ROBERT FORD ASSASSINATES JESSE JAMES



0. ROBERT FORD ASSASSINATES JESSE JAMES - Story Preface

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Even though Jesse James wasn't sure that he could trust Bob Ford, the famous outlaw removed his gun—in Ford's presence—while in his home on the 3rd of April, 1882. Jesse was unaware of Ford's deal with the Governor of Missouri: If Ford would kill Jesse, the governor would give Ford a reward and pardon him for a prior murder. This image, by an unnamed artist, imagines the last seconds of Jesse's life. It is online via the State Historical Society of Missouri.

After an attempted robbery in Northfield, Minnesota, in September of 1876, the James-Younger Gang disbanded. The robbery went awry and the Younger brothers were captured.

Years later, two new gang members - Robert and Charlie Ford - joined forces with Frank and Jesse. Their last train robbery - on September 7, 1881 - was at Glendale, Missouri. Thereafter, using the alias of Tom Howard, Jesse moved his family to St. Joseph, Missouri where they rented their home.

Zee wanted her husband to stop the robberies altogether. Jesse said he wanted to have enough money to buy a farm in Nebraska. He thought he'd plan, and carry out, one last escapade against a Platte County bank.

Since even Frank was living elsewhere, the only two people left to help were Charlie Ford and his brother Bob. Neither had been with Jesse during his guerilla days. Neither were related to him.

Jesse thought he could trust Charlie; apparently he was less sure about Bob.

At the end of March, Jesse invited the Ford brothers to live in his home, to help him plan the bank robbery. He had no idea that Robert Ford had a deal-in-the-works with the governor of Missouri, Thomas Crittenden.

Ford had allegedly killed a man and, in exchange for a pardon, worked a deal with the governor. If Bob Ford would kill Jesse James, the governor would pardon him for the prior murder. There was an added temptation: A $10,000 reward on Jesse's life.

It was hot the morning of April 3, 1882. After feeding his horses, Jesse took off his jacket and unbuttoned his vest. So no one would see his guns, if he needed to go outside again, Jesse did something he rarely did: He removed his gun belt.

The last gun he used, according to the Library of Congress, was a .45 Schofield.



In the house with the Ford brothers, Jesse decided to dust some pictures. Zee and both children were in the kitchen. With his back to his friends, Jesse heard a clicking sound. It was a sound he knew well - the sound of a cocking gun.

Turning slightly, Jesse may never have seen who shot him. It was Robert Ford.

A single bullet entered Jesse's head, disintegrating his brain.

The autopsy report, quoted in the April 7th, 1882 issue of the *Kansas City Daily Journal*, states:

> *The ball was lodged at the junction of the suture which divides the occipital, parietal and temporal bones of the left side.*

In other words, the bullet did not leave his head.

As the thirty-four-year-old outlaw dropped dead to the floor, his children ran into the room. Charlie Ford told Zee that a gun had gone off accidentally. His brother, the assassin, had already fled the house.

Jesse's body, packed in ice, took a last train trip - to Kearney, Missouri. His remains were buried in a plot at the family farm where his mother could keep an eye on things. She had these words carved into his tombstone:

> *In Loving Memory of My Beloved Son,*
> *Murdered by a Traitor and Coward*
> *whose name is not worthy to appear here.*

Although sympathy for Jesse's exploits had weakened in the years before his death, many folks were still upset about his murder. Charlie, fearing for his life and constantly on the move, committed suicide within two years.

Bob, who was proud of what he did, posed with his gun. For a time he appeared in *Outlaws of Missouri*, an act which let him tell his story again and again. Of course, he always failed to say he'd shot Jesse from behind.

Antagonistic audiences ended Bob Ford's stage career. He ultimately settled in Creede, Colorado - a place of stunning beauty in the Rocky Mountains. The Library of Congress describes what the town was like when Bob Ford lived there:

> *The town of Creede is nestled in a valley in Mineral County. Along with several tents, structures in the town include one and two-story wood-frame residences and commercial storefronts ...The cliffs of the rocky canyon that surrounds the town are immediately behind the buildings. Architectural elements of the one and two-story log, and wood-frame buildings include gables, false fronts, clapboard siding, cornices, and false fronts . . . Ore cars of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad extend over the tracks in the town. . . Wood-frame residences and commercial storefronts parallel the tracks . . . Tents are scattered among the one and two-story wood-frame residences and structures.*

One of the tents in the town was a temporary saloon, owned by Robert Ford, “the coward” who assassinated Jesse James.

On the 8th of June, 1892, a would-be customer named Edward O. Kelly walked into the bar carrying a sawed-off shotgun. With his back to the door, Ford heard his customer say:

Hello, Bob.

Turning toward the voice was Robert Ford’s last act.

Men carried guns, and shot them at will, during those decades of war and violence. Frank James decided to turn his gun in. He stood trial for his alleged crimes, was acquitted on all charges and lived to be seventy-two years old.

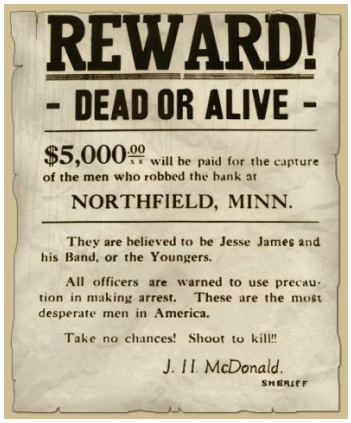
Jesse, however, remains one of America’s most famous outlaws. But one thing about his story (and the way his life ended) is ironic.

He (like most of his victims) died unarmed.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ROBERT-FORD-ASSASSINATES-JESSE-JAMES-Jesse-James

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/ROBERT-FORD-ASSASSINATES-JESSE-JAMES-Jesse-James

Media Stream



Wanted Poster: Jesse James, Dead or Alive
Image, Library of Congress.
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Robert Ford, the Assassin of Jesse James
Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.
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Charlie Ford, Brother of Jesse James' Assassin

U.S. National Archives.

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St. Joseph, Missouri - Jesse James' Death

Image, courtesy Denver Public Library.

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Jesse James' Last Home

Image, courtesy St Joseph, Missouri Historical Society.

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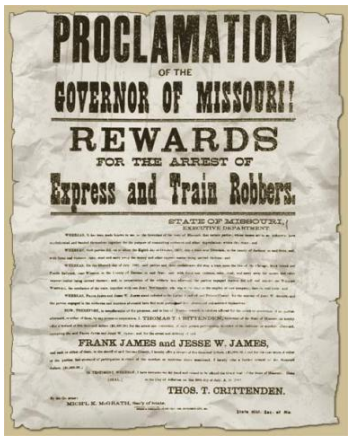

Arrest Proclamation - Jesse and Frank James

Image online, Library of Congress.

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Jesse James - Wife and Children

U.S. National Archives.

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Jesse James at His Death

Library of Congress.

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Body of Jesse James

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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Remains of Jesse James in His Coffin

Library of Congress.

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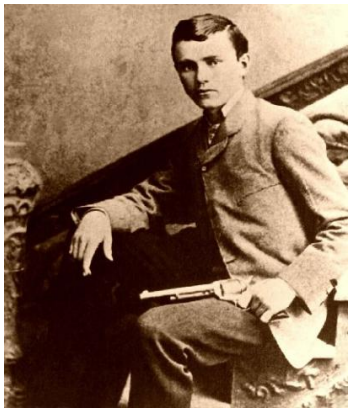

Robert Ford with the Gun He Used to Kill Jesse James

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Location of Creede, Colorado

Image online, courtesy ePodunk.

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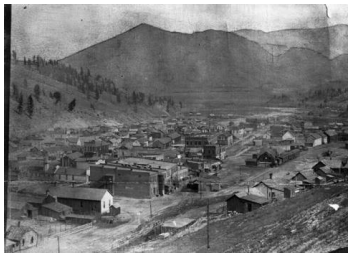

Creede - When Bob Ford Lived There

Library of Congress, image X7429.

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Town of Creede, Nestled in the Rockies

Library of Congress, image X7425.

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Valley in Mineral County, Colorado

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress, image X7446.

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Last Chance Mine, Creede Colorado

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress.

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Mining Towns in the Rockies

Library of Congress, image X747.

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Mountains Form the Backdrop of a Mining Town

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress, image X7917.

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False Fronts in a Colorado Mining Town

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress, image X7917.

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Ore Cars on the Denver-Rio Grande Railroad

Library of Congress, image X7477.

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Rail Tracks Parallel Residences in Mining Towns

Online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress, image of Creede Colorado.

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Edward O'Kelly, Assassin of Robert Ford

Image online, courtesy the U.S. National Archives.

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Bob Ford and His Tent Saloon in Creede, Colorado

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress.

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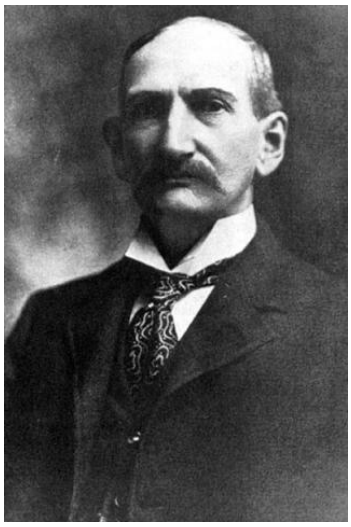

Frank James in Later Life

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress.

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