

OTTERVILLE TRAIN ROBBERY BY JAMES GANG RECALLED

Missouri newspapers of the past few months have carried articles reviving legends which had accumulated around the exploits of the James Boys. This revival, no doubt, was occasioned by the moving picture "Jesse James" filmed over a year ago in Southwest Missouri in the vicinity of Pineville.

An incident which many may have forgotten is the train robbery at Otterville, 63 years ago.

A "History of Howard & Cooper Counties—1883," gives the following account of the Train Robbery which created so much comment at the time:

"On the night of the 13th of July, 1876, a passenger train on the Missouri Pacific railroad, was robbed about one mile east of Otterville, in Otterville township, by a band of eight men. Their names were Frank and Jesse James, Cole and John Younger, Bill Chadwell, Clell Miller, Charley Pitts and Hobbs Kerry.

"After opening the safe of the United States express company, and the safe of the Adams express company, the robbers proceeded the same night to a point on Flat Creek, where they divided the treasure, which consisted of about \$22,000 in money, and other valuables, such as jewelry, bonds, coupons and exchange, which were being carried east by the express companies.

"They, however, took nothing with them but the money. At the point above named, on Flat Creek, Hobbs Kerry, one of the band, separated from his companions. Hiding his saddle and bridle in the woods, he turned his horse loose on the prairie and, going to Windsor, took the Missouri, Kansas and Texas train to his home at Granby, Mo., where some weeks after he was arrested.

"He confessed the crime and guided the officers of the law to the place where the robbers had divided the money, and where was found much of the jewelry, and other valuables taken by them, being such property as they could not well use, and were afraid to have on their persons.

"At the November term, 1876, of the Cooper circuit court at Boonville, Hobbs Kerry was indicted, and at the April term, in 1877, Kerry was tried convicted and sentenced to four years' imprisonment in the penitentiary. James H. Johnston, prosecuted, and John R. Walker, defended."

"Immediately after the train robbery at Otterville, the robbers were joined by one of the Younger brothers, the youngest who supplied the place of Kerry, and all proceeded to Northfield, Minn., where on the morning of the 7th day of September, 1876, in the attempt to rob the bank at that place, Bill Chadwell, Clell Miller and Charlie Pitts, were killed outright, and the three Youngers were wounded and captured, and served sentences in the Minnesota penitentiary.

The James brothers made their escape, and were engaged in many robberies subsequent to that time. Jesse James was killed by the Ford boys (Bob and Charley), on the third of April, 1882. Frank James, afterwards, and in September, 1882, surrendered himself to Governor Crittendon, of Missouri, in the executive office, in Jefferson City.

He quietly walked into the Governor's office, announced who he was, unbuckled his belt containing his pistols and cartridges, and handing them to the Governor, surrendered.

Another interesting point of interest in the vicinity of Otterville, is the existence of a ridge of old earthen embankments, which may be distinctly seen from Highway No. 50, a short distance east of the town. These embankments are still in an excellent state of preservation despite 78 years of existence without care or attention.

These elevations form what local citizens of the community say are breastworks thrown up by Federal soldiers which had assembled along the west banks of the Lamine River to protect a wooden bridge at the then terminus of the Missouri Pacific railroad completed to Otterville in the year 1859 or 1860.

Here, 40,000 Federal soldiers and confederate sympathizers had gathered in June 1862, after martial law had been proclaimed but a sanguinary conflict was narrowly averted it is said, by the level-headed judgment of followers of Captain Alexander of the Confederates and Colonel Brown of the Federals.

After a parley, it was agreed that the Federal troops be withdrawn from Otterville if the Confederates would disband which they did. Colonel Brown accompanied his soldiers to Jefferson City and the "home guards" returned to their farms. Thus the tension was relieved and the loss of the lives of many Missourians doubtless saved had the impending conflict occurred.

Senator J. H. Gunn, an Otterville banker and native of the community, believes the locality of sufficient historical interest to justify a commemorative marker.

Second District Congressman William L. Nelson never overlooks an opportunity to extol the virtues of Missouri country-cured ham and bacon.

The current issue of The Country Gentleman quotes him as saying that "So convinced am I as to the superiority of the product of Missouri smokehouses that I shall be happy to see arranged a national exhibit of the best hams that the various states can offer."

Congressman Nelson, a former Cooper County editor from Buncepton, now of Columbia, has contributed to the glory of the state as a producer of fine cured hams on his own farm and as one of the founders of the Missouri Farmers' Ham and Bacon Show at the State Fair at Sedalia, and he is still the reigning judge at this annual event, in existence for more than twenty years.

It is not merely artistry in the curing of hams, he says, that accounts for the excellence of the Missouri produce but skill in the breeding, care and feeding of the hogs as well.