

# THE JESSE JAMES STORY

From

The Routons of Paris and Henry County, Tennessee

by Stephanie Routon Tayloe

I have heard the story of Jesse James camping in the front yard of my great grandmother, Mary Catherine Haymes Routon so many times. Every time it gets a little larger or different.

I remember my grandfather, S. J. Routon, telling me the story in the early 1950's and he remembered distinctly the

kinds of horses they had some seventy years later.

It was a custom, in the days of my grandfather, for travelers to stop in the countryside houses and ask for overnight lodging. My grandmother's house was located in a curve of the road on the Old

McKenzie Highway. Late in the evening several men on horseback approached her house. They asked my widowed great-grandmother if they could camp overnight in her yard. My great uncles took care

of the horses, rubbing them down and feeding them.

The men slept on the grass in the yard. The next morning they paid her and she explained that they had paid her too much.

They then told her they were the James Brothers and had been to Princeton, Kentucky, where they had robbed a bank.

They admitted that the money was stolen, but Yankee money.

They were making their getaway to Dyersburg, and to cross the river over into Missouri. We have no information as to whether this was reported to the local law enforcement people, or whether there were any attempts to turn these men in.

Many years after Jesse had been killed and Frank had paid his debt to

society he had a wild west traveling show, and it came to Paris.

He went to the court house in Paris and brought a show license from my uncle Quince Routon, who was county court clerk, and had become a man after being one of the boys at the old homeplace who cared for the James boys' horses the night they had slept in their front yard the years before. He replied they had slept in many front yards and were never turned in to the law. They were treated as southern crusaders and they depended upon the hospitality of the broken south and used it to get away with their crimes. They paid their way, with stolen money. To some small boys they were heroes, and legends. I still remember the animation of my grandfather telling me this story. I wish I could remember his description of the horses and guns the James boys had.

I had been told that with the James brothers gang there were some men with the last name of Younger who had relatives in Henry County and they helped hide the criminals out at times.

My great-grandmother was a devout Christian woman who would have never taken stolen money without her southern sympathies being aroused. Her father and two brothers were killed in the War.

Another notorious criminal called on the Routons in the 1930's. In the cold winter someone broke into my grandmother's greenhouse and slept where it was warm. The next day they found where he had slept and reported back to my grandparents that the intruder was none other than Machine Gun Kelly from Memphis.