

Visitor Said He Was Jesse James

(First of Two)

By KEITH ALLRED
City Editor

KENNARD — The visitor, an invalid, claimed to be 105 years old.

He drank nothing but straight whiskey, took pride in his remarkable eyesight and didn't mind demonstrating his shooting ability.

His East Texas host, who had to help the old man with his bath at night, noticed marks all over his body — many of them apparently caused by bullets.

In Cole James' mind, all of this leant credence to the old-timer's claims that he was a famed distant relative of his.

The man was using the name Frank Dalton, but he told Cole

James of Kennard that his real name was Jesse James.

Never mind that story about Robert Ford shooting the outlaw in the back while he was standing on a chair and dusting off a picture.

The man told Cole James that he had sung at his own funeral and served as a pallbearer.

The real victim of Ford, he claimed, was a man named Charlie Bigelow who was renting a house that Jesse James bought "and never lived in a day of his life."

Cole James, now retired and 80 years of age, recently recalled the old man's two-week stay at his farm here, a visit for which James cannot pin down the exact year but which he says occurred in the 1930s

or 1940s. Another resident of the area who remembers how word got around about the visitor said it was in the '40s.

James said he first heard about the man by way of a letter. Dalton wrote James that he had a broken hip, he was stranded in Center, and he had heard that there were some Jameses living at Nogah's Prairie near Kennard.

The Kennard man went to Center to visit with him, and

Dalton (or James) returned to the Cole James residence a couple of days later.

"He said his daddy was a first cousin to my granddaddy, Robert James, who came from Mississippi," Cole says. "He wouldn't talk to people much during the daytime, but at night when everybody left he would tell some of his stories."

"He didn't like Yankees," he said when he was 14 some Yankees shot his daddy, shot his mother's arm off and hanged Jesse and left him to die. He said they lit a fire under his feet.

"But his mother cut him down with a butcher knife after they had gone.

"He showed me rope burns. See Visitor, Page 9

ANGELINA SKIES

Sunday, September 23
Sunset today 6:15 p.m. Sunrise tomorrow 7:08 a.m. Moonrise tomorrow 5:08 a.m. New Moon, Sept. 26. The planet Mars rises 2:34 p.m. and it is now brighter than any star and nearly as bright as the planet Jupiter. Jupiter is in the south height 9:27 p.m.



COLE JAMES
... outlaw's kin?

un victim: Was 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 outlaw's step-father, Dr. Robert Simons, 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.