

Zerelda James, the Tantalizing Mother of Jesse James



Zeralda James

Jesse James was the son of a Baptist preacher of prominence and eloquence in his day. The father was a native of Logan County, Kentucky, and the mother (whose maiden name was Zerelda Cole) was born in Woodford County, Kentucky, about half way between Versailles and Lexington where the father kept a hostelry known as Cole's Tavern. Upon the death of the father the widow removed to the neighborhood of Stamping Ground in Scott County to be among her relatives.

This is where she met and married in 1840 Rev. Robert J. James. IN 1843 they removed to Missouri, settling in Clay County, where Jesse was born in 1845. Mrs. James was a handsome, vivacious, devil-may-care girl, careless

of good or evil report. Tall, large-framed, and full of animal life, she was the universal favorite among those of the opposite sex, and her marriage to a clergyman was one of those surprises she was fond of indulging in. Her hair was black as the raven's wing, her eyes black and piercing. Her temper was quick and tiery, her tongue sharp and cutting, and her enmity deadly and enduring. Later in life she became a large woman, her hair sprinkled with gray, but her eyes steill keen and piercing and her temper ungovernable as ever. Several years after the death of Mr. James, she was married to Robert Mimms, whom she was known to have harassed into the grave. Afterwards, she married Dr. Samuels, a prominent physician of Clay County.

She is attributed to the evil life led by her sons, Frank and Jesse James. It was the home guards in their town which encouraged Frank and Jesse to join the Confederate lines under the notorious Quantrell. Jesse was only fourteen years of age.

When they sacked the town of Lawrence, Kansas, Jesse shot down women and children without compunction and later boasted that he had murdered thirty-six citizens with his own hand. But the crowning horror of his life occurred on the morning of September 17, 1861, in Missouri, when a gang of Quantrell's band of cut throats under Bill Anderson galloped into the village and sacked the store, plundered houses, then waited for the train to arrive from St. Joseph (bound for St. Louis), which they stopped and ordered thirty two sick federal soldiers en route to the hospital in St. Louis to descend from the train.

Then, they stood them in a row and the two James boys loading their pistols as fast as they emptied, shot all of them to death. Source: An article from The Bourbon News, Millersburg, Kentucky, April 18, 1882.