



History 101

Jesse James

Jesse Woodson James was born in Missouri on September 5, 1847. He had two stepbrothers and two stepsisters, in addition to two natural brothers. He was skilled with horses and a natural leader, but he was never a very skilled marksman.

In 1863, Jesse joined Quantrill's raiders. Quantrill didn't really want him, but "Bloody" Bill Anderson took Jesse under his wing. He was part of the Centralia massacre in 1864. He is also known to have been a spy for the rebel army.

Frank and Jesse had talked about forming a gang with Cole Younger, but Jesse was not with them when they committed their first robbery in February 1866 at Liberty, Missouri. Jesse didn't join them until October. Frank and Cole Younger got about \$57,000 from that job. But it wasn't until March 1867 that they pulled their first job together. They tried to rob a bank at Savannah. All three aimed at the bank president, but all were poor shots, and only one bullet barely grazed him. This job failed.

In March 1868, the James brothers and Younger brothers robbed the banking house of Nimrod & Cin in Russellville, Kentucky. In 1869, they robbed a Richmond, Missouri Bank. That same year they robbed the Daviess Savings Bank at Gallatin, Missouri. On April 29, 1872, five men, including James, robbed a bank in Columbia, Kentucky.

Jesse is thought to be the mastermind behind robbing railroad express cars. Their first target was the Chicago and Rock Island express near Adair, Iowa, on July 21, 1873. Two months later Frank and Jesse stole \$10,000 from a Kansas City fairground. By that time the Pinkertons were after them.

In 1874, they robbed the Iron Mountain Railroad train in Wayne County, Missouri. While hiding out, the Pinkertons caught John and Jim Younger. John was shot in the neck and killed. In 1875, Jesse married his cousin Zerelda. They would eventually have two children. Frank married Annie Ralston about the same time. The following year, a disastrous robbery attempt at Northfield, Minnesota, resulted in many of those in the James gang losing their lives. This time the citizens fought back. Jesse and Frank made good their escape, but had to lay low for over three years.

In October 1879, he was back to his old tricks with a new gang. They robbed a Chicago and Alton train. They robbed four more trains in 1881, the last one at Glendale, Missouri. Two of their gang members were captured after that one. After that the James gang was never heard from again. Jesse was killed by Bob Ford, a gang member, on April 3, 1882, reportedly for the reward money.

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