



Frank and Jesse James, 2E: The Story Behind the Legend

Ted Yeatman

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To some he was a Robin Hood, a mythic figure of righteous retribution.

To others he was the devil incarnate, a bloodthirsty hooligan and cold-blooded killer.

The disparity between these views of the outlaw Jesse James is often attributed to an almost invisible line between marauding Missouri guerrilla bands of the Civil War and the general lawlessness that plagued the Old West.

The beginning of the legend of the James brothers, which began in 1866 - the first successful peacetime daylight bank robbery - is somewhat murky. But once their careers in crime commenced, the James brothers eluded capture for sixteen years, until Jesse was killed in 1882 by Bob and Charlie Ford while the three of them planned the robbery of the Platte City Bank. Frank was never apprehended but surrendered voluntarily to the governor of Missouri. Since then the exploits of the James gang have become legendary.

Frank and Jesse James is a complete account of the James brothers during the Civil War, the following sixteen years of notoriety, and the lives of those who outlived Jesse. Yeatman has created a thoroughly documented popular narrative. Also included are dozens of heretofore unpublished illustrations and photographs of the people, places, and artifacts associated with the notorious brothers.

Ted Yeatman began researching this book twenty-five years ago, reviewing materials in Missouri, Tennessee, Maryland, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, Minnesota, Illinois, and the District of Columbia. He discovered items that had never been published, particularly a cache of Pinkerton letters concerning the firebombing of the James farm in 1875 (somewhat analogous to the FBI's role in the Branch Davidian crisis near Waco, Texas, in 1993) and heretofore overlooked papers in the National Archives regarding the Civil War activities and later banditry of the James brothers. Yeatman also assisted in the 1995 exhumation and forensic examination of the remains of Jesse.

The result is a complete account of the James brothers during the Civil War, the following sixteen years of notoriety, and the lives of those who outlived Jesse. Yeatman has created a thoroughly documented popular narrative that will be satisfying both to readers who know little or nothing about the James brothers and those who have read everything. Also included are dozens of heretofore unpublished illustrations and photographs of the people, places, and artifacts associated with the notorious brothers.

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