

## *Jesse James*

### *Complete Program Transcript*

**Narrator:** In the spring of 1864, Jesse James rode to war ... there would be no papers to sign, no brass-button uniforms, no government-issue firearms. He simply followed creeks and hog-trails into the darkness of the Missouri woods, where the guerrilla fighters made camp.

**Phil Stewart, Local Historian:** The regular Confederate forces had already been driven out of this area. If a young man was going to fight for the Southern side, it was going to have to be with a guerrilla unit because there were no active Confederate forces in the area.

**Fred Chiaventone, Author:** When Jesse James first joins the Missouri guerrillas -- what they often referred to as bushwhackers -- he's 16 years old. He's tall. He's slender. He's very fair-complexioned. He has the most piercing bright blue eyes.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** He was still growing. And he had a very youthful look. He had a very soft, sort of oval face. He had a nose that was slightly turned up. He had these very bright blue eyes and sandy hair.

**Phil Stewart, Local Historian:** He was about 5 foot 6, kind of lean, maybe 120 pounds. The first thing you thought is, what is this kid doing here?

**Narrator:** Jesse James' boyhood was a long, sure ride toward battle -- on a trail marked by partisan politics, violence and loss.

He was born in September of 1847 in Clay County, Missouri, to Robert and Zerelda James, who had migrated west from Kentucky. Robert James was a slave-holding Baptist preacher who

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worked hard to keep the abolitionists and their threatening doctrines from circulating among his congregants.

When Jesse was only three, Robert James died of cholera. Zerelda managed to fend off poverty by marrying a country doctor named Reuben Samuel, but life in Missouri in the 1850s was hardly stable. The question of slavery was ripping apart the American frontier.

When Jesse was just nine, the Kansas-Missouri Border War erupted. During the five years of bloody fighting that followed, everybody on that border was forced to take sides. The James-Samuel family sided Southern. Slaves accounted for nearly half the family's wealth. The way they saw it, no government had the right to strip them of their property or tell them how to conduct their business.

So there was no confusion in Jesse's household when the Civil War began: his older brother Frank joined up to fight with the Rebels. But Union troops routed the Confederate forces in Missouri, and then occupied Clay County.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** For the most part in Clay County, these occupying forces were other Missourians. The provisional state government of Missouri organized its own militia force, and these local Missourians saw their Confederate neighbors as traitors. The local militia forces began to raid the homes of those suspected of assisting the insurgents and partisans in Clay County. And the war quickly took on this savage counterinsurgency, guerrilla warfare conflict that can be some of the most savage warfare of all.

**Phil Stewart, Local Historian:** The Southern sympathizers in this area could easily be taken out, lynched in their own yards. Their houses were burned on a regular basis. Livestock confiscated by the Union authorities. And it became an eye for an eye.

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**Christopher Phillips, Historian:** It was so bad that, uh, one Union commander actually ordered the depopulation of four entire countries of western Missouri. Everyone had to leave and then their homes were burned.

**Narrator:** By 1864, most Missourians were tired of seeing Confederate sympathizers strung up on their front porches; or Unionist civilians gunned down in their fields. But the James-Samuel clan ran with a fierce and militant minority.

Jesse's brother Frank had joined a murderous Confederate guerrilla group; in retaliation, Jesse's stepfather was tortured nearly to death; his pregnant mother arrested. Zerelda signed an oath of allegiance to the Union to get out of jail, but she refused to abide by the terms of her surrender ... and she refused to let her sons forget the family's humiliation.

**Michael Gooch, Local Historian:** She was not a wallflower by any means, very vocal, very outspoken. Frank and Jesse were definitely raised pro-Southern, pro-Confederate. To be treated like the Jameses were treated demanded that vengeance be taken or you could not hold your head up as a man.

**Narrator:** In Missouri, vengeance was best got riding with one of the dozens of bushwhacker groups in the state. Over the next year, Jesse James would be schooled in violence and terror.

Though they were partisan Confederates, these guerrillas operated without official sanction, and outside the accepted rules of war. They were simply out to punish their enemies, promoting fear as they went.

Jesse's most important mentor was William T. Anderson, Bloody Bill. Anderson's sisters had been arrested for aiding the bushwhackers; one was crushed to death in a jail collapse. By 1864, Bloody Bill was in full fury.

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**Tom Goodrich, Author:** Bill Anderson's group never numbered more than 80. And yet those 80 men just nearly turned Missouri inside out. His was the group. And it only stands to reason that some impressionable kid like Jesse would want to go out and join the best because that's the one that's going to do the most damage to this hated enemy.

**Phil Stewart, Local Historian:** William T. Anderson was a psychopath. This guy loved to kill. The odds didn't matter. He could go in three-to-one odds against him and just look at his men and go, there they are, let's go, draw pistols and ride right into the middle of them.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** The actual fighting was incredibly savage. The warfare was very close range. The use of the revolver as the primary weapon dictated that it be close-range warfare.

**Michael Gooch, Local Historian:** The guerrillas habitually carried multiple revolvers. You'd ride into battle, shoot off one revolver, drop it, pick up another revolver and continue right on fighting. So a guerrilla armed with even just three revolvers had 18 quick shots as opposed to the single shot weaponry that his opponents were carrying.

Now the 36 caliber not being a real fast killer because of its small size, but you still have a wounded opponent laying on the ground. And Union medical records indicate an awful lot of head shots so we know they were just walking up and finish them off after the battle.

**Fred Chiaventone, Author:** Jesse and his companions, they're not satisfied just to kill the enemy. They will go in, they'll wade in, they'll break skulls, they'll slash throats. They took trophies. Very often scalps, sometimes ears. Oft times they would cut off noses. What they set out to do was to terrorize all of their enemies and potential enemies and to dissuade people from supporting the federal cause. They would spread word of their deeds and also of their threats that hopefully would be picked up by the newspapers and printed.

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**Narrator:** On September 27, 1864, in Centralia, Missouri, Anderson's boys gave the papers something to write about. They murdered 22 unarmed Union soldiers heading home on leave and, as part of a massive guerrilla army, ambushed and butchered a hundred and fifty federals.

**Deb Goodrich, Author:** They are just slaughtered. They are slaughtered by the guerrillas. And Jesse would have been there. He would have seen this. He would have taken part.

**Tom Goodrich, Author:** This is one of the ultimate atrocities of the Civil War. A hundred and some men, helpless, disarmed, murdered in their tracks. It would have been a very terrible thing to see. Beheadings, disembowelments, torture, fiendish torture, men begging for the lives.

**Michael Gooch, Local Historian:** Those bodies were pretty well mutilated up. Accounts say that there was not a, a corpse on that field that had the same head on it that it started the day with.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** In one case, a man's privates were described as being cut off and shoved in the man's mouth. And there were scalps taken. There were other acts of mutilation. It was an incredibly brutal day.

**Deb Goodrich, Author:** Every man that took part in the Centralia massacre witnessed something that would be impossible to forget. We can imagine the pictures. We can imagine what body parts thrown across the field looked like. It's more difficult to imagine the smells. It's more difficult to imagine the sounds that they would have heard that day. I don't know how they could have not been transformed.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** These were young men who were literally soaked in blood. Jesse James was immersed in the most savage kind of bloodshed conceivable.

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**Narrator:** The horror of Centralia focused attention on Jesse's family and on his guerilla leaders. Federal officers banished Zerelda from Missouri, and had her shipped upriver to Nebraska. The Union Army assigned an old Indian tracker named Samuel P. Cox to hunt down Bill Anderson. A month after Centralia, Cox and his men lured Anderson's crew, Jesse James among them, into a trap in western Missouri. They shot Bloody Bill off his horse that day and displayed his body like a trophy in a local courthouse.

But Jesse wouldn't quit. Even after the Confederacy surrendered the following spring, Jesse James was still fighting. Two weeks after the surrender, Wisconsin cavalrymen shot him through the lung and forced the 17-year-old rebel to pledge allegiance to the Union.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** There was a sense that the Civil War had ended not just in the Confederate defeat, but that Jesse James himself had been defeated. The end of the war was as personal an experience, as bitter an experience, as you can imagine for him.

**Narrator:** After a decade of vicious war, Missourians craved normalcy; they wanted to harvest crops, raise hogs, go to church. Men on both sides went back to their farms and tried to fit themselves into their old lives. But after the war, how could things be like old?

Politics in Missouri was complicated and nasty, still split along the fault lines of the war. The Radicals -- hard-line Unionist and anti-slavery -- took power in post-war Missouri, and they meant to make a stiff peace. They pushed through a new state constitution outlawing slavery, ran Confederate partisans out of public office and stripped them of the vote. In Clay County three out of four white males were disenfranchised.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** Old office holders, people who had been leading figures in their community, were forced out of office and new men were put in their place. These new men who were put into place were the Radicals who had emerged out of the Civil War, people who

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had embraced the new society of emancipation, of civil rights for African Americans, and who represented an overthrow of everything the old society had stood for.

**Fred Chiaventone, Author:** There were a great many men who were able to put aside old hurts and they were able to go back and buckle under with the Republican administration. But there were some, especially the younger ones, Little Archie Clement, Fletch Taylor, Jesse James, his brother Frank, who just couldn't accept the status quo after the war. They just couldn't deal with it. They felt they were being hounded. They were being persecuted for their role in the war. And so they elected to live outside of society and to prey on it.

**Michael Gooch, Local Historian:** The James boys were not forced into anything. It was not easy on any former guerrilla after the war. But so many of the boys did not resort to outlawry or violence. It's kind of like everything else in life. You make your choices.

**Narrator:** Beginning in 1866, the old bushwhackers robbed banks in Liberty, Richmond and Savannah, Missouri, and Russellville, in Kentucky, leaving a trail of dead bank clerks, lawmen and civilians. Many of the bushwhackers were tracked down and jailed, or shot dead, or lynched.

The James brothers were known to associate with the suspects in this string of robberies, but Jesse had never been publicly connected with a crime, never been so much as mentioned in a newspaper.

That changed in December of 1869, in a small town in northwest Missouri ... the way Jesse and Frank understood it, Bill Anderson's killer, Samuel Cox, was running the bank in Gallatin. By most standards the bank robbery was a disaster: Jesse had stolen a portfolio full of worthless paper; he hadn't killed Cox, but a cashier named John Sheets.

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But it was a crime that set the James brothers mold: an armed daylight raid, a cold-blooded murder carried out in the name of the Confederate cause, and 22-year-old Jesse practically screaming for attention.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** As Jesse made his escape from the scene, more than once, they spoke to bystanders and Jesse repeatedly stated that he had killed the killer of Bill Anderson. That he had taken revenge for Anderson's death and he was certainly quite proud of the fact. In fact, he seemed to have been in a state of ecstasy over it.

**Cathy Jackson, Historian:** The Gallatin bank robbery was significant for Jesse James because it was the first time that he was really mentioned in conjunction with a crime. They told his name. They told where he was from.

**Narrator:** Newspapers across the state replayed the robbery, the deliberate assassination of the clerk, and the James brothers' daring escape ... a "desperate and dangerous man," they called Jesse, "wandering, reckless ... a Strong southern man."

The story caught the attention of an editor at the Kansas City Times, John Newman Edwards. Edwards was former Rebel Army officer who was trying mightily to inspire the old Confederate wing of the Democratic party to jump back into the political skirmish.

**Fred Chiaventone, Author:** Edwards is a bit of an alcoholic. He's disappointed. He is an unrepentant rebel. And if there was ever a minister of propaganda for the Southern rebels and the outlaws that followed the Civil War, it was John Newman Edwards.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** Edwards learns of this Confederate guerrilla who, four years after the end of the war, tries to take revenge for the death of Bill Anderson, one of the most ruthless Confederate guerrillas. And this naturally appeals to him.

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**Narrator:** Not long after the Gallatin robbery, Edwards sought out the James brothers, and as soon as he met them, he understood what he had. Frank was shy and sullen, maybe, but Jesse was a horse that could be ridden for distance.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** Jesse was temperamentally clearly the one who liked to get attention. He wanted to be somebody who had a public presence. He wanted to be out there in the public eye.

**Narrator:** With Edwards as his spur and proof-reader, Jesse wrote a letter, addressed to the Governor of Missouri, but published in the Kansas City Times. Jesse denied any involvement in the killing at Gallatin, and began a campaign to win himself status as Missouri's Number One Victim. The beauty of it was, that Jesse's own story rhymed perfectly with the bigger myth Edwards was trying to create -- all ex-Confederates were being victimized by the Radicals. Over the next year and a half, Jesse James -- along with Frank and a half-dozen ex-bushwhackers such as Clell Miller and the Younger brothers -- robbed one bank, two stagecoaches, and two railroads.

Meanwhile, Edwards was busy knitting the new legend: young Jesse, according to Edwards, had fought with grit and valor in the war -- and he was still fighting. If Jesse James was robbing anybody, it was only Radical banks and the corrupt railroad corporations who were ruining Missouri farmers. In Edwards fanciful telling Jesse was religious, fastidious, kind to women, children and animals; saved poor widows from foreclosure. He was ... America's own Robin Hood.

**Fred Chiaventone, Author:** Now there's no evidence that Frank and Jesse James ever robbed from the rich and gave to the poor. It's a pretty good bet that Frank and Jesse used their ill-gotten gains for their own purposes. But, there's this mythology which grows around and Edwards is the one who waters this myth and allows it to flourish and grow.

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**Christopher Phillips, Historian:** Some of the newspaper titles that emerge during this period of time suggest the deep groundswell of sympathy for people like Jesse and Frank James who were fighting a war that in many people's minds hadn't ended. And many of these papers were, were paying close attention to the antics of Frank and Jesse James.

**Fred Chiaventone, Author:** Frank and Jesse James decided what they would best do is turn their efforts against the representatives of the Northern elites, and that would be the railroads and the banks and the express companies. And in many ways, they looked at themselves as freedom fighters and tried to strike a blow for Southern manhood and Southern honor and Southern virtue.

**Deb Goodrich, Author:** There was shame in losing the war. But here was Jesse who was still making life difficult for the occupation forces.

**Cathy Jackson, Historian:** If you're going to be an outlaw, what better way to escape the law and get people to help you than to have them believe that you're doing it for them. For a greater good.

**Narrator:** Jesse's rising notoriety coincided neatly with the improving political fortunes of ex-Confederates; while Missourians had blocked full citizenship for freed slaves, the ex-Rebels had won back the vote ... and by 1874 the old Southern-sympathizing Democrats were beginning to win back seats in the state legislature.

Zerelda was in her glory. Jesse and Frank's mother was pleased to grant an audience to reporters, through whom she could threaten witnesses who stepped forward to identify her sons or deny their involvement in any crime: "No mother," she opined, "ever had better sons; more affectionate, obedient and dutiful."

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But she was hardly alone. The James boys and their confederates had safe harbor with dozens of friends in Clay and the wealthiest farmers in neighboring Jackson County. They hid in plain sight in Nelson County, Kentucky, where a former bushwhacker had been made deputy sheriff, or at their uncle's in Logan County, Kentucky. They were welcomed by former Rebels in Texas and California and by Klansmen in North Carolina.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** During the 1870s, Frank, Jesse James, the Youngers, lived in their home counties, traveled freely, used the trains, and were often protected and given help by their neighbors and their old Confederate supporters.

**Phil Stewart, Local Historian:** They helped them considerably. They would hide them out. They would give them food, clothing, horses, trade off tired horses for fresh horses.

**Narrator:** Not everybody in Missouri, or even in their own neighborhood, was so sanguine about the James brothers. More sober souls were lamenting Missouri's growing reputation as the "Robber State," pointing out the alarming drop in property values. Republicans made the James gang a campaign issue, accusing the Democrats of being soft on crime -- when the criminals were old Confederates. Love him or hate him, everybody was talking about Jesse James.

When Jesse married his first cousin -- the decidedly plain and care-worn Zee Mims -- in April of 1874, Edwards described the bride as elegant, attractive, and devoutly religious. And the 26-year old outlaw worked hard to keep up his end of the bargain. He carried a well-thumbed bible, kept fine horses, dressed in style ...

Over time, Jesse James began to inhabit the myth Edwards made. "We're not ordinary thieves," he announced to the passengers on the first train the gang robbed, "we're bold robbers!"

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At another train robbery, in 1874, the James gang left the telegraph wires uncut ... and the contents of the press release they left behind were quickly dispatched throughout the country.

**Cathy Jackson, Historian:** Let's face it, his story was a good story. It had conflict. It had drama. And the national press took up the news: The New York Times, San Francisco, New Mexico, Chicago, Kentucky. The news spread everywhere.

**Michael Gooch, Local Historian:** I think he gloried in that attention. I think Jesse had a tremendous ego and he loved reading about himself in the papers.

**Deb Goodrich, Author:** Jesse's a little farm boy from western Missouri. And all of a sudden, he's in newspapers across the country. It's a lot easier to buy into that legend than it is to take a long, hard look at yourself.

**Narrator:** What he was, was a thief and a cold-blooded murderer; Jesse had little interest in a fair fight; each of his victims had been unarmed and helpless.

For all his press clippings, Jesse James had no permanent home, few possessions and fewer safe havens. His success in getting attention for himself only made things worse. Governor Silas Woodson issued a \$2000 reward for the James brothers, then persuaded the state legislature to fund a squad of "secret police" to track down the bandits.

The biggest threat to Jesse's life came from the private sector. In 1874, the express companies, tired of having their baggage car safes emptied, hired Allen Pinkerton and his detective agency to put a stop to Jesse and Frank. Pinkerton sent an undercover agent into Clay County.

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**Phil Stewart, Local Historian:** The first thing he did after getting off the train was to go to the sheriff, ask where the James or Samuel farm is. He told the sheriff who he was and what he was doing. The sheriff told him "Do not go out there. Those boys will kill you. If they don't kill you, the old lady will." He didn't listen. He was later found the next day with four gunshot wounds in his chest and two in his head with a note pinned on his jacket that said this is what happens to detectives who come looking for the James boys.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** Allen Pinkerton had never suffered a defeat like this. It became a personal vendetta for him, and he began to undertake the operation on his own expense.

**Narrator:** On January 25, 1875, on information that Frank and Jesse were at home, three Pinkerton detectives and a handful of Clay County locals made a raid on Zerelda's. Shortly after midnight, the posse tried to flush Frank and Jesse from their mother's house. The Pinkertons abandoned the raid when one of their incendiary devices exploded inside the cabin. Jesse's half-brother, Archie Samuel, had been killed by flying shrapnel; part of Zerelda's right arm had been severed. Frank and Jesse were nowhere to be found.

**Phil Stewart, Local Historian:** The public outcry after the Pinkerton raid was widespread. The general consensus was we don't like what the boys are doing as far as robbing banks and trains and killing people. But that does not justify blowing up houses with old ladies and small children. Yes, we want to get rid of these guys, but at what cost?

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** People who before had either been skeptical or openly hostile to Jesse James as simply a criminal who was trying to manipulate the public with his letters to the press actually began to see him as he had been promoting himself. He was a victim of these Northerners who were trying to persecute the South and were picking on him as a former Confederate.

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**Narrator:** Jesse and Frank hid in Nashville, with good reason to keep their heads down: that summer, Zee gave birth to Jesse's son, Jesse Edwards James; Frank had just married Annie Ralston, a former schoolteacher who had little enthusiasm for her husband's life of crime. With public sympathy behind them, John Newman Edwards was working the Missouri state legislature, trying to get Frank and Jesse amnesty for war crimes and a fair trial for any crimes that could be charged to them. Police work being what it was in Missouri -- and juries being what they were -- there was a good chance the James brothers could walk away free men.

**Phil Stewart, Local Historian:** Frank James looked at it as an opportunity to settle down into a normal life which, especially by 1875, is exactly what Frank wanted to do. Jesse, on the other hand, believed that it was all a ploy. That if they rode into Jefferson City or any place else to give themselves up, they would be hung immediately.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** The attention he had gotten only fed his ambition to be seen even more widely as a Confederate hero. At this moment, I think he saw it not as a chance to give up his life of crime, but in fact, to take it to another level.

**Narrator:** In the summer of 1876, the entire country seemed on fire. Economic depression loomed, and labor fights escalated toward destruction and murder. Western expansion grew more and more bloody: in the Dakota Territory, Crazy Horse and his warriors wiped out George Armstrong Custer and his soldiers. A bitter Presidential election divided the nation. Reconstruction advocates in the South were buckling under the weight of white supremacist thuggery.

With Radical Reconstruction teetering, the fate and future of civil rights in the South was at stake; and Jesse James made bold to insert himself into that story. That September, Jesse, Frank and a band of ex-bushwhackers that included Cole Younger and his brothers, Clell

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Miller, Charlie Pitts and William Chadwell, set out for Northfield, Minnesota. Bob Younger said one of the gang had a spite against a major depositor at Northfield's First National Bank.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** There was one very distinctive thing about Northfield -- that was the presence of Adelbert Ames who had been the Radical Republican governor of Mississippi, who had been one of the foremost advocates for civil rights in the South and who had been elected with almost unanimous black support in Mississippi during the period when Reconstruction was in force there. So Ames's presence was definitely a draw for them.

**Narrator:** After a decade of well-publicized daylight bank robberies, civilians had learned to be on the look-out. And when Northfield's main street merchants saw three strangers go into the bank -- and five more armed men take up positions outside -- they picked up their guns and headed for the street.

**Cathy Jackson, Historian:** These were hard-working Northerners who did not believe in such foolishness as letting people come into their town and hold up their bank and take their hard-earned dollars.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** They lost the element of surprise. The Younger brothers in particular were cornered against this bare masonry wall, basically a shooting gallery in which they were butchered. And on the inside, the bookkeeper, Joseph Lee Heywood, bravely refused to open the safe. And as the robbers gave up and left, one of them turned and shot the bookkeeper down in his tracks, cold-blooded murder.

**Narrator:** By the time inside men emerged from the bank, William Chadwell was already dead; and Clell Miller lay dying in the street. Frank, Jesse, Charlie Pitts and the Youngers managed to escape, but found themselves lost in the unfamiliar Minnesota woods and hunted. Thousands of Minnesotans pulled down their shotguns and formed posses and picket-lines, in one of the largest manhunts in American history.

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Two weeks later, cold, hungry and badly wounded, the Younger brothers, and Charlie Pitts were cornered by a posse near Madelia, Minnesota. Pitts was killed and the three Youngers shot up and captured.

Only Jesse and Frank emerged from the Minnesota woods; Northfield had been a bitter defeat for Jesse; the gang had been cut to pieces by Northerners. But that was not the story that took hold. In the Southern-leaning broadsheets, the James Gang's Waterloo turned into Jesse's Great Escape.

**Cathy Jackson, Historian:** The Northfield bank robbery secured his fame as being extraordinary. Here you have a man who travels almost 500 miles from Minnesota back to Missouri. He is horseless. Doesn't have any food. He only had a few weapons. Yet they traveled 500 miles back through posses that numbered over 1000 men. And that escape was played up over and over again.

**Narrator:** After the botched Northfield job, Frank and Jesse disappeared from public view. They quietly re-settled in Tennessee, where Jesse lived under the alias J.D. Howard; Frank became B.J. Woodson. Jesse and Zee had a second child on the way. And Frank and his wife Annie had a newborn too.

**Phil Stewart, Local Historian:** Frank James lost a lot of his enthusiasm for the outlaw game after Northfield. Frank rented a farm right outside of Nashville, was raising hogs, corn, had a son, and I believe, was very content and peaceful right outside of Nashville. Jesse, on the other hand, also living in Nashville, very restless.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** He continued to engage in get-rich-quick schemes: cornering the local corn market in his county. Buying race horses and entering them in races around the South.

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**Michael Gooch, Local Historian:** Jesse was noted for being a gambler and being a very bad gambler. He lost a lot of money playing cards and such.

**Phil Stewart, Local Historian:** By the late say 1878, 79, Jesse was running out of money. Something was going to have to be done.

**Narrator:** For Jesse, it was bad enough being broke. But after more than seven years of constant play in the press, he couldn't stand that his name was fading from sight. His son Jesse and daughter Mary had no idea their father was a notorious outlaw; they didn't even know their own last name, and they certainly didn't enjoy the spoils. The Howards owned little besides some stolen jewelry Jesse had given Zee and an arsenal of revolvers, rifles and shotguns.

**Michael Gooch, Local Historian:** There's no glory in sitting on a horse farm in Tennessee. Jesse James had to be Jesse James.

**Cathy Jackson, Historian:** I think he was perhaps a victim of the times and a victim of himself, of his own innate tendencies to like violent things and to be caught up in that kind of excitement.

**Narrator:** In the summer of 1879, Jesse rode back into Missouri and made a new James gang - - recruiting a couple of cousins and some young farmhands from the old burnt district.

**Michael Gooch, Local Historian:** They were not a ghost of what he'd had before. Just common, run-of-the-mill, back country thieves and killers. You don't have the people who were trained, if you will, during the war.

**Narrator:** That October, the James gang stopped a train at the Glendale depot in Jackson County, Missouri, robbed the express car, pistol whipped the express manager ... and left a

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press release: "We are the boys that are hard to handle and will make it hot for the party that ever tries to take us."

Jesse and his gang went on his most vicious and fast-paced spree, robbing a stage at Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, a government payroll office in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, and then two separate trains in Missouri. At the first they murdered the conductor and one passenger. At the second, Jesse identified himself to all who could hear. "If we are going to be wicked," he yelled "we might as well make a good job of it."

Amid his own noise, Jesse James was deaf to the sound of public sentiment shifting beneath him. Not even John Newman Edwards stood up to defend his old friend.

**Christopher Phillips, Historian:** By the 1880s, there was a completion of the Confederate renaissance in Missouri. Both senators had had some tie to the Confederacy. Both houses of the state legislature by the late 1870s were filled with former supporters of the Confederacy or outright Confederates, former Confederates themselves. The ex-Confederates had accomplished what Jesse James had been fighting for for the last 15 years.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** It was clear that Jesse's time had passed. And there was an increasing sense of resentment even among former Confederates who saw that there was really no excuse any more for Jesse's bandit career because the battle had been won.

**Narrator:** Jesse James' home-staters were, in fact, anxious to be rid of him once and for all. His own ex-Confederate neighbors made plans to assassinate him. The new Democratic Governor, Thomas T. Crittenden, convinced the executives of the state's railroads and express companies to put up the money for a fat reward: \$10,000 for each of the James brothers. Frank had abandoned his little brother for safer pastures. Left to himself, Jesse grew increasingly paranoid that one of his own men would turn on him -- and increasingly violent.

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He murdered one of his crew and was hunting another. Gang members Dick Liddil and Bob Ford decided it might be a good time to open up negotiations with the Governor.

**Phil Stewart, Local Historian:** By 1881, early 82, Jesse James life was changing, and not for the better as far as he was concerned. He moved his family up to St. Joseph, Missouri, and again was trying to get this gang together. The only thing that he could come up with as far as gang members were Bob and Charlie Ford and they were less than credible or dependable. But was almost to the point that he had no choices.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** Jesse still had robberies planned. So he brought the Ford brothers into his own house. He thought it would be safer that way.

**Narrator:** By the time Bob Ford arrived at Jesse's house in St. Joe, he had already cut a deal with Governor Crittenden. In a private meeting two months earlier, the Governor had assured Bob Ford the reward money would be his if he captured Jesse. If he killed him, the Governor had the power to pardon.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** It's widely believed that the governor understood clearly that the deal meant the death of Jesse James. The governor of Missouri, had essentially conspired to assassinate someone, a private citizen. As notorious and as ruthless and as vicious as Jesse James was, it was an extraordinary event where the Governor of the state conspires to assassinate one of his citizens.

**Phil Stewart, Local Historian:** Early morning of April 3rd, 1882, they were sitting around the table and Charlie was sweating. Zee thought that Charlie was sick. Asked him if he was sick. Not knowing that Bob had told Charlie about the plot to capture or kill Jesse and that he was going to take Jesse the first opportunity he had.

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**T.J. Stiles, Author:** Jesse was preparing for a robbery that he was planning on carrying out and he was going in and out of the house and it was so hot he had to take off his coat and that led him to take off his guns for fear that he'd be seen as he went in and out of the house.

**Phil Stewart:** He made a comment that it wouldn't be a good idea if passers-by saw a man in his own house so heavily armed. So he took his gun-belt off, laid it in on a bedroom bed. Now, that was very unusual. In fact, Bob Ford later said that he had never seen Jesse without his guns before.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** And that was exactly the opportunity that they'd been waiting for. And, as legend correctly has it, Jesse got up on a chair to dust a picture.

**Phil Stewart, Local Historian:** Bob pulled a pistol, the end of the barrel was just about three and a half to four feet from the back of Jesse's head -- and if there's anybody in the world that knows the sound of a cocking hammer, it was Jesse James. For a fraction of a second, Jesse knew that it was over.

**Narrator:** The dramatic death of Jesse James, at age of 34, only increased the reach of his name. News spread from his home county papers to both coasts and beyond: Latin American poet Jose Marti wrote him up in Venezuela's La Opinion Nacional; Oscar Wilde reported on the auction of Jesse's possessions.

Death pictures went on sale; so did pieces of the St. Joe house pried off by the most intrepid on-lookers. Bob Ford and his horse went on the New York stage to re-enact his daring deed. Zee James agreed to write a book; she needed the cash. Jesse's mother considered -- and then rejected with great fanfare -- a \$10,000 offer for her son's body. A promoter wanted to take it on a country-wide tour.

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Zerelda James Samuel had her son buried in her front yard, where she could keep watch on the grave from her bedroom window. But she gave in to temptation -- offering tours to travelers who came over from the new spas in nearby Excelsior Springs, and selling pebbles from his grave for a quarter a piece. When she ran out, she replenished the gravesite from the stream behind her house.

Brother Frank managed to get in on the action too -- after he wriggled free from the noose. Within months of Jesse's death, Frank had turned himself in to Governor Crittenden and gone to trial in Missouri. A jury had acquitted him on all charges. Around 1900, Frank and his old buddy Cole Younger went on tour with a wild-west show.

By then, the ugly truths about Jesse had been papered over. Jesse James -- Confederate avenger -- disappeared. And as Big Business took hold of America, and the public began to see the corporation as the new villain, people clung to the image of Jesse as the American Robin Hood fighting for the Little Guy.

**Fred Chiaventone, Author:** All of his crimes and misdeeds seem to be stripped away or seem not to adhere to him simply because he is the underdog. He is the man who is fighting against authority, and something in that appealed to the American character, or the American sense of justice.

**Michael Gooch, Local Historian:** What we celebrate today, if celebrate's the right word, is the myth of Jesse James not the reality of Jesse James. And there's a wide divergence -- myth versus reality.

**T.J. Stiles, Author:** The irony of Jesse James is that in death, he's become a symbol of what's seen as quintessentially American, what unites all of us -- the frontier, westward expansion, the cowboys and Indians story of American history. Whereas, in life, he had been a symbol of what divided us.

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