



### Historians Corner, Paul R Petersen

Paul is the Author of *Quantrill of Missouri*, *Quantrill in Texas*, *Quantrill at Lawrence* and *Lost Souls of the Lost Township*. Petersen is a retired U.S. Marine Corps master sergeant and a highly decorated infantry combat veteran of the Vietnam War, Operation Desert Storm, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is a member of the William Clarke Quantrill Society, the James-Younger Gang Association, the Sons of the American Revolution, and the Jackson County and Missouri State Historical Societies.

## The Early Upbringing of Frank and Jesse James

Robert Sallee James, father of Frank and Jesse James, was born in Licksillet, Kentucky. He was the son of John W. James and Mary "Polly" James Poor. His father, John, was a highly respected Baptist minister and farmer from Goochland County, Virginia. Robert's grandfather, William James came to Virginia, from England in the late 18th century and fought with Light Horse Harry Lee during the Revolutionary War. Through his mother, Robert was also a descendant of the Jamestown Society, qualifying ancestor Dr. John Woodson. Woodson was an Oxford educated surgeon who arrived at Jamestown, Virginia in April 1619.

In 1838, Robert enrolled in Georgetown College in Georgetown, Kentucky. Georgetown College is a small, Christian college chartered in 1829. It was the first Baptist college west of the Allegheny Mountains. In 1839 Robert was ordained as a Baptist minister. He graduated in 1843 with honors and a Bachelor of Arts degree. While in Kentucky at a revival meeting Robert met Zerelda Elizabeth Cole, who was living with her mother's relatives where, although she was not a Catholic, she was enrolled in a Catholic girls school in Lexington, Kentucky. They married on December 28, 1841. The family soon relocated to Clay County, Missouri, where Zerelda's mother and stepfather were living nearby. Robert commuted back to Kentucky and eventually received a Master of Arts from Georgetown. He was considered a gifted student and a skilled orator.

Robert and Zerelda had four children, Alexander Franklin, Robert, Jesse and Susan Lavenia. Robert James became a noted preacher in Missouri. He was among the founders of William Jewell College in 1849 in Liberty, Missouri, and was the pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Clay County, which went on to become the largest Baptist church in northwest Missouri. He also

started the congregation of the Providence and Pisgah Baptist churches in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, all of which are still in operation today. He was known for his passionate sermons and his ability to attract new members to the congregation. He received no income for his preaching and supported his family by raising hemp on his 275 acre farm. Besides Robert's evangelistic work north of the Missouri River he often was invited to preach to the congregation of the Big Cedar Missionary Baptist Church located in the Valley of the Little Blue in Jackson County, Missouri, eight miles south of Independence, where Quantrill recruited a large number of men like John and Ed Koger, John and Jabez McCorkle, Thomas Harris, John Wigginton, John Jarrette, Richard Maddox, William Moore, George Shepherd; Frank, Joseph and Thomas Lea, and the Flanery and Shepherd brothers. The church was established by William Hagan and Henry Washington Younger, father of Cole and James Younger,

Shortly after the birth of his daughter, Susan, and feeling the call of God to be an evangelist to the gold miners in California during the Gold Rush, Robert James traveled to California to preach. Sadly, in just a few short weeks he contracted typhoid, and died on August 18, 1850. His grave has never been officially identified and no marker exists for him today. Robert's death left his family saddled with debts and many of his possessions, including his slaves, were auctioned off to pay the families bills.

Though Jesse's father died when he was only three years old both he and his brother Frank continued to be raised in a Christian home. Frank was known to be serious and straightforward, fond of books and constantly reading the classics often quoting large sections of Shakespeare. Neither he nor his brother,

Jesse were ever known to drink. "A man's a fool to drink," Frank said. "It takes away his money and his brains and does him no good in any way."

Jesse emulated his brother's reading habits, but instead of Shakespeare his favorite book was the Bible, which he memorized and quoted frequently. Jesse was a member of his father's Baptist church and even sang in the church choir. His favorite hymn was "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." He was a devout believer and was never known to swear or use foul language. When he first joined Quantrill, as Jesse was cleaning his pistol it accidentally went off shooting off the tip of the third finger . of his left hand. Rather than cursing Jesse reportedly uttered, "That's the dod-dingus pistol I ever saw!" After that the nickname "Dingus" stuck with him.

Both Frank and Jesse found themselves surrounded by fellow Baptists in Quantrill's company. Quantrill was known to be a regular attendee of the Oak Grove Baptist Church where Hiram Bowman was the pastor. A large group of his men were members of the West Fork of the Little Blue Baptist Church in the Brooking Township of Jackson County and many others from eastern Jackson County were members of the Six Mile Baptist Church near Sibley, Missouri.

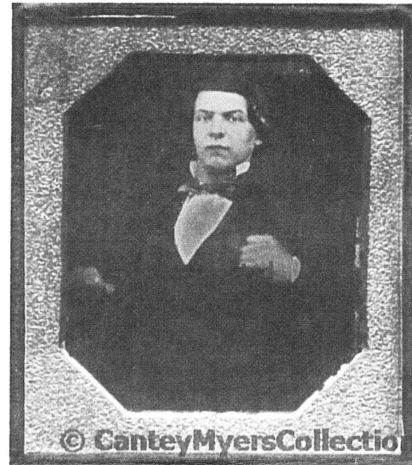
At the end of the war when Jesse attempted to surrender under a flag of truce with a group of guerrillas led by Lieutenant Archie Clement to Union authorities in Lexington, Missouri they were fired on by Federal soldiers. Jesse was wounded and lay for two days before a local farmer found him and took him to Reverend Hiram Bowman's home in Oak Grove before being carried to his mother to be cared for.

Being part of Quantrill's guerrillas kept Frank and Jesse from being able to return to their home and peaceful pursuits after the war. Hounded by Federal vigilantes intent on murdering the brothers and plundering their property the James boys were driven from their home and forced to go into hiding and seek revenge by other than honorable means. Even while hiding out from the authorities while visiting old guerrilla friends in Kentucky, like Donnie and Bud Pence and Bob, Tom and Ike

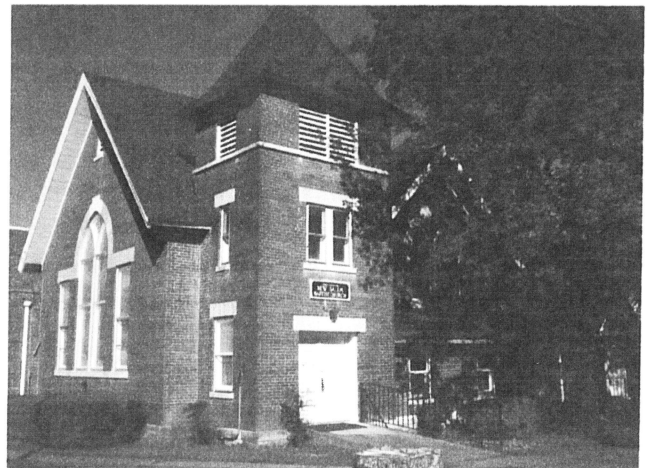
Hall, Frank James taught Sunday School at the New Salem Baptist Church in Deatsville near Samuel's Depot.

Since the death of the James brothers their lives have become the unwanted brunt of myriad, sensationalized, Hollywood, stereotypical, wild-west outlaw books and movies. But a look at historical fact shows that the truth is often stranger than fiction.

**Article by Paul R. Petersen.**



**Photo of Robert Sallee James from CanteyMyersCollection.com.**



**Photo of New Salem Baptist Church from authors collection.**