1876 – almost 17 months after Dan's assassination. No birthdate is give; I presume this Daniel N. Askew is the father.

My Friend, Jesse James!

I remember to this day how my bored and sleepy eyes popped wide open! "Really, papa? Honest? You mean the real Jesse James?"

Yes, he meant the real Jesse James. The freebooting bandit whom legend made into an American Robin Hood. The daring train robber who wouldn't take money from Confederate veterans. The same Jesse James who gave a poor widow \$10,000 to pay off the homestead mortgage when a greedy banker came to repossess her homestead – then robbed the banker of the bag of money on his way back into town. The same Jesse James who loved children and would often teach them to shoot his pistol and entertained kids by giving them rides on his big, high-stepping roan. That's the hero that my papa knew personally – Jesse James, the real thing?

Boy, let me tell you, when my papa told me about being a friend of Jesse James, my estimation of him rose to astronomical heights. Nobody in Tioga grammar school had a papa who had known such a great person. I remem-

bered that a kid named Baynard Farrell had once bragged before that his daddy was a friend of Governor Huey P. Long. After that, the teacher started treating Baynard Farrell like a pet because his daddy was a friend of Huey P. Long. Well, big deal! You just wait 'til they hear about my papa riding horses and shooting pistols with Jesse James! They'd have to show me a considerable amount of respect on account of that, wouldn't they?

Yet, after the first flush of excitement, shadows of skepticism began to cloud my brain. Suppose – just suppose – my papa had been making all that up. What if he'd just said that to get my attention. Maybe he hadn't really known Jesse James. Maybe he had just read about Jesse James in a magazine and ... I figured it might be a good idea to confirm the veracity of the story before I blabbed all over Tioga

grammar school that my father was the best friend Jesse James ever had.

So sobered by a cautious instinct that has bothered me all my life, I asked my two nephews, Roy and Sidney Block, to see if they could get my papa to tell them, too, what he'd said to me about knowing Jesse James. So they did, and he did, and to this very day Roy Block says he remembers his grandfather, my papa, telling him that he'd once lived on a farm next to the home of Jesse James.

So over a half century later, in 1987, I decided to investigate that myth I had remembered for so long. In preparation for a visit to places in the vicinity of my father's youth, I read several text books about north central Missouri. With the memory of papa's story just faintly flickering, one day, in the genealogical department of Dallas
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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

April 6, 1989

Dear Mr. Perry,

Enjoyed talking with you in St. Joseph and Liberty this past weekend and appreciate your answering all the questions we fired at you regarding Jesse James.

During my research for the Gads Hill article, I ran across a bit of trivia I'd like to share with you. Possibly you already know this, but here it is anyway.

Do you remember back in the 1950's there was a colorful octogenarian named Benarr MacFadden, a physical culturist who ate health foods and made news by parachuting out of airplanes to celebrate his 83rd and 84th birthdays: (He vowed he would live to be 100, but I don't think he even made it to 90 – little wonder, considering his life style.) I remember reading about him in Reader's Digest and seeing him on newsreels, etc.

His greatest claim to fame, though, was a magazine publisher. Besides health magazines, he gave us such literature(?) as *True Confessions*, *Modern Romances*, *True Detective* and others.

One of the things I remembered all these years was that Benarr MacFadden was born in the little village of Mill Spring, Mo.

While pouring over microfilm of old newspaper accounts of the Gads Hill affair I did a double-take when I read that the outlaws spent the eve of the robbery in Mill Spring at McFadden's (the newspaper's spelling.)

I checked and learned that Benarr MacFadden was born in 1868 which would have made him six years old when Jesse James (allegedly) and the boys spent the night there.

Thanks again for the interesting conversation.

Sincerely,
Ron Beights

New James Story —

(Continued from Page One)

"I'm Jesse James, chief of the James gang." Kearney laughed at the joke, but asked no more questions. In just a week from that day, Kearney was going down the street in New Point when he saw the stranger on his big, fine saddle horse, come riding up the street. They met and chatted a while, and the stranger asked Kearney to show him where he could get something to drink. Kearney took him to Winslow's drug store, and introduced him to the proprietor as "Jesse James, chief of the James gang." Winslow laughed and shook hands with the stranger who smiled and said nothing. They got a half pint of whiskey which the stranger put in an inside coat pocket, and then went up to the barn where Dr. Kearney kept his horses.

On reaching the barn, the stranger opened his coat to take out the bottle of whiskey. He barely touched the whiskey to his lips, and passed the bottle to Kearney. Kearney insisted on his drinking, but he refused saying, "Keep it; I haven't any use for it. I never drink." After chatting a few moments longer they prepared to make the exchange agreed upon and the stranger wanted Kearney to throw in the halter. Kearney refused and told him he could get a web halter at Barnes' store for 50 cents. The stranger said, "all right," and went down and bought the halter.

Mr. Barnes' daughter, a Mrs. Hitchcock, was in the store and her attention was attracted to the stranger. He returned to the barn, gave Kearney the watch and rode out of town leading his newly purchased horse. When he had gone, Mrs. Hitchcock came running up to Dr. Kearney in a terrible state of excitement. "Do you know who you have been trading horses with?" she cried. "Well," said Kearney, "I know who he said he was."

"I know who he was," said she.

Kearney said, "Tell me who he was, then. My curiosity has been aroused, and I'd like to know for certain."

"That was Jesse James," she replied, "I know him better than I know you."

The stranger, whoever he was, was seen no more in that vicinity; and a few

months later Jesse James was killed in St. Joseph. The pictures of the dead outlaw published in the papers bore a striking resemblance to Dr. Kearney's strange acquaintance.

— Reprinted from the Missouri Daily Mail.

Dan Askew —

(Continued from Page Two)

Central Library, I came across a non-circulatory book titled "The Rise and Fall of Jesse James" by Robertus Love. (Non-circulating means the book is considered to be rare, and patrons are not permitted to remove such books from the library.)

The book was published in limited edition in 1926. Authored by a retired newspaper man who was a native of Missouri, Love had determined to write an absolutely factual account of the legendary outlaw. Other factual volumes have been written since, but they all owe much of their content to this complete and unbiased investigation by newsman Robertus Love. One such, more recent documentary is the book "Jesse James Was His Name," by William A. Settle, Jr., published in 1966. On it we base the facts recited here which collaborate my father's story:

Fact #1: In 1875, and for at least 15 years previously, Daniel Askew operated a farm adjacent to the James property and family home in Clay County, near Kearney, Missouri, which is about 30 miles north of the Kansas City-Independence area. At the time of the 1860 Census Dan Askew was residing in the community at that same location.

Fact #2: Robert James, father of Frank, Jesse and Susan Lavenia James, was a preacher who left his family in Missouri to temporarily search for gold in California. He became ill and died in California. After a period of bereavement, his wife, Zerelda, married a country doctor named Reuben Samuel, who was fond of all her children. Dr. and Mrs. Samuel lived in the James family home and had four children of their own—Archie, John, Fannie and Sally.

When Thomas E. Askew, my papa, turned six years old in July 1874, Archie Samuel, Jesse James' half brother, was eight years old. It was the year, also, when Tom's father, Richard Askew, says he moved from Randolph County to Saline County, Missouri. I think it is entirely reasonable to assume that the Richard Askew family did not go directly to Saline County. Instead, they may have first

visited the Daniel Askew family in Clay County. If so, it's likely that my papa "lived on a farm near the home of Jesse James and played with his brother," just as he said he did.

Ida Almanine Askew was eight also, in the summer of 1874. Zerelda's daughter, Susan Lavenia, was 25, and may have already moved from the home. But Dr. Samuel's 8-year-old son, Archie Peyton Samuel (Jesse and Frank James' half brother) was certainly there, as the tragic event we will soon relate will prove. It's unknown whether papa's twin, Charles E., was still living, but I am inclined to think he was not; else papa surely would have mentioned him in the story he told me.

Fact #3: In William A. Settle's extremely well-documented book, "Jesse James Was His Name," he tells how fond Jesse James was of his half-brother Archie Peyton. And it's said that Jesse liked all children. So it's only natural to believe he was friendly to his kid brother's playmates. I've no doubt in my mind that my papa rode double on the saddle skirt, with his arms wrapped around Jesse James' waist, while they galloped around the pasture on Jesse's big roan. I imagine Jesse let all the boys shoot his pistol—at cans. That's the kind of sport country boys still enjoy.

Well, so much for the reasons I believe papa really did know Jesse James. But we can't let the story rest here because something horrible happened to Daniel Askew—a tragic fate that papa did not tell, at least not to me; or if he did, I did not remember. Yet, in a way, the fate of Dan Askew relates to Tom Eskew's biography. I'll recount the story as briefly as possible:

On the night of January 26, 1875, acting upon a mistaken belief that the outlaw James boys were visiting their mother at the old family farm near Kearney, a party of Pinkerton Agency detectives slipped outside a kitchen window and tossed a firebomb inside. The commotion awakened Mrs. Samuel who ran into the kitchen and began pushing what she thought was a flaming ball of cotton into the fireplace with a poker. But the device exploded, mangling her right hand so badly it later had to be amputated. Worse still, other fragments of the bomb killed her son, 8-year-old Archie Peyton. News about the maiming of a mother and the murder of her innocent child enraged people everywhere. Newspapers across the country expressed their condemnation of the Pinkerton Detective Agency's fiendish deed.

(Continued on Page Four)

Dan Askew —

(Continued from Page Three)

Then it was learned that a farm hand named Jack Ladd who had worked several months for Daniel Askew had disappeared from the community on the night of the raid. Many people concluded that Ladd was really a Pinkerton undercover agent who had been staked out on Dan Askew's farm to alert the authorities of the presence of the James boys. Rumors also spread that Daniel Askew himself had aided the attacking party.

Now, I have not searched for complete records which tell Dan Askew's side of the story, or of his reaction to the accusations. Because the details of this controversy, as interesting as they might be, are really not part of the Tom Eskew biography since we have already substantiated young Tom's association with Jesse James in the summer of 1874. But for anyone interested enough to search we can assure them that further information does exist. According to William Settle's book, "a story from Chicago where the Pinkerton's headquarters was located, *** (was to the effect) that Askew had threatened to tell the details of the fatal raid and had been silenced."

That "silencing" came about eight o'clock in the evening of April 12, 1875. It was a moonlit night. Someone hiding in a woodpile rose up and shot Daniel H. Askew to death.

The James boys were suspected, naturally. But they denied the accusation, claiming they were hundreds of miles away in Texas as the time — and there's some evidence that seems to support the alibi; especially since killing Askew would have the kind of vengeance for which they normally might have proudly claimed credit. According to author Robertus Love, Frank James, who lived on for many years after being pardoned for his crimes, commented about the incident, saying: "If I had known or even strongly believed that it was Dan Askew who led the party to my mother's, I would have killed him at the first chance; but I never believed he could be such a fool, and I ascribed the guilt to Jack Ladd, his hired man."

Another assassination theory promoted by the Chicago Times newspaper was that the Pinkerton detectives themselves had killed Dan Askew to make it look like revenge, hoping to turn the tide of public hostility away from their agency.

Well, that was 112 years ago. Tom Eskew's Uncle Dan (who was two years older than Richard), was 48 when he died. He was survived by his wife, Adaline, 35, and a daughter, Maurie, 18. He's buried in the cemetery of the New Hope Baptist Church, but no one ever pauses before his grave as they do that of the famous outlaw, Jesse James.

One last observation: The Jesse James home and farm is a historic site now. The museum attracts tourists from all over the nation. I visited the place in the summer of 1987. The previous day, in beautiful weather, I had visited the easily accessible and magnificent shrine of Will Rogers in Claremore, Oklahoma, and I was surprised that I was the only one there. Next day I reached Kansas City and it was a

really horrid day for sightseeing — raining cats and dogs. But since I'd come so far for the specific purpose of investigating my father's story, I drove the 30-40 miles north to Kearney, then another 15 or more miles on a black-topped, but still definitely rural road. And at the Jesse James Farm, wouldn't you know, out there in the country in the pouring down rain were more than a dozen people crowded in the small rooms, listening to a tour guide recite the legend of the famous outlaw.

I introduced myself to the curator, Milton F. Perry. He was cordial and shared information from research about the James' 1870s neighbors. He pointed out the location of the Daniel Askew farm, which was about 300 yards distance.

Construction was underway on a facility where actors rehearsed to present stage plays about the high points in the Jesse and Frank James saga. I asked one of the young lady actresses how the script dealt with Daniel Askew. She laughed and replied, "Oh, we shoot him down. He's one of the bad guys."

So, if I have consumed more than justifiable space here, it's because as far as I can tell, Dan is the only Eskew, or Askew, great or small, who left an indelible mark on history. It might be sad that the most significant claim to fame any Askew, or Eskew, attained, was Dan's for having been gunned down by henchmen of America's most famous desperado.

Frank James and the Kentucky Derby

An interesting article by Rick Cushing, has been published by the Louisville *Courier Journal* and picked up by other papers, about the 1889 Kentucky Derby. Frank James was smart to bet on Spokane, not the favorite, Procter Knott. It was good he did so, for Spokane was a dramatic winner, and paid a handsome sum to James. Our thanks to Charles Kope and Hartel Boggs for sending us copies of the articles.

Our thanks also, to Tom and Helen Allison, for the gift of several interesting old postcards about the James Farm and other sites.

James Farm Sales Items

Books

- (1) *Jesse James Was His Name* by Dr. William Settle\$9.00
- (2) *Background of a Bandit* by Joan Beamis and William E. Pullen\$6.00
- (3) *Goodbye Jesse James* (collection of newspaper articles)\$5.00
- (4) *40 Years of History at the James Farm* by Martin McCrane\$5.00
- (5) *Roscoe Gun Battle* by Wilbur Zink \$3.50
- (6) *Younger Genealogy* by Marley Brant \$6.00
- (7) *From the Pen of a Noble Robber..* \$4.50 (The Letters of Jesse Woodson James)
- (8) *Jesse and Frank James: The Family History*\$8.00

Posters

- (1) Missouri Wanted Posters\$1.00
- (2) Kentucky Wanted Posters\$1.00
- (3) Minnesota Wanted Posters\$1.00

Postcards

- (1) Old Grave Site
 - (2) New Grave Site
 - (3) 1885 — Family Members in James Yard
 - (4) Frank Standing By Gate
 - (5) James Farm, (front view)
 - (6) James Farm, (cabin view)
 - (7) Jesse's Home, St. Joseph
 - (8) Jesse's Wedding Portrait
 - (9) Cabin (before restoration)
 - (10) Liberty Bank Museum (Interior)
 - (11) Liberty Bank Museum (Exterior)
- 3 for \$1.00

All prices listed above include postage. Please make checks or money orders to "James Farm Fund". Friends of the James Farm members will receive 10% discount on all sales items.

**PRELIMINARY PROGRAM
1989 ANNUAL MEETING
"Friends of the James Farm"
August 5, 1989**

HISTORICAL CONFERENCE

LOCATION: CLAY COUNTY COMMISSION AUDITORIUM, 3RD FLOOR, OLD CLAY COUNTY COURTHOUSE, LIBERTY SQUARE, LIBERTY, MISSOURI.

- 9:00 a.m. Welcome, Clay County Commission
- 9:30 - 10:15 The Making of a Legend: The movie, "Jesse James."
Larry Bradley, author *The Making of a Legend*.
- 10:15 - 10:30 Break
- 10:30 - 11:15 Panel Discussion: Experiences during the filming of "Jesse James," by persons who appeared in the movie.
- 11:15 - 12:00 The James family's reaction to the movie, "Jesse James," by Judge James R. Ross.
- 12:00 - 1:00 Luncheon and program
- 1:00 - 2:00 Discussion: "How to portray Jesse James in Museums."
- 2:00 - 2:30 Business Meeting, Friends of the James Farm, Elections
- 2:30 - 2:45 Break
- 2:45 - 3:30 Preview of the video: "The Truth of a Legend," by Phillip W. Steele.
- 3:30 Discussion: New Discoveries in James and Allied Family History.

NOTE: The authors of several books and tapes will be present to autograph copies of their books and tapes. Books can be purchased at sales counter.

**BANQUET & FILM PRESENTATION
GRANADA THEATRE
1015 Minnesota Ave., Kansas City, KS**

- 6:00 p.m. Reception
Background music on the Theatre Organ
Cash Bar
Tour of the Theatre
- 6:45 Dinner
Greetings by "Governor T.T. Crittenden of Missouri," and "Frank James."
Presentations of Historical and Artistic Collections to the James Farm Museum.
Awards and Comments.
Showing of the 1939, 20th Century Fox Film, "Jesse James."
(Historical Note: The film "Jesse James" was shown at the theatre in 1939.)

ACCOMMODATIONS

Unlike previous meetings, we will not have a headquarters hotel this year. Instead, we suggest you make arrangements to stay at a hotel most convenient for you. The Howard Johnson, North, is such a facility. It is located in Kansas City, North, at the junction of I-35 and I-29 and is midway between our meeting sites. It is also convenient to Kansas City International Airport and to travelers arriving from all directions.

Their rates as quoted to us are:

1 Person, 1 bed:	\$42.00
2 Persons, 1 bed:	\$46.00
2 Persons, 2 beds:	\$50.00

Amenities include a restaurant and lounge, indoor swimming pool, whirlpool, sauna, exercise equipment and in-room movies. They request reservations be made prior to July 22.

You can call Howard Johnson's toll free number:
1-800-654-2000.
(Persons over 60 and government employees:
inquire about discounts.)

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FRIENDS OF THE JAMES FARM.

*Checks Must Be Received By
July 30, 1989*

Send to:
FRIENDS OF THE JAMES FARM
% Jesse James Bank Museum
103 N. Water Street
Liberty, MO 64060

PLAN NOW TO ATTEND!

**REGISTRATION FORM
FRIENDS OF THE JAMES FARM 1989 MEETING
AUGUST 5, 1989**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

HISTORICAL CONFERENCE & LUNCHEON

Please reserve _____ places, @ \$6.50: Amount _____

^{Banquet}
Please reserve _____ places, @ \$20.00: Amount _____

Total Enclosed: _____

Screenwriter – From Page One

In the years immediately following the war's end, though, the thievery continued, primarily in bank robbing. The first and, at least in this area, most famous: Feb. 13, 1866, when a group of about a dozen men, led by the James brothers, robbed the Clay County Savings Bank in Liberty of \$60,000 and fatally shot a witness as they made their getaway. It was reputed to be the first daylight bank robbery in peacetime.

There are other tidbits about Jesse's life Stratton would like to explore. How, for instance, did the James brothers end up outlaws when they were raised in a strict, bedrock-Christian-values home? How was it that Jesse became the leader of his group, even though he was the youngest? Is it true that Jesse possessed a sixth sense about people and their intentions: What influence did Jesse's domineering mother Zerelda have on him?

Stratton, who studied journalism for a while at the University of Kansas, thinks his training there probably helps him tell an honest story. He's honed a loyalty to the facts "right up to the point where they ruin a story," he says with a chuckle.

Stratton also served in Korea and eventually worked 10 years for a Chicago ad agency, where he did "honest advertising" for such clients as Kellogg's Frosted Flakes and Nestea. In a

break from the agency, he wrote an unpublished book about Confederate Army Gen. Joseph Shelby, who holds the distinction of being the only Southern general who never surrendered. It would be Stratton's first and last book – it was "probably in the Guinness Book of World Records for the number of publishers who turned it down." But by his late 30's Stratton would make a living by writing – not ads, not books, but teleplays.

It was his interest in Shelby and that era, coupled with his Kansas City roots, that made the Jesse James story appealing to him – and one he would get to do some 15 years after his arrival in California.

Asked what he'd do with the "Last Days" movie, he told the bigshots: "I'd like to stick as close to the facts as

possible, because I've seen too many movies that didn't."

"There's a rule that when you run out of facts, you go with the myth," he adds. "I think we're going to try to use as much of the facts as we can."

Although the movie now being proposed is far from being images on film, Stratton is hopeful about its chances. Granted, recent movies "Silverado" and "Pale Rider" did not ride tall in the box-office saddle, but the recent TV miniseries "Lonesome Dove" scored a large audience. In general, though, the perception in Hollywood now is that Westerns won't make money, Stratton said.

"You all better call this a long shot," he says. "We happen to believe, though, that there's room for a good Western."

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

Name _____

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