



JESSE JAMES
... did he survive?

Was Eastex's Visitor Jesse James?

History Has Drawn Some Intriguing Parallels

(Second of Two)
By KEITH ALLRED
City Editor

KENNARD — Who was the 105-year-old 'man' who visited the Cole James farm near here in the 1940s?

Was he the outlaw Jesse James, as he told the Kennard-area host?

Was his real name Frank Dalton, as he told other people before coming to East Texas?

Or was he somebody else?

A check of a book entitled "Jesse James, My Father," and subtitled "The First and Only True Story of His Adventures Ever Written," at Kurth

Library in Plain, turned up some striking similarities in the two versions of the fate of Jesse James.

It also revealed discrepancies that make it difficult to believe both, unless it is allowed that mistakes were made as a result of faulty sources, poor memories or for some other reason.

At the same time, the similarities are numerous enough to make it appear that if the Kennard Jesse James was a phony, he was a knowledgeable phony — maybe even someone who had been close to Jesse James.

One of the paragraphs in

the book which stuns the reader who has heard Cole James' story deals with the Jesse James Funeral.

Cole James says that his visitor, in claiming to be Jesse James, told him that he sang at his own funeral and even served as his own pallbearer.

The funeral, he said, was actually for a man named Charlie Bigelow, who was renting Jesse James' house at the time Robert Ford fired his fatal shots.

The Jesse James Jr. book, drawing on newspaper accounts, lists five pallbearers who carried the casket, and adds, "There was another, a

sixth pallbearer, a rather mysterious character, whom none of the other five seemed to know. He seemed to have charge of the cortege and directed the movements, but neither his fellow pallbearers nor the bystanders knew who he was. He was a stout and well-preserved man, of perhaps forty years, and seemed to understand what he was about, but no one could say who he was or where he came from."

Was the mystery pallbearer Jesse James in some sort of disguise? Was he an unnamed Jesse James associate, maybe one who eventually would wind

See History, Page 2

an visitor East Texas at the age of 105?

• Cole James' visitor told the Kennard man that the James gang hated and "tried to kill every Yankee they could."

Jesse James Jr. says in his book that the James family, immigrants from the South, were persecuted in Missouri because they sympathized with the cause of the South during the Civil War period.

This, he notes, is what led Jesse James to join Quantrell's Guerrillas at the age of either 15 or 16.

Cole James says he was told by his visitor that a group of Yankees shot Jesse's daddy, shot Jesse's mother's arm off and hanged Jesse, leaving him to die.

According to Jesse James Jr., the visitor's step-father, Dr. Rowden Smith, who had a rope put around his neck and placed over a limb. Then, he says, the step-father was strung up and tortured with the rope cutting into his neck until it bled.

Jesse Jr. says that the outlaw's mother had her arm shot off — but he says it was by Pinkerton detectives who also murdered Jesse's half-brother.

The Kennard visitor had 32 bullet wounds, according to a count by Cole James.

The Jesse James Jr. book says that at the time of Jesse Sr.'s surrender at the close of the Civil War he had "the scars of twenty-two wounds in his body." He still would have the opportunity to add to that figure in later adventures.

Those are some of the similarities, but there are also notable discrepancies.

• The major conflict deals with the death of Jesse James, which Jesse Jr.'s book portrays in much the same manner that most people have heard it.

"The Ford boys killed my father for the reward that was offered for his apprehension," Jesse Jr. says in the book. Jesse Jr., six years old at the time of the death, says that his father had taken off his revolvers and put them on the bed, when he noticed that a picture on the wall was "hanging awry."

He stood on a chair to straighten the picture, then started to brush the dust from it, the book says, with his back to Robert and Charlie Ford.

The Fords, Jesse Jr. said, had the confidence of Jesse Sr. "and Charlie had been with him for years."

"Bob Ford drew his revolver, aimed it at the back of my father's head and cocked it. Father heard the click . . . and fell backward dead."

Jesse Jr. states earlier in the chapter, however, that his account is second-hand.

"The story of the murder of my father and the immediate

later years as lawmen hounded Jesse James, forcing him to face a constant threat of being shot.

Several other points could be probed. But a satisfactory conclusion probably would never be possible with details from the two sources.

It would appear that the Kennard visitor was about the right age, give or take a few years, to be Jesse James. James, according to his son's book, was born in 1847 and would have been 105 years old in 1952. The Kennard visit reportedly was in the 1940s.

The visitor knew enough about the outlaw and his loot to convince Cole James that he was not just a teller of tall tales.

But the question of the visitor's real identity probably never will be answered.