

# JAMES FARM JOURNAL

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

WINTER 2014

## ROBERT SALLEE JAMES AND ZERELDA COLE

### A few letters tell the true story of love, family and faith

*"My Dear Beloved Z.E.C.*

*I according to promise take my pen to write to you ..."*

For over 130 years the world has held hard and strong onto the image that was Jesse James, his brother, Frank, and their family. Despite the numerous books, films and articles written, little is known that can be verified as truth.

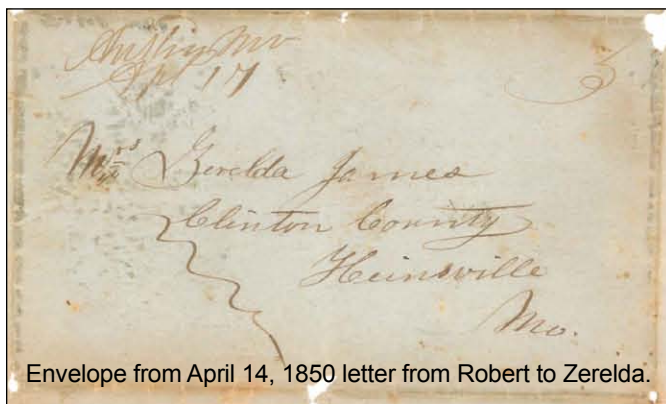


The boy's father, Robert Sallee James, has always been an enigma to me because he died so young. He appeared a young, virile, enthusiastic and evangelical preacher man. He loved the Lord and he married Zerelda Cole.

As historians, we all know the Zerelda who was the mother of Jesse and Frank. The very pregnant Zerelda who stood up to the Union soldier who had beaten 15-year-old Jesse and were torturing her husband, Samuel, hoping to find Frank and the guerrillas. The Zerelda who never lost faith in her two sons, who saw her young son, Archie, die in a horrific explosion in which she lost part of her own arm.

We know the Zerelda who had to endure the loss of her beloved Jesse, murdered while his back was turned by the coward Robert Ford.

Zerelda is always depicted as tall, stout



and a tough pioneer woman. Indeed she was. Nevertheless, Zerelda Cole was once a young teenage woman who fell in love with the young preacher Robert James.

We know little about these years and tend to forget that Zerelda and Robert fell in love, married and moved out here to Kearney long before the Civil War and during a time when Missouri was still being developed by pioneers; when Missouri was the gateway to the west that was still in various stages of discovery.

At one time she had hopes and dreams like any other young married woman.

Earlier this year, the Friends of the James Farm board learned that a large auction of James family memorabilia was going up for sale. Board member and Cole family direct descendent Scott Cole, volunteered to act on the auction. What he acquired for us shed some light on those early years of Robert and Zerelda James.

It was a true find for James historians and for the museum.

Thanks to the board's contribution and the generous donations of others, Cole was able to purchase a number of items, which are now on loan indefinitely to the museum.

There are a few letters from Robert to Zerelda beginning with the Sept. 24, 1842 letter at the beginning of this

article. The couple were not married yet and still in the throes of courtship.

Just how romantic was Robert?

*"I have been in the company of a great many young ladies since I saw you last and I also attended the Methodist campmeeting (sic) Sabbath before last, and took a good survey of all the ladies; but there were none of them, who can be compared with you; because you excell (sic) them as far as the winged eagle soars in the ethereal sky*

*Continued on page 5*

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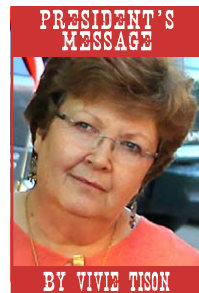
[www.jessejames.org](http://www.jessejames.org) | 

### Newsletter Design/Layout

*Liz Johnson ~ Jolly Hill*  
[www.jollyhill.net](http://www.jollyhill.net)

## A NEW YEAR, 2014 REUNION IN THE PLANNING STAGES, IT'S TIME TO RENEW

Another year has flown past us and makes us take stock in what the board has been doing all year. We are very happy to have been able to make some substantial contributions to the James Farm.



Anna's diploma underwent a thorough cleaning and pressing to get all those wrinkles out. It no longer looks like the document was printed on fabric but of parchment. We were also able to obtain,

through auctions, letters written by Rev. Robert James to Zerelda on his way to the gold camps in California, along with some of his hand written sermons he wrote while in seminary school. These

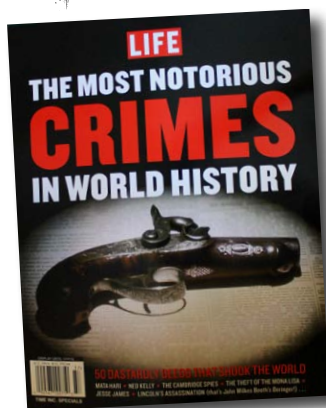
were obtained through your membership dues and donations.

Please take a moment to send in your renewal form and payment so that we can continue to preserve, protect, and encourage research of the historic time represented by the James Farm and its social history.

In the coming newsletters you will learn more about what the board has in store for our annual reunion in June. This will be our most exciting program to date! Another update is that we are now on Facebook. Board member Liz Johnson keeps us current with facts and photos of the James Family. So sign in (Friends of the James Farm) and check us out.

The Board of the Friends of the James Farm wish everyone a happy, healthy 2014!

## LIFE REMEMBERS JESSE JAMES



Jesse James is still being remembered for his exploits as an outlaw. Last year LIFE magazine published, "The Most Notorious Crimes in World History," which included a chapter on our own Jesse James under the "Profit" section. Of the "50 Dastardly Deeds That Shook The Wold," Jesse James was one of the six that was listed on the front cover. This oversized magazine can still be found on Amazon. Look for the edition that has the pistol on the cover, edited by Robert Sullivan. It originally released Jan. 1, 2013.



# Jesse James Old West Revolver Shoot September 2013 Results

Compiled by Bryan Ivlow

The winners of the Sept. 14, shoot at the JamesFarm are as follows:

### CARTRIDGE DIVISION

- **First:** Randy Webber
- **Second:** Bob Foreman & Terry Barr – tied
- **Third:** Andrew Anderson

### CAP & BALL DIVISION

- **First:** Keley Bush
- **Second:** Jacob Whitehead
- **Third:** Paul Weller

### SPECIAL TARGET CARTRIDGE DIVISION

- **First:** Andrew Anderson & Terry Barr – tied
- **Second:** Bob Foreman
- **Third:** Bruce Holston

### SPECIAL TARGET CAP & BALL DIVISION

- **First:** Jacob Whitehead
- **Second:** Keley Bush
- **Third:** Randy Snider

## JESSE JAMES OLD WEST REVOLVER SHOOT SATURDAY, April 5, 2014

Registration 8 a.m. • Shoot 9 a.m.  
James Farm, 21216 Jesse James Farm Rd.  
Kearney, MO 64060 • 816-736-8500

Test your skills on the favorite targets of Buck & Dingus, aka Frank & Jesse, and win a prize! This ain't no tea dance so shooters are encouraged to dress accordingly.

Cap & Ball Revolver, Frontier Cartridge Revolver, Replicas OK  
*Fixed sights and dueling stance only*

Visit the website: [www.jessejames.org](http://www.jessejames.org) and click on the link for the shoot for rules and regulations

*Sponsored by Clay County Parks, Recreation & Historic Sites and the Friends of the James Farm*

## SEPTEMBER 2014 POWDER SHOOT PHOTOS



Clockwise from top left: Sept. 2013 shoot participants; Frank Cardean providing top notch entertainment; safety first – shooting at targets; vintage 1800s rifle. (Photos by Beth Beckett)



# DID JESSE'S HORSES PERFORM IN A CIRCUS?

A fellow enthusiast recently called our attention to a long-standing rumour that some of Jesse's horses may have spent time performing in a circus. His ponderings were greeted by forum members with the equally long-standing view that the horses were probably fake and that any attempts to prove the identification of them would be impossible. Still, three of us decided to take a closer look and what we found surprised us all.



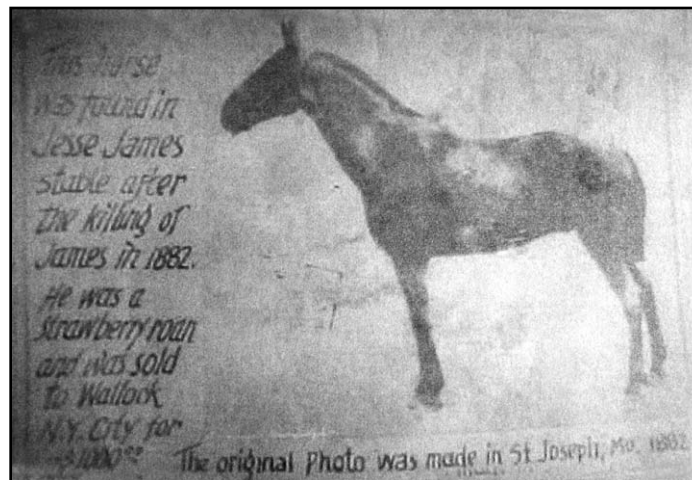
OUTLAW TALES

BY MICHELLE POLLARD

There were two horses found in Jesse's stable on the day he was killed – a Strawberry Roan and a Black Mare. Both were thought to have been stolen and indeed the *Kansas City*

*Daily Journal* of 6th April 1882 reported that the equine pair had been successfully returned to their rightful owners – L. G. Robinson of Clay county and J. R. Terhune of Andrew county. But that was not the end of the matter. Before these gentlemen could return home with their property, Mr E. F. Mitchell, a livery, feed and sale stable proprietor of St Joseph with an eye for an opportunity, approached both these men with an interesting proposition. He wished to purchase both horses and offered a reasonable price for each - more than either of them were deemed to be worth at the time. Robinson declined the offer, but Terhune, who had all but given up on finding the horse he had had stolen from him and had no doubt purchased another to replace him, agreed and Mitchell became the proud owner of the Strawberry Roan.<sup>1</sup>

Soon thereafter, and perhaps following the testimony of the Ford brothers, Mr Mitchell acted upon rumours regarding another horse, which had been owned by Jesse but had recently been sold by him, and was then in the possession of Charles Alderman. Mitchell "bought this bay horse from Alderman before other parties had an opportunity to make offers for it."<sup>2</sup> Such was the growing understanding



Left: photo states – "This horse was found in Jesse James stable after the killing of James in 1882. He was a strawberry roan and was sold to Wallock (sic), N.Y. City for \$1,000.00. Original photo, St. Joseph, Mo. 1882."

Below: Oct. 31, 1884 ad featuring Jesse's roan.



forehead, white spot at the end of nose. The tail is also short." When asked what he planned to do with the horses, Mitchell stated his intention "to place them in one of the largest circuses this summer."<sup>3</sup> However, that was not to be the fate of these two horses. Instead, Mitchell sold them, for a "fabulous price" rumoured to be \$2,100,<sup>4</sup> to an agent of James H. Wallick, an actor of the day, "whose appearances in so called border dramas helped codify what would become the western."<sup>5</sup>

Wallick was to star in James McCloskey's new play, *Jesse James – The Bandit King*, in which the actor "cut a dashing figure" as Jesse.<sup>6</sup> In this early script, "the aged mother was killed by a bomb thrown into her home... Shapleigh, the villain, coveted the house and land and his accomplice undertook the horrible act. When Jesse, alias Joe Howard, swore vengeance, Shapleigh accused him of the deed, which forced Jesse into hiding and a life of crime."<sup>7</sup> Although Wallick was well known and well liked and his troupe of fellow actors no doubt hardworking, it was the performing horses that drew the adoring crowds. 'Roan Charger' and 'Bay Raider', as Jesse's previously owned horses were now known, often received better

of the importance of these horses that efforts were made subsequently to steal them both from Mitchell's stable but the would-be thieves were thwarted.

"The roan is fifteen hands high," noted one reporter, "weighs 1050 pounds, is about six years old with mane roached and tail short, and in body is square trimmed and fleet built... The other horse, the bay, is about sixteen hands high, has four white feet, a white star in

*Continued on page 6*



LETTERS continued from page 1

above the genus on earth ...

“For I do not think there is any on earth who I could choose, that would please me as well as the one I have chosen. (Z.E.C.) ...

“How often have I thought of you and those beautiful lines you gave me, since we took the parting hand, and it is the last thought that leaves my mind at the lonesome hour of night and the first in the morn ...

“Cupid who is the go of love had shot one of his winged darts in my bosom, which I hope will never be drawn and your beauty excells (sic) that of Venus, who was the goddess of beauty ...

“I assure you, if you will wait, that length of time (as I have told you) I will never forsake you ...”

Be still my heart!

Robert certainly had a way with words, and just a few months after he wrote this letter to his beloved, the couple were wed.

This letter is the only one we have dated before the couple married. We also acquired letters from Robert that he wrote whilst en route to the California gold fields from which he would not return.

By 1850, Robert and Zerelda had three surviving children and he had been a successful preacher at three churches in the area. The most recent was the founding of Pisgah Baptist Church just outside of present day Excelsior Springs in 1849, and which would play a small role in the bush-whacking days of Frank and Jesse years later.

Robert wrote to Zerelda in April of 1850 from Fort Carney (sic) near Grand Island, Neb., and again in May of 1850 from Grand Island. It was not near as romantic as when he and Zerelda were courting, but his love for his family does shine through. He told of regular prayer services, snowy weather and a lot of wagons heading west, mentioning that he had been told there were 400 wagons alone between Fort Carney and St. Joseph.

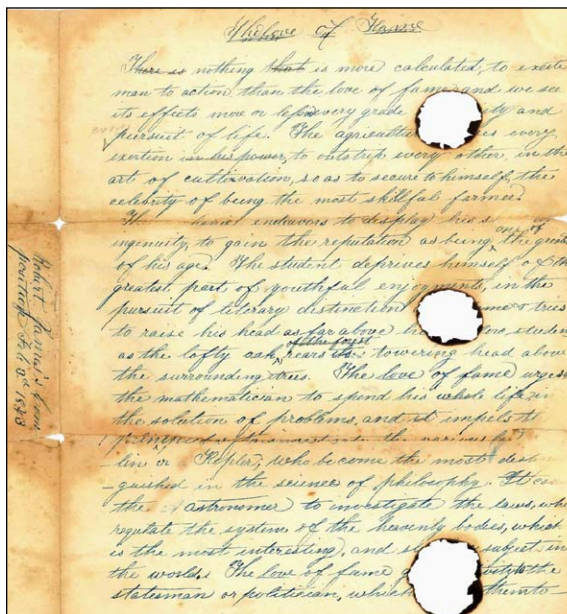
Chillingly, he twice refers to the possibility that he will not return from California.

“I pray God that you may read your Bible, live as a Christian & train up your children in the faith of duty. So if we never meet in this world that we may meet in heaven.”

This is repeated more than one time in each letter. Knowing the path Frank and



Letter from Robert to Zerelda dated May 17, 1850 from Grand Island, Nebraska. (Photos: Friends of the James Farm)



This essay by Robert James, dated Feb. 3, 1843 and entitled, “The Love of Fame,” is an almost eerie insight into the life Jesse James would choose to lead. The essay begins: “There is nothing more calculated to excite man to act on than the love of fame.”

Jesse took in their young adulthood, it gives you pause to wonder if Robert had an intuition as to the future of his two sons.

At the end of the letter, he tells Zerelda: “Live as a Christian & pray for me that if we no more meet in this world we can meet in Glory.”

There has been speculation for well over 100 years as to exactly why Robert decided to leave three successful churches and a young family behind for the gold fields of California. Was it because he wanted to

preach God’s word to the sinners of the gold rush or did he want to escape a nagging wife?

We will never know, but one thing is for certain, Robert James did not return home. Zerelda was left a young widow. If she was not the strong woman we know of today in 1850, then the death of her husband was the turning point for the backbone we see in Zerelda for the rest of her life.

The last letter from Robert, dated July 19, 1850, contains reports of many who have already died after arriving in California. He reports that he is feeling well. Nonetheless, he too would perish from cholera on Aug. 18, 1850, in Hangtown, California (now known as Placerville).

These letters provide some insight into the young James family.

Also acquired were religious essays Robert had written prior to leaving for California. As a noted revivalist, one often has to wonder what difference he might have made in the lives of Jesse and Frank had he lived.

The letters will be on display sometime in the new year. Please watch for a notification of the new exhibit on our website: [www.jessejames.org](http://www.jessejames.org), or our Facebook page: Friends of the James Farm.

JESSE'S HORSE continued from page 4

reviews than their human counterparts and wowed audience with their tricks and bravery. Billed as trained acting horses, they “would endear themselves to audiences by tearing down reward posters, descending down a staircase, and rescuing a damsel from a burning building.”<sup>8</sup> They also pick pocketed, drank beer and played the piano alongside other trained horses and a trick donkey.<sup>9</sup>

Not all reviews were good, however. One reporter in Utah wrote, “If [The Bandit King] had stopped short at the cleverness of the horses it would have been excusable – but the inability to see through the gauzy, fish-net flimsiness of the plot and the situations baffles all understanding.”<sup>10</sup>

Still, ‘Roan Charger’ and ‘Bay Raider’ performed alongside each other in The Bandit King and, simultaneously, The Cattle King, to packed theatres, delighting audiences across America until October 1888, when the death of ‘Roan Charger’ was announced in the newspapers. It was reported that he had died in New Orleans from a rupture of a blood vessel.<sup>11</sup> ‘Roan Charger’ was buried six miles from the city where his grave was “kept green by the people of the Delta City.”<sup>12</sup>

‘Bay Raider’ continued to be named on billboards and in newspaper advertise-



An early advertisement for the “Bandit King’s” roan charger. (Photos courtesy of Michelle Polard)

ments until 1895 at which time it seems the show stopped before making a brief, unsuccessful, comeback in 1902, perhaps due to the absence of its earlier stars.<sup>13</sup>

James W. Wallick committed suicide at the Commercial Hotel in New York on May 1, 1908, after “a spell of illness and despondency over financial matters.”

The newspaper reported that he had made and lost several fortunes in the theatre business. He was 69 years old.<sup>14</sup>

1. *Maysville Evening Bulletin*, 15 April, 1882 and *Sedalia Weekly Bazoo*, November 20, 1883.
2. *Maysville Evening Bulletin*, 15 April, 1882.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Sedalia Weekly Bazoo*, November 20, 1883.
5. *Renegades, Showmen and Angels – A Theatrical History of Fort Worth from 1873-2001*, James L. Jones, 2006, pp55-6.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Performing the American Frontier 1870-1906*, Roger A Hall, University of Cambridge, NY, p 130.
8. James L. Jones, *Op. Cit.*, pp55-6.
9. *Washington Times*, May 5, 1895.
10. *Salt Lake Herald*, July 8, 1888.
11. *Richmond Democrat*, TX, October 6, 1888.
12. *Kansas City Times*, March 9, 1892.
13. Roger A. Hall, *Op. Cit.* p 129.
14. *New York Times*, May 2, 1908.

# Thank You!

**W**e are very grateful to Jeanne Ralston for her generous donation toward the purchase of the letters acquired in last June’s auction.

*“I hope this type of collaboration/partnership will encourage others, such as FOJF members, interested sponsors and members of the community to support future acquisitions of artifacts that are relevant to the Jesse James Farm & Museum. It is important to continue the work in building quality exhibits in which to attract tourists, as well as scholars to this historic site.”*  
~ Jeanne Ralston

**Editor’s note:** Anyone interested in donating to the Friends of the James Farm, please feel free to contact us via mail:

**Friends of the James Farm**  
P.O. Box 404, Liberty, MO 64069

Via email to Vivie Tison:  
[vtison@aol.com](mailto:vtison@aol.com)

By calling **816.736.8500** or visiting our website: [www.jessejames.org](http://www.jessejames.org)

We are a 501c3 organization that seeks to support and promote public interest in and awareness of the James Farm Historic Site. The farm is owned and operated as a historic site by Clay County (Missouri) Parks & Recreation.





# Who Killed Jesse?

*A reprint from the Neosho Daily News June 18, 1979*

A handful of historians carefully dug into an abandoned grave last fall. What they found revived a century-old debate about the life – and death – of Jesse James.

Is a .38-caliber bullet they unearthed the slug that “laid poor Jesse” in his grave? Or was it a .44-caliber slug, as the man who pulled the trigger had claimed?

Jesse James has been immortalized in song, prose, film. But the true story behind the legend may never be known. It literally has been whittled away by tourists, fraught with conflicting accounts and glossed over by the prospect of a quick buck.

Was he an American Robin Hood? A greedy murderer? Whatever he was, this outlaw who pioneered the daylight bank holdup and perfected the art of train robbery isn't forgotten. Tourists by the thousands flock to his stomping grounds in Northwest Missouri, and debate over his death on April 3, 1882, still rages.

The grave of Jesse Woodson James was still fresh when his grieving but practical mother, Zerelda, started selling tours of the family log cabin for a quarter. For another two bits, she'd take your picture next to the gravemarker or let you have a pebble from the gravesite. When the pebbles ran low, she'd send a neighbor's kid to the nearby creek for more.

Today, the Jesse James business is booming. “He's become bigger than life,” says one historian.

The 20th century team sifting the empty plot on the farm near Kearney, Mo., was mindful of misadventures there more than 75 years before. Jesse's ornate iron casket with glass sides fell apart when his family tried to move it, and some bones fell back into the grave. The remains were moved to a cemetery. But what had been left behind?

The recent excavation turned up pieces of coffin, bone fragments, a tuft of hair and the bullet. No major archaeological find, but enough to answer a few historical questions -- and raise many more.

Some 700 books have been written on the James Gang, most of questionable accuracy.

“I'm amazed at the lack of scholarly research on Jesse James,” says Milton Perry, a Clay County historian. “Only now are we beginning to know more about the real Jesse James. The real person and the folklore hero aren't much alike.”

The greatest Jesse James legend is that he robbed from the rich to give to the poor, but Perry says, “there's no evidence that the James Gang ever gave to the poor.”

Folklore depicted Jesse James as lashing out at hated institutions of the day. Banks were a target because they took property from farmers, trains because they ran roughshod over farmers when track was laid.

“The James Gang was innovative; it attacked institutions rather than individuals,” Perry says. “People sort of applauded and envied anyone who could rob those hated institutions.”

But the evidence indicates that James, like other outlaws, was interested only in loot, and he personally killed 16 persons.

Until recently, it was generally accepted that Jesse was killed by a .44-caliber bullet. A .38-caliber slug found in the James Farm grave could be the fatal bullet. It was old enough, he said, and its condition was “consistent with other slugs which have passed through a victim's skull.”

The Pony Express Historical Association in St. Joseph, owner of the murder site, assails that conclusion. A spokesman, Gary Chilcote, claims a hole in the wall at the murder scene is proof that the fatal slug exited Jesse's head.

The hole certainly is proof enough for tourists. Over the years they have managed to widen it to the size of a large potato by collecting keepsake splinters. Chilcote believes one of the early tourists probably retrieved the bullet for a souvenir.

A newspaper story published four days after the murder says an autopsy showed

the bullet lodged in Jesse's head. Autopsy records haven't been found, however.

Until all the evidence is in, history buffs in these parts will continue the controversy. And controversy means tourists.

Jesse James' life and death are depicted in sequence near St. Joseph and Kansas City today: The farm near Kearney where he grew up, the Liberty bank 10 miles away where the gang staged its first holdup, and the St. Joseph house where Jesse met his death.

The cabin where Jesse James was born, reared and later hid from authorities rests on rolling farmland overlooking a shallow creek. Its wood planks, brittle after 120 years, need repair.

A \$50,000 restoration is underway there, and Parks Director Stephen L. Davis says, “I'm still hoping we'll find a bag of loot stashed somewhere.”

The scene of Jesse's first bank robbery, the Clay County Savings Association in Liberty, has been restored. Visitors can buy James Gang souvenirs in the gift shop, and their dollars are beginning to replace the \$60,000 Jesse James carried out of town in 1865.

More than 20,000 annually visit the site in St. Joseph where Jesse was murdered.

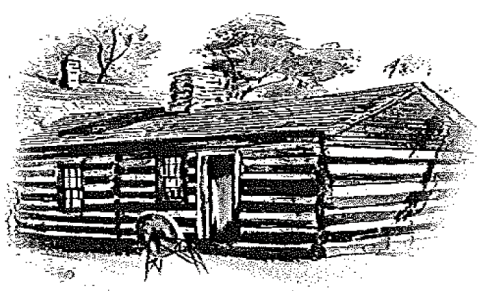
On the day of this death, Jesse James was discussing bank robbery plans in his house with two new cohorts - Charley and Bob Ford. During the conversation, Jesse noticed a framed inscription on the wall, “God Bless This Home,” was crooked. He stood on a chair to straighten it.

The Ford brothers drew their guns - they had been waiting for such a moment. Bob, a baby-faced man of 21, pulled the trigger ending the James Gang's 16-year reign.

The gang had been blamed for nearly every robbery in the country - no matter that some were pulled off at nearly the same time hundreds of miles apart. Historians give this final toll: 11 banks, seven trains, three stagecoaches, one county fair and a payroll messenger.

**Friends of the James Farm**

P.O. Box 404  
Liberty, MO 64069  
www.jessejames.org  
816.736.8500



James homestead cabin —  
Original art by Jim Hamil

**Return Service Requested**

YES, I want to join the Friends of the James Farm. I have checked my level of membership in the box at right and enclosed a check or money order for the amount indicated.

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*(Mark One)*

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- Bushwhacker . . . . . \$30
- Clay County Irregular . . . \$50
- Road Agent . . . . . \$100
- Long Rider . . . . . \$250
- Home Guard . . . . . \$500

Is this a renewal?  Yes  No

Outside the continental U.S., please add \$5 to your membership contribution.