

**UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA
Edmond, Oklahoma
Jackson College of Graduate Studies & Research**

**Jesse James in Public Memory:
The Robin Hood Myth, Museum Interpretation and
Newspaper Analysis of Missouri's Famous Outlaw**

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY

**By
Stephanie A. Coon**

Edmond, Oklahoma

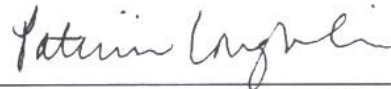
2008

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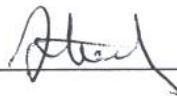
APRIL 2008



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Abstract

NAME: Stephanie A. Coon

TITLE: Jesse James in Public Memory: The Robin Hood Myth, Museum Interpretation and Newspaper analysis of Missouri's famous outlaw

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PAGES: 110

ABSTRACT: Jesse Woodson James (1847-1882) is one the most notorious bandits in U.S. history. The study focuses on the importance of understanding myths and interpretive materials to gauge public memory of historical criminals. Each chapter represents an aspect of popular culture that supplements the traditional historical knowledge of Jesse James. Though historians disagree regarding his role in public memory, newspapers, museums and films perpetuate the Robin Hood myth of Jesse James.

The first chapter is a literary review that establishes a framework for historical research and future study of Jesse James. Public memory and popular culture assist historians in gaining insight into events and people who do not normally leave records. The second chapter discusses the Robin Hood myth compared to Jesse James in American consciousness. The text outlines various aspects of the fable while addressing how Jesse James fills all of the required elements. Building on the myth, chapter three addresses the dual interpretations of museums in Missouri and Minnesota when dealing with the controversial figure. The four museums consulted in this study are the Jesse James Farm in Kearney, Missouri, the Jesse James Bank museum in Liberty, Missouri, the Northfield Historical Society Museum in Northfield, Minnesota and the Jesse James Home in Saint Joseph, Missouri. Continuing with popular culture, chapter four delves

into the newspaper political debates surrounding the perception of James and the state of Missouri because of his crimes. The major newspapers used to understand the debate include *The St. Joseph Daily Herald*, *The Liberty Advertiser*, *The Kansas City Star* and the *Kansas City Journal of Commerce*, *The Saint Louis Globe* and *The Saint Louis Republican*. A short analysis of ten films produced between 1939 and 2007 uncovers the Hollywood portrayal of Jesse James. The directors of these films took liberty with both the Robin Hood myth and the documented life of Jesse James to turn the man into a hero. Jesse James is a controversial figure in American history and historians continue to disagree over how future generations will remember the outlaw.

Acknowledgements

When I started to write my thesis, I thought, “Why in the world would I want to do this?” Now, I understand that the research and writing of this paper has not only challenged me, but also has provided a strange sense of pride at having completed such an arduous task. A project such as this can only be accomplished with the assistance of several people, who deserve recognition. First, I want to thank the staff of the History and Geography Department and in particular, to the faculty members who served as my committee: Dr. Patricia Loughlin, Dr. Carolyn Pool and Dr. Stanley Adamiak.

The staff of the Western History Manuscript Collection located at both University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of Missouri-Kansas City assisted immensely. The staff accommodated a tight research schedule by transporting numerous boxes of manuscripts from Columbia to the location in Kansas City. To Hayes Scriven, Director, Northfield Historical Society Museum; Gary Chilcote, Director Jesse James Home; and Elizabeth Beckett, Director, Clay County Historical Sites and their respective staffs, thank you for your willingness to allow surveys in your institution. I also have to thank the supervisors at my two jobs, who have allowed numerous days off for research and writing of this thesis. Thank you Linda Lofton, Director of Admissions, and the entire management staff of Barnes & Noble. I would not have been able to finish this if you had not been willing to work with a rather strange schedule.

I could never have completed a project of this magnitude without my friends who have supported me. My new friends in Oklahoma, especially Rachelle and Victoria, you

have all been rocks when as I fell apart. To my “Aunts” Debbie and Trudy you have supported me since the day I moved in back in 2005. Thank you for being so supportive as I adjusted to a new state, and being so far away from my family. Finally four long time friends who have supported my work and deserve special recognition for their assistance. Lani thank you for helping me figure out topic choices, where to begin with research and all of your assistance in the final months of this thesis. Julie and Carole, thank you for supporting and encouraging me throughout graduate school and particularly as I worked on my thesis. Peggy your professional and personal encouragement means more than I can ever explain.

Last, I need to thank my family for all of their support through the last three years. Lindsey, thank you for the copy machine that has saved numerous trips and dollars for research photocopies and Rita, thank you for spending your days off shuttling me to UMKC, and for spending the entire time feeding the meter. Michelle, thank you for sparking my interest in “Uncle” Jesse and being willing to listen to my opinions, even when they differed from yours. Mom, you have been a rock throughout the last three years, from not letting me postpone graduate school when dad died, convincing me that I could finish my courses when I thought it was impossible and the constant proofreading of chapters. Thank you for everything. Finally, Dad, you were so excited when the acceptance to graduate school arrived and you were determined I would start even when it looked like the funding was not going to come through. I wish you were here, but I know you are looking down celebrating the completion of this thesis and my graduation.

Introduction

Jesse James is one of America's most notorious bandits. Born Jesse Woodson James in 1847, Jesse and his brother, Alexander Franklin, experienced a difficult life. As children, their father Reverend Robert James, left the family to preach to gold seekers in California, where he died shortly after arriving. Zerelda James, their mother, remarried twice, with Benjamin Simms dying shortly after marriage, and Dr. Rueben Samuel devoting his life to the family.¹ Jesse had a strong religious background and even considered joining the ministry. However, the outbreak of the Civil War disrupted those plans. Angered by both a Union soldier attack on his stepfather and the treatment of southern sympathizers like himself, Jesse enlisted in the guerilla forces under William Quantrill and "Bloody" Bill Anderson. At the conclusion of the war, James returned home nursing a chest wound received while surrendering in May or June 1865.² Researchers question the reality of the attempted surrender, as some believe James and his men stumbled onto a unit of Federal soldiers, who attempted to capture Jesse.³ The politics of the war continued to haunt the James family. The James boys were angry about the treatment of former Confederates, as most were forced to swear a loyalty oath to the U.S. A number of their compatriots, some who lost their land in the war, were

¹ Martin E. McGrane, *The James Farm: It's People, Their Lives and Their Times* (Madison: Caleb Perkins Press, 1994), 4.

² Jesse E. James, *Jesse James: My Father* (Saint Louis: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1899).

³ William Settle, *Jesse James was his Name, or Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966), 31.

unable to own land. For a time in early 1865, the Samuels family was banished from Clay County Missouri.⁴ The idea for revenge most likely came from Jesse, who could not resound himself to being a simple farmer after his guerilla training. The brothers formed the first James gang to rob banks and trains across the country.

Throughout the Civil War, Missouri experienced turmoil. For years prior to the war, the slavery issue divided the state, with multiple political leaders resigning in order to protect their future with the United States.⁵ When the U.S. selected Lincoln for President in 1860, Missouri chose a pro-slavery candidate for governor in an attempt at balance.⁶ Missouri never officially seceded from the union but Confederates in the state used the chaos to their advantage, first at the battle of Wilson's Creek in August 1861, then with the development of various guerilla units. After the end of the war, Missouri once again found itself in a state of division, with Republicans and Democrats constantly at odds with one another. When the issue of Jesse James arose, the political parties continued their divisions with Republicans standing up as anti-James who believed nothing should deter the capture of the outlaw, especially money. Democrats on the other hand tended to attempt to pass bills that supported the brigand.⁷

This study focuses on the importance of understanding myths and interpretive material to gauge public memory of historical criminals. Each chapter represents an aspect of popular culture that supplements the traditional historical knowledge of Jesse James. Derived from advertising and the entertainment industry, popular culture differs

⁴ Settle, *Jesse James was his Name*, 30.

⁵ Charles M. Harvey, "Missouri from 1849 to 1861," *Missouri Historical Review* 2 (1907): 25.

⁶ Charles M. Harvey, "Missouri from 1849 to 1861," *Missouri Historical Review* 2 (1907): 32.

⁷ Comments from author based on newspaper research.

from the more traditional institutions.⁸ “Popular culture is designed for little more than immediate gratification.”⁹ Criticism of popular culture is not a new phenomenon. Since the rise of social classes, the affluent class has demeaned the tastes of the lower class.¹⁰ During Jesse’s career, the criticism over dime novels was rampant, particularly by the law enforcement searching for the outlaw. Though historians disagree regarding the role of Jesse James in public memory, newspapers, museums and films perpetrate the Robin Hood myth of Jesse James.

Chapter 1 provides a framework of previous historians who have conducted research about the outlaw. The historiography of Jesse James stretches from a book written by his son in 1889 to those in 2005. Each of these books shies away from a focus solely on popular culture of James in Missouri. For years, the Old West has been prominent in popular culture, through books, illustrations and mass produced products.¹¹ The 1939 film *Jesse James* appealed to a public furious with legal injustices and drew newfound interest in the people who defied the corrupt system.¹²

Chapter 2 discusses the Robin Hood myth and how Jesse James best illustrates the story. The two names are interwoven so often that it becomes easy to believe that James was the United States answer to Britain’s loved hero. My family is from Missouri, so James stories became fairytales throughout my childhood. These stories included one

⁸ MSN Encarta. “Popular Culture.” http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761585688/Popular_Culture.html (Accessed 2 April 2008).

⁹ Jib Fowles, *Advertising and Popular Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 10.

¹⁰ Fowles, 53.

¹¹ Richard Aquila. *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 1.

¹² Aquila, 118.

that my great grandmother Reno sat down on Jesse's lap and covered him with her dress to protect him from the sheriff in St. Joseph. My father used to walk through the house singing Billy Gashade's "Jesse James was a lad," which helped further the Robin Hood myth to his future children. Jesse James is a force with Missourians and their descendants. Much like the English use Robin Hood to improve some aspects of their history, some parts of the state of Missouri relies on Jesse James for advertising, including a marina at Smithville Lake, pictures at various restaurants in St. Joseph, billboards along the interstate leading to Jesse's residence in St. Joseph, and even the city slogan refers to the outlaw.

Chapter 3 addresses the importance of museum interpretation regarding Jesse James. Museums are set aside to hold items in trust for the public, and the curators are charged with presenting an accurate unbiased account of the items in their care. Three museums are entirely dedicated to James, while the fourth maintains a major exhibit dealing with the outlaw. Each of these, three located in Missouri and one in Minnesota, interpret the facts of the James story, while attempting to make an impression on their visitors. The museums, selected from a large list of locations, are the James Farm in Kearney, Missouri, the Jesse James Bank Museum in Liberty, Missouri, the Northfield Historical Society Museum in Northfield, Minnesota and the Jesse James Home in St. Joseph, Missouri.

Chapter 4 delves into the ongoing argument that occurred in Missouri newspapers about Jesse James. Following the Civil War devastation, the two major political parties used Jesse James as a campaign promise. The original research belief that papers were divided east and west fell apart as political divisions became more evident. This chapter

covers the important discussions of amnesty, the reward for James, the Ford brother's arrangements with the Governor, and even the assassination of Jesse. The major newspapers used for this study include *Kansas City Times*, *The Kansas City Journal of Commerce*, the *Saint Louis Globe Democrat*, the *Saint Louis Republican*, and the *Saint Joseph Daily Herald*. The chapter concludes with a discussion over how Jesse James continues to make headlines today with coverage of the 1995 exhumation, the 125th anniversary of the James assassination and the release of the recent Brad Pitt movie.

Chapter One

Standing on Historians Shoulders: Previous Research on Jesse Woodson James

Jesse James is one of the most prominent criminals in American history. Research about James focuses on the Civil war and his crimes rather than popular culture. Scholars have used newspapers, museums, movies and even dime novels in the quest to understand Jesse James in popular culture. Throughout the years, several historians have claimed to have expert knowledge about James, beginning in the 1920s with Robertus Love, continuing to Homer Croy and William Settle in the 1960s, and most recently to Marly Brant and T.J. Stiles.¹³ Love stated that his book was ninety-nine percent true, although a reviewer points out that Love tends to focus on the entire gang, while explaining the constant finger pointing about the robberies.¹⁴ Homer Croy grew up in northwestern Missouri, where he learned the James' gang escapades, and composed his book based entirely on descendent interviews. A reviewer claimed Croy placed too much emphasis on old-timer's accounts, which Croy treats as fact.¹⁵ While the reviewer claimed that Croy composed a book of tall tales, William Settle created a well-

¹³ Robertus Love, *The Rise of Jesse James* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1926); Homer Croy, *Jesse James was my Neighbor: The Whole Unvarnished Truth about the most Notorious Bandit and Outlaw the West has Ever Known* (New York, NY: Dell, 1960); William Settle, *Jesse James was his Nam, or Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966); Marly Brant, *Jesse James: The Man and the Myth* (New York, NY: Berkley Books, 1998); T.J. Stiles, *Jesse James: The Last Rebel of the Civil War* (New York, NY: A.A. Knopf, 2002).

¹⁴ Review of *The Rise and Fall of Jesse James* by Robertus Love *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 14 (June 1927), 118-120. This review courtesy of J-STOR archive.

¹⁵ Michael J. Broadhead review of *Jesse James was my Neighbor* by Homer Croy, *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 40 (Winter 1997), 422-424. Homer Croy (1883-1965) wrote books and screenplays including Will Rogers' first talking picture. *I Shot Jesse James* was a script for a 1949 movie by the same name. Croy's other works includes the *Jesse James was my Neighbor* and *Cole Young: The Last of the Great Outlaws*.

researched, historically based book, which is the best choice for reading. Settle spent his graduate years chasing newspapers, government documents and interviews with witnesses to produce his dissertation, which he later released as the groundbreaking *Jesse James was his Name*.¹⁶ Settle's goal was to cut through the myths perpetuated by Confederate Missouri editor John Newman Edwards to find the truth. One reviewer believed Settle cut through the fiction, but chased some rumors in dead end alleys. Another reviewer stated that while most books written prior to James' death and those produced since, are products of amateur historians, incapable of recognizing the truth. The reviewer continued that Settle's book is an important volume, based not on Robin Hood myths, but on research.¹⁷ Marly Brant built on Settle's work by cutting through new myths to the man, much as she did with previous work on the Younger brothers.¹⁸ T.J. Stiles, seen most often in documentaries about Jesse James, discussed the end of the Civil War, and how the guerilla training James received under Bill Anderson and William Quantrill, negatively influenced the young man. Stiles became the first to label Jesse

¹⁶ William Settle (1915-1988) received his Masters of Arts in history with his research topic of Frank and Jesse James. In 1966, he published a longer version of his PhD dissertation under the title *Jesse James Was His Name*. The book was a popular success, praised as an accurate account of the James Boys. As a result, Settle earned notoriety as an authority on the James gang.

¹⁷ Nicholas P. Hardeman, review of *Jesse James was His Name or Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri* by William A Settle, *The Journal of American History* 54 (June 1967): 161-162. This review courtesy of J-STOR archive; Albert Castel, review of *Jesse James was His Name or Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri* by William A Settle, *The Journal of Southern History* 33 (August 1967) 416-417. This review courtesy of J-STOR archive.

¹⁸ Marly Brant, *Jesse James: The Man and the Myth* (New York, NY: Berkley Books, 1998). Marly Brant worked in the entertainment industry for twenty-nine years and has written numerous books about the television and music business. Brant's research has appeared in television programs on A&E, and The History Channel among others. Brant has published numerous articles about James in *Wild West* magazine, including "Jesse James Defender John Newman Edwards," and "The Robberies of the James-Younger Gang." Her other research includes *The Story of Cole Younger by Himself*, *The Outlaw Youngers: A Confederate Brotherhood* and *Outlaws: The History of the James-Younger Gang*.

James as America's first terrorist.¹⁹ One reviewer deemed Stiles' book as not the last one on the legendary outlaw, but a hard one to beat.²⁰ In his research, Stiles uncovered an untapped resource. A Missouri state historic site at Watkins Mills, near Kearney, Missouri, covers the life of Zerelda and her family following the death of Robert James. There is a large number of letters, including those written by the Clay County sheriff during the hunt of the James brothers, which volunteers typed. A statement on Stiles website says that he has no reason to believe that these letters are forged.²¹ Other recent finds by researchers include the personal research materials of Homer Croy and William Settle, housed in the Western History Manuscript Collection at the University of Missouri.

Primary sources are important to understand the culture of America and the outlaw behavior of Jesse James. Newspapers, while biased, provide sources of popular opinion and culture. These include national newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The National Police Gazette*, as well as the local papers *Liberty Weekly Tribune, Kansas*

¹⁹ T.J. Stiles, *Jesse James: The Last Rebel of the Civil War* (New York, NY: A.A. Knopf, 2002). T.J. Stiles was raised in Minnesota, and grew up with his father saying they were related to a member of the James-Younger gang. Despite focusing on European history during his postgraduate work, Stiles found himself working at Oxford University Press, working on American historian's books. A freelance project, turning William Settle's biography into a children's book, peaked Stiles interest. From that point, the biography of James during the Civil War and as an underestimated political figure was born. T.J. Stiles has written other books about various topics in history. His works include *In Their Own Words: Robber Barons and Radicals*, *In Their Own Words: Civil War Commanders*, *The Citizen's Handbook*, and *In Their Own Words: Warriors and Pioneers*. Stiles served as one of the historical consultants on the recent American Experience episode on Jesse James.

²⁰ William L. Richter, review of *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* by T.J. Stiles, *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 62 (Autumn 2003), 337-340. Albert Castel, review of *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* by T.J. Stiles, *Missouri Historical Review*, 98 (April 2004), 263-264.

²¹ Scheduling conflicts during recent research trips to Missouri have prevented the viewing of these documents. I hope to see them in the future, even after completion of this thesis.

City Times, and *The Saint Joseph Daily Herald*.²² When dealing with newspapers, a basic overview of journalism history is helpful. Scholarly materials that assist with this include David Dary's *Red Blood and Black Ink: Journalism in the Old West* (1998) and Mark Summers' *The Press Gang: Newspapers and Politics 1865-1878* (1994). Others include Karen Roggenkamp *Narrating the News: New Journalism and Literary Genre in Late Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers and Fiction* (2005), Martin Lee and Norman Solomon *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media* (1990), Laurence Greene *America Goes to Press: The News of Yesterday* (1970), David Sachsman *The Civil War and the Press* (2000) and Fred Fedler *Lessons from the Past: Journalists' Lives and Work, 1850-1950* (2000).²³ Dary focuses his research on the journalistic styles of the old west. He discussed the early editorial, printing styles, and the development of various western newspapers. Summers addressed the history of multiple newspapers while pointing out the importance of these papers in daily and political life. Roggenkamp discussed the major dailies of the late 1800s and how they

²² *The New York Times* covers all of the multiple locations James is accused of robbing. *The National Police Gazette* tells the story of Jesse James from the point of view of police but it also covers each death announcement. The St. Joseph newspaper carries articles concerning Missouri issues, especially immediately following James' death, as he was hiding in the small town. *The Nashville Tennessean* comes from Jesse's hiding spot following the botched Northfield, Minnesota robbery. The Kansas City and Liberty newspapers are all from the area immediately around the hometown of James and most of his gang.

²³ David Dary, *Red Blood and Black Ink: Journalism in the Old West* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1998); Mark W. Summers, *The Press Gang: Newspapers and Politics 1865-1878* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Karen Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News: New Journalism and Literary Genre in Late Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers and Fiction* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2005); Martin A. Lee. and Norman Solomon, *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media* (Secaucus: Carol Publishing Group, 1990); Laurence Greene, *America Goes to Press, the News of Yesterday: The History of the United States are Reported in the Newspapers of the Day from the Boston Tea Party to the World War* (Freeport: Books of Libraries Press, 1970); David B. Seichsman, Kittrell Rushing and Debra Reddin van Tuyll, *The Civil War and the Press* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000); Fred Fedler, *Lessons from the Past: Journalists' Lives and Work, 1850-1950* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 2000).

were forced to create a more literary version of the news with characters and dialogue.²⁴

Lee produced an important guide on detecting bias in the media. While reporters, like historians, are supposed to present both sides of a story, Lee pointed out how often newspapers are unreliable sources. Greene incorporated the best versions of the top stories in history from the 1700s to the 1900s into a single book. There is little analysis, but instead reprints of various articles. Sachsman, Rushing and Redding van Tuyl compiled chapters by multiple authors addressing how the Civil War newspapers handled various issues, while Fedler focused his research on a one hundred year period, 1850-1950, and analyzed how the journalism career changed drastically since the earliest newspapers. While newspapers serve as important primary sources, books written during the period are equally valuable.

In the late 1800s, essentially a twenty-year period at the end of the century, five books appeared about Jesse James. These books came from Joseph Dacus, James Buel, Thomas Daggett, Frank Triplett, Jesse James, Jr., and even a man who wanted to keep his identity a secret.²⁵ Joseph Dacus, James Buel and Thomas Daggett all wrote in the two years just prior of Jesse's death and dealt solely with the myths about Jesse James, continuing to portray James as a Robin Hood and protector of the poor. In the months

²⁴ Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, xiii.

²⁵ Joseph A. Dacus, *Life and Adventures of Frank and Jesse James: The Noted Western Outlaws* (Saint Louis, MO: J.S. Goodman, 1880); James Buel, *The Border Outlaws: An Authentic and Thrilling History of the Most Noted Bandits of Ancient or Modern Times* (Saint Louis, MO: Historical Publishing Company, 1881); Thomas F. Daggett, *The Outlaw Brothers: Frank and Jesse James Lives and Adventures of the Scourges of the Plains* (New York: NY, R.K. Fox, 1881); Frank Triplett, *Jesse James, The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James: The Only Correct and Authorized Edition* (Saint Louis, MO: J.H. Chambers & Co., 1882); *Jesse Edwards James, Jesse James, My Father* (Independence, MO: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1899); No Author, *The Life and Daring Adventures of this Bold Highwayman and Bank Robber and His No Less Celebrated Brother, Frank James. Together with the Thrilling Exploits of the Younger Boys. Written by ***** (One Who Dare Not Now Disclose His Identity)* (Philadelphia, PA: Barclay & Co., 1882).

following Jesse's death, Frank Triplett made a deal with Jesse's mother Zerelda Samuels, to interview the family and produce an accurate story that explained Jesse's motives. Samuels later denied such an agreement occurred. The most problematic of these books would be the one written by Jesse's son and the one that the author feared revealing his identity. The young James penned a book dispelling all of the negative beliefs about his father, saying Jesse would never shoot anyone unless provoked. However, Jesse Junior was a young child when his father died, so he based his entire book on stories told from family and friends of the deceased outlaw.²⁶ A man who withheld his identity wrote the other problematic book. A variety of materials are responsible for this book, as it continued to play on the information from the dime novels and the stories of John Newman Edwards.

Just after the turn of the century and beyond, Jesse remained an important figure in publishing. Production continued on dime novels, a comic book series, the creation of a book rumored written by Jesse, and another book by William Ward. In the late 1990s, another book appeared, telling a different version of the James story. W.B. Lawson authored several dime novels, known by the detectives pursuing Jesse as trash and continued to fuel the belief that James was America's answer to Robin Hood.²⁷ A comic book series, featuring the Pinkerton Detective agency, contained at least one issue that

²⁶ Jesse Edwards James (1875-1951) was born in Tennessee during the time his father was in hiding in Nashville. As a child in hiding, James went by the name Tim Edwards. Following his father's death, James moved to Los Angeles and became a lawyer and later, along with his sister appeared in the 1920 film *Jesse James under the Black Flag*. James wrote his first book about the life of his father, then went back to revise and release under a longer title with additional information.

²⁷ W.B. Lawson, *Jesse James' Bloodhounds, or A Crimson Trail in the Outlaw Country* (New York, NY: Street & Smith, 1903); W.B. Lawson, *Jesse James' Railroad or the Outlaw Brotherhood at Bay* (New York, NY: Street & Smith, 1902); W.B. Lawson, *Jesse James in Disguise or The Missouri Outlaw as a Showman* (New York, NY: Street & Smith, 1901); W.B. Lawson, *Jesse James the Outlaw: A Narrative of the James Boys* (New York, NY: Street & Smith, 1901).

revolved around the James boys.²⁸ In the year following Jesse's death at the hands of Robert Ford, a novel appeared to explain why Jesse turned to the life of an outlaw. Many said the bandit wrote it, however it is doubtful that Jesse would have taken the time to defend himself or explain why he resorted to the crimes committed over the sixteen-year career.²⁹ William Ward drafted a book that included in the title the "only true account" much like many of his predecessors, and yet Ward relied heavily on the myths of the gang rather than producing new information.³⁰ Max McCoy, an award winning novelist and reporter, drafted a fiction book that plays as though Jesse survived the assassination attempt, and went on to tell his life story to Mark Twain, which continued to fuel claims that Jesse did not die in 1882.³¹

Jesse James was a wanted man, which led to a number of government documents related to his crimes. The Missouri State Archives in Jefferson City house the Governor Papers, including those of Joseph McClurg and Thomas Crittenden. The exclusion of discussion between Crittenden and the Ford brothers disappoints researchers, particularly the plans made about the arrest of James. Also housed at the state archives are the microfilmed copies of the numerous warrants issued for Jesse and other members of his gang, from throughout the state, as well as the findings of several grand juries regarding

²⁸ *Wild Bandits of the Border: A Thrilling Story of Adventures of Frank and Jesse James, Missouri's Twin Wraiths of Robbery and Murder.*

²⁹ Jesse James, *How I Became an Outlaw* (New York, NY: F. Tousey, 1893).

³⁰ William Ward, *The James Boys of Old Missouri: The Only True Account of the Outlaw Deeds of the Bandit Kings of the Far West and the Assassination of Jesse James by Bob Ford* (Cleveland, OH: Buckeye Publishing Company, 1907).

³¹ Max McCoy, *Jesse: A Novel of the Outlaw Jesse James* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1999). Max McCoy is an award winning novelist and investigative reporter. Born in Kansas, the majority of his novels deal with Kansas and Missouri. McCoy's books cover a variety of topics from Indiana Jones to the Aryan Nation.

the issuing of the warrants. As part of the microfilm collection are the Federal Census records and a reel of Circuit Court case files.³² The census records count Jesse, under his assumed name, while hiding in Saint Joseph. In Clay County, the archives house materials about the robbery of the Clay County Savings Association bank and the pursuit of the bandits.³³

While Settle started out with his book as a Ph.D. dissertation, he was not alone in the choice of Jesse as a topic. Two recent dissertations, by R. Christopher Anderson and Cathy Madora Jackson, are available.³⁴ Anderson's work, "Jesse James and the American Cinema," addressed the history of Jesse James stories and their creation at the hand of John Newman Edwards, whom Anderson blamed for the variety of fiction available about James. The original goal of the dissertation was to address the history of outlaws and other important western figures, although through research Anderson changed to focus solely on James. Anderson spent his chapters addressing the earliest movies available, including *Jesse James under the Black Flag*, the 1921 silent film *Jesse James* and continues through the 1957 *The True Story of Jesse James*. Jackson, on the other hand, focused her research on newspapers and dime novels to grasp the story of Jesse James in the American west. Jackson points out that during the reconstruction period, many Missourians envied Jesse, and wished they could have been the bold and

³² The circuit court files held by the Missouri State archives are only available for research on site, not for use via interlibrary loan, so complete material continued is not clear.

³³ The Clay County archives have not been accessible due to a move, so a complete list of materials is sketchy.

³⁴ R. Christopher Anderson, "Jesse James and the American Cinema: The Outlaw as a Cultural Phenomenon" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1985); Cathy Madora Jackson, "The Making of an American Outlaw Hero: Jesse James, Folklore, and Late Nineteenth Century Print Media," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Missouri, 2004). Cathy Madora Jackson also wrote about "American Outlaw Heroes" at the University of Missouri in Columbia, in 2004.

fearless man striking back at the Union army, who remained kind to the poor and downtrodden.³⁵ Jackson relied on books that discussed the guerilla forces during the Civil War and those that deal with John Newman Edwards, who continued to pursue the innocent nature of Jesse James.

In addition to the materials by Croy, Stiles and Brant, other secondary sources are available that deal with the life of James. These secondary materials include scholarly journal articles, documentaries and music that continue to display the love for Jesse James.³⁶ The articles about Jesse come from a variety of journals, including *Museum Graphic*, *Wild West*, *American History Illustrated*, *American History*, *The Tennessee Historical Quarterly* and *the Literary Digest*. The topics varied from the myths surrounding James, to the circumstances that drove him to the life of crime, and even most recently cover the decision to exhume the remains of Jesse to prove he died in 1882. Two interesting features including a piece written by Ted Yeatman, focused on the plans made by the Ford brothers to eliminate Jesse before he ended their lives, and the lucky break for one young photographer in Saint Joseph, who held the rights to the Jesse James in death picture, even after he sold his studio.³⁷

³⁵ Cathy Madora Jackson, "The Making of an American Outlaw Hero: Jesse James, Folklore, and Late Nineteenth Century Print Media," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Missouri, 2004), 21.

³⁶ Among the multiple monographs about Jesse, there are several reference materials available, including: Paul Finkelman, ed. *Encyclopedia of the United States in the 19th Century* (New York, NY: Charles Scribners Sons, 2001); Jay Robert Nash, *Encyclopedia of Western Lawmen and Outlaws*, (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1992); Bill O'Neal, *Encyclopedia of Western Gunfighters*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979); David J. Wishart, *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Ramon F. Adams, *Six-Guns and Saddle Leather: A Bibliography of Books and Pamphlets on Western Outlaws and Gunman* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954); Kathleen P. Chamberlain, *Wild Westerners, A Bibliography*, (Albuquerque, NM: Center of the American West, Department of History, University of New Mexico, 1998)

³⁷ *Museum Graphic* is a magazine produced by the Saint Joseph Museum in the 1950s. The articles covered various aspects of the museums throughout the city, although tended to focus several pages, or in some cases entire editions to their most famous museum, the Jesse James home. One small piece, written

Multiple items ensure that Jesse James remained a popular topic in historic discussions. Documentaries available on public television include “I Shot Jesse James,” produced by Samuel Fuller and Preston Foster. This movie gave the background of the life of Robert Ford, the man who shot America’s most famous outlaw. A and E network funded two documentaries about James, “The Search for Jesse James” and “The James Gang: Outlaw Brothers.” The first followed historians and scientists through the process of exhuming James and conducting DNA tests to prove that the person buried in the grave was in fact the outlaw. The second followed the James gang through their crimes, and attempted to show that their actions did not qualify them as Robin Hoods. Other documentaries included one entitled “Jesse James: Outlaw Hero”, “Life and Death of Jesse James” and one simply entitled “Jesse James.” In addition to these documentaries, multiple major motion pictures address the life and crimes of James. Hollywood saw Jesse James as an ideal subject for films because of his cloudy past. The earliest film is from 1921, a silent film entitled “Jesse James,” while the first available for rent or from libraries is also called “Jesse James,” produced in 1939. Jesse James being so prominent led to famous actors Roy Rogers and Clayton Moore to star as the outlaw. Recently, Jesse James was back on top, after Warner Brothers studios produced the film “The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford,” released in 2007. Brad Pitt starred as the unfortunate James, and Casey Affleck played the demonized Robert Ford, a role that garnered him numerous award nominations for supporting actor. While this movie, based on the book of the same title, painted James in a positive light, it tried to tell

in spring 1957 edition, revealed Mrs. R.O. Powelson suggested the cities slogan “Where the Pony Express Began and Jesse James Ended.” *Wild West Magazine* covers a variety of topics that deal with the period of growth into the American west, but does focus several cover stories to Jesse James and the lives impacted in various ways by his life and death.

the story of Jesse as accurately as possible with a limited amount of documented history.³⁸

Music also assisted with popularizing James to younger generations. Music is important in the history of the United States. Jesse James is the subject of one famous song where he is the hero. Multiple versions of this song are available, including two versions available on the Library of Congress website. This song is one most Missourians grew up learning until Jesse James was deemed a poor example for children. “Jesse James was a lad that killed many a man, he robbed the Danville train, but the dirty little coward who shot Mr. Howard, has laid poor Jesse in his grave.” Popular country music artist Toby Keith helped maintain Jesse James’ popularity by mentioning him in the song “Should’ve been a Cowboy.”³⁹

In addition to the music that maintained the popularity of Jesse James, one can visit his home state of Missouri to understand the special place in popular culture as a

³⁸ Andrew Dominik and Ron Hansen, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, DVD, Directed by Andrew Dominik (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers Pictures, 2008). Unless you view the entire list of credits, you will not see the statement, “This film is based on actual historical events. Dialogue and certain events and characters contained in the film were created for purposes of dramatization.”

³⁹ Steve M. Davis and Michael Carroll, *The Search for Jesse James* (New York, NY: A&E Home Video, 1996); Samuel Fuller and Preston Foster, *I Shot Jesse James* (Baker City, OR: Nostalgia Family Video, 1996); Greystone Communications, *The James Gang: Outlaw Brothers* (New York, NY: A&E Home Video, 1995); *Jesse James: Outlaw Hero* (United States: Artsmagic, 2006); Joseph Kane, Roy Rogers, George Hayes and Sally Payne, *Jesse James at Bay* (Charlotte, NC: United American Video, 1995); Casteel Productions, *Life and Death of Jesse James* (Clarksville, AR: Casteel Productions, 1991); Mark Zwonitzer, Michael Murphy and Brian Keane, *American Experience: Jesse James* (Boston, MA: PBS Home Video, 2006); Touchtone Pictures, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007). *Jesse James at Bay* has been released as part of a Roy Rogers collection on DVD, hence the 1995 date. Margaret Bradford Boni, *The Fireside Book of Favorite American Songs*, (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1952); Benjamin Albert Botkin, *A Treasury of American Folklore: Stories, Ballads and Traditions of the People* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 1944); E.A. Briggs, *Jesse James* (Pipe Creek, TX: Library of Congress, 1939); Wayne Erbsen, *Authentic Outlaw Ballads* (Asheville, NC: Native Ground Music, 1998); Wayne Erbsen, *Outlaw Ballads: Legends and Lore*, (Asheville, NC: Native Ground Music, 1998); John J. Koblas, *Outlaw Ballads and Fiddle Music* (Mankato, MN: Rainbow Recording, 2004); Kathleen Krull, *Gonna Sing My Head Off! American Folk Songs for Children* (New York, NY: A.A. Knopf, 1990); Mrs. Vernie Westfall, *Jesse James* (Library of Congress, 1940). Missouri natives often sing the song about Jesse James. The song appears in multiple folk and children’s music books as listed above.

hero. In Kearney, the James Farm welcomes hundreds of visitors each year. The farm, site of the planning of many of the James-Younger gang robberies, is now home to a museum. Visitors to the farm tour the old farmhouse, learn about the childhood of both Frank and Jesse, and their mother Zerelda. Many historians believed the Pinkerton attack led Jesse James turn to his life of crime as a revenge with the Pinkerton Detective Agency. Nearby, at the Kearney cemetery, the grave holding the remains of Jesse James is the recipient of more visitors than all other graves combined. During the 1995 exhumation, security forces were around the cemetery to protect anything missed in the excavation. Following the burial, a new headstone was placed for Jesse and Zee, a flat stone, surrounded by cement to prevent souvenir seekers from chipping away any portion of the stone. In the same county, just a few miles away, is the Jesse James Bank Museum. The building holds historical importance as the site of the first daylight peacetime robbery in the United States.

An hour away, the town of Saint Joseph, Missouri, plays a large role in the popularization of Jesse James. The visitor's convention recently recorded a tourism video and played up the fact that the notorious robber once resided and died in the small town. The town website says, "The town where the Pony Express began and Jesse James ended," while the visitors bureau has also put several billboards with large pictures of Jesse James to advertise the city.⁴⁰ Saint Joseph maintains the Jesse James House, currently a museum, which is the building where Robert Ford carried out the assassination. However, even more than the museums, one can walk through various stores and see the way that Jesse James affects the town today. At a local K-mart, near the registers, are tee shirts with guns on them, that say, "St. Joseph Missouri, home of

⁴⁰ The Saint Joseph Visitors Convention, www.stjomo.com. Accessed 10 October 2006.

Jesse James,” and a barbeque restaurant called Rib Crib features a large painting of the James brothers just inside the front door.

Some secondary books related to Jesse James include *The Crittenden Memoirs*, which sheds light on the Governor who made a deal with members of the James-Younger gang in an attempt to rid the state of Missouri of the wrath of the James brothers. Jerry Gaddy’s *Dust to Dust: Obituaries of the Gunfighters* combined various newspaper obituaries for multiple outlaws into a comprehensive volume. James David Horan’s *Desperate Men: Revelations from the Sealed Pinkerton Files* spent the first half of the book discussing the James-Younger gangs various robberies across the country. The second half of the book goes on to blame the James boys for the actions of later groups of outlaws. Additional books include *The History of Clay and Platte Counties* (1885), Frank Richard Prassel’s *The Great American Outlaw: a Legacy of Fact and Fiction* (1993), and Troy B. Riggs’ *The Bad Men of the West* (1999).⁴¹ Jesse James has been the subject of multiple books with reputable sources. These include *Background of a Bandit: The Ancestry of Jesse James* (1970), *Goodbye Jesse James: A Reprinting of the Best News Stories Concerning the Career and Death of Americans Most Famous Outlaw* (1967), and *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007).⁴²

⁴¹ Henry Huston Crittenden, *The Crittenden Memoirs*, (New York, NY: Putnam’s Sons, 1936); Jerry Gaddy, *Dust to Dust: Obituaries of the Gunfighters*, (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1977); James David Horan, *Desperate Men: Revelations from the Sealed Pinkerton Files*, (New York, NY: Putnam’s Sons, 1949); *History of Clay and Platte Counties, Missouri*, (Saint Louis, MO: National Historical Company, 1885); Frank Richard Prassel, *The Great American Outlaw: A Legacy of Fact and Fiction*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Troy B. Riggs, *Outlaws: The Bad Men of the West*, (Enid, OK: Troy B. Riggs, 1999). Henry H. Crittenden (born 1859) was a railroad worker, court clerk and real estate agent prior to retiring to conduct historical research and writing.

⁴² Joan M. Beamis and Wilham E. Pullen, *Background of a Bandit: The Ancestry of Jesse James* (New Hampshire: Beamis-Pullen, 1970); *Goodbye Jesse James: A Reprinting of Six of the Best News Stories Concerning the Career and Death of Americas Most Famous Outlaw* (Liberty, MO: Jesse James Bank Museum, 1967); Rob Hansen, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (New York,

Jesse James is one of the most interesting mythical figures in American history, because new discoveries constantly throw the past beliefs out the window. While historians such as William Settle, Marly Brant and T.J. Stiles have produced books deemed the best historical sources on James, the cultures change. This thesis deals with various aspects of popular culture, beginning in chapter two with the development of the Robin Hood myth in America. Chapter three delves into the role museums play in shaping popular culture, while chapter four adds to the work of previous historians who dealt with Missouri newspapers and the battle over Jesse James.

NY: A.A. Knopf, 1983, 2007). *Background of a Bandit*, written by Joan Beamis, could possibly be a conflict of interest; Beamis is a descendant of Drury James, an uncle of Frank and Jesse. Some historians believe that her material was restricted by co-author Wilham Pullen and the DAR. Pullen was trying to prove his relationship to the James family. *Goodbye Jesse James* was published by the Jesse James Bank Museum in Liberty, Missouri. The book combines articles covering the multiple times that the media claimed the infamous robber outlaw had perished. *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, by Rob Hansen, originally published in 1983, with a scheduled reprinting in 2007 to coincide with the release of the movie by the same name.

Chapter Two

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly:

The Robin Hood Myth and Jesse W. James, 1847-1882

*Jesse James was a lad that killed many a man/ He robbed the Danville train/But that dirty little coward that shot Mr. Howard has laid poor Jesse in his grave. / Poor Jesse had a wife to mourn for his life/three children they were brave/But the dirty little coward that shot Mr. Howard has laid poor Jesse in his grave.*⁴³

Missouri residents share Billy Gashade's song with children during discussions of Jesse James, the most celebrated outlaw in history, who lived a controversial life that continues to draw researchers today. Biographers uncover fables about James, and then proceed to perpetuate them in their publications. A sampling of these tales include a discussion of fugitive verses Christian man, and a look at the death and apparent resurrection of the infamous bandit, both assisting in Jesse James being labeled America's Robin Hood. To interpret James, one must address the tales, and strive to present the truth of this dichotomous figure. Comprehending the development of James as Robin Hood requires a study into how he fits in the world myth. Jesse James suffered at the hands of the enemy, proceeded to rob the rich, and gave money to the poor, assisted his fellow man, and died at the hand of a traitor.

⁴³ Austin E. and Alta S. Fife, eds. *Cowboy and Western Songs: A Comprehensive Anthology* (Ojai, CA: Creative Concepts, 1969), 254-256. This song appears in multiple works of American folk songs, all with similar lyrics. This copy does include multiple verses not included in this paper. Other works include: Kathleen Krull, ed. *Gonna Sing My Head Off: American Folk Songs for Children* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1992.); Kathleen Krull, ed. *I Hear America Singing: Folk Songs for American Families* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992); Wayne Erbsen. *Outlaw Ballads, Legends and Lore* (New York, NY: Native Ground Music, Inc, 1996). The ballad also appears in Homer Croy. *Jesse James was My Neighbor: The Whole Unvarnished Truth About the Most Notorious Bandit and Outlaw the West has Ever Known* (New York, NY: Duell, 1949); John W. West, "To Die Like a Man: The 'God' Outlaw Tradition in the American Southwest" (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 1964). West includes twenty-six variations of the ballad beginning on pages 276-296. West also include some basic background information about the original author and initial performance of the ballad in Creede, Colorado.

Robin Hood of British lore is a ruffian, living outside the protection of the law. He is not a common criminal; he robs from the rich, gives to the poor. Robin's enemies are the rich and corrupt, although he supports the rightful king. Robin Hood will live as long as someone tells the bold legends' tale.⁴⁴ Historian Kent Steckmesser explains, "The folk of medieval England idolized him as the symbol of resistance to a corrupt priesthood and nobility."⁴⁵ The character of Robin Hood is not just a British figure, but appears in Germany as Schinderhannes, in Italy as Fra Diavalo and in Australia as Ned Kelly, a person driven to life as an outlaw by persecution, who eventually dies by a traitor's hand.⁴⁶ America's version of this mythic figure comes in the form of Jesse Woodson James, a man born to Baptist Minister Robert and his wife, Zerelda James, in Clay County Missouri in 1847.⁴⁷ Despite his upbringing in the church, Jesse fell into a life of prosecution and outlawry. Historians and folklorists question what led the public to begin referring to James as America's Robin Hood, a debate that continues with each publication.

⁴⁴ "Robin Hood: A Beginners Guide to Robin Hood," <http://www.boldoutlaw.com/robbeg/robbeg1.html>. 1 February 2007, 1; W.E. Simone, "Robin Hood and Some Other Outlaws," *The Journal of American Folklore* 71 (1958): 27 – 33.

⁴⁵ Kent Steckmesser, "Robin Hood and the American Outlaw," *The Journal of American Folklore* 79 (1966): 348.

⁴⁶ Schinderhannes' proper German name was Johannes Bueckler, the captain of a gang of robbers. Bueckler began young, stealing cows skins at the age of 14. Fra Diavalo, literally Brother Devil, the name given to Michele Pezza, was a famous brigand leader who leader forces against French occupation of Naples, popularized in novels by Dumas. Ned Kelly was a folk hero made famous because of his defiance of colonial authorities.

⁴⁷ Kent L. Steckmesser, "America's Robin Hood," *Mankind* 10 (1968): 16. The basics of James' childhood are also available in: Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor: The Whole Unvarnished Truth About the Most Notorious Bandit and Outlaw the West has Ever Known*, New York: Duell, 1949; and William A. Settle, *Jesse James was his Name, or Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966.

Many historians agree that circumstances led Jesse James into a life of crime. As historian John West stated in his dissertation, “On April 3, 1882, Jesse James the man passed into history but Jesse James the Southwestern Robin Hood began to pass into undying legend.”⁴⁸ Federal soldiers, angry that Frank James had disappeared, assaulted a pregnant Mrs. Samuels, then grabbed her husband and hung him from a tree.⁴⁹ Jesse managed to free Samuels, but the damage was irreversible. Because of the torture, Samuels had rope burns on his neck for the remainder of his life and suffered mental problems, eventually leading to his death in the state hospital.⁵⁰

Following this attack, Jesse James decided to strike back at the Yankees who had tried to kill his stepfather. Jesse joined Frank in approaching William Quantrill, leader of the guerilla forces in Missouri. Quantrill accepted Frank, but refused Jesse because he was too young. A determined Jesse approached Bill Anderson, another guerilla leader. Anderson allowed Jesse to join his unit, and James proceeded to become one of the most violent in the group. In one instance, similar to the Robin Hood legend, Jesse disguised himself as a girl, and went to a disorderly house frequented by Federal officers. When a number of Union officials filled the house, Jesse called his guerilla forces in to attack, devastating the Federal army.⁵¹ Throughout the remainder of the war, Jesse fought alongside his brother for the southern cause. At the conclusion of the war, when most of

⁴⁸ John W. West, “To Die Like a Man: The ‘Good’ Outlaw Tradition in the American Southwest” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas), 37.

⁴⁹ Anthony Gish, *American Bandits: A Biographical History of the Nation’s Outlaws—From the Days of the James Boys, the Youngers, the Jennings, the Dalton Gang and Billy the Kid, Down to Modern Bandits of Our Own Day, Including Dillinger, “Pretty Boy” Floyd, and Others* (Girard, KS: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1938).

⁵⁰ Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 8.

⁵¹ John W. West, “To Die Like a Man,” 39.

the Confederate troops had surrendered, the Missouri guerrillas continued their attacks. Eventually, Jesse agreed with his mother that it was time to return to his pre-war life, and he led a small group of men in for surrender. After securing their parole for crimes committed during the war, Jesse was leading the men toward their homes. Without warning, Federal forces fired on the group, severely wounding Jesse. Cole Younger, a member of the group and later a gang member, went to the Union general requesting protection to take Jesse home to die. Rumors abound that Cole Younger said, "Jesse meant to come in and give himself up, open and honest, just like he promised his ma he would. I am taking him home to her. I reckon there aint nothing else me or anybody else can do for him now."⁵² Luckily, Jesse encountered his second cousin, and future wife, Zerelda (Zee), who nursed him back to health.⁵³

Robin Hood stole from the rich, but historians disagree if Jesse accurately fits this aspect of the legend. February 14, 1866, dawned a quiet, cold morning in Liberty, Missouri but that changed with the first daylight bank robbery in history, diagonal from the courthouse. The criminals escaped with a wheat sack full of gold and silver coins, cash deposits and multiple U.S. bonds. Even after this robbery, the James-Younger gang continued in their raids, gaining large quantities of cash with each crime. "No evidence shows that money from the robberies found its way into the pockets of the deserving poor."⁵⁴

⁵² Will Henry, *Jesse James: Death of a Legend* (New York: Leisure Books, 1996, 2003, 75; John W. West, "To Die Like a Man," 26.

⁵³ Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 34.

⁵⁴ Steckmesser, "Robin Hood and Some Other Outlaws," 350.

Similar to Robin, the gang used tricks to prevent locals from figuring out their plans, while preparing to escape with the spoils. In Liberty, a group of sixteen men rode into town, dividing into groups of two to keep watch on the various streets leading to the square. Two men entered the bank, clad in long coats to hide their weapons, and proceeded to warm themselves at the stove to avoid suspicion. One man approached the counter, seeking change for a one-hundred dollar bill. When the banker looked down to make change, James drew his weapon and demanded the cashier open the safe. Like Robin Hood, Jesse and his gang would avoid shooting the cashier, as to avoid extra attention. The gang would force the cashier into the safe, providing additional time for escape. In Liberty, the robbers left the outer door of the safe unlatched, allowing Greenup Bird and his son to escape and call for assistance. Historians question the inclusion of Jesse in this robbery. As John Edwards said, “In the spring of 1866, he [Jesse] was just barely able to mount a horse and ride.”⁵⁵ In an attempt at humor, following the Corydon, Iowa robbery, James approached the platform of a debate where Henry Clark Dean discussed the need of the railroad in town. Jesse suggested a problem at the bank, which caused several moments of heated debate prior to citizens checking the bank, only to find the cashier locked in the safe and the money gone.⁵⁶ Despite the claims of Jesse James as America’s Robin Hood the difference remains that Robin Hood stole from the rich, while James stole from poor, hardworking neighborhood farmers. After multiple successful bank burglaries, the James gang began to broaden their attacks, setting their sites on the land grabbing railroads.

⁵⁵ Edwards, *Noted Guerillas*, 449.

⁵⁶ Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 65.

The hardest part of the train robberies came with stopping the engine. The gang, typically not Frank and Jesse, would build some sort of block on the tracks. The gang leaders would then board the first car, demanding the money from the safe, while another rummaged through mail sacks, seeking Uncle Sam's money. Additional gang members clamored on board cars, quickly relieving passengers of money and jewels. Legends state that Jesse would first ask farmers and widows to raise their hands, revealing they never stole from these two groups. Rumors say that Jesse wished to maintain the belief he only held up rich Yankees. One gentleman on the train questioned Jesse about his belongings, revealing himself as a former Confederate soldier. James quickly returned the comrade's wallet and watch.⁵⁷ During the train robbery at Blue Cut, a widow revealed she was riding the train to bury her recently deceased husband. Jesse, being a kind southern gentleman, returned her stolen money and provided an additional two hundred dollars.⁵⁸ Other stories illustrate a chivalrous gentleman, who robbed men and kissed women.⁵⁹

With all of these events pushing Jesse James into the role of Robin Hood, a story that involved a widow pushed James to hero status. While running from the authorities, Frank and Jesse stopped at an eighty-acre farm in Fayetteville, Missouri. The owner, a widow named Maupin or Moppin, agreed to provide them a meal, and while the boys waited, they noticed she was crying. Inquiries lead to the story behind her tears. Her husband had recently been killed, and a loan shark was demanding payment in full on the

⁵⁷ John W. West, "To Die Like a Man", 41.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 42.

⁵⁹ Haldeen Braddy, "Jesse James's Chivalry," *The Journal of American Folklore* 69 (1956): 62.

property. Jesse insisted on loaning her the money and helped her to create a receipt. Later, after the loan shark left, he met an unfortunate demise. Jesse and Frank, hiding near a bridge, ambushed the man, and relieved him of his extra money. Records later revealed that the widow's husband had paid the loan just before his death, but the receipt never made it to their home.⁶⁰

Similar to the British character, Jesse James had numerous Sherwood Forests.⁶¹ While some would willingly assist the James boys, a majority of the farmers were unaware of what the gang members looked like. Immediately following the Civil War, townspeople held negative opinions of the banks and railroads, so they willingly helped the outlaws. One example, the Carmichael family, of Maryville, Missouri, agreed to allow men passing through town to stay one evening in their home. Folks described the James' boys as gracious and entertaining. Several weeks later, Mr. Carmichael learned that the family had aided the fugitives unknowingly.⁶² In the town of Maryville, Missouri, Mrs. John Nanson received the James boys willingly, offering a meal and place to rest. When federal soldiers approached, Nanson hid the boys between her feather mattresses.⁶³ Because of their fame, people everywhere want to claim to have assisted the boys. JoAnna Stull, registrar for the City of Greeley Museums, traced her genealogy to Saint Joseph, Missouri. She learned her grandmother had lived down the street and

⁶⁰ Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 100-103; Widow Story, as told to Homer Croy, Homer Croy Papers folder 757, Western History Manuscript Collection, Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri; John W. West, "To Die Like a Man," 44. This story also appears in various films throughout history.

⁶¹ The reference to Sherwood forests is courtesy of Malachai Antal, per a March 2007 peer edit.

⁶² Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 5.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 13.

according to a diary, she provided food to the Howard family. Rumor in my family says that my great grandmother Reno sat in Jesse's lap and covered him with her dress to prevent the police from spotting him.⁶⁴ Author Homer Croy received letters telling of interaction with the fugitives. One states their father played poker with the "fine young men," while another explained whenever the gang stopped to eat, they paid more than the meal was worth. One letter summed up the southern point of view best. During the 1870s, Jesse hid with the Jarette family in Louisiana. The neighbors were unaware of the identity of the stranger, but later, when Jarette revealed his identity, "I'm sure if they'd introduced themselves, they would have been safe. My dad and the other men were still mad as hell at the Yankees."⁶⁵

The problem surrounding Jesse James comes from the conflicting stories of a fugitive who is also deemed a nice Christian gentleman. One example is that no person would swear being a witness to Jesse's crimes. "Other than a reluctant handful of ex-war comrades, fellow guerillas and actual gang members, not fifteen persons in the state of his birth could, *or would*, take certain oath to the identity of America's most famous outlaw."⁶⁶ James' mother and wife were the only ones who could swear with legal certainty that Jesse James was actually killed in Saint Joseph during the 1882 coroners' inquest. Following the stick up in Liberty, Greenup Bird, the cashier of Clay County

⁶⁴ In July 2004, JoAnna Stull was discussing her genealogy with me, when the subject of Jesse James came up. She had just learned about her family connection to the James family and was excited to share the information. My grandmother, Alfonso Leona (Reno) Coon told the story of how her mother protected Jesse James from the authorities by sitting in his lap and covering him with her dress. The story was passed along from Great Grandma Reno, to my grandmother to my father, Gary Coon.

⁶⁵ Jim Milling, Letter to Editor, *Dallas News*, 15 September 1949, Homer Croy Papers (folder 746), Western History Manuscript Collection, Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

⁶⁶ Will Henry, *Jesse James: Death of a Legend*, 83.

Savings Association, never swore to the identity of the men who committed the crime. Despite these and other declarations of innocence, hard evidence surfaced to tie crimes to James. While riding a stagecoach, Judge Roundtree found himself without his gold watch and his daughter-in-law without her diamond ring. Later, following James' death, they found the watch among Jesse's belongings.⁶⁷

Accusations of murder eventually joined the other crimes. In February 1866, George Wymore, an innocent boy on his way to William Jewell College, died from a gunshot following the Liberty robbery. The fatal bullet came from one of the gang members shooting wildly at approaching police. During the bank hold up in Richmond, Missouri, the cashier caught the attention of Jesse James. Following a quiet discussion with Frank James, Jesse without warning shot the man. James explained he was certain the man was S.P. Cox, a union soldier who had killed Bill Anderson, the James boy's commander during the Civil War. Jesse misidentified the man and instead murdered Captain John W. Sheets, a local man. Jesse, committing his first post war murder, got a taste of blood money.⁶⁸ Years later, Sheets widow denied the accusations, "he was not killed by the James boys and the bank was not robbed at the time he was killed."⁶⁹

In April 1875, Pinkerton's detectives, believing Frank and Jesse to be home, attacked the family farm, costing the life of their young stepbrother, Archie, and their mother her left arm. Simple questions of neighbors traced to an undercover detective

⁶⁷ Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 292.

⁶⁸ Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 55-56; Jesse James Bank Robbery Museum, Author tour, Liberty, Missouri, 27 December 2006.

⁶⁹ Flora E. Stevens, statement regarding Gallatin Robbery, Missouri Historical Society, William Settle Papers, Folder 40, Western History Manuscript Collection, Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

working at a neighboring farm. Beginning in January 1875, Detective James Ladd received employment on Daniel Askew's property. Ladd informed the Pinkertons that Jesse was going to be at his mother's home. Operatives approached the home late in the evening, throwing a black powder bomb through the window. Archie, injured in the explosion later died. A young African American boy of the Samuels grabbed a gun and shot at the detectives. One shot made contact with Jack Ladd, who later died.⁷⁰ Frank and Jesse sought revenge on Askew, who had unknowingly employed a Pinkerton operative. One evening he went to draw water from his well, but never returned. His body, discovered later, had three shots in the back.

Jesse James did not trust people easily. When a gang member, Ed Miller wanted out, James feared he would turn traitor. One day the two men went riding, and only Jesse returned. A week later, neighbors discovered Miller's body hanging from his horse, again shot in the back. James had committed yet another murder.⁷¹ The case of Detective Witcher is similar to the other murders. Witcher believed he had the best plan to catch the James boys. Disguising himself as a working man, he approached the Samuel's farm in Kearney. Near the home, a man stepped out of the bushes. Witcher stated he had been working in Nebraska for the previous five months, but his soft hands betrayed his story. The James boys shot him and dumped his body in a different county.⁷² Despite the evidence, Jesse James Jr. swore his father never killed except in war or self-defense.⁷³

⁷⁰ Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 88-91.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 93, 160.

⁷² *Ibid*, 85-86.

⁷³ John W. West, "To Die Like a Man," 27.

The unthinkable occurred following the Pinkerton's bomb attack. Public support for Jesse increased. Midwesterners felt the James' boys were a product of the border war and wanted to overlook some of their deeds. The rise in public outrage led to the state representatives questioning the actions of the Pinkertons. "Pinkerton's paid assassins did this because they knew better how to kill women and children than armed men in open combat," stated John Edwards.⁷⁴ Jefferson Jones of Calloway County introduced a resolution March 17, in the Missouri House of Representatives offering amnesty.⁷⁵ Missouri's legislature began debating a resolution proposing amnesty. The bills stated that Jesse, Frank and Cole Younger would receive official pardons if they agreed to come home and live in peace. Unfortunately for the gang, the bill did not pass.⁷⁶

Where Jesse differs from the Robin Hood legend is on religion. Jesse James was born to a Baptist minister, raised by a God fearing mother. At an early point in life, Jesse even considered following his father's example, joining in the ministry. James, reportedly pious, followed the Richmond murder by being baptized and joined the Kearney Baptist Church in 1868, although after multiple robberies were traced to Jesse, the deacons kicked him out.⁷⁷ Despite this negative action from religious people, Jesse

⁷⁴ Edwards, *Noted Guerillas*, 457.

⁷⁵ William A. Settle, "James Boys and Missouri Politics," *Missouri Historical Review* 36 (1942): 416.

⁷⁶ "Proceedings of the House" *Jefferson City People's Tribune*, 17 March 1875; *Jefferson City Peoples Tribune*, 24 March 1875, 1. "Amnesty proposition for James Boys," *Saint Louis Globe Democrat*, 2 October 1882, 2. These articles from William Settle Papers, Folder 44, Western History Manuscript Collection, Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri; Anthony Gish, *American Bandits*, 33.

⁷⁷ Kent L. Steckmesser, "America's Robin Hood," 16; Peter Lyon, "Wild, Wild West," *American Heritage* 11 (1960): 40.

James would refuse to steal from a preacher.⁷⁸ With each new town, James would join one of the local churches. In Nashville, he attended a Methodist church and while in Saint Joseph, his membership was at a Presbyterian church. Residents of Calloway County were excited when a stranger suggested a singing school, which lasted two months during the summer. At the end of the season, the teacher revealed himself. One member, James Womack, remembered fondly, “I suppose I am one of the few people living who can say he had Jesse James as a singing school teacher.” However, a family member disputes this story, saying James was tone deaf.⁷⁹ Throughout his life, from guerilla soldier to desperado, Jesse James prayed, believing God spoke to him and read the Bible. Family legend said that Jesse carried either a Bible or New Testament on each raid.⁸⁰

Outside the church attendance, praying and Bible reading, other actions conflicted with Jesse’s outlaw behavior. When trying to purchase horses for his stepfather, Jesse stopped at Confederate General Jo Shelby’s home. Mrs. Shelby sent her young servant boy to town, where he got in a fight with a white boy about his age. The African American boy ran home, begging Mrs. Shelby for protection. James offered to take care of the mob, encountering them at the entrance to the Shelby property, telling them to turn around and go home, that they were not going any further.⁸¹ James saved an African

⁷⁸ John W. West, “To Die Like a Man,” 41; Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 63; Harry Craghead, letter to Homer Croy, Homer Croy Papers, Folder 746, Western History Collection, Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

⁷⁹ Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 68, 144; John W. West, “To Die Like a Man,” 41.

⁸⁰ Question about Bible, letter from Homer Croy to Jesse James Jr, Homer Croy Papers, Folder 757, Western History Manuscript Collection, Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia Missouri.

⁸¹ Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 49.

American boy, just because he respected life, which conflicts with typical hoodlum behavior.⁸² While staying in Indian Territory, James stopped at a preacher's home. During the visit, he learned the family kept a bag of gold for an Indian chief. James did not touch the gold, because the man was a preacher. In another instance, James questioned a Lutheran minister about his congregation, possibly trying to decide the best point of attack. Upon searching the man's home and finding only a few coins, James left without stealing the money. "I don't need it badly enough to take it from a poor preacher. I am Jesse James and not as bad as some people think."⁸³

The major difference between the Robin Hood character and Jesse James involved the media. Robin Hood occurred when the best method of accusations came from wanted posters in various towns. Jesse James faced the dilemma of newspapers. Press accounts never matched what occurred. In addition, the James gang faced the accusations for multiple crimes they could not have committed. "Whether this will be charged to the James boys or not we are writing unadvised."⁸⁴ An unknown man, Alfred McGinnis, planned to use this to his advantage, plotting to murder his brother-in-law and lay blame on the James boys.⁸⁵ In an attempt to rectify the situation, Jesse wrote letters denying the crimes. One letter stated, "Perhaps nothing I might say in the way of denial would change any man's opinion; but this I do say, neither Frank nor myself has been in

⁸² Ibid, 50.

⁸³ Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 68; John W. West, "To Die Like a Man," 41.

⁸⁴ Kansas City Journal Articles, William A. Settle Collection, Folder 43, Western History Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

⁸⁵ Liberty Advanced articles, William A. Settle Collection, Folder 44, Western History Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

Missouri since October 3, 1873.”⁸⁶ Each story enhances the development on the Robin Hood myth surrounding Jesse James.

Jesse James fulfilled the final aspect of the Robin Hood legend in a way that creates a separate story. Robin Hood died at the hand of a traitor. Newspapers portray the death of Jesse James in numerous articles throughout his crime spree. On two occasions, the *National Police Gazette* reported the death and days later published a copy of a handwritten letter from Jesse requesting they send him a copy of their newspaper. So many stories appeared that the Pinkertons began to believe the publications were lies created to take the heat off Jesse.⁸⁷ Alan Pinkerton said, “They have had Jesse dead so often we have made up our minds not to ever believe reports of his death unless they send his scalp along as corroborative testimony.”⁸⁸

Beginning in 1879, *The New York Times* reported Jesse James dead. On 5 November, the paper gave an account of an incident that followed the Glendale train robbery, involving Jesse and George Sheppard. Sheppard and his nephew had served alongside James in the Missouri guerillas throughout the Civil War, and the men were not good friends. The tension was evident whenever they joined forces to commit a crime. Despite their problems, Jesse would include Sheppard in his gang in multiple crimes. According to the *News York Times*, George Sheppard was enraged over Jesse killing his nephew. Despite Sheppard’s statement that he saw blood pouring out of a hole behind

⁸⁶ “A Traduced Gentleman.” *New York Times*, 20 July 1875, 2. William A. Settle Collection, Folder 43, Western History Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri. These denial letters are groups in folder 40 (1870-3) of Settle Papers. These letters come from various newspapers.

⁸⁷ “Jesse James Alive.” *National Police Gazette*, 10 January 1880, 2; “The Bandits Boast,” *National Police Gazette*, 1 April 1882, 10.

⁸⁸ *Liberty Weekly Tribune*, 9 January 1880, 2.

Jesse's left ear, detectives and police doubted the story.⁸⁹ Two months later, the *New York Times* again reported Jesse dead at the hand of Sheppard. This time, reports say that Mrs. Samuels wept openly at the arrival of the coffin. Various detectives tried to trick Sheppard into changing his story, but he maintained every detail exactly as his Grand Jury testimony.⁹⁰

Unfortunately, for Sheppard, his story proved false. It appeared no one knew James' whereabouts, however, two members of the gang, Charles and Robert Ford, knew exactly where Jesse, his wife and children were hiding. Bob Ford studied Jesse with an odd intensity, memorizing genealogy, heists and injuries and then repeated it to whoever would listen. Bob earned a limited trust from Jesse as the two men began planning the robbery of a Platte City, Missouri, bank. Ford was one of few to have this trust as James trusted few people, two out of thousands.⁹¹ Unbeknownst to the James family, known as Mr. and Mrs. Tom Howard by Saint Joseph residents, Bob and Charlie Ford met with Missouri governor Thomas Crittenden. The discussion hammered out how Jesse James would meet his demise. The agreement entailed the Ford brothers killing Jesse and turning themselves in to the local sheriff. The brothers would then be arrested, tried, pardoned and receive the \$10,000 reward. April 3, 1882, began as a normal day for the James/Howard home. Bob and Charlie knew they had to act soon because newspapers printed the surrender of Dick Lidell, a former gang member.

⁸⁹ "A Notorious Outlaw Murdered," *New York Times*, 4 November 1879, 1; "The Killing of Jesse James", *New York Times*, 5 November 1879, 5.

⁹⁰ "The Outlaw JJ Reported Dead, *New York Times*, 6 January 1880, 1; "Sheppard's trick," *Liberty Weekly Tribune*, 21 May 1880, 1.

⁹¹ Edwards, *Noted Guerillas*, 451.

The chance arose when Jesse did something unexpected. Because of the heat, Jesse removed his coat, and to prevent attracting neighbors suspicion, he removed his gun belt as well. The Ford brothers and Jesse were discussing the Platte City bank when Jesse noticed a picture high on the wall. James stood on a chair to straighten or dust the picture. Robert Ford drew his gun and shot Jesse, leaving him to bleed to death on the floor in front of his family. The Ford brothers celebrated their achievements and turned themselves in to the local sheriff. The Sheriff arrested Bob and Charles, and put them on trial, in courtroom three of the Buchanan County Courthouse, in Saint Joseph. The jury found the men guilty and sentenced them to death. Governor Crittenden subsequently pardoned the Ford brothers.⁹² Due to the repeated “death” stories, few believed the initial report. A local photographer received a call to come take a picture of the body. Doubts about the photo arose, but the son stated his father did nothing to change the appearance of the corpse for the picture. The Buchanan County coroner also conducted an inquest. Only two people could swear to the identity of the man at Sidenfaden mortuary, Zerelda Samuels and Zee James. The inquiry quickly ended and the body was released.⁹³ Numerous Clay County residents waited in the rain to greet the funeral train. Reporters at the service reported Zerelda Samuels broke down, saying, “Oh my generous noble hearted Jesse. Why did they kill my poor boy that never wronged anybody, but helped

⁹² “Bandit Band,” *St Joseph Herald*, 6 April 1882, 1; “The Dead Outlaw,” *St Joe Herald*, 12 April 1882, 2. The Buchanan County Courthouse is still located in downtown Saint Joseph. The courtroom where the Ford brothers trial occurred is now home to Juvenile court, but the room itself remains. In a recent visit, I discovered the sign on the outside of the building that makes the courthouse as a historical landmark, the site of the trial for the murder of Jesse James.

⁹³ Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 184-90; Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 193. In this chapter, Croy refers to the ledger, located at Heaton Bowman Smith and Sidenfaden mortuary. In December 2006, I made a visit to the funeral home, and was able to see not only the ledger, but also the undertaker basket used to transport Jesse James remains from his home to the funeral home following his murder.

them and fed them with the bread that should go to his orphans?”⁹⁴ Outrage at the murder flooded the newspapers. One article stated, “Nobody can appreciate the full extent of damage our state suffered. But the state of Missouri is suffering more disgrace. The Governor should be the last man to set aside the law. It is difficult to determine whether the state’s reputation is damaged most by Jesse James’ career of crime or the circumstances of his death.”⁹⁵

Jesse James lay quiet in his grave for over fifty years, and then he felt the overwhelming urge to rise up and walk the earth again. In 1932, he walked into an Excelsior Springs, Missouri hotel, willing to answer questions to prove himself. The man’s answers labeled him a pretender. In 1934, Chas R. Montgomery wrote a letter to Governor Guy Park stating that a major hoax had been pulled in 1882, and that Jesse James was alive and well. Montgomery stated James wanted to return home but only if Park guaranteed a pardon. In response, Park said Montgomery was mistaken, that Jesse James was dead.⁹⁶ In 1948, at the age of 101, Jesse James appeared in Lawton, Oklahoma. J. Franklin Dalton convinced the town and eventually the state that he was the real James. Dalton traveled for the next several months, participating in speaking engagements, creating a large spectacle and drawing extensive amounts of money.⁹⁷

In the late 1990s, a new James appeared on the scene, north of Austin, Texas. Betty Duke, a housewife bitten by the genealogy bug, discovered her great-grandfather’s

⁹⁴ Peter Lyon, “Wild, Wild West,” *American Heritage* 11 (1960): 39.

⁹⁵ “Poor Missouri,” *St. Joe Daily Herald*, 14 April 1882.

⁹⁶ Letter from Chas R. Montgomery, to Guy Park, 1934, Guy Park Papers, Folder 679, Western History Manuscript Collection, Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

⁹⁷ “Jesse James is Alive,” *Lawton Constitution*, 19 May 1948, 1, Homer Croy Papers, Folder 756, Western History Manuscript Collection, Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri; Homer Croy, *Jesse James was My Neighbor*, 250-253. In a brief side note, Dalton also claimed he was Billy the Kid.

diary and personal letters. These materials contained references to well known James gang members. Next came a photo of Dianah, her great-grandmother. Duke believes that Jesse faked his death, and then moved to Texas, where he began a new family.⁹⁸ When workers at the Jesse James farm in Kearney denied the claim, Duke took personal photos and historically accurate pictures of Jesse James and Zerelda Samuels to the Texas state crime lab, who issued a statement that the photos were a ninety-nine percent match.⁹⁹ Mrs. Duke continues to proclaim, granting interviews and having her book, *Jesse James Lived and Died in Texas*, made into a movie. The attention continues to draw more claims from families across the country.¹⁰⁰ Most recently, Mrs. Duke has written another book, *The Truth about Jesse James*. Her website does not give any updates about the film production of her first book.

Documentaries followed scientists on their quest to prove the bones in the James grave are that of Jesse. Due to the impersonators and alleged fake deaths, there have been five exhumations of the grave of Jesse James. The final burial included full military honors by the Sons of the Confederates.¹⁰¹ In *The Search for Jesse James*, viewers follow the Duke family, who exhume their great-grandfather in an attempt to find enough DNA to prove that J.L. Courtney was the true Jesse James. By the end of the show, we

⁹⁸ Betty Duke, "Jesse James Contender: J. Lafayette Courtney, who died in Texas, could be real Jesse James." *Wild West* 13 (October 2000): 60. Betty Duke, *Jesse James Lived and Died in Texas*. Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1998.

⁹⁹ "Jesse James' Death Hoax and Buried Treasures." <http://www.jessejamesintexas.com/>. 20 February 2007.

¹⁰⁰ Angie Dingus, "Body of Evidence," *Texas Monthly* (August 1997); Bobbie Lee, "Roar of the Crowd," *Texas Monthly* (October 1997).

¹⁰¹ Recorded message at Jesse James Home, Authors personal visit, Saint Joseph, Missouri, 26 December 2006.

learn that this was a false hope. In *Investigating History: the Mystery of Jesse James*, viewers witness the 1995 exhumation of the James grave in Kearney. The documentary shows the trail of the DNA testing to rest the case of Jesse's death. Ironically, the guards of the grave and all evidence discovered during the process were from the Pinkertons security agency. In each documentary, the narrator mentions the lack of the killing bullet in the grave. Homer Croy discovered the reason in 1945, although few appear to believe the statement, "My father, Dr. J.W. Heddens was coroner of Buchanan County at the time. He removed the bullet and gave it to the James family."¹⁰²

Jim Milling, a James fan wrote, "Let Jesse James rest in peace. He certainly never had a moment's peace during the Civil War. Granted that Jesse robbed a few piratical land grabbing railroads and knocked off a number of Yankee financed banks, he fought for the Lost Cause didn't he?"¹⁰³ The outlaw Jesse James remains a controversial figure in American history because of his crimes and the actions taken to end his crime sprees. The stories surrounding the actions of this desperado make him an interesting person to study. The most important tale revolves around the Robin Hood theme to James' life. The stories that play into each area of this study perpetuate the legend in a way that is difficult to distinguish stories from reality. In 1927, plans to create a memorial to James drew fire, while supporting the positive view of Jesse. "The fact of the matter is that Jesse James was a high-minded, self-sacrificing, brave, generous-hearted Robin Hood who refused to leave helpless communities without protection from lawless bandits." While the article is sarcastic, it serves to support a positive point of

¹⁰² *The Search for Jesse James*, prod and dir. Bill Kurtis, Kurtis Productions, Ltd. 1996; *Investigating History: The Mystery of Jesse James* prod and dir. Bill Kurtis, Kurtis Productions, Ltd. 2003.

¹⁰³ Letter to the editor, Homer Croy Papers, Folder 746, Western History Manuscript Collection, Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

view.¹⁰⁴ As a quote from Carl Sandburg, appearing in *Classic Film Collector* said, “Jesse James to the United States is what Robin Hood and Dick Turpin are to England. Jesse James today is a household word.”¹⁰⁵ Public memory of the outlaw is altered through the Robin Hood myth, which historians know is distorted through museums, newspapers and films.

¹⁰⁴ “The Battle over a Jesse James Monument,” *The Literary Digest* 95 (1927): 44.

¹⁰⁵ Edgar Shaw, “Memories of Old Westerns,” *Classic Film Collector* 17 (1967), n.p. Folder 41, Box 20, Dickinson Research Library, National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Chapter 3

Presenting the “Truth”: Museum Dissemination of Jesse W. James

The past is also what is commemorated by monuments and markers, plaques and parades, historic sites and museums. Almost always a monument is an attempt to interpret an event in which those who have erected it take pride. There are ways by which a specific culture names its heroes, those people who made us what we are, in a prideful way.¹⁰⁶

A sign proclaiming, “See the bullet hole” greets visitors walking up the stone stairs to a single story white house at the Jesse James Home in Saint Joseph, Missouri.¹⁰⁷ Over the last thirty years, more than 600,000 tourists have flocked to the museum. The majority consist of out of town tourists, excited to step on the same floor where Jesse James lost his life in April 1882. Across the Midwest, historical societies have erected markers and established museums dedicated to events related to Jesse James. Various towns host reenactments and festivals drawing visitors to watch the spectacle. As with all aspects of history, concerns arise over the portrayal of the truth. The list of robberies for the James gang includes twenty-six robberies across the west. Some of these locations include historical markers, while others have small exhibits or even full museums dedicated to Jesse James. In Gads Hill, Missouri, the site of the first train robbery by the James gang has a simple plywood sign marking the location. In Corydon, Iowa, the original train tracks that the outlaws separated are now in a local park with a marker explaining the robbery. After looking over materials on thirteen James’ robberies, four museums warrant further analysis: Kearney, Liberty and Saint Joseph,

¹⁰⁶ Sanford Levison, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 65. The quote is from Yale Historian Robert Winks, although there is not another book listed.

¹⁰⁷ Jesse James Home. Tour by Author. 26 December 2006.

Missouri, and Northfield, Minnesota. The choice of each of these museums is based on the career of James. Kearney, Missouri is where Jesse was born in 1847, while the St. Joseph museum is the location of his demise in 1882. The selection of Liberty is based on the location being the first robbery attributed to Jesse James and the museum in Northfield, is considered the end of James' career as a bank robber. Museums are charged with protecting artifacts and presenting an unbiased story. When dealing with a figure of mythical proportions, the way an institution prepares and interprets materials for the public should correlate with the truth, and not depend on myths like that of Robin Hood.

A 2005 survey by the Regional Arts and Culture Council in Portland, Oregon, revealed that forty-eight percent of the population chose to visit museums, ranking them third as a choice for arts and culture, following musical and theatrical performances.¹⁰⁸

Historians and tourists alike trust museums to accurately present material on various subjects. This trust should not be violated for a museum or curator's personal gain.

Kathleen McLean, exhibit design specialist, sums up the matter best, "People still trust the information they find in museums and exhibit organizers must live up to that trust."¹⁰⁹

In a 2004 Smithsonian survey, visitors were asked about their experience, and forty percent of respondents claimed that they gained information or insight.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Regional Arts and Culture Council, "The Value of Arts and Culture, Spring 2005," Regional Arts and Culture Council, <http://www.racc.org/recsources/research/publicopinionsurvey.php> (accessed 13 June 2007).

¹⁰⁹ Kathleen McLean, *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions* (Washington: Association of Science-Technology Courses, 1993), 19-20.

¹¹⁰ Smithsonian Institution Office of Policy and Analysis, "2004 Smithsonian Institute Visitor Survey," Smithsonian Institute http://www.si.edu/opanda/Reports/Reports/SI2004_Survey_Booklet.pdf (accessed 13 June 2007).

Museums are important for Americans to understand national and local history. When a museum focuses on a historical figure whose history is more folklore than fact, the directors face an arduous task¹¹¹ Across the United States, thousands of museums cover topics from local to national history, and some are dedicated to the weird. Author David Dean believes, “People are the only reason for museums to exist. It may appear simplistic and obvious, but the fact is sometimes overlooked.”¹¹² Dean continues, “Museums now compete for a share of the public attention with non-intellectual establishments like shopping malls, cinemas, sporting events and other such popular institutions. Educational pursuits are not always viewed as enjoyable or desirable by the leisure-seeking populace.”¹¹³ Simply put, when on vacation, the American public would rather spend money to sit in a movie than expand their minds.

The James Farm, Kearney, Missouri, the Jesse James Bank Museum, Liberty, Missouri, the Northfield Historical Society Museum, Northfield, Minnesota, and the Jesse James Home, Saint Joseph, Missouri all rely on documented history to bring the life of Jesse James to their patrons. As Yale historian Robert Winks explains, “History became what the written texts said it was instead of a rendering of history as it actually happened. We all know that history is simultaneously three things: what actually happened, what historians chose to record and what the people believe to be true about the past.”¹¹⁴ The generally accepted notion is that the events of history will be remembered only if

¹¹¹ Joe Blumberg, “Jesse: Scoundrel Then, Terrorist Now?” *St. Joseph News Press*, April 3, 2007, 1.

¹¹² David Dean, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 19.

¹¹³ Dean, *Museum Exhibition*, 91.

¹¹⁴ Sanford Levison. *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 103.

recorded, a fact that museums base their existence upon. First came the selection of subjects for analysis, then came the numerous ways available to gauge visitor's reaction to the museum. After examining several books on visitor surveys, a list of questions to ask came together. However, it would have been impossible to approach these visitors without the permission of the directors. Each of the four museum directors received a personal request, along with a copy of the list of questions. In each case, the director examined the questions, made suggestions for clarification of survey, and even requested some questions be eliminated. It was clear however, that the surveys needed to remain brief, as most visitors would not want to take time to answer detailed questions. A copy of the survey, as well as a compilation of the survey results is included in appendix A. We begin our tour in Kearny, Missouri, in the home where Jesse James was born and raised.

This is the house Jesse was born and raised in. The original part of the house, back that way, was built back in 1822. These first three rooms were added later.¹¹⁵

After meeting a tour guide, visitors enter the James farmhouse, much like one hundred years ago. Beginning in 1883, in the little town of Kearney, Missouri, a distraught Zerelda Samuels began a tradition that continues today. Mrs. Samuels, dealing with the recent death of her son Jesse and arrest of son Frank, began to offer tours of her farm to inquiring minds. Zerelda Samuels enjoyed greeting visitors from a chair in the front yard of her home, and then proceeded to showcase the tree Union militiamen hung her husband Dr. Samuels from and continue to the fireplace where a Pinkerton's bomb

¹¹⁵ James Farm. Tour by Author, 8 June 2007.

killed her little boy, Archie.¹¹⁶ The focal point of every tour was a stop at the grave of her murdered son. Emphasis was placed on the writing on the headstone, “murdered by a traitor and a coward whose name is not worthy to appear here.”¹¹⁷ Zerelda loved to tell visitors “Jesse and Frank had been good boys, but because they’d been Confederate guerillas, revenge seeking Yankees drove them into lives outside the law.”¹¹⁸ These visitors learned about the history of the Samuels property, and the hardships that led to Jesse’s outlaw life.

Traveling through the countryside of Clay County, Missouri, tourists quickly understand the reasoning for Jesse to return home whenever possible. Covering forty acres, the farm is picturesque, with wide-open fields, a small creek and trees surrounding the James home. Arriving in a small parking lot, visitors are directed to a large brown building, where galleries containing materials owned by the county and James family are on display. Upon entering, travelers are greeted by a volunteer, who directs them into a small theatre for a presentation about the life of Jesse James, or allows them to walk around the gallery and examine the personal belongings. Some of the items here include the boots and spurs Jesse wore at the time of his death at the hands of Bob Ford, a model of the farm during the winter, original saddles used by the James brothers during the peak of their careers, and paintings of Jesse loaned by a descendent. On the left, in a glass

¹¹⁶ Martin E. McGrane, *The James Farm: It’s People, Their Lives and Their Times* (Madison: Caleb Perkins Press, 1994), 55.

¹¹⁷ James Farm. Tour by Author, 8 June 2007.

¹¹⁸ Martin E. McGrane, *The James Farm: It’s People, Their Lives and Their Times* (Madison: Caleb Perkins Press, 1994), 4.

case is the base of Jesse's original headstone, all that remains from tourists and collectors who chipped away pieces for souvenirs.¹¹⁹

The second gallery contains information about the death of Jesse and the 1995 exhumation, which occurred to prove that James was buried in the Mt. Olivet cemetery in Kearney, not an imposter. One display is a replica of the living room of the house James died in, and includes the original embroidery that Jesse was standing on a chair to straighten when Ford took the deadly shot. There are also pieces of the original casket, and a bullet from an old Civil War wound. On the last wall prior to starting down the path to the house, are papers signed by Alexander Franklin James on the day he surrendered to Missouri Governor Thomas Crittenden.

After allowing time for the video to finish and people to tour the museum galleries, one of the volunteers explains the next tour will begin soon, and asks guests to start down a blacktop path to the little farm house. Nearing the house, the tour encounters a wooden bridge, crossing a small creek. Along the creek, multiple trees are standing, providing a great deal of shade against the stifling Missouri heat. The Friends of the James Farm proclaim that the farm looks exactly as it did over one hundred years ago.¹²⁰ After climbing a short set of stairs, a tour guide meets the group on the porch of the James family home.

After establishing the basic rules, no pictures inside the house and no touching of artifacts, tourists walk back into history. The first room, one of three added in the 1893 "Eastlake Cottage" addition, was used by Zerelda as a parlor until her death in 1911.

¹¹⁹ James Farm. Tour by Author, 8 June 2007.

¹²⁰ Friends of the James Farm, "James Farm," <http://www.jessejames.org> (accessed 7 June 2007).

Following her death, Frank and his wife Annie used it as their bedroom.¹²¹ The design of this addition is based on materials ordered from the Sears catalog of the time.¹²² On the wall, is a business degree acquired by Frank and Annie's son, Robert, as well as a picture of Annie. The furniture in the room dates to when the James family lived in the house, including the bed used by Frank, as well as Annie's sewing machine, and Frank's original bookshelf, engraved with his name. Inside are Frank's favorite books, namely Shakespeare.¹²³ At one time, the house had carpet, but in order to prevent dust and wear by the numerous tourists, the decision was made to remove it. The wallpaper is faded and peeling, but the guide assures visitors that if it were not the original, the décor would be better.

The walls of the next room, once used by Frank and Annie as a parlor, are covered with family pictures. On one wall is a picture of Zerelda Samuel, following the amputation of her right arm to the elbow in 1875. Another wall has memorial stones for Archie Samuel and Jesse. First is Archie's, whose memorial stone is engraved with the saying, "he was murdered by the Pinkertons band whose bomb also severed his mother's right arm."¹²⁴ On the next wall is the family of Jesse James. One picture is of his widow, Zerelda Mimms James. Named after Jesse's mother, Zee, as she was commonly known, was Jesse's first cousin.¹²⁵ There are also pictures of Jesse's children, Jesse Jr. and Mary,

¹²¹ Friends of the James Farm, "James Farm," <http://www.jessejames.org> (accessed 7 June 2007); James Farm. Tour by Author, 8 June 2007.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ James Farm. Tour by Author, 8 June 2007.

¹²⁵ James Farm. Tour by Author, 8 June 2007.

who went against the family heritage with their choice of careers. Jesse Jr. became a criminal attorney, while Mary served as a bank teller for some time.¹²⁶ Another picture, our guide pointed out, is of Frank James with his favorite horse Dan, who is buried somewhere on the property. The last room of the 1890's addition is a kitchen. Of all of the items, only the kitchen table was original to the house, the others are period pieces. This is the only room equipped with electricity, the only modern convenience ever installed in the home.¹²⁷

Finally, the tour leads through the original cabin. Zerelda's bedroom is the first, the room where Jesse was born. The bed is original although the heating stove was removed in the late 1970's to allow more room for tourists to maneuver. The guide points out an interesting feature of the room. By standing near the bed, and looking at the window at an angle, one can see the location of Jesse's original burial. Zerelda feared grave robbers, so she made sure that she could see the grave out her bedroom window.¹²⁸ The final room is the most infamous of the entire house. The original kitchen, complete with Zerelda's first cooking stove, and the original door, plugged from bullets shot by Jesse when militia tried to arrest him.¹²⁹ But the door is not the reason for the fame. In January 1875, the Pinkerton detective agency, hired by railroad companies to catch the James brothers, launched an attack on "Castle" James.¹³⁰ The goal was to evacuate the house and make sure the family had no access to weapons. First, the detectives smoke

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ James Farm. Tour by Author, 8 June 2007; McGrane, *The James Farm*, 4.

¹²⁹ James Farm. Tour by Author, 8 June 2007.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

the family by lighting cotton on fire around the kitchen, but due to the time of year, the cotton was wet and would not light. The next step was to try throwing fiery rags through the window, but the family would simply stomp them out, defeating the purpose of catching the floor on fire.¹³¹

The final Pinkerton attempt to vacate the home came with the use of a Grecian urn, filled with a greasy substance. While newspapers of the time state that the purpose was to blow up the farm, the staff at the farm are quick to point out that they are not sure if it was meant as a flare or to explode. Zerelda pushed the urn into the fireplace, where it came in contact with hot coals, and exploded.¹³² Dr. Samuel was quoted as saying, “I then got the shovel and began to push it towards the hearth, and just as I succeeded, the shell exploded...I was thrown against the ceiling and heard a tremendous report. Outside I heard several hurrahs, then the groans of my little boy and the agonized cries of my wife, who told me her right arm was blown to pieces.”¹³³ Shrapnel flew through the room, hitting Archie in the chest, and Zerelda in the arm. Archie died four hours later from loss of blood, and Dr. Samuel was forced to amputate Zerelda’s right arm at the elbow.¹³⁴ Despite all of the chaos that occurred, the James boys were not captured. Historical records show that no one is sure if Frank and Jesse were even in the house at the time of the attack. As a result of the attack, the Pinkerton’s lost their credibility, and the train company provided Zerelda with a free pass to ride the train whenever she chose.

¹³¹ James Farm. Tour by Author, 8 June 2007.

¹³² My sources conflict over who was actually pushing the device. The tour guide at the James Farm states that Zerelda pushed the device into the fireplace, while McGrane states that Dr. Samuels pushed the device.

¹³³ McGrane, *The James Farm*, 42.

¹³⁴ James Farm. Tour by Author, 8 June 2007.; McGrane, *The James Farm*, 4.

Zerelda made the train company pay, riding as often as possible with family, friends and strangers off the street, until her death on the train in February 1911.¹³⁵ Following Zerelda's death, Frank continued to grant tours, for fifty cents per person, until his 1915 passing.¹³⁶

After exiting the house, and walking across a small porch, the tour proceeds to Jesse's original grave. A replica of the headstone exists, and the original footstone remains. The grave is covered with small rocks, gathered from the nearby creek. At the time of the first tours, Zerelda would offer to sell a rock from Jesse's grave for a quarter. The sales were lucrative, and our guide pointed out that on the specific day, she would have made four or five dollars. To keep with the story, the guide mentioned that the gift shop continues to sell "Jesse" rocks for a quarter.¹³⁷ Jesse's original casket and remains were moved in 1900 to Mt. Olivet cemetery when Zee passed away, because by that time, "you just did not bury people in your front yard."¹³⁸

The tour guide then allows you to explore the property alone, although they lock the house to prevent theft. One outbuilding is a slave quarters, a recent addition to the farm. It is a replica of where a married slave couple would have lived at the time. There is also a smoke house right next to the water pump. Just at the outside edge of the fencing around the farm, the owners of the property have modernized enough to put a men's and women's toilet.

¹³⁵ James Farm. Tour by Author, 8 June 2007; McGrane, *The James Farm*, 55.

¹³⁶ McGrane, *The James Farm*, 55.

¹³⁷ James Farm. Tour by Author, 8 June 2007.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

The James farm went through a difficult history, much like the famous outlaws. Descendants of the James boys owned the property until 1978, but at that point, the Missouri winters and hot, humid summers seemed like they may reclaim the place.¹³⁹ The original wing of the house was in ruins, and even the new addition was in poor condition. The farm had survived war, outlawry and international notoriety, only to fall into disrepair.¹⁴⁰ In 1978, Clay County, Missouri, purchased the property, and hired historic preservation experts to restore the farm to its former glory.¹⁴¹ Carpenters used as much of the original material as salvageable, combined with tools and techniques from the early 1820s, and worked a miracle. Tourists again began to pass through the restored home of the James boys, but also saw an example of Missouri frontier architecture.¹⁴² It was a result of this transformation, that visitors began to ask what they could do to help, which brought to life an organization known today as the “Friends of the James Farm,” that visitors can pay membership dues to finance continuing restoration work at the farm.¹⁴³

Throughout the tour, the guide was knowledgeable and able to answer questions. The owners of the farm try to present the most accurate information possible. When asked a question about the neighbor who employed an undercover Pinkerton operative, the guide mentioned the location of the farm as well as emphasized that there is no way to know if Jesse and Frank were home the night of the raid. The museum staff addresses

¹³⁹ McGrane, *The James Farm*, 61.

¹⁴⁰ McGrane, *The James Farm*, 61.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

the changes made to the farm at every opportunity, from pointing out the original exterior of the building at the back corner, to the removal of the heating stoves. An important aspect of the farmhouse is the decision to attempt to avoid the location becoming a tourist trap. Visitors can only take pictures on the outside of the house, and the gift shop, while small, resides in the welcome center for the property instead of inside the home.

With permission from Elizabeth Beckett, coordinator of the Clay County historical sites, surveys were placed in the gift shop of the farm beginning in June 2007. Visitors completed thirty-two surveys over a four-month period with the majority classifying themselves as intermediate in previous knowledge of James. When responding to the question of accuracy in the portrayal of Jesse in the museum, ninety-nine percent of responses that the farm is accurate, and ninety-eight percent of these visitors felt they learned new information during their visit.

At the bottom of the surveys, a space was left for additional comments. One visitor, categorizing themselves in the sixty plus age range, noted the site was not handicap friendly, however the rest of the comments were positive. One visitor, Nadia R. of Minnesota made the trip to Kearney because she thought Jesse James was sexy.¹⁴⁴ While not a helpful comment for the purpose of the surveys, it served to entertain the staff. Sixty year old Jerry C. brought his granddaughter to the farm to expose her to the James gang's exploits. Randy K. came clearly unaware of the work completed at the farm, saying it was more than expected, that the museum and farmhouse were interesting.

The James Farm is a Clay County historical site, and does a wonderful job of presenting an unbiased and accurate account of the events surrounding the property, and addressing the outlaw life of Jesse James. Following the birth of Jesse James, and his

¹⁴⁴ Last names from surveys are being withheld for privacy reasons.

growing into adulthood in Kearney, Jesse began to commit his crimes. The next museum addresses the first of many in the sixteen-year crime spree – the Jesse James Bank Museum, in Liberty, Missouri. Historians disagree over the participation of Jesse in the robbery in Liberty, however, as the tour guide points out, the owner can say what he wishes about the site.

But we can say now, or Mr. Wymore can say for sure that Jesse was the second man. We think the second man could have been a friend of Jesse's named Arch Clement.¹⁴⁵

Eleven miles southwest of the James farm, lay the town of Liberty, home of the Jesse James Bank Museum. The building sits on the northeast corner of the old square, and is the former location of the Clay County Savings Association, site of the first daylight peacetime bank robbery. The building is owned by Mr. Wymore rather than the City of Liberty, and the museum is run by the Clay County historical society, but because of the private ownership, the interpretation is more subjective.

Just days after the Christmas holiday, traveling in snowy weather, it was easy to understand how the weather played a role in the robbery that February day in 1866. Entering the town square, the courthouse, which is said to have housed an important trial that assisted the outlaws in their crime, remains in the center of the town, and sitting diagonally northeast, is the Jesse James Bank Museum. Visitors approaching the museum, see a sign that says the building is on the National Register of Historic Places, for both the age of the building and the historic significance of the robbery. A guide,

¹⁴⁵ Jesse James Bank Museum. Tour by Author, 27 December 2006.

who informs the group of the time for the next tour, greets tourists entering the museum.¹⁴⁶

Initially, Sandy addressed the changes made in the building. Originally constructed in 1858 for Farmer's Exchange Bank, it remains the only building on the square that predates the Civil War.¹⁴⁷ The small room at the entrance, formally housed the office for the board of directors, and most likely did not include the door that serves as the entrance.¹⁴⁸ The guide continues to point out the various changes made to the gift shop area, but points out that the ceiling remains the original tintype in both the entrance and main exhibit area. Sandy then addressed the bank area, which underwent few changes.

Following the closure of Clay County Savings Association in 1866, the building became anything from a doctor's office to a lawyer's office. Despite all of these different businesses, they did not remove the original safe, nor alter the interior of the lobby in any way.¹⁴⁹ The vault and safe were unique in their construction. When the building was built for the first Liberty bank, the bank and sidewalls of the vault were constructed, then the twelve-thousand pound safe on unmaneuverable wheels, was installed, then the front of the vault was put in place. This made it so that the safe could not be removed from the vault unless the entire front was removed first.¹⁵⁰ The hardwood floor in the bank remains in good condition, although Sandy does mention that at one time it may have

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Jesse James Bank Museum. Tour by Author, 27 December 2006.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

been covered in carpet, which assisted in preservation. Late in 1965, Mr. Wymore purchased the building, planning to complete the restoration in time to reopen it as a museum on the centennial of the robbery, 12 February 1966, at two in the afternoon.¹⁵¹ The doors reopened just in time to witness a reenactment of the robbery, and has continued to provide historic information on a daily basis ever since.

Mr. Wymore did not have a great deal of work to put into the building. He had to alter the way a stovepipe hung from the ceiling, and acquired some period furniture to set up the exhibit, but for the most part, the museum was ready to open in a matter of weeks.¹⁵² Sandy mentioned some variations of the furniture during the tour, including the recreation of a president's desk, sitting in a corner near the entrance of the bank lobby, and the heating stove being similar to that of the time. The banker's desk is another piece of period furniture, and then Sandy addresses a tall desk sitting near the vault entrance. The desk stands about five feet tall, and according to records of Mr. Wymore, it was made by Reverend James in the early 1840s on a farm near his in Kearney.¹⁵³ The other item mentioned is the counter itself. The counter is dark green, standing about three feet high, and then on top there are white bars making the counter appear about five feet tall with an opening in the center.¹⁵⁴ The counter is low, it is assumed, because of the time period when the bank opened the gold rush was in full force. Customers bringing in their gold and silver would want to be able to see the scales

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Jesse James Bank Museum. Tour by Author, 27 December 2006.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

as the banker weighed it, so the lower counter was best for both sides.¹⁵⁵ The most important item dealing with the counter is the discussion over the bars. Sandy mentioned that if our pictures were shared with others, we should make sure to explain that at the time of the robbery, the bars would not have been in place. The counter was clear of any obstructions, and in turn would have been easy for the outlaws to jump over when committing the robbery.¹⁵⁶

After discussing the furniture in the room, and addressing the safe and vault, the tour turns to the discussion of the robbery itself. Because of the period furniture, it is easier for guests to understand how the room looked that February day. The difference between the museum in Liberty and other museums dealing with Jesse James is that while some institutions have multiple conflicting eyewitness stories to set up their interpretation, the Bank Robbery museum has the testimony of Mr. Byrd, the cashier the day of the robbery. Sandy points out that the tour guides, which differ from day to day, provide the information while making sure to edit the bad language used by the robbers and quoted by Mr. Byrd. There is a detailed record of the events beginning with the entrance of two men, dressed in long coats, who warm themselves by the stove prior to approaching the counter.¹⁵⁷ The story continues with the request for change of a large bill, and then the first man jumps over the counter and the attack begins. The tour goes on to explain that one robber relieves the bank of its gold and silver in the safe, while the other opens a small box on the banker's desk and removes various amounts of cash and

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Jesse James Bank Museum. Tour by Author, 27 December 2006; Greenup Bird, "Personal Account of the Clay County Savings Robbery, 13 February 1866." Courtesy of Jesse James Bank Museum.

liberty bonds.¹⁵⁸ When the men are ready to leave, they force the two men working at the bank, Mr. Byrd and his son William, into the vault, pushing the door closed, and exiting the bank. The gang members joined their comrades outside, and the group of men, ranging between twelve and fourteen, rode their horses hard to the east, and across the river. A large posse gave chase, but came back hours later empty handed.

The museum interpretation is historically based, although because the owner is a distant relative of an innocent bystander killed in a shootout among the gang members outside the bank and the posse pursuing them, there is a chance of bias. The name of the museum itself brings a question, as there is no solid evidence to state that Jesse James was actually at the bank, although, like the guide said, Mr. Wymore, the owner, can say that Jesse James was there if he chooses. The tour has negative aspects as well. The guide mentioned that because the counter is a modern version of the original, the guests could feel free to sit on it, or even slide across it like the robbers would have at the time. Despite the fact that the counter is not original, typically you would not want to allow guests to treat the furniture like they would their personal belongings.

Also the back room of the museum has an exhibit that deals with various pictures of the James-Younger gang members.¹⁵⁹ While it is a common belief that the James boys were involved with the Clay County robbery, the identity of the robbers was never addressed by Mr. Byrd, the main witness. Also, perhaps due to the divided loyalties following the Civil War, few people ever identified Jesse, and few pictures existed of him. By establishing an exhibit with so many pictures, it seems to undermine the belief

¹⁵⁸ Jesse James Bank Museum. Tour by Author, 27 December 2006.

¹⁵⁹ Jesse James Bank Museum. Tour by Author, 27 December 2006.

that only one picture of James existed in a locket around his mother's neck. The photos do address the second man rumored to have participated in the robbery, Arch Clement, but again, the pictures are from more recent scholarship that undermines the accuracy of the exhibits.

While the Liberty museum was the first of the crimes committed by the James gang, they continued the spree, attacking various banks, trains, stagecoaches and even the Kansas City fairgrounds. However, one bank, now a museum altered the way that one Minnesota town remembers the James gang. Northfield, home to the Defeat of Jesse James Days each September, was the beginning of the end of the James-Younger gang.

But the nefarious (utterly immoral or wicked) outlaws made a critical mistake. They underestimated the fortitude and ingenuity of the townspeople of Northfield. This exhibit tells the story of the bungled 7 minute raid and how Northfield citizens defeated the most notorious gang of it's time.¹⁶⁰

The first sign visitors see upon entering this small museum is the above quote, from author George Huntington. The small town of Northfield, Minnesota, situated on the Cannon River, about an hour south of Minneapolis, is known in banking history for the seven-minute raid attempted by the James-Younger gang in September 1876. Travelers approaching the town from the southwest, maps lead visitors through the small towns of Dundas then back out into countryside before finally reaching Northfield. Along the route, several diners are named for the famous Jesse James, yet there is nothing mentioning the historic raid on highway signs. Even after entering edges of Northfield, there is no indication of the museum dedicated to the attempted robbery. Driving into the old square, finally there is mention of the Northfield Historical Society Museum, location of the restored building dedicated to the robbery.

¹⁶⁰ Northfield Historical Society Museum. Tour by Author, 6 June 2007.

Entering the museum, visitors are guided through a small gift shop, where their admission fee is paid, then proceed into the museum. The first exhibit deals with the development of the town, whose history is based in milling. The room is small, and covers the original plots of the old town square, and the development of two colleges, St. Olaf's and Carleton College. The explanations are brief, without a great deal of information about any specific topic. In a departure from typical museum language, the signs use the abbreviation for before present (B.P.), as opposed to the more prevalent before common era (B.C.E.) The worker then asks everyone to proceed into the next room, where a video about the Northfield Bank Robbery is played. "Division Street, Northfield, Minnesota, nearly two o'clock in the afternoon of September 7, 1876. No one here can possibly realize that moments from now, their lives will be changed forever."¹⁶¹ The movie discusses the origination of the James-Younger raid, as a conversation between eight men at the home of Jesse and Frank James, in July 1876. Sitting around the room were the James brothers, Cole, Bob and Jim Younger, Bill Stiles, Clell Miller and Charlie Pitts.¹⁶²

The gang discussed heatedly a plan to travel farther north than previous robberies, to a little town in Minnesota. Rumor among the former guerillas was that Major Generals Benjamin Butler and Adelbert Ames, two Union appointed governors, stole money from the south and placed it in the First National Bank in Northfield, Minnesota.¹⁶³ The heated discussion revolved around whether the men would be able to conduct the robbery and

¹⁶¹ Northfield Historical Society Museum. Tour by Author, 6 June 2007.

¹⁶² Northfield Historical Society Museum. Tour by Author, 6 June 2007; George Huntington, *Robber and Hero: The Story of the Northfield Bank Raid*, (Northfield: Northfield Historical Society Press, 1994), 3.

¹⁶³ Northfield Historical Society Museum. Tour by Author, 6 June 2007.

escape without capture. Bill Stiles had once lived in Rice County and assured the members of the gang that he would get them all home safely.¹⁶⁴ The men agreed that getting revenge on two of the most hated Union men was all the reason required to attempt the robbery.¹⁶⁵

After watching the video, which contains sections of a reenactment during the “Defeat of Jesse James Days,” the volunteer informs visitors they can continue through the museum, but no pictures are allowed. In the room where the video is played, several signs hang, with information about the illegal activities of the James-Younger gang. The first sign explains that the data for the exhibit, while based on eyewitness accounts, comes from a single source, a book originally published in 1895. George Huntington’s aim for the book, *Robber and Hero: The Story of the Northfield Bank Robbery* was to present the correct account of the facts and leave readers to convey their own lesson. Huntington omitted revolting details and combined eyewitness testimony to produce the text.¹⁶⁶ The next picture shows a map of the Midwest, with highlights of the various robberies attributed to the James gang. With all of the information here, not a single source is listed, so the general thought would be that there is no need for a citation. Turning left, there is a discussion of the plans for the robbery, which originally was focused on the little town of Mankato, however it was deemed too risky when someone recognized Jesse James, so the gang moved to Northfield, which contradicts the video introduction.¹⁶⁷ Cole thought the Minnesota raid might be risky, instead arguing they

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Huntington, *Robber and Hero*, XLIII.

should rob a wealthy bank across the border in Canada.¹⁶⁸ The gang spent the latter part of August exploring eight or nine possible locations for the robbery, going as far north as St. Paul and as far east as Red Wing.¹⁶⁹ According to Cole Younger, the gang voted on Northfield.¹⁷⁰

The third room of the museum deals with memorials for the botched raid. Several cabinets contain firearms, some manufactured as collector items, imprinted with “Defeat of the James-Younger Gang, 1876-1976”, while another case contains replicas of the types of weaponry used by common Northfield citizens to defend the bank against the outlaws.¹⁷¹ Also in this room, a case contains the original bankbook, open to the page completed on 7 September 1876, showing the vault held over fifteen thousand dollars on the day of the robbery.¹⁷² Next to the book, a large memorial dedicated to Joseph Lee Heywood, considered the hero of the Northfield robbery. When the robbers demanded Heywood open the vault, he continually stated that a recent addition to the safe was a time lock system, which meant that the employees could only open the safe at specific times throughout the day. The outlaws did not believe this statement, but did not have a

¹⁶⁷ Northfield Historical Society Museum. Tour by Author, 6 June 2007; George Huntington, *Capture at Madelia*, (Madelia: Watonwan County Historical Society, 1976), 4. This statement is questionable. Few, if any pictures, existed of Jesse James at the time, so how would someone in Minnesota recognize the robber.

¹⁶⁸ John Koblas, *Faithful Until Death: The James-Younger Raid on the First National Bank Northfield, Minnesota, September 7, 1876*. (Northfield: Northfield Historical Society, 2001), 14.

¹⁶⁹ Huntington, *Robber and Hero*, 1, 5; Huntington, *Captured at Madelia*, 3-4.

¹⁷⁰ “Outlaw a Suicide,” *New York Times*, 20 October 1902, 5.

¹⁷¹ Northfield Historical Society Museum. Tour by Author, 6 June 2007.

¹⁷² Northfield Historical Society Museum. Tour by Author, 6 June 2007.

chance to argue with Heywood too much, as their attention was drawn to a commotion outside.¹⁷³

The actions of the bank robbers, discussed on the introductory video, are also addressed by the book mentioned on the introductory panel to the exhibit. The belief is that Bob Younger, Charlie Pitts and Frank James gathered on the north side of Canon River, near the Ames mill, and then proceeded across a large steel bridge into the town square. Mr. G.E. Bates, a witness to the street fight, noticed the men, riding fine horses whose swagger indicated their toughness, but other townspeople laughed off his concerns.¹⁷⁴ “They came over the Old Cannon River Bridge, two by two. They were elegantly mounted with gorgeous saddles on sturdy horses. We were suspicious,” said Northfield resident Maude Bill Ordway.¹⁷⁵ These three men served as lookouts, determining if the number of people on the street was too large to attempt the robbery. Although many people were in the town square, the men decided to execute the plan.¹⁷⁶ The men waited for their comrades to enter the area as backups, then entered the bank. Three men entered the bank, yelling they intended to rob the bank, and they quickly began threatening Joseph Lee Heywood, the bookkeeper, saying they would blow his head off.¹⁷⁷ While they attempted to relieve the bank of its money, the remaining men stood watch at various points on the square.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ “A Robbers Foray,” *Prairie Farmer*, 16 September 1876, 300.

¹⁷⁵ John Koblas, *Faithful Until Death*, 53.

¹⁷⁶ Northfield Historical Society Museum. Tour by Author, 6 June 2007.

¹⁷⁷ Northfield Historical Society Museum. Tour by Author, 6 June 2007; “A Robbers Foray,” *Prairie Farmer*, 16 September 1876, 300; Huntington, *Captured at Madelia*, 11.

Local hardware merchant, J.S. Allen, attempted to enter the bank, only to be stopped. The action drew Allen's suspicion, so he turned around and ran into the street yelling, "Get your guns boys, they're robbing the bank."¹⁷⁸ The yelling served to anger the robbers, especially when across the street a bystander shouted "robbers in the bank," causing Cole Younger to fire a warning shot and stopped Clell Miller from shooting J.S. Allen.¹⁷⁹ The astuteness of Allen drew the townspeople's attention, who began firing on the outlaws. The gang had to leave a comrade behind, dead on the streets of Northfield.¹⁸⁰ The attack on the First National Bank of Northfield planned to be an act of revenge lasted only seven minutes. When the smoke cleared, three outlaws lay dead in the street.¹⁸¹

The final room in the museum is in the original First National Bank building. When the Northfield Historical Society took control of the Scriver building, the historic bank was in no shape for visitors. The society hired a good carpenter, who recreated a replica of the original counter, taking oak and applying proper paint to make the wood appear as pine.¹⁸² The flooring in the building is the original hardwood, and remains in good condition. The vault is original, although the door is a recreation, painted to look like the one in the bank that fateful day in 1876. Behind the counter are three original tables and hanging on the wall the historic clock from the original bank. Other materials

¹⁷⁸ Northfield Historical Society Museum. Tour by Author, 6 June 2007.

¹⁷⁹ "The Northfield Bank Robbery," *New York Times*, 5 July 1897, 5.

¹⁸⁰ "The Northfield Bank Robbery," *New York Times*, 5 July 1897, 5; Huntington, *Robber and Hero*, 12, 35.

¹⁸¹ Northfield Historical Society Museum. Tour by Author, 6 June 2007.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

are not addressed as original or period pieces. Despite all of the original items, there is no signage that addresses the bank scene. The restoration is beautiful, but the lack of discussion makes this a difficult scene to understand for visitors. A small notebook sits on the counter, filled with articles about the restoration, yet visitors who do not look closely would be unaware of this information. To improve their facilities, the society should consider adding some sort of interpretation to allow visitors to understand the scene.

The interesting feature to the museum is that the town focuses so much of their tourist dollars on the bungled raid, so the largest portion of the building is dedicated to the interpretation of the event. However, the museum is called the Northfield Historical Society Museum, so perhaps they should consider having a wider variety of information, and spend more than just one room on the history of the town and events that have occurred since. Another interesting item throughout the entire exhibit, even in the video, there is little direct mentioning of Jesse James, and most references are in passing. This could be because the book the exhibit is based on rarely mentions him, but it seems strange to not mention of the outlaw, as in years following James' death, the true names of the participants came out.

In Northfield, Hayes Scriven agreed to put the surveys out after reading the questions in advance. Again most visitors qualified themselves as intermediate in their knowledge of James. One hundred percent of respondents believed the museum had an accurate portrayal of Jesse. Seventy-five percent of the respondents were new visitors over the four-month period, but most listed other as their reason for visiting, followed by

that the museum looked interesting. One visitor was there to conduct a radio interview with the staff.

Jeremy P. and Mandi V. told how fun it was to learn the real story of the Northfield robbery, and seeing the artifacts and location firsthand, while Jean L. admired the preservation of the items. Susan H. enjoyed the building preservation and the use of it to provide historical information, while Gail P. talked about how wonderful it was to be in the bank where everything occurred. Paul H., a chief with the American battlefield Protection admired the presentation. Again some comments were general. One visitor provided information on a rock on the banks of the Madella River, inscribed with the James name. George B. summed up his visit “The Northfield robbers got what they deserved! The townspeople were justified in fighting back! Good for them!”

The Northfield bank raid served as the last for the James-Younger gang. The Youngers were sentenced to life in prison at Stillwater Prison in Minnesota, while the James brothers escaped to their family farm in Missouri. The James brothers knew that they needed to go into hiding to protect their families, so they dropped off the radar for several years. It was not until 1882 that the James brothers once again drew the media’s attention, with the death of Jesse and the surrender of Frank. In the years following Jesse’s demise, the incident in Northfield continued to draw comparisons. In December 1926, a group of six men entered a Rochester bank, just southeast of Northfield, and followed the James-Younger style to escape with twenty thousand dollars.¹⁸³ Just four years later, Minnesota experienced nineteen robberies in eight months. The contemporary robbers borrowed techniques from the James-Young gang while adding

¹⁸³ “6 Bandits Raid Bank in James Gang Styles,” *New York Times*, 5 December 1926, 3

their own techniques.¹⁸⁴ Today, Northfield celebrates what residents deem the only dark side of the town with the Defeat of Jesse James festival each September, which includes a ten-minute reenactment.¹⁸⁵

Jesse James moved here in 1881 and lived here 100 days. The house was then located at 1318 Lafayette Street, on the hill about a block north of here.¹⁸⁶

Another warm spring day began 3 April 1882, in Saint Joseph Missouri, a relatively small town located north of Kansas City, right on the Missouri river. The friendly little town had no idea that by the end of the day, the quiet atmosphere would be disrupted by gunfire, a well-known outlaw would lay dead, and two men would be charged with his murder. Jesse James, known by residents as Tom Howard, had arrived in St. Joseph in November 1881, while trying to remain hidden from various police organizations who sought him for multiple crimes. The home, rented from a city councilman for fourteen dollars a month, sat on a hill, separated from its neighboring buildings, and provided a stunning view of the town.

Jesse was sitting in the parlor with two men, Charles and Robert Ford, planning a robbery for the next day.¹⁸⁷ James enjoyed his life as a family man, and planned to use the spoils of this robbery to purchase property in Nebraska, where he would become a farmer, and raise his children outside of the life of crime.¹⁸⁸ Jesse knew that his luck was running out, as Governor Crittenden had issued a ten thousand dollar reward, and one

¹⁸⁴ "Bank Robbers Busy in Rural Minnesota," *New York Times*, 31 August 1930, E8.

¹⁸⁵ Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris. "Cows, Colleges and Contentment," *New York Times* 3 August 1986, XX37.

¹⁸⁶ Jesse James Home. Tour by Author, 26 December 2007.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

former gang member, Dick Lidell, had turned himself in, and was assisting the Missouri government with charges against the outlaw. Jesse knew that he needed assistance with the robbery, but his former gang members were in prison or dead, so he relied on the Ford brothers to help him with this raid. Unknown to Jesse, the brothers were conspiring with the Governor to kill Jesse and collect the reward.

Jesse discussed the plans quietly, as his wife and children were in the kitchen. Looking about the room, he noticed a needlepoint hanging on the wall was crooked or perhaps needed dusting.¹⁸⁹ In a move contradictory to his typical behavior, Jesse removed his guns to prevent questions from the neighbors. Moving a chair against the wall, he stood up to begin his task.¹⁹⁰ Behind him, the Ford brothers saw this as their chance, and took aim. Jesse heard the gun, and began to turn, but was unable to prevent the shot. The bullet entered behind Jesse's right ear, and at the time, it was believed the bullet exited over his left eye, although researchers today believe the bullet remained lodged in James' head.¹⁹¹ Jesse's children, Jesse Jr. and Mary, and wife, Zee, entered the parlor to find Jesse laying dead on the floor, his blood soaking into the wood flooring.¹⁹²

The Ford brothers sent a telegram to the governor, and then surrendered themselves to city marshal Enos Craig.¹⁹³ They knew there was nothing to fear, as their deal with Crittenden protected them from prosecution. Despite the agreement, Bob and Charles went on trial, were sentenced to hang, and pardoned by the Governor within

¹⁸⁹ Jesse James Home. Tour by Author, 26 December 2006.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

hours. The courthouse where the trial occurred is a historical landmark. While Bob and Charles were enduring their easy punishment, Zee was a mess. She held her husband's head in her lap, and when initially questioned by authorities, she proclaimed that the man lying there was Tom Howard, a cattle buyer. Later, unable to maintain the charade, she admitted that her husband was the notorious Jesse Woodson James.

The little house on the hill has since been moved twice. Immediately following Jesse's death, the owner charged a small admission fee to allow tourists to see the house. Unexpectedly, though, souvenir hunters began to tear up pieces of fence and try to chip away pieces of the flooring. They also dug at a small hole in the wall, determined to be a bullet hole caused when the bullet exited Jesse's head, enlarging it to many times the original size. When the house was moved at first, it was to keep the tourists from congesting the small streets surrounding the location. The owner sold the house and it was moved to a busy street known as the Belt highway.¹⁹⁴ However, the new owner could not afford the city taxes, and St. Joseph resumed ownership in the 1970s.

Since the city took control of the home, and transformed it into a museum, over six hundred thousand visitors have streamed through the door. The black fence outside has a sign proclaiming "see the bullet hole," and several websites dedicated to the James gang give directions to the location. The house, moved a second time, is now located behind another prominent museum in the St. Joseph area, just blocks from where it stood on that fateful April day.¹⁹⁵ In recent years, the director of the museum, Gary Chilcote, provided a granite marker for the original location on Lafayette.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Jesse James Home. Tour by Author, 26 December 2006.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

Signs direct visitors around the back of the house, where they enter through the original kitchen. The use of the house as a museum has established this room as a small gift shop, and for payment of admission. On the wall facing the door, is a large painting of what Jesse looked like on the day he was killed, and around the room there are newspaper articles about the museum, as well as developments in the Jesse James story. After a small crowd gathers, the volunteer leads them into the parlor, and begins an audio recording that tells the story of the events of April third. There is mention of the legendary bullet hole, and the current belief that the bullet never left Jesse's head.¹⁹⁷ The Buchanan county coroner removed the bullet and gave it to the family, a fact not mentioned by historians.¹⁹⁸ The recording goes on to mention the various items around the room. On the wall above the bullet hole is the "original" needlepoint Jesse was dusting, however, the James farm in Kearney disputes that belief.¹⁹⁹ Lower on the wall is a framed .44 Smith and Wesson, similar to the gun used by Bob Ford to kill Jesse. There is also a chair in the position used by Jesse, and a painting of the events of the day. Also in the room is another large painting of Jesse, at the age of his death, and the recording mentions a green loveseat, sitting along the wall.

The tour continues into a bedroom, that covers the 1995 exhumation of Jesse's remains in Kearney. The walls in this room are covered with pictures and details from the exhumation and DNA test. Along one wall is a glass case, with a model of a skull,

¹⁹⁶ Saint Joseph Missouri Historical Marker. Tour by Author, 5 June 2007.

¹⁹⁷ Jesse James Home. Tour by Author, 26 December 20067.

¹⁹⁸ Buchanan County Coroner to Homer Croy, File 741, Homer Croy Papers, Western History Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.

¹⁹⁹ Jesse James Home. Tour by Author, 26 December 2006.

showing where the bullet entered Jesse's head. Next to that case, another is filled with pictures from the DNA process as well as from the last funeral conducted by the Sons of the Confederate Veterans. Museum director Chilcote even served as pallbearer at that funeral.²⁰⁰ Above these pictures are several paintings and drawings from George Warfel from various points in Jesse James life, including his guerilla lifestyle and up until his death. The final room, a bedroom, is set up with a bed, dresser and materials typical of the time. Along one wall, there is a case with information about the James' children, as well as other materials from the James family. Above the bed are two paintings of Jesse, one representing his role in the Civil War, the other illustrates the more gentlemanly side of James.²⁰¹

Outside of the parlor, there are little details provided for visitors. Other than the mention of the green loveseat in the parlor, the rest of the furniture goes unmentioned, with visitors not learning if they are period pieces or just donations to the museum system. The house is not historically accurate, and the largest conflict is over the bullet hole. With the sign outside proclaiming that visitors can see the hole, it seems contradictory to include in the recording that it is now believed that the hole was created by something else. The little house on the hill, well preserved, is an entertaining trip for Jesse James fans. With the lack of signs, the interpretation is left to the visitors, so verification of the truth comes from an increased interest that leads to research on the James gang and their crimes.

Director Chilcote approved the placement of the surveys in his museum, however said that the staff, made up entirely of volunteers, would not be mentioning the papers to

²⁰⁰ Brant, *Jesse James*, 335.

²⁰¹ Jesse James Home. Tour by Author, 26 December 2006.

the visitors. Despite this warning, the largest number, fifty-five surveys, came from this location. The number of visitors who call themselves novices on Jesse James is nearly equal to the intermediate knowledge level. Ninety-eight percent of visitors said the museum had an accurate presentation and nearly all said they learned something new. About ninety-five percent were new visitors with the majority coming because the museum looked interesting, followed closely by the number who came for family and because of a travel guide.

Visitor Brenda D. said the museum was very interesting and that her family loves old west history. Amar S. adds that the legend of Jesse James adds an interesting and thought provoking chapter to the American experience. One visitor in his twenties, Matthew S. revealed that Jesse was his childhood hero, while Dan H. said the museum was worth the admission. One family felt the St. Joseph museum could have been more cooperative, but did not mention how they came to this opinion. With each year that passes, more people find ways to connect themselves to James. Cliff C., a sixty plus visitor labeled himself as a cousin of Jesse, who was very interested in family history.

Multiple museums and historical markers exist across the Midwest address the crime spree of the James-Younger gang. At each location, the interpretation deals with the specifics of the local crimes, while some of them go in depth about the life of Jesse James, and the James-Younger gang. At the James farm in Kearney, guests learn about the childhood of the James boys, and the activities that pushed the boys over the edge into a life of crime. Just a few miles away, tourists receive an in depth look at the first robbery committed by the gang, while learning the historical significance of the event. In the small Minnesota town of Northfield, guests understand the beginning of the town,

while learning a large deal of information about the only failed robbery of the James-Younger gang. Finally, just over an hour north of Jesse's birthplace, is the home where Jesse met the ultimate betrayal, death at the hand of one of his gang members. While these four museums have established interpretative goals, and institution visitor cards, the directors agreed to outside visitor questions about their experiences. Each of these museums has attempted to provide the truth about the life of the outlaw Jesse James without depending on the myths perpetrated through films and newspapers.

Chapter 4

Evidence of Judgment: Missouri Newspapers and Jesse James

The newspaper is the historian's surest and most nearly eternal source of information. The living event is forever gone, but the newspaper is evidence that life was here.²⁰²

The career of Jesse James spanned sixteen years and encompassed numerous crimes. As James grew bolder, newspapers across the state engaged in a vicious battle over the outlaw and the reputation of Missouri. As the scuffle raged on, the division grew politically rather than geographically. Throughout history, newspapers have played a significant role in public memory of people and events. In Missouri, newspapers helped solidify the hero myth of Jesse Woodson James.

The role of newspapers in America varies depending on who is speaking. David Macrae, a Scotsman who visited just after the Civil War, noticed that in New York City in 1868, there were more dailies published than in England, Scotland and Ireland combined.²⁰³ Macrae also saw that newspapers were as necessary as money, but much more plentiful. Some prisons even provided newspapers to inmates, as to do otherwise would be cruel and unusual punishment.²⁰⁴ The problem, however, is that facts pass into circulation quickly, but at the same time, inaccuracies and outright lies are published. Newsroom ritual is to spread out clippings of a past collection of articles on a particular

²⁰² David Dary, *Red Blood and Black Ink: Journalism in the Old West* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1998) i.

²⁰³ Summers, *The Press Gang*, 9.

²⁰⁴ Summers, *The Press Gang*, 9.

subject and draw heavily on these earlier released stories.²⁰⁵ Journalists throughout U.S. history understand they provide a comprehensive record of society's doings. Journalist William Swislow provides a look into the field, "Because of our professional fixation on the day's events, journalism is the most ephemeral of professions. Most of us are forgotten almost as quickly as our newsprint yellows."²⁰⁶ A writer knows they are only important until the next issue appears.

Rumors say that Jesse loved to read the newspapers to keep up on his actions. When Jesse "died" at the hands of George Sheppard, Jesse could not resist sending a letter to the editor, asking for the special edition paper to be sent to his mother in Missouri.²⁰⁷ Newspapers in Missouri have an interesting history. In July 1808, the *Missouri Gazette* in Saint Louis became the first newspaper printed west of the Mississippi River. Owned by Joseph Charless, the *Gazette* went through multiple owners and paper shortages before Charless' son obtained partial control. In 1822, the paper's name changed to the *Missouri Republican*, and in 1835, it became a daily.²⁰⁸ On the other side of the state, William Rockhill Nelson founded the *Kansas City Evening Star* in 1880.²⁰⁹ Various towns across the state produced daily or weekly editions. Some of those, referenced later, include the *Rolla New Constitution*, *Liberty Weekly Tribune* and

²⁰⁵Martin Lee, *Unreliable Sources*, 15.

²⁰⁶ William Swislow, "They Stopped to Conquer," *The Quill* (July/August 1990): 23, as quoted in Fedler, *Lessons from the Past*: 2.

²⁰⁷ "Jesse James Alive," *National Police Gazette*, 10 January 1880, 2; "The Bandits Boast," *National Police Gazette*, 1 April 1882, 10.

²⁰⁸ Dary, *Red Blood and Black Ink*, 304.

²⁰⁹ Dary, *Red Blood and Black Ink*, 32.

the *Boonville Weekly Eagle*. Despite all of the papers, the local news, including bank robberies, covered several small paragraphs, or at most a single column.²¹⁰

A combination of small amounts of local news and lack of specifics allowed several years of robberies by the James-Younger gang to occur without credit. In February 1866, the small Kansas City suburb of Liberty earned a record never desired. A group of men rode into town, without notice by the townspeople. Two of the men entered the Clay County Savings Association and requested change from the cashier, Mr. Greenup Bird. Minutes later, the group fled the town with sixty thousand dollars, making Clay County Savings the first peacetime daylight bank robbery in history.²¹¹ The *Liberty Weekly Tribune* covered the crime in the next issue, however the front page story encompassed only two columns.²¹² Mr. Bird, one of two witnesses could provide accurate details of the crime, but was unable to provide descriptions of the robbers. Historians debate if Jesse was involved, although this is a general accepted belief. The common thought is Jesse assisted with planning, as he was recuperating from a chest wound received during a botched surrender at the end of the war.²¹³

Over the following three years, the James-Younger gang was credited with four robberies in Lexington, Savannah, and Richmond, Missouri, as well as one in Russellville, Kentucky.²¹⁴ In December 1869, the media began to link the robberies with

²¹⁰ Dary, *Red Blood and Black Ink*, 128.

²¹¹ Jesse James Bank Robbery, Tour By Author, 27 December 2007.

²¹² *The Liberty Weekly Tribune*, 18 February 1866, 1.

²¹³ Jesse James Bank Robbery, Tour By Author, 27 December 2007.

²¹⁴ Legends of America, "Old West Legends: Timeline of the James Gang." <http://www.legendsofamerica.com/WE-JesseJamesTimeline8.html> (accessed 3 March 2007).

Jesse. During the Gallatin, Missouri robbery at the Daviess County Savings Bank, two gang members held a heated discussion over the identity of the cashier. Jesse, it is assumed, believed the gentleman to be Samuel Cox, the killer of “Bloody” Bill Anderson. A split second decision led to Jesse drawing his gun and murdering the man behind the counter. However, a huge mistake was made, the murdered man actually being former Union soldier Captain John Sheetz.²¹⁵ The newspapers began to publish articles tying every robbery across the west to Jesse and his gang. These made the group appear ubiquitous, appearing in Virginia, Kentucky and Missouri in one day, then robbing a bank in Corinth, Mississippi, followed by a train robbery in Muncie, Kansas the next.²¹⁶ One report showed that the James brothers were guilty of killing an immigrant traveling through Clay County however when the truth came out, the boys were not involved in the death.²¹⁷

Governor Woodson faced a major dilemma. The public, outraged by Sheets murder, demanded action. “I, Silas Woodson, Governor of the state of Missouri, by virtue of the power vested in me by the law do hereby offer a reward of two thousand dollars for the arrest and delivery of Jesse James to the Sheriff of Daviess County.”²¹⁸ The reward offer did not assist in the capture, as the James-Younger gang struck a train at

²¹⁵ Jesse James to Editor *Gallatin North Missourian*, 8 January 1874, William A. Settle Papers Folder 43, Western History Manuscripts Collection, University Of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

²¹⁶ *Lexington Weekly Caucasian*, 18 April 1874, 2. William A. Settle Papers Folder 41.

²¹⁷ *Rolla Constitution*, 18 April 1874, 2. William Settle Papers Folder 41.

²¹⁸ Silas Woodson, Reward for Jesse James 13 October 1873, *Proclamation to the People of the State of Missouri*. Alvord Collection. Western History Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

Gads Hill, Missouri, an action that brought the lawlessness in the state to the forefront.²¹⁹ Previously, the general assembly had vetoed requests for Special Forces to search for the outlaw. Now they decided to grant the governor the power to call up a secret service of men to capture Jesse.²²⁰ The following month, a resolution passed, creating a ten thousand dollar fund to assist in the apprehension of James.²²¹ In Rolla, the *Constitution* called the move a good decision, saying it was finally time to rid the state of the outlaws, which is a departure from comments made a year later following the Pinkerton raid.²²² The *St. Louis Republican* said it was time for the governor to ask for assistance, “He can’t get salt on their tail, let someone else try.”²²³ The continued crimes by the James gang angered the state and media outlets across Missouri began to demand action be taken against the outlaws.

Even though most papers turned against the James gang, the editor of one of the Kansas City dailies, John Newman Edwards, proclaimed the innocent nature of Jesse through numerous editorials.²²⁴ However, these positive stories did little to counteract the negative publicity. A January 26, 1875, event changed the view. Just after midnight,

²¹⁹ After almost ten years of robbing banks, the gang first robbed the Chicago-Rock Island and Pacific Railroad in Adair, Iowa in January 1873, escaping with \$75,000. A year later, after hearing a rumor that detective Allan Pinkerton and multiple rich passengers would be on board, the James gang decided to rob the St. Louis-Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad line. Ronald Beights, “Jesse James and the Gads Hill Train Holdup,” *Wild West Magazine* (2005) http://www.historynet.com/magazines/wild_west/3034996.html?showAll=y&c=y. (Accessed 16 June 2007).

²²⁰ *Jefferson City People’s Tribune*, 18 February 1874, 1; Missouri General Assembly, Journal of the House, (Jefferson City, 1874), 362-368. William A. Settle Papers Folder 41.

²²¹ *Jefferson City People’s Tribune*, 30 March 1874, 22; Missouri General Assembly, Journal of the House (Jefferson City, 1874), 588-589. William A. Settle Papers Folder 41.

²²² *Rolla Constitution*, 28 March 1874, 2. Settle Papers Folder 41

²²³ *Saint Louis Republican*, 24 March 1874, 1. Settle Papers Folder 43.

²²⁴ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 80-91.

a group of men arrived via special car on the Hannibal-Saint Joseph express, representing the Pinkerton National Detective Agency.²²⁵ Acting on a tip from undercover operative Jack Ladd, stationed at a neighboring farm, the Pinkertons planned to capture Frank and Jesse.²²⁶

Newspaper reactions were instantaneous. Instead of gaining public support, the Pinkertons created a climate of sympathy for Jesse.²²⁷ The agency denied that any operative threw the bomb in the house, and for years to come, magazines would claim that the agency made a martyr of James.²²⁸ In Saint Louis, the newspapers printed very little about the events in Kearney, only a short editorial about why there was an explosion, then days later, a description of the raid.²²⁹ In Kansas City, the two main dailies engaged in a battle. The *Kansas City Times*, the morning after the attack said, “just how far a band of detectives or anybody should go in their attempts to capture the outlaws is definitely not known,”²³⁰ and “there is no crime, however dastardly which merits a retribution as savage and fiendish as these men.”²³¹ On the other side of the political spectrum lay the *Kansas City Journal of Commerce*. “It’s not known if the James brothers are guilty of all the crimes charged against them, but they are guilty

²²⁵ *Lexington Weekly Caucasian*, 30 January 1875, 1. Settle Papers Folder 44.

²²⁶ James D. Horan. *Desperate Men: Revelations from the Seal Pinkerton Files*. New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons: 1949, 89.

²²⁷ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 81; Voss, *We Never Sleep*, 26.

²²⁸ Voss, *We Never Sleep*, 26; Warren Nolan and Owen White, “The Bad Men from Missouri,” *Colliers* 81 (28 January 1928). Settle Papers Folder 44.

²²⁹ *Saint Louis Republican*, 31 January 1875, 4 February 1875. Settle Papers Folder 45.

²³⁰ *Kansas City Times*, 27 January 1875. Settle Papers Folder 44.

²³¹ *Kansas City Times*, 27 January 1875. Settle Papers Folder 44.

enough to make them outlaws. The Democratic Party fostered the lawlessness of the James boys.”²³² In response, an editorial said, “the party came like thieves in the night and fled from the state like fugitives from justice. Comanche’s of the plains were never guilty of a more brutal act of vengeance.”²³³ Other, smaller publications like the *Liberty Advertiser*, *Rolla Constitution* and *Sedalia Daily Democrat* supported Jesse while the *Saint Joseph Daily Herald* felt attempts to capture the outlaws should be accepted without question.²³⁴ These disagreements continued the following month with the state congress discussions over the Pinkerton’s actions.

Representatives in the General Assembly of Missouri felt pressure to act following the Pinkerton raid. A resolution requested a full investigation. “The terrible tragedy at the home of the mother of the James boys adds one more disgrace to our state,” said one editorial.²³⁵ According to the *St. Louis Republican*, the preamble caused issues and the *Liberty Weekly Tribune* stated Republicans voted against conducting an investigation.²³⁶ Governor Charles H. Hardin found himself in the spotlight.²³⁷ After previously requesting the assembly to include a secret service fund in the state budget,

²³² *Kansas City Journal of Commerce*, 29 January 1875. Settle Papers Folder 44.

²³³ *Kansas City Times*, 29 January 1875. Settle Papers Folder 44.

²³⁴ *Liberty Advertiser*, 11 February 1875. *Rolla Constitution*, 30 January 1875; *Sedalia Daily Democrat*, 28 January 1875; *Saint Joseph Daily Herald*, 2 February 1875. Settle Papers Folder 43.

²³⁵ *Sedalia Daily Democrat*, 31 January 1875. Settle Papers Folder 43.

²³⁶ *Saint Louis Republican*, 3 February 1875; *Liberty Weekly Tribune*, 5 February 1875. Settle Papers Folder 44.

²³⁷ Charles Hardin was the twenty-second governor of Missouri, serving from January 1875 to January 1877. His career was not negatively impacted by the James Brothers and the Pinkerton Fiasco. *Biographical Directory of the Governors of the United States, 1789-1978*, Volume 2. Westport: Meckler Books, 1978. Available from the National Governors Association, <http://www.nga.org/> (accessed 6 August 2007).

following the Pinkerton raid, Hardin was subpoenaed regarding the authorization of payment from the ten thousand dollar fund.²³⁸ The *Boonville Weekly Eagle* released some of the details, that bullet marks and blood spots in the home were not as a result of an attempt to fight back, but from previous attacks on the house, and dog fights.²³⁹ Some public debate occurred, with one paper excited about the decision to investigate the “cowardly and atrocious acts of a body of detectives.”²⁴⁰ The *Kansas City Journal of Commerce*, however, held different beliefs, “it is believed there are many Democratic citizens of Missouri who don’t approve the course of leaders of the party and thus don’t like to appear to endorse the outlaws.”²⁴¹ The results of the investigation revealed that the Pinkertons had been behind the attack, and they had acted on bad information. Outrage continued with some citizens demanding the agency be held responsible for their actions. In a surprising turn of events, the tide of public support remained on Jesse’s side. The Robin Hood myth took hold and remained important in the newspaper systems of Missouri.

On 17 March 1875, Jefferson Jones, representative of Callaway County, stood before the general assembly to introduce an amnesty bill for the James and Younger boys²⁴²

Whereas, Equality is the essence of true Democracy, and no distinction in person or class should ever be made by law under a government of a people possessed of virtue, intelligence and true courage...all persons in

²³⁸ *Boonville Weekly Eagle*, 29 January 1875, 1. Settle Papers Folder 44.

²³⁹ *Boonville Weekly Eagle*, 29 January 1875, 1. Settle Papers Folder 44.

²⁴⁰ *Rolla New Constitution*, 30 January 1875. Settle Papers Folder 43.

²⁴¹ *Kansas City Journal of Commerce*, 2 February 1875. Settle Papers Folder 43

²⁴² Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 81.

the military service of the United States, or who acted under the authority thereof in the state, are relieved from all criminal punishment for all acts done by them since the first day of January, A.D. 1861...Whereas under the outlawry pronounced against Jesse W. James and others who gallantly periled their lives and their all in defence of their principles, they are of necessity made desperate, driven as they are from home and their county, they can know no law but the law of self-preservation...Believing these men too brave to be mean; too generous to be revengeful...true statesmanship alike demand that general amnesty should be extended to all for attacks done or charged to have been done during the war...that full and complete amnesty and pardon will be granted them for all acts charged or committed by them during the late civil war and inviting them peaceably to return to their respective homes, and there quietly remain.²⁴³

The wording of the resolution led some historians to speculate that John Newman Edwards wrote the original draft.²⁴⁴ Throughout the entire bill, the reference to amnesty relates solely to the activities. The press battle raged, in large part because of the politics surrounding the amnesty bill.²⁴⁵ In the *Saint Louis Dispatch*, an editorial stated that the James boys should be hunted on suspicion alone.²⁴⁶ Just two days after the reading of the bill, and just prior to the vote, the *Kansas City Journal of Commerce* published its beliefs. “The state protects the worst brigands that ever cursed the state...other men who fought against the union were granted full amnesty and returned home, save those few bloodthirsty and lawless...it attempts to protect them and save them the consequences of their crime.”²⁴⁷ Clearly, the editors felt strongly about the proposed amnesty. “It is the

²⁴³ *Jefferson City People's Tribune*, 24 March 1875. Settle Papers Folder 44.

²⁴⁴ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 82.

²⁴⁵ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 83.

²⁴⁶ *Saint Louis Dispatch*, 8 March 1875; Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 80.

²⁴⁷ *Kansas City Journal of Commerce*, 19 March 1875.

first instance in all history where a government proposed, by solemn act, to take the side of brigands against society.”²⁴⁸

However, the *Commerce* appeared outnumbered in the attacks. The *Lexington Advertiser* offered support of Jesse, despite previously being victims. “There has been only one indictment of James at Gallatin – following an unofficial investigation.”²⁴⁹ Even the *Jefferson City People’s Tribune* the capital city paper supported amnesty.²⁵⁰ On 20 March 1875, a vote in the state house passed, but the measure failed in the state senate.²⁵¹ In a small town about ninety minutes away from Kearney, the defeat of the bill brought forth strong support for Jesse. “No men ever tried harder to bury in the obscurity of an isolated farmer’s life, quit the trade of war, forget the past and begin again.”²⁵² However, the *Journal of Commerce* insisted on the last word, that the “amnesty proposal made citizens feel strongly that the authorities would do nothing to rid the state of outlaws.”²⁵³ Jesse complicated the issue of amnesty by mailing letters to various newspapers through his career, as it appeared he was demanding amnesty. One example of these letters comes from the *Gallatin North Missourian* following the robbery and

²⁴⁸ *Kansas City Journal of Commerce*, 19 March 1875.

²⁴⁹ *Lexington Advertiser*, 11 March 1875; Daviess County Grand Jury, Report of the Daviess County Grand Jury; Daviess County, Arrest Warrants for Jesse and Frank James. Courtesy of the Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, Missouri

²⁵⁰ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 82.

²⁵¹ William Settle Papers Folder 40. I have contacted the Missouri State Archives for copies of this material, however in their research they did not find any information.

²⁵² *Sedalia Daily Democrat*, 4 February 1880. Courtesy of Missouri Historical Newspaper Project, <http://newspapers.umsystem.edu/archive/Skins/Missouri/navigator.asp?skin=Missouri&BP=OK> (accessed 1 May 2007).

²⁵³ *Kansas City Journal of Commerce*, 5 May 1875. Courtesy of Missouri Historical Newspaper Project, <http://newspapers.umsystem.edu/archive/Skins/Missouri/navigator.asp?skin=Missouri&BP=OK> (accessed 1 May 2007).

murder that occurred there. “This proposition, however, I do make, and will stick to it. I made it to McClurg when he was Governor, and he said it was fair and manly, although he did not pay any attention to it, and I now make it to Governor Woodson, who has offered a large reward for my head. If he will guarantee me a fair trial, and protect us from a mob, we will come to Jefferson City and surrender ourselves.”²⁵⁴ Throughout the sixteen years of being on the run, Jesse repeatedly denied involvement with the crimes, however he never once asked to be pardoned, just asked for a fair trial away from a mob, although the stipulation was to never have to surrender in a town he was accused of robbing. The incessant crimes and denials drew the politic factions throughout the states newspapers into a vicious battle over the control Jesse James had in Missouri.

While the media divided based on their politics there was some slight division from east to west. In Saint Louis, the *Republican* used an interview with a Pinkerton detective to attack Clay County, making accusations that the county frequently protected Jesse from the law.²⁵⁵ The people of Clay County were repeatedly maligned over the behavior of Jesse and other members of his gang.²⁵⁶ One editorial revealed the true feelings of Kearney residents, “beyond former bushwhackers, family and friends, there is little support of the James boys.”²⁵⁷ In 1874, the *Kansas City Times*, later a Jesse supporter, spouted anger over the situation in the state. The assumption throughout other states was that the controlling party allowed Jesse to flourish, with the blame hurled back and forth between radical Republicans and Democrats. In April, the *Times* commented

²⁵⁴ Jesse James to the *Gallatin North Missourian* Editor, 8 January 1874. William Settle Papers Folder 43.

²⁵⁵ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 62.

²⁵⁶ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 86.

²⁵⁷ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 86.

that if the recent events occurred under a Democratic state government the radicals would quickly find explanation in that fact alone.²⁵⁸ In May 1874, the *St. Louis Republican* charged that the Democrats were friends and protectors of the outlaws. The *Times* replied that the Democratic Party was the opposite, composed of law-abiding citizens whose patience was stretched thin.²⁵⁹ They continued with an attack on the radical Republicans that the mere existence of the robbers was a testimony to the lawlessness and inefficiency of the party.²⁶⁰ Why would anyone believe that the Democrats were friendly to highwaymen, “such claptrap is merely for political purposes” to malign the Democratic Party.²⁶¹

In 1875, the two Kansas City dailies, the *Journal of Commerce* and the *Kansas City Times*, engaged in battle. The *Journal of Commerce* represented the Republican anti-James side, while the *Kansas City Times* had Democrat leanings.²⁶² The *Journal of Commerce* attacked Clay County because Kansas and Iowa were ridiculing the state for the outlaw behavior and Clay was the main problem; because of the county authorities appear to keep their mouths shut while former guerillas hid James.²⁶³ The *Times* reply revealed Clay as home to sturdy Democrats and that remained the sole reason for the misrepresentation.²⁶⁴ The *Journal of Commerce* continued arguing their point, saying the

²⁵⁸ “Slanderous Accusation,” *Kansas City Times*, 15 April 1874, 2. Settle Papers Folder 43.

²⁵⁹ “Slanderous Accusation,” *Kansas City Times*, 15 April 1874, 2. Settle Papers Folder 43

²⁶⁰ “Slanderous Accusation,” *Kansas City Times*, 15 April 1874, 2. Settle Papers Folder 43.

²⁶¹ “Slanderous Accusation,” *Kansas City Times*, 15 April 1874, 2. Settle Papers Folder 43

²⁶² Author belief based on comments found during research.

²⁶³ *Journal of Commerce*, 25 April 1875, 2. Homer Croy Papers Folder 755. The ironic part of the attacks by the Kansas City newspapers on Clay County is that the city is to this day, part of Clay County.

²⁶⁴ *Kansas City Times*, 30 April 1875, 2. Croy Papers Folder 755.

James gang threatened respectable citizens and no one seemed to be putting forth an effort to stop to lawlessness.²⁶⁵ One resident said, “I feel like leaving everything I have and going where I can live free from this constant apprehension.”²⁶⁶ In September 1875, the *Times* printed a quote from Senator Carl Schurz that illustrated the Republican belief about the Democrats, that the party was supposedly “opposed to ending mob violence because they failed to pass a resolution demanding suppression.”²⁶⁷

In Saint Louis, the two papers had very little attack propaganda occurring. In 1875, the *Dispatch* defended Clay, saying, “Life and property are safer in Clay than in the streets of Saint Louis. Never a man killed last year except Askew.”²⁶⁸ The *Saint Louis Republican*, other papers revealed, only wrote about Missouri “when venting spite and uttering malignant falsehoods.”²⁶⁹ In 1881, another Saint Louis paper published an article berating Clay County and the behavior of the James boys.²⁷⁰ Other smaller cities across the state spent several months covering the debate from their point of view, while addressing other issues in the debate over the James boys. Rolla, a small town in the southern Missouri, spent just over a month in 1875 discussing the topic. At the end of March, an article congratulated the governor for finally attempting to prevent the outlawry. The article referred to the passing of the secret service act as well as the

²⁶⁵ *Journal of Commerce*, 5 May 1875, 2. Croy Papers Folder 755.

²⁶⁶ *Journal of Commerce*, 5 May 1875, 2. Croy Papers Folder 755.

²⁶⁷ *Kansas City Times*, 29 September 1875, 2. Settle Papers Folder 43.

²⁶⁸ *Saint Louis Dispatch*, 11 May 1875, 2. Settle Papers Folder 43.

²⁶⁹ *Kansas City Times*, 29 September 1875, 2. Settle Papers Folder 43.

²⁷⁰ *Saint Louis Chronicle*, 12 July 1881, 10. Courtesy of Missouri Historical Newspaper Project, <http://newspapers.umsystem.edu/archive/Skins/Missouri/navigator.asp?skin=Missouri&BP=OK> (accessed 1 May 2007).

creation of the fund to assist with the investigations.²⁷¹ In April, the *Constitution* discussed the depreciation of the land in Clay County. According to the report, Jesse's behavior caused farm property to decrease in value anywhere from ten to fifty dollars.²⁷² The discussion over Missouri and outlawry continued the following day, when the editors mentioned that Missouri had become the center of journalistic shafts recently, and that no event in the state equaled the murder of a German family in Illinois, and that Kentucky added to the victims of lawless revenge.²⁷³ At the end of the month, the *Constitution* argued against the *St. Louis Republican* over Clay County. The editors claimed that the *Republican* ran repetitive articles about the James boys, blaming the people of the county, even though the poor folks of the area had nothing to do with Jesse and did not sympathize but condemned his behavior.²⁷⁴

The small town of Liberty, just north of Kearney, experienced the wrath of the James boys in 1866, had two newspapers that discussed the Governor and the state in relation to Jesse. The main paper, *The Liberty Weekly Tribune*, discussed the governor's message to the general assembly asking for the establishment of the secret service fund while another editorial described Governor Woodson as the champion pardoner of the United States. "He pardoned over seventy five convicts, yet wonders why Missouri is overrun by thieves and murderers."²⁷⁵ Later, in October, a New York philosopher

²⁷¹ *Rolla Constitution*, 28 March 1875, 2. Croy Papers Folder 755.

²⁷² *Rolla Constitution*, 3 April 1875. Croy Papers Folder 755.

²⁷³ *Rolla Constitution*, 4 April 1875. Settle Papers Folder 43.

²⁷⁴ *Rolla Constitution*, 24 April 1875, 2. Croy Papers Folder 755.

²⁷⁵ *Liberty Weekly Tribune*, 23 April 1874, 2. *Liberty Weekly Tribune*, 24 April 1875, 2. Croy Papers Folder 755.

ridiculed Missouri in a speech, and the *Tribune*'s response was to ask why Carl Schurg was including the state, when in New York gravestones were routinely removed from the cemetery and placed in front of saloons.²⁷⁶ In 1875, the *Liberty Tribune* wrote from within Clay County, defending itself against the attacks from inside and outside the state. Reports showed that less than ten people knew Jesse and less than ten percent were pleased with the activities, but again, there was less crime in Clay than all of the counties making a fuss, and in fact, Kearney was not protecting Jesse James.²⁷⁷ Also during 1875, Liberty acquired an additional newspaper, the *Liberty Advertiser* that reported, "there is no reign of violence in Clay. The tale is as false as if it had been manufactured in the laboratory of hell."²⁷⁸ Even with all of the debate surrounding the actions of Jesse James, the media had an event looming on the horizon that would sell plenty of papers.

Jesse James had gained notoriety for his sixteen-year crime spree; however a single event would cement his place in history and popular culture. Jesse was suddenly determined to leave Missouri and begin an honest farmer's life in Nebraska, but he knew the money to buy land would have to come from a robbery.²⁷⁹ Most of his former gang members were dead or in jail, except Charles Ford, Charlie as he was known. Charlie suggested including his younger brother Robert, or Bob, Ford. Some claim that Jesse

²⁷⁶ *Liberty Weekly Tribune*, 30 October 1874, 3. Settle Papers Folder 43.

²⁷⁷ *Liberty Weekly Tribune*, 7 May 1875, 2; *Liberty Weekly Tribune*, 14 May 1875, 1; *Liberty Weekly Tribune*, 29 November 1874, 1. Croy Papers Folder 755.

²⁷⁸ *Liberty Advertiser*, 29 April 1875, 2. Croy Papers Folder 755.

²⁷⁹ "Bob Ford's Story," No Details included in scrapbook, Broadhead Collection Folder 5, Western History Manuscripts, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

said he never trusted Bob, but that Charlie was as true as steel.²⁸⁰ Seeing the Fords as his only option, Jesse welcomed the volunteers and the three men quickly began planning to rob a bank in Platte City, Missouri.²⁸¹ While Jesse James was still a hunted outlaw, his alter ego, Thomas Howard, and his family lived peacefully in a small house overlooking the Missouri river in Saint Joseph.²⁸² It was in this location that fate dealt a devastating blow to the James family. One early April morning, just after breakfast, Jesse, Charles and Bob retired to the living room to discuss the final plans for the following day. Unbeknownst to Jesse, the Ford brothers had betrayed his trust, meeting with Governor Crittenden to plan Jesse's demise.²⁸³ Jesse died and became an American legend.

The majority of Missouri newspapers seemed too shocked to print stories, or perhaps they were saving ink, because Jesse had been reported dead so many times previously.²⁸⁴ In the days following the assassination, the Buchanan County coroner conducted an inquiry into the death, determining the body, laying at the Sidenfaden funeral home, was that of Jesse Woodson James.²⁸⁵ Even with this information, people felt hard pressed to believe the story that Jesse was dead. Two weeks later, a reporter for the *New York Times* said a number of Missourians believed it was not Jesse killed."²⁸⁶

²⁸⁰ Legends of America, "Robert Ford," Complete List of Old West Outlaws, <http://www.legendsofamerica.com> (accessed 15 August 2007).

²⁸¹ Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 117.

²⁸² Settle, *Jesse James was His Name*, 117.

²⁸³ "Jesse James, the Notorious Bandit who has Disgraced Missouri by his Lawless Acts at Last is Dead!" *Rolla New Era*, 8 April 1882, 2; "The Missouri Bandits," *New York Evangelist*, 13 April 1882, 4; "Jesse James Killed," Article with no information, Scrapbook, Broadhead Collection Folder 5.

²⁸⁴ "Jesse James Shot Down," *New York Times*, 11 April 1882, 1.

²⁸⁵ Heaton Bowman Smith and Sidenfaden Mortuary, Tour by Author, 26 December 2006.

²⁸⁶ "Doubt of Jesse James' Death," *New York Times*, 11 April 1882, 5.

As the news spread, a crowd gathered which led to Jesse being laid out on a table for viewing.²⁸⁷ One very lucky photographer, James Will Graham, was summoned to the funeral home and took the now famous death picture of James. The picture was in high demand, and to this day, is sold as a postcard.²⁸⁸ The popularity over Jesse's crimes and his sudden unfortunate death struck the people of Missouri strangely, and they began to flock to the home he was murdered in, stealing pieces of the fence, and chipping away pieces of the hardwood. The owner of the home even tried to recoup the money lost on the damages by charging ten cents admission initially, although that quickly raised to twenty-five cents.²⁸⁹

The *Saint Joseph Daily Herald* quickly embraced the most popular story in the country, and spent several days through the middle of April covering various aspects of the life and death of Jesse James. On April 6, the paper published an interview with Jesse's mother, Zerelda Samuels. When asked if Bob Ford, the shooter, was a relative, she replied, "No, thank God, there are no traitors in our family."²⁹⁰ The county coroner, a friend of "Mr. Howard" was scarcely able to believe that the polite man he knew had even been a bold rider of the forest.²⁹¹ After the commotion in St. Joseph was complete, the remains of Jesse were taken to Kearney to be buried at the family farm, just outside

²⁸⁷"Jesse James, the Notorious Bandit who has Disgraced Missouri by his Lawless Acts at Last is Dead!" *Rolla New Era*, 8 April 1882, 2.

²⁸⁸ E. Listle Reedstom, "A Once In a Lifetime Opportunity: James Will Graham Photographed Jesse James in Death." *Wild West Magazine* 11, no. 4 (1998): 12

²⁸⁹ Ted P. Yeatman, "Jesse James Assassination and the Ford Boys," *Wild West Magazine* (December 2006), 43.

²⁹⁰ "Bandit Band," *Saint Joseph Daily Herald*, 6 April 1882, 1.

²⁹¹ "The Funeral Train," *Saint Joseph Daily Herald*, 6 April 1882, 1; "The Bold Brigands," *Saint Joseph Daily Herald*, 7 April 1882, 1. he Dead Outlaw," *Saint Joseph Daily Herald*, 12 April 1882, 1.

the house where he was born.²⁹² Ms. Samuels inquired of the undertaker if the body of Jesse was in fact inside the box, as she feared someone might have stolen his remains.²⁹³ Prior to the burial, Jesse's casket was carried in the home for his ill brother to pay final respects, and then a local minister said a few words prior to the casket being lowered in the small grave.²⁹⁴

While the state and the nation appeared to be in a state of shock over the events surrounding the death of Jesse, Bob Ford felt free to tell his side of the story, complete with the details about making a deal with Governor Thomas Crittenden to kill Jesse and collect the substantial reward.²⁹⁵ The most famous photo of Bob Ford remains one of him holding the gun he used for the murder, followed by pictures of his bar in Creede, Colorado, the site of his death.²⁹⁶ All of the talk by Bob and Charlie began to draw attention to the Governor, and his role in the death of the outlaw. The anger in the state grew that the Crittenden had made such a deal, in an attempt to clear the state of outlaws, and make himself more positive looking for a congressional position.²⁹⁷ The *St. Joseph Daily Herald* reported on the state's conflicting feelings. "No one can appreciate the full extent of damage which our State has suffered in the career of the gang of murders and

²⁹² "The Funeral Train," *Saint Joseph Daily Herald*, 6 April 1882, 1.

²⁹³ "The Funeral Train," *Saint Joseph Daily Herald*, 6 April 1882, 1.

²⁹⁴ "Bob Ford's Story," Scrapbook, Broadhead Collection Folder 5, Western History Manuscripts, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

²⁹⁵ When conducting a Google image search for Robert or Bob Ford, the first picture that comes up is the one of him holding the gun that he used to kill Jesse.

²⁹⁶ "Poor Missouri," *Saint Joseph Daily Herald*, 14 April 1882, 1.

²⁹⁷ "Poor Missouri," *Saint Joseph Daily Herald*, 14 April 1882, 1.

robbers, of which the late Jesse James was the famed leader.”²⁹⁸ The state in fact had suffered, from the constant political disagreements within the state, to the barbs thrown by the states surrounding Missouri, calling it a haven and protector for the outlaw, etc. However, just a few paragraphs down in that same article, the author relayed an important thought, “The Governor should be the last man in the state to depart from the law, and for this he is being severely criticized by the press. It would be difficult to determine whether the reputation of the state was damaged most by Jesse James’ career of crime or by the circumstances of his unlawful assassination.”²⁹⁹

According the James historian William Settle, the general assembly of Missouri was a hotbed of debate regarding the “legalized murder” of Jesse James.³⁰⁰ The political debate increased when Republicans in the assembly proposed resolutions commending the governor for his actions related to the death of James.³⁰¹ One resolution ended with the statement, “But the fact that assassination was resorted to, to accomplish the desired end, is a humiliating confession of the inability of the party in power to execute the laws, and a dark stain upon the escutcheon of the state.”³⁰² The Republican Party again was firing attacks at the Democratic Party for the inability to stop the James gang during their years of power. Eventually, the use of James’ assassination for political gain ended, although the Republican used the inability of the Democrats to stop the crimes against

²⁹⁸ “Poor Missouri,” *Saint Joseph Daily Herald*, 14 April 1882, 1.

²⁹⁹ William Settle, “The James Boys and Missouri Politics,” *Missouri Historical Review* 36 (July 1942): 419

³⁰⁰ “Governor Crittenden’s Actions,” *New York Times*, 29 April 1882, 5.

³⁰¹ Settle, “The James Boys and Missouri Politics,” 420.

³⁰² Settle, “The James Boys and Missouri Politics,” 421.

them during the surrender and trial of Frank James.³⁰³ Even with the death of the outlaw, Jesse remained a top news story for various media outlets.

Living the life of an outlaw comes with drawbacks, but there are also advantages to the life of crime, especially in the case of Jesse James. His premature death, followed multiple rumors of his death at the hands of former allies, led to a popular interest and in turn generations of people fascinated with the former bushwhacker's life. In the years following Jesse's demise, and even today, people continue to claim they helped the outlaw, and there are various claims of life after death. Across the west, the fascination with Jesse and his crimes has created a legacy that will last for generations to come.

In 1927, the *Literary Digest* covered a hot topic that caused quite a stir across the U.S. In the forty years following the death of James, young boys had come to idolize the man, who was America's answer to Robin Hood.³⁰⁴ Dime novels, movies and other forms of entertainment led to a popularity of sorts, and drew support towards Jesse. In October 1927, a discussion arose in Kearney, Missouri, Jesse's hometown, about erecting a statue in honor of the man, at the cemetery where he was laid to rest with his wife in 1902. Supporters of the monument said that Jesse was a "high-minded, self-sacrificing, brave Robin Hood, who refused to leave helpless communities without protection from lawless bandits who masqueraded as constituted authorities."³⁰⁵ Opponents remarked, "what is this age coming to when the George Washington's have mud slung at them and the Jesse Jameses are eulogized in marble?"³⁰⁶ Jesse James biographer Robertus Love,

³⁰³ "The Battle Over Jesse James Monument," *Literary Digest* 95 (29 October 1927), 44.

³⁰⁴ "The Battle Over Jesse James Monument," 44.

³⁰⁵ "The Battle Over Jesse James Monument," 44.

who wrote a questionable history, swore that Jesse deserved the honor because James and his gang were “devilized by misrepresentation.”³⁰⁷ The author of the piece in *Literary Digest* pointed out that if supporters of the bandit were to be believed, Jesse was not reckless, but the indomitable leader of a noble though lost cause who was received by his neighbors gladly. With folks in several Missouri counties remembering Jesse fondly, retelling the stories of his religious upbringing, and his generous nature towards the poor.³⁰⁸ The thought of building this marble marker angered the public, and many believed it should be stopped by official action or through the public opinion, “Why this attempted sanctification at such a late date, of an enemy of society who paid a fitting penalty for his life of crime.”³⁰⁹ In a bit of irony, the author commented, “So cherished is Jesse that he is becoming a subject of historical research and the cynosure of highbrows in their analysis of American psychology. Soon he may be included, dates and all in schoolbooks. Yet no one rises to defend him from these vandal hands!”³¹⁰ In Saint Joseph in 1950, the monument discussion rose again. As author Merrill Chilcote said, “Jesse James; a scoundrel in life, a martyr in death; but a man whose wrong steps were imbedded not in the sands of time, but in the solid concrete of history.”³¹¹

Of course with all of the popular support of Jesse, it was inevitable that there would be the impersonators, although some took their act to extremes. An early claimant

³⁰⁶ “The Battle Over Jesse James Monument,” 44.

³⁰⁷ “The Battle Over Jesse James Monument,” 44.

³⁰⁸ “The Battle Over Jesse James Monument,” 48.

³⁰⁹ “The Battle Over Jesse James Monument,” 48.

³¹⁰ “The Battle Over Jesse James Monument,” 48.

³¹¹ Merrill Chilcote, “Jesse James: A Scoundrel and Martyr,” *Museum Graphic* 2 (Spring 1950), 9.

appeared in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, in 1932 and was ridiculed by Jesse Jr. and wife, Stella.³¹² In 1950, a man living in Oklahoma claimed that the man who died in April 1882 in Missouri was not Jesse James, and could not be because he, J. Frank Dalton, was the real Jesse James. Dalton claimed that he had faked his death in St. Joseph, even attending the funeral before retreating into a quiet life, raising another family.³¹³ The stories he told, including the one about Jesse losing a finger in an accident involving a gun, drew the attention of the FBI, who created a file for their investigation. Dalton toured the country, giving speeches about his life of crime and granting interviews. One such interview resulted in an amusing book about all aspects of “Jesse’s” life.³¹⁴

Another pretender arose in the last twenty years, through his great-great granddaughter. Betty Duke, a woman living in Texas, caught the genealogy bug, and in some old photographs, she discovered a picture that she claims was Zerelda James Samuels, Jesse’s mother. Duke traveled to Missouri where she showed the photo to the staff at the James family farm museum, which denied the two women were the same. Duke continued her pursuit of the truth, sending the photo of her grandmother and one of Zerelda Samuels to the Texas investigation department who used computer software to

³¹² Merrill Chilcote, “Jesse James: A Scoundrel and Martyr,” *Museum Graphic* 2 (Spring 1950), 9.

³¹³ “Another Fake Jesse James Loses in Missouri Inquiry,” *New York Times*, 24 April 1932, n.p. Croy Files Folder 754.

³¹⁴ “‘That’s him’ says Jennings as he Identifies Jesse James.” *Columbus Ohio Dispatch*, 5 July 1948, 1. Croy Papers Folder 756; “Shades of Barnum! Jesse James (He Says) is Here for the Fair,” *Nashville Tennessean*, n.d. Croy Papers Folder 756; Homer Croy, “Jesse James May Never Die,” *The American Weekly* 28 November 1948, n.p. Croy Papers Folder 756; “30,000 People, Lawton’s Biggest Crowd Jam City to Hear ‘Jesse James’ Speak,” *Lawton Constitution*, 19 May 1948, n.p. Croy Papers Folder 756; “Oklahoma Paper Claims Jesse James Living – Past 100 Now.” *Lawton Constitution* 19 May 1948, Croy Papers Folder 756; “Jesse James is Alive! In Lawton,” *Lawton Constitution*, 19 May 1948, 1. Croy Papers Folder 756. In a side note, it is interesting to mention that when Dalton’s claim of being Jesse James was proved false, he went on to claim he was Billy the Kid.

determine that the photos were of the same woman.³¹⁵ Duke's goal, as listed on her website is to establish her great grandfather's identity and to correct historically accepted version of history.³¹⁶ Duke went as far as to raise the money to have her grandfather J. L. Courtney exhumed to have a DNA test completed to prove his identity. The first exhumation resulted in the wrong grave being dug, and when Duke tried to pursue it further, her family and ultimately a judge denied to continued exploration.³¹⁷ Despite the setbacks, Duke continues with her pursuit to prove her relative was Jesse James, and has published a book *Jesse James Lived and Died in Texas*, which has recently been optioned as a movie script.³¹⁸

With all of the people claiming to be Jesse, and those across the county who claim to be relatives, one scientist decided in 1995 to prove the bones in the Kearney grave belonged to that of Jesse W. James. Professor J. Starrs secured the permission of surviving members of the Samuels and James family to exhume the grave of James and run DNA tests to put the final nail in the coffin of Jesse. The process, the subject of an A & E documentary, showed the actual digging in the grave as well as the spreading of Jesse's bones across the country for various labs to conduct tests. The results concluded that the bones in the grave were that of Jesse Woodson James.³¹⁹ Following the

³¹⁵Henry Walker, *Jesse James, "The Outlaw,"* Des Moines: Wallace Homestead, 1961.

³¹⁶Betty Duke, "Jesse James Death Hoax and Buried Treasure," www.jessejameslivedintexas.com (Accessed 3 March 2007).

³¹⁷William McCan, "Statement of Recognition, 1999," Austin, Texas Police Department, Department of Forensic Science. "Jesse James Death Hoax and Buried Treasure." www.jessejamesintexas.com/images/statementofrecognition1.jpg (Accessed 3 March 2007); Betty Dorset Duke, *Jesse James Lived and Died in Texas*, Austin: Eakin Press, 1998.

³¹⁸Betty Duke, "Jesse James Death Hoax and Buried Treasure," www.jessejameslivedintexas.com (Accessed 3 March 2007).

completion of the tests, Jesse was given his third burial, this one with military honors and a Confederate flag draping the casket. Over five hundred people, including six great grandchildren attended the funeral. Dr. James E. Starrs, Gary Chilcote and other James historians served as pallbearers. A horse drawn carriage carried the casket, and an honor guard made up of Confederate re-enactors participated.³²⁰

Other materials continue the legacy of Jesse, including music, movies, television and museums although newspapers do not address all of these items. The movie “The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford” drew a great deal of attention because of the decision to use Brad Pitt as the famous outlaw.³²¹ In recent years, a growth in the number of museums dedicated to the life of Jesse James has drawn an extra interest to the history of the man. Some of the museums include the Jesse James Home, Jesse James Farm, Liberty Bank Robbery Museum, Corydon Historical Society, and Northfield Historical Society Museum.³²² In Cincinnati, a lifestyles piece addressed the rise of the James museums. “Towns where a notorious criminal once lived usually don’t want to be remembered for that connection. Residents don’t like thousands of people making pilgrimages to visit the birthplace of a brutal killer.”³²³ Some St. Joseph residents

³¹⁹ Betty Duke, “Jesse James Death Hoax and Buried Treasure,” www.jessejameslivedintexas.com (Accessed 3 March 2007).

³¹⁹ Glen Slattery, “No Rest for the Deceased,” *New York Times*, 2 May 1998, A15; “Doubts about Jesse James Lay to Rest,” *American History Magazine* 31 no. 2 (May/June 1996): 8.

³²⁰ “Doubts about Jesse James Lay to Rest,” *American History Magazine* 31 no. 2 (May/June 1996): 8; Brant, *Jesse James*, 267.

³²¹ The movies dealing with Jesse James will be addressed in a later chapter.

³²² This is a short list of a few museums, as there are numerous museums across the west that focus on the outlaw, as well as multiple festivals named for Jesse.

³²³ Amy Shafer, “Jesse James History Alive in Missouri,” *Cincinnati Post*, 25 August 2000. Article courtesy of Cincinnati Post, www.cincinnati.com (accessed 16 March 2007).

would rather historians focus on the more positive historical activities including the beginning of the Pony Express.³²⁴ One longtime resident, Marie Madinger, has repeatedly said that the billboards advertising the city with a huge picture of Jesse James create a negative view for those driving up the I-29 and I-35 corridors of Missouri.³²⁵ Jesse James Home director Gary Chilcote, a longtime researcher of the outlaw, admits that residents wish to drop the James museum to allow more attention to be spent on the Pony Express Museum or the Patee House Museum, with focus on the old west history of the city.³²⁶

Jesse James created division with his crimes but the public may not have continued to focus on the outlaw if the newspapers had not been involved. If the media had just let stories revolving around Jesse disappear the public could have forgotten about James. Newspapers did not necessarily support or denounce James based on a side of the state or even a county, but instead tended to divide themselves in a partisan format. The political division led to vicious battles between two or more dailies in any given city, which kept the issues surrounding the infamous outlaw at the forefront of Americans minds. Because of the continued press surrounding James, the debate over the actions of James and those who pursued him are reoccurring issues in public memory. The use of newspapers to provide a positive side to Jesse continues to keep the Robin Hood myth of the outlaw at the central theme of James' place in history.

³²⁴ Amy Shafer, "Jesse James History Alive in Missouri," *Cincinnati Post*, 25 August 2000. Article courtesy of Cincinnati Post, www.cincinnati.com (accessed 16 March 2007).

³²⁵ Marie Madinger, Interview by Author, 9 March 2007.

³²⁶ Amy Shafer, "Jesse James History Alive in Missouri," *Cincinnati Post*, 25 August 2000. Article courtesy of Cincinnati Post, www.cincinnati.com (accessed 16 March 2007).

Conclusion

Jesse James was a simple Missouri boy who had a dark side. The young, religious man became a career criminal, robbing banks and trains for sixteen years. For years leading up to and following his death, Zerelda James, his mother, swore that James' was forced into a life of crime by the Yankees who persecuted him constantly. The problem with this line of thinking is Jesse was one of several hundred men who served with William Quantrill during the Civil War and despite their guerilla training, most managed to live quietly following the end of the war. One man who served alongside the James brothers, Christopher Young Steen, went on to homestead in Edmond, Oklahoma in 1889. Steen served with Jesse at Centralia, the worst battle they witnessed, yet he did not follow the same path.³²⁷ On the other hand, we have Jesse, who found himself unable to go back to the life of a farmer. The culture of the period, namely the difficulties for southern sympathizers to lead a normal life, not even able to own land, caused the James boys to seek revenge. After the first robbery in February 1866, Jesse began a transformation into a beloved outlaw, America's answer to Robin Hood. Historians disagree over how films perpetuate this myth in public memory, newspapers and museums.

Future of Popular Culture

The basis of popular culture is a value system created through movies, newspapers and music. These forms of entertainment emphasize the importance of the public in historical memory because of their mass production. Popular culture is truly the

³²⁷ *The Edmond Sun*, 23 March 1922, 7; *The Edmond Enterprise*, 23 March 1922, 8. Special thanks to Brian Bashore at the Oklahoma History Center Research Library for bringing these obituaries to my attention after hearing my discussion of my topic.

field of advertising where writers influence traditional principles through their work. However, the roots of western popular culture relates to folklore from popular sources including almanacs, magazines, diaries, sermons and pamphlets.³²⁸ The first demand for the west came with the 1939 *Jesse James* produced by Fox pictures. The movie appealed to a public “incensed with legal injustices and attracted to colorful individuals who defied a corrupted system” like Jesse James and Billy the Kid.³²⁹ Another aspect of popular culture comes with tourism, which is important for the Old West themes in U.S. history. Tourism is a danger though, because while the towns welcome the thousands of visitors, these historical locations are changed in unanticipated and uncontrollable ways.³³⁰ The way that American looks at it is past will continue to be affected by popular culture because these are the types of items preserved. This thesis presented three areas of popular culture that have changed the public memory of Jesse James.

Future of Jesse James

Jesse James is an interesting figure in the Old West. Historians look at his past because of the intriguing beginnings that rapidly morphed into the outlaw behavior, with discussions of Jesse’s life bringing new attention to the dead outlaw. Recent thoughts include one revolving around his heritage, particularly his paternal lineage. Some recent movies question if Reverend Robert James was indeed Jesse’s father. Movies produced in the last twenty years have fueled suspicions about Jesse’s fidelity. In some, the script portrays James having numerous affairs, including one with his uncles’ young new wife.

³²⁸ Richard Aquila, *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 3.

³²⁹ Aquila, 118, 1.

³³⁰ Hal K. Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the 20th Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 10.

These ideas fuel rumors of multiple descendants and even faked death scenarios. In the coming years, one woman who claims that Jesse is her great grandfather has managed to have her book optioned as a movie. While doubts about the authenticity of the claim abound, the appearance of this material will further the interests in Jesse James. With continued discussions over this, we may continue to see Jesse James as a top news story. This information could lead to more investigations into possible additional offspring, who may fight the scientific tests run in 1995, and they may continue to draw attention to Jesse. Certainly many James' worshippers would love to prove their blood connection to the famous Missourian.

Whatever a person believes about Jesse Woodson James, it is clear that history has no intention of writing the man out of our country's past. Alternative history will continue to play with our emotions, making us believe that Jesse was a kind-hearted man, wrongly accused of multiple atrocities. Those who create these alternative views rely on public opinion. Without these doubts to play on, there would be only the one story, which few would enjoy. Nor, would Hollywood continue to tug our heartstrings. The recent movie starring Brad Pitt as Jesse James will draw more research, because if such a famous actor is willing to put his career on the line with a small film, surely there is more to the subject than in previous beliefs. With each passing decade, Jesse will continue to hold that special place in America's heart, because deep down, we all love the bad guy. Historians are slowly beginning to understand the important role public opinion has in understanding the past.

Jesse James has become an all-consuming force for many historians, myself included. Most non-Missourians do not have a pencil sketch of Jesse hanging in their

living room, right beneath of a picture of their grandmother. When co-workers discover the topic of this thesis, they quickly provided the nickname “The Outlaw” and found the strangest ways to draw my opinion about Jesse. In the same way, public opinion can serve to bring forgotten topics to the forefront and even change the generally accepted truth about a historical figure. Jesse James will maintain his hold on the special place in the country’s past, because no matter what mud is thrown at his name, the public opinion keeps him as the outlaw with a silver lining.

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Appendix A

Jesse James Historical Sites Visitor Survey

Any information provided will be used by Stephanie Coon in a chapter for her Master's thesis at the University of Central Oklahoma. Names, if provided, will be used only for direct quotes. Thank you for your assistance.

Name (optional): _____

Hometown: _____

Age Range: 1-10 11-20 21-30 31-40
 41-50 51-60 60 +

Previous Knowledge of Jesse James: Novice Intermediate Expert

Based on your previous knowledge, do you feel the museum accurately presents the information on Jesse James?

Yes No Not Sure

Did your visit provide you with new information?

Yes No

Why did you choose to visit this museum?

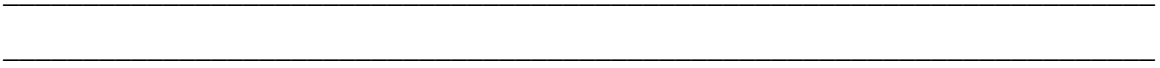
Looked Interesting Family Travel Guide
 Movie or Television Program Sign Newspaper Story
 Other _____

Have you visited this location previously?

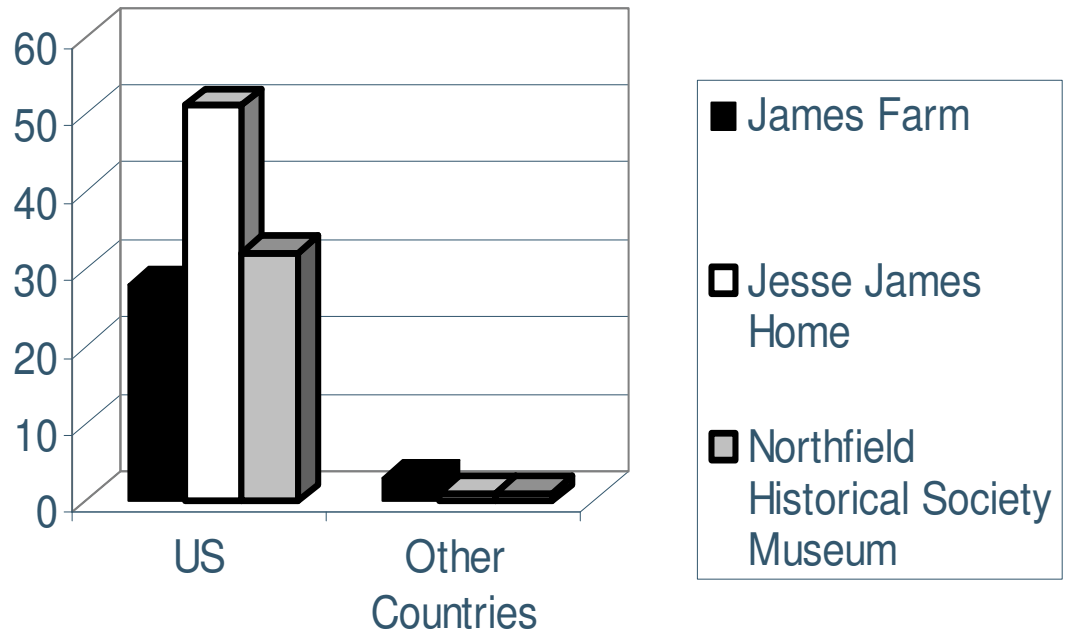
Yes No

If return visitor – Why did you choose to repeat your visit: _____

Additional Comments:



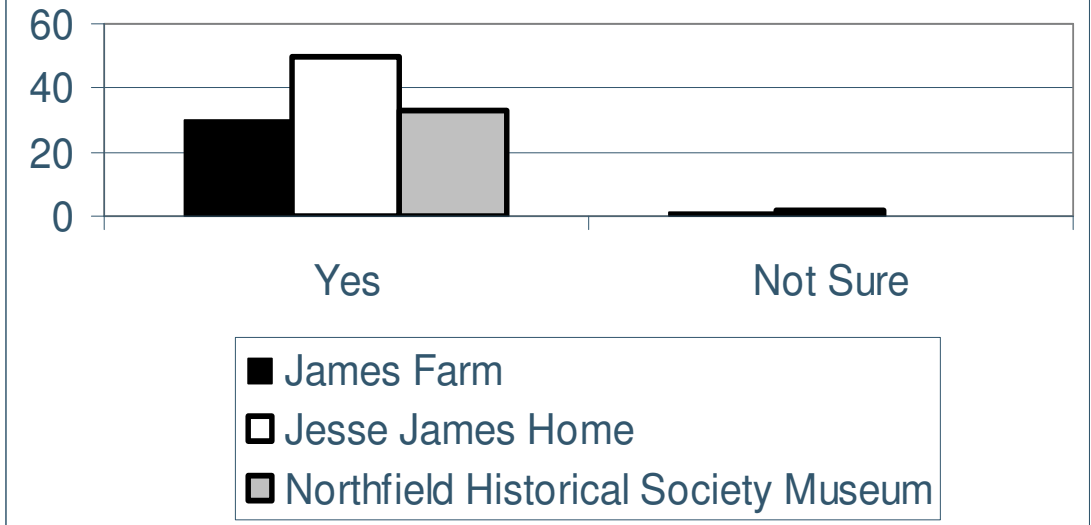
Where is Your Hometown?



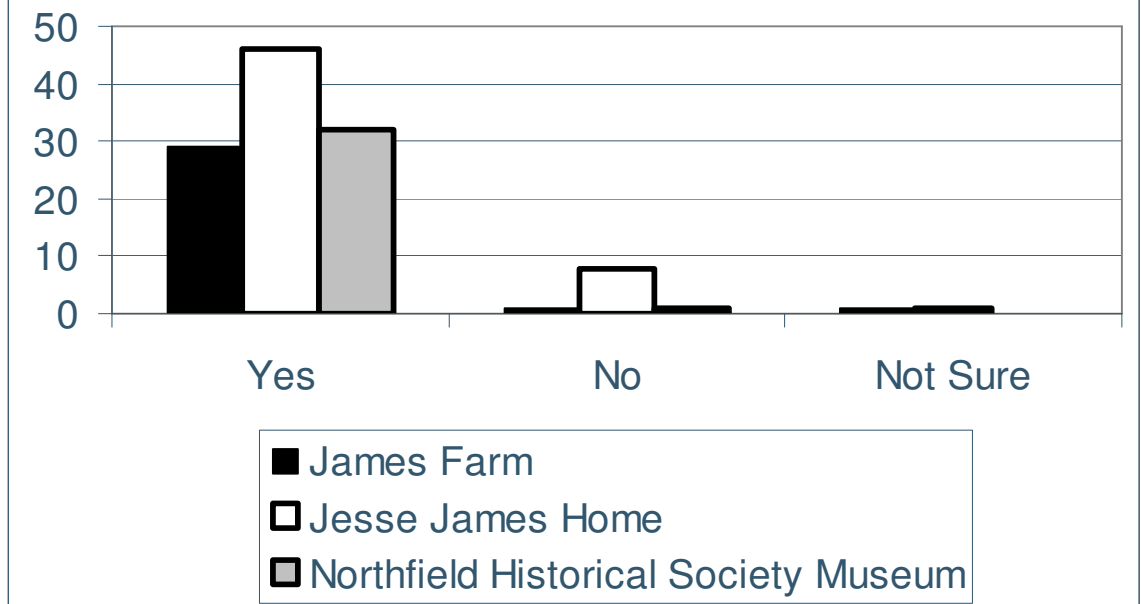
How Do You Rate Your Previous Knowledge of Jesse James?



Do You Feel the Museum Accurately Presents Jesse James?

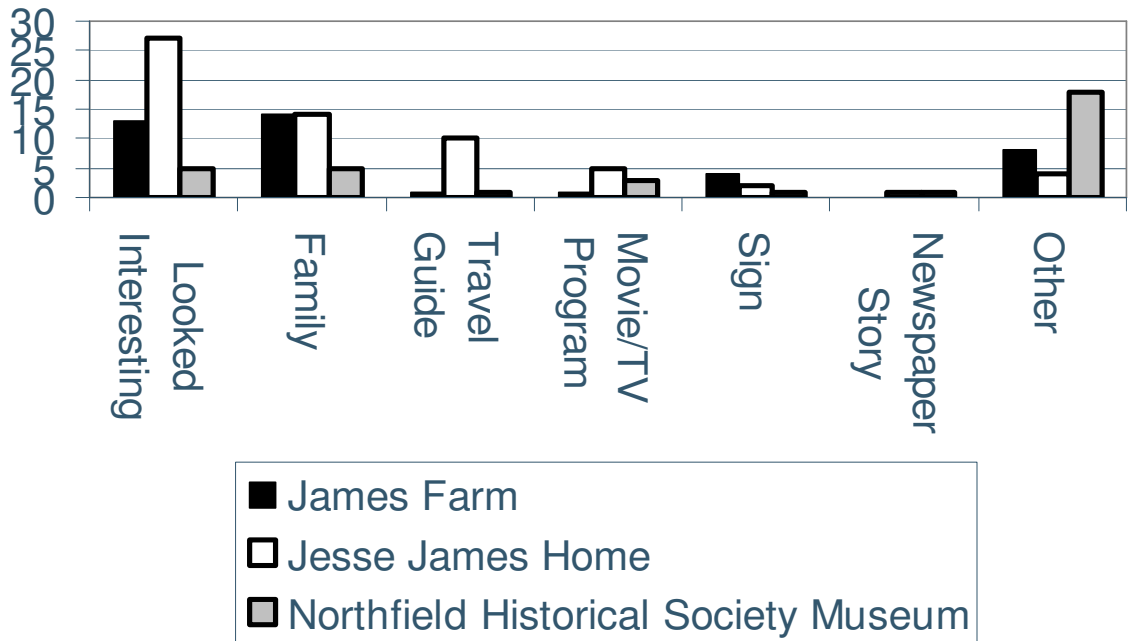


Did the Museum Provide New Information?

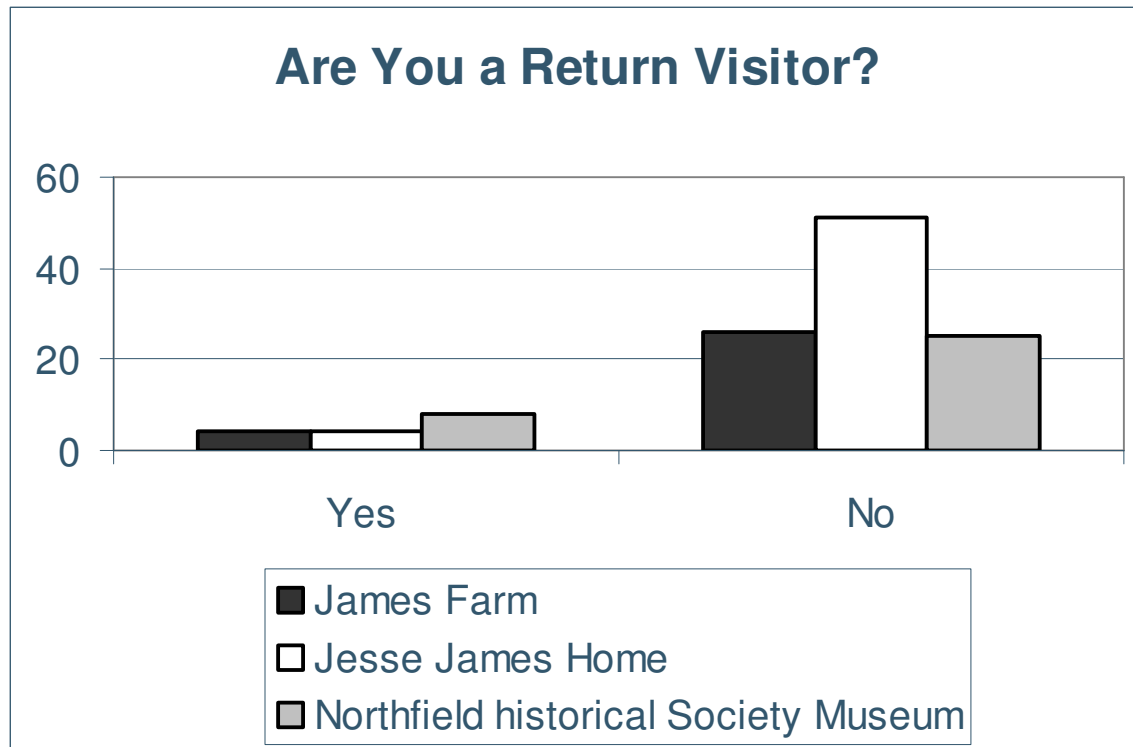


Why Did You Choose to Visit?

(Visitors could choose multiple options)



Are You a Return Visitor?



Appendix B

Jesse James in Clay County, Missouri³³¹



The outside of the James Farm House, from Jesse's original grave

This picture shows the original log cabin exterior.

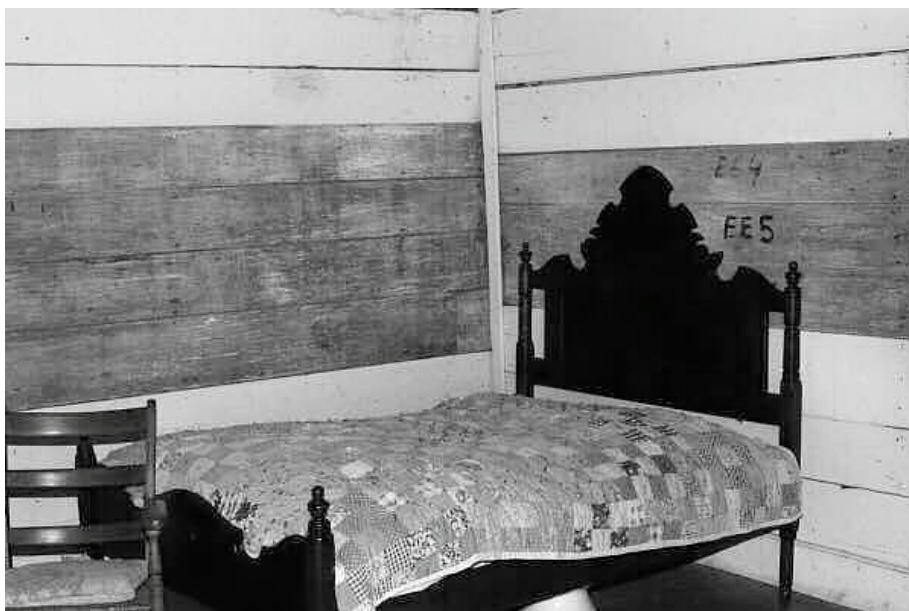


³³¹ Farm interior photos courtesy of "Friends of the James Farm", www.jessejames.org. Exterior photos and cemetery photos are author provided.



This bedroom, added in 1893, used by Frank and Annie until 1911, when Annie passed away.

The pictures are of Jesse and Archie, along with their photos of their memorial stones.



This bedroom was built in 1822, part of the original house. Jesse was probably born in this room, and his grave is visible out the window.

January 26, 1875
made this
window famous,
as the Pinkerton
Detectives threw
a Grecian urn in,
which exploded,
killing Archie
Samuels.



This is a replica
of Jesse's
original
headstone. All
that remains of
the original is the
base, on display
in the museum.

JESSE JAMES BANK MUSEUM

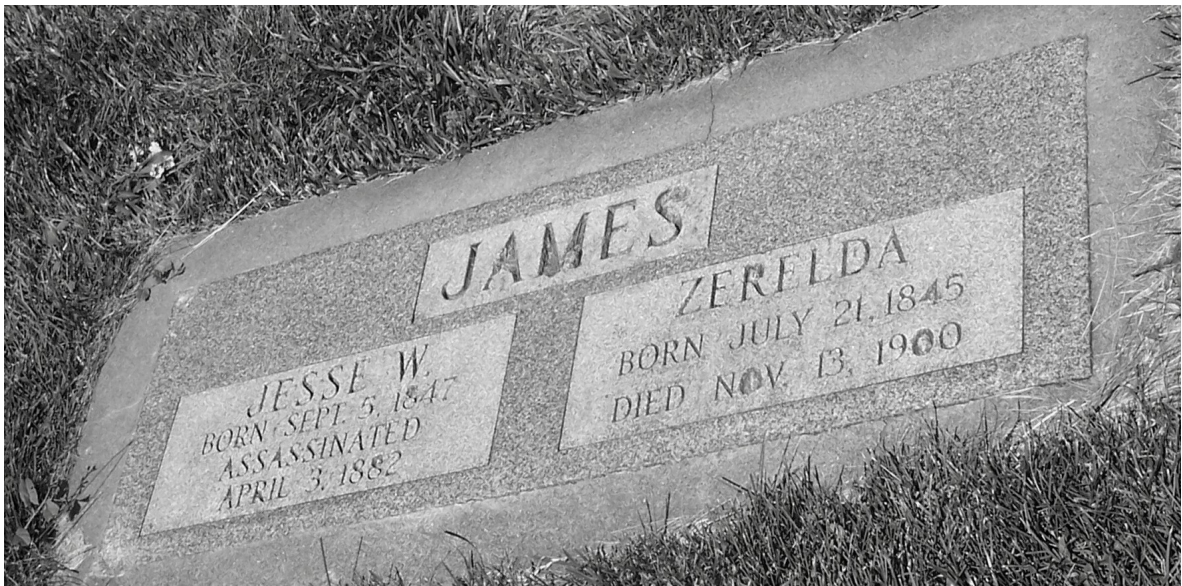
SITE OF
FIRST DAYLIGHT BANK HOLD UP
IN UNITED STATES
CLAY COUNTY SAVINGS ASSOCIATION
ROBBED OF \$60,000
FEBRUARY 13, 1866
ATTRIBUTED TO JESSE JAMES GANG



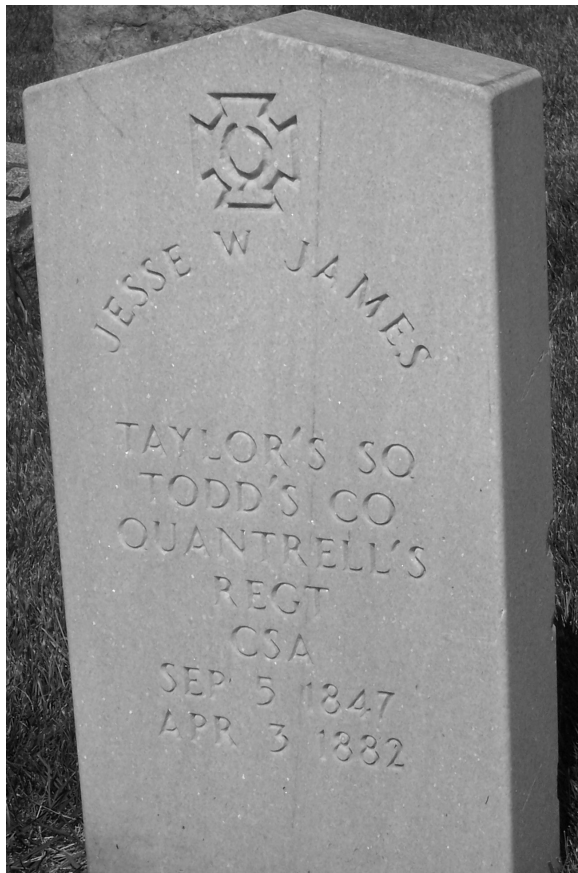
This calendar is set at the exact time of the robbery. On the left, the window has the original panes of glass.

The original safe installed at Clay County Savings Association.





Jesse and Zee's grave, at the Kearney Cemetery. The headstone was cemented in 1995 following the exhumation process, to prevent people from chipping away the stone, like all of the previous stones.



Jesse's military headstone

Appendix C

Jesse James in Northfield, Minnesota³³²



The Scriver Building, home of the Northfield Historical Society Museum, and the site First National Bank in 1876

Stairwell on side of building used for protection by the James gang in 1876



³³² The original 1876 photo courtesy of the Northfield Historical Society Museum, <http://northfieldhistory.org/bank-site>. The photos of the bank layout are from George Huntington's *Robber and Hero*. The other photos are from the author's tour of Northfield.

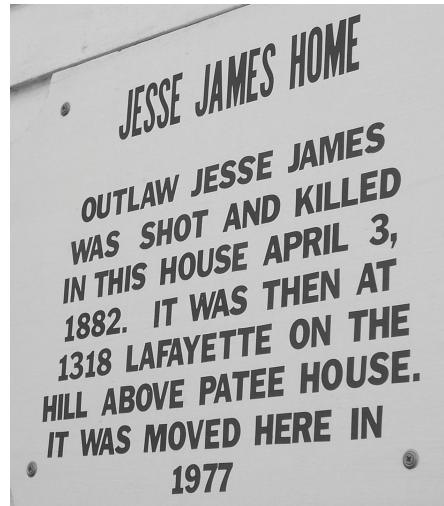
Picture of the
bank in 1876,
which has been
restored by the
Northfield
Historical
Society Museum



Ames Mill, built by Captain Jesse Ames, a Union soldier who
Jesse wanted to get revenge on, which led to his planning the
attack on the Northfield bank

Appendix D

Jesse James in Saint Joseph, Missouri³³³

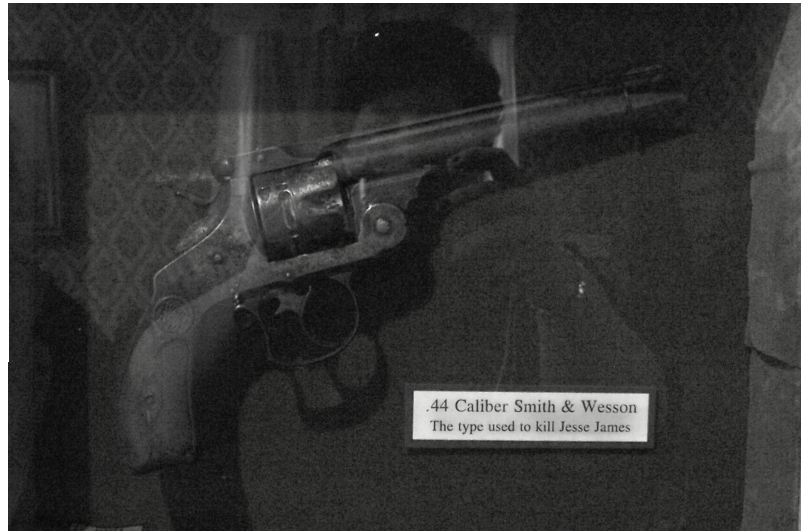


³³³ All photos taken by author at various museums. The historical photo of the house following the shooting is from the website of T.J. Stiles. <http://www.tjstiles.com>.



A crowd gathered April 3, 1882, following Bob Ford's exclamation that he shot Jesse James

An example of the weapon used to shoot Jesse

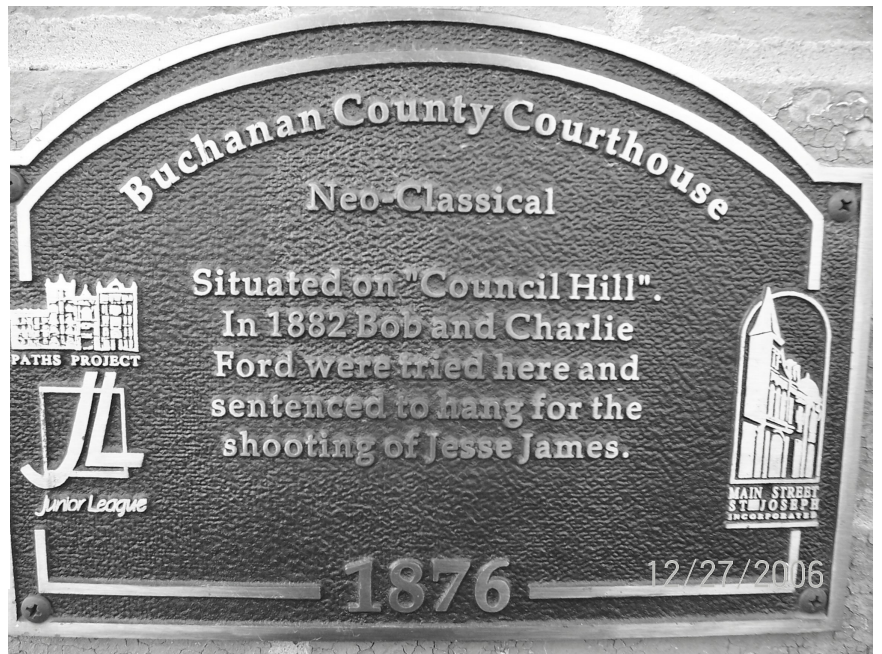


A replica of the embroidery Jesse was straightening at his death and the chipped "bullet hole" in the living room wall



Jesse's remains lie in state at Fry Funeral Home following the 1995 exhumation and DNA testing

Sign outside courthouse. The original courtroom has been remodeled, but exists on the 2nd floor of the building

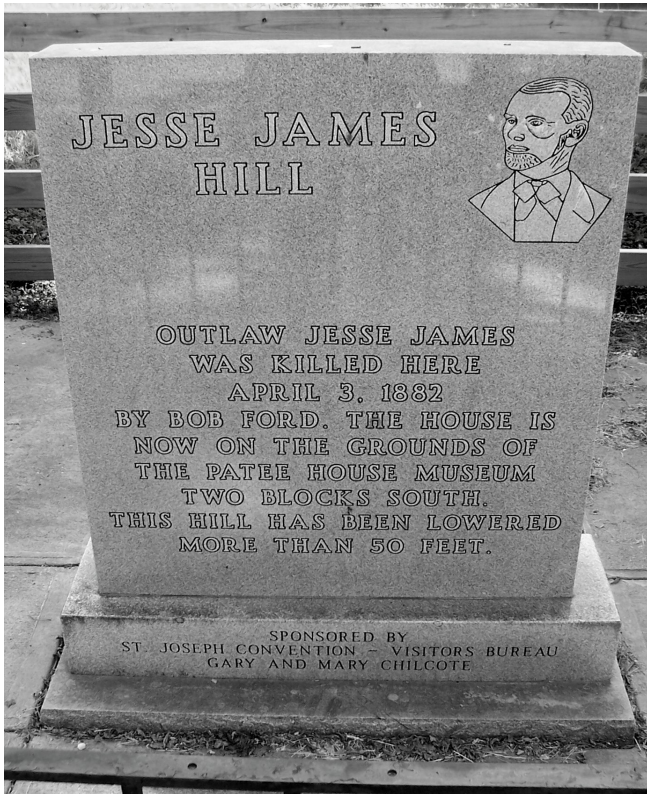


Heston-Bowman-Smith & Sidenfaden Chapel
 3622 Frederick Blvd.
 St. Joseph, Missouri 64506
 Telephone 232-3355 or 232-4428

The Undertaker's Basket

This Basket Was Used To Bring Jesse James To H.O. Sidenfaden Undertaking Co. in April 1882.





Original location of Jesse's home in St. Joseph, the "Little House on the Hill"

Appendix E:

The Silver Screen of Deceit: Hollywood and Jesse James

Historical motion pictures often can be characterized as a pack of lies about events that never happened told by people who weren't there.³³⁴ --George Santayana, philosopher

*Jesse James*³³⁵

Directed by: Henry King

Starring: Tyrone Power, Henry Fonda, Nancy Kelly, and John Carradine

*“After the Civil War, America looked to conquer the west, which led to railroads who were predatory and unscrupulous. This is the time of Jesse James.”*³³⁶

Jesse James has a large number of inaccuracies throughout the movie, from the house explosion at the James farm, to the house where Jesse and Zee resided in St. Joseph. From the beginning there is no mention of the remarriage of Jesse and Frank's mother to Dr. Reuben Samuels. Instead, the only Reuben in the story is “Uncle” Rueben, who Zee is living with in Liberty. The location itself is off, as the James farm is in Kearney, about thirteen miles away, and Zee did not return to Liberty following the birth of their son. The explosion at the James farm was from the Pinkerton detective agency, which was searching for the James boys; however, their mother was not killed in the explosion. Zerelda lost an arm, and her son, Archie died, but Zerelda survived long after

³³⁴ Peter Rollins, ed. *The Columbia Companion to American History on Film: How the Movies Have Portrayed the American Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), xiv.

³³⁵ Nunnally Johnson, *Jesse James*, VHS, Directed by Henry King (Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1939)

³³⁶ Nunnally Johnson, *Jesse James*, VHS, Directed by Henry King (Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1939)

Jesse's death. The home in St. Joseph, where Jesse and Zee hid, according to the movie, was a two-story building, although the actual house was a single story home. The storyline involving the birth of Jesse and Zee's son in the St. Joseph home also does not match historical record, as Jesse Jr. was born while they were in hiding in Tennessee. Throughout the film, Zee is good friends with a peace officer, something that is not confirmed by the historical record.

*Days of Jesse James*³³⁷

Directed by: Joseph Kane

Starring: Roy Rogers, Don Bary, Harry Worth, Gabby Whitaker

*Jesse James at Bay*³³⁸

Directed by: Joseph Kane

Starring: Roy Rogers, Gabby Haynes, Al Taylor, Darrell Wilks

Jesse James at Bay plays on a twin theme, having Cliff Burns and Jesse James appear at different times, indicating the dual identities that Jesse is sometimes said to have, the hero and the outlaw. According to this movie, everything Jesse did was for a good cause, and he never did anything for himself. Throughout the movie, Jesse is portrayed in a positive light, working hard to prevent the railroad from controlling all of the best land. The movie has inaccuracies, with the main being that Jesse and the sheriff were on good terms, as documented history differs with this opinion. Outside that, the movie maintains a good level of accuracy to historical records, which are hard to maintain with a character like Jesse James.

³³⁷ Jack Natteford and Earle Snell, *Days of Jesse James*, VHS, Directed by Joseph Kane (Los Angeles, CA: Republic Entertainment, Inc and Paramount Motion Pictures Group, 1949).

³³⁸ Harrison Jacobs and James R. Webb. *Jesse James At Bay*, VHS, Directed by Joseph Kane (Los Angeles, CA: Republic Entertainment, Inc and Paramount Motion Pictures Group, 1941).

*Jesse James Rides Again*³³⁹

Directed by: Fred Brannon and Thomas Carr

Starring: Clayton Moore, Linda Sterling, Roy Bancroft, John Compton, and Fred Graham

At the end of World War II, soldiers began to return home to their families, and create suburbs, where their children could grow up safe. It was during this time that Republic Studios recruited Clayton Moore, later famous as Lone Ranger, to play Jesse James in a thirteen episode serial. The goal was to give youngsters some excitement each week, while creating a hero for young men in Jesse Woodson James. By the end of the second episode, it is easy to see why so many children growing up at the time were enamored with Jesse. Each episode is action packed and ends with Jesse or one of the other major characters lives in danger.

*The Adventures of Frank and Jesse James*³⁴⁰

Directed by: Fred Brannon and Yakima Canutt

Starring: Clayton Moore, Steve Darrell, George J. Lewis, John Crawford and Sam Flint

“The story of Frank and Jesse James is told in bullets and blood, but this is the story of their fight to right wrongs committed in their names.”³⁴¹

This series has little historical accuracy. Frank and Jesse stayed apart following Northfield, as they wanted two different ways of life. Each episode has a villain, worse than Jesse, trying to do something bad to Jesse, only to fail, in a pattern similar to old

³³⁹ Franklin Adreon and Basil Dickey, *Jesse James Rides Again*, VHS, Directed by Fred Brannon and Thomas Carr (Los Angeles, CA: Republic Entertainment, Inc and Paramount Motion Pictures Group, 1947).

³⁴⁰ Franklin Adreon and Basil Dickey, *The Adventures of Frank and Jesse James*, VHS, Directed by Fred Brannon and Yakima Canutt (Los Angeles, CA: Republic Entertainment, Inc and Paramount Motion Pictures Group, 1948).

³⁴¹ Franklin Adreon and Basil Dickey, *The Adventures of Frank and Jesse James*, VHS, Directed by Fred Brannon and Yakima Canutt (Los Angeles, CA: Republic Entertainment, Inc and Paramount Motion Pictures Group, 1948).

cartoon of Wiley Coyote and the Roadrunner. Throughout the entire series, Jesse has been telling the land surveyor his plans, which Jesse would never have done. Jesse thought land surveyors were equal to the land grabbing railroads. The gun fighting was more accurate as Jesse was known to be good with a gun, perhaps as a result of his guerilla training

*The True Story of Jesse James*³⁴²

Directed by: Nicholas Ray

Starring: Robert Wagner, Jeffrey Hunter, Hope Lange, Frank Gorshin and Carl Thayer

*“The tragic war between the states spawned much that was good and much that was evil. No person better symbolized that curious nature more than a quiet farm boy named Jesse James, who became America’s most notorious outlaw. Much that you will see here is fact and much is as close to what actually happened as any man can testify.”*³⁴³

The movie begins telling that the events throughout are as accurate as any man can testify. Although the credits do list a person responsible for historical data, it remains doubtful how everything occurs. While Jesse did join the guerilla forces following an attack from Union soldiers, there is no documented proof of the involvement of the neighbor or a discussion about slaves. The neighbor did help with the planning of the attack by the Pinkerton Detective Agency, however his name was Askew not Arkew. He did meet an untimely death, but it is believed he was shot in the back, which differs from the film. The movement of Jesse and Zee to the home in St. Joseph came too early in James’ career, as they first lived in Tennessee and even in Kansas City prior that final

³⁴² Nunnally Johnson and Walter Newman, *The True Story of Jesse James*, DVD, Directed by Nicholas Ray (Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1957).

³⁴³ Nunnally Johnson and Walter Newman, *The True Story of Jesse James*, DVD, Directed by Nicholas Ray (Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1957).

home. The home in St. Joseph was rented, although according to records the monthly rent was fourteen dollars, and was paid to a city councilman, but the house has always been single story with two bedrooms. The death of Jesse came at the hands of Bob Ford, however, he was not a big part of Jesse's life, being introduced to the James brothers after the botched Northfield robbery. Bob is rumored to have killed Jesse with a gun given as a gift, however not by one of Jesse's personal guns. The way that people stole items is truthful, as everyone wanted a piece of Jesse James. Some souvenir hunters even gouged pieces of the hardwood floor to try to have a sliver of wood tinged with Jesse's blood.

*The Last Days of Frank and Jesse James*³⁴⁴

Directed by: William A. Graham

Starring: Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson, June Carter Cash, Darrell Wilks

The movie *The Last Days of Frank and Jesse James* is fairly accurate. The obvious problem with the structure of the James home in St. Joseph, but the film does bring up some interesting questions regarding infidelity of Zerelda James-Samuels and even with Jesse James. The demise of Jesse is close to documented history, although instead of an embroidered piece, it is a horse picture in the movie. The play starring Bob and Charlie Ford is as authentic as can be told by records, and the demise of the Ford brothers is a fairly good guess as to what happened. The next film, *Frank and Jesse*, leaves historical fact to be desired.

*Frank and Jesse*³⁴⁵

Directed by: Robert Boris

³⁴⁴ William Stratton, *The Last Days of Frank and Jesse James*, DVD, Directed by William A. Graham (Burbank, CA: Joseph Cates Productions and National Broadcasting Company, 1986).

³⁴⁵ Robert Boris, *Frank and Jesse*, DVD, Directed by Robert Boris (Los Angeles, CA: Trimark Pictures, 1994).

Starring: Rob Lowe, Bill Paxton, Randy Travis and Todd Field

“They tried to forget their rebel ways, but some things are meant to be.”

Like all of the other Hollywood features about the James gang, this movie has a lot of issues with documented facts. The Gallatin robbery resulted in the death of John Sheetz, but the belief is that Jesse shot him because the man looked like someone who had killed James’ commanding officer during the Civil War. The chest wound Jesse received was not as a result of the Gallatin ambush, but was a wound from the attempted surrender at the end of the Civil War. As for the choir in Illinois, there are rumors that Jesse led a choir; however, it has never been determined. The issue of Zee shooting Detective Wicher is false, as it has been decided that Jesse and Frank killed him after catching him trying to move into Clay County to be a farm hand. Jesse never built a peace ranch, although he was planning to move to Nebraska following one final robbery, which never occurred, in Platte City, Missouri. Once again, the home where Jesse’s family lived in St. Joseph was shown as a two-story home, when in fact it was a single story home sitting on a hill. The final fallacy is that Jesse was shot in the back, which he was not. The bullet went in just below the left ear, not in the middle of the back.

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford³⁴⁶

Directed by: Andrew Dominik

Starring: Brad Pitt, Mary-Louise Parker, Casey Affleck, Sam Rockwell, Sam Shepard, and Paul Schneider

“He considered himself a Southern Loyalist and guerilla in a Civil War that never ended. He regretted neither the robberies, nor the seventeen murders that he lay claim to. And on September 5, 1881, he was 34 years old.”

³⁴⁶ Andrew Dominik and Ron Hansen, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, DVD, Directed by Andrew Dominik (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers Pictures, 2008).

“This film is based on actual historical events. Dialogue and certain events and characters contained in the film were created for purposes of dramatization.” By watching the entire credits, you see this line, which is unique to this movie about Jesse James. For the most part, this movie is accurate to the book upon which the script was based, but it also has more accuracy to the documented fact than most of the previous movies Hollywood has produced. This is the only movie to get the home where Jesse died as a single story, although it appears to be slightly larger than the actual home. The interactions with the Fords and other gang members seem to be accurate, especially the story of Ed Miller’s death, which was later found hanging from his horse, shot in the back. This version however, brings some interesting matters up for possible research. Did Jesse really know what was coming, that Bob Ford was going to shoot him, or was it a surprise? Did Jesse plan to die, and had he been contemplating suicide for many months? Robert Ford hoped for fame, for riding the world of the outlaw, however after the resentment he experienced, did he honestly regret his actions like the film said. One can only guess as to what really occurred in that last year of the life of Jesse Woodson James.