

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 9, 1955

### **The Jesse James House**

We made the journey by motor car to Paso Robles last week. The day was perfect for such a jaunt, the sun shone brightly on the hills and on the freshly plowed fields as we traveled the River Road to King City, from where we took the main highway.

These back roads are so much more interesting and adventuresome than the highways and the new freeways where the rush of traffic prevents one from taking time to see the beauty of nature in its fullness. The hills are now completely green and much of the farm land is already showing the neat long rows of lettuce, beans and other products which will all too soon be harvested and off to market---so fast do the days, weeks and months pass.

Make the trip into the country now, dear reader, and see for yourself how beautiful our Monterey County is in the month of March.

We were on our way to Paso Robles with a twofold purpose in mind, to see the Jesse James house there and to call on Eric Lundgren, a collector of guns and other fascinating items—in other words to interview a collector to whom other collectors go for advice, appraisals, information or additions to their collections. The experience we enjoyed was well worth the motoring miles we traveled to find out that Mr. Lundgren was truly an enthusiastic and knowing collector.

We were not so fortunate with the Jesse James House, our second objective—it had been torn down a few weeks ago to make room for progress—and a super motel is being built on the site.

We thought of Allen Knight and his marine collection as we viewed the several items which Mr. Lundgren had gathered together. One of the most interesting was a log book of the ship *Fanny* bound for San Francisco in 1849. With Capt. Coffin in command, the ship sailed from Holmes Hole on Aug. 22, 1849 and arrived in San Francisco on Feb. 22, 1850, taking 183 days to make the sailing. The log has two primitive water color pictures drawn with ink of the vessel and the land or islands they passed as they sailed to and from San Francisco. The captain died of black jaundice on Oct. 25, 1849 and was

buried at sea, the first officer taking charge and going on with the log.

We also inspected a true work of art in a whale gun with harpoon attached, which Mr. Lundgren allowed us to bring back to Monterey for display in the Old Custom House. It had been made in San Francisco in the early days and was used up and down the coast by the whalers, who had a prosperous business in Monterey at one time.

Our search began for the Jesse James House, about which we had read in a recent issue of the *Museum Graphic*, published in St. Joseph, Mo. The house, as pictured in the *Graphic*, had been a two story wooden building with a small front portico, surrounded by a number of huge, oak trees, most of which had been sacrificed for the building of a modern motel.

Jesse and Frank James, had known the house. It was built some time between 1866 and 1868 by their uncle, Drury W. James. Being sought by the Missouri state militia, they had, as refugees, accepted employment as vaqueros on the La Panza ranch some miles east of Paso Robles. Jesse came to town twice a week to take the hot Sulphur baths for which the place was noted even in those days. He had hopes that the baths would have a healing effect upon an old gunshot wound from which he suffered.

The 30,000 acre La Panza cattle ranch east of Paso Robles owned by Drury W. James and John D Thompson as partners and the former for a time also owned and operated the famous resort health hotel there.

Bartlett Boder, the author of "Jesse James Was a Vaquero" in the *Graphic*, told of an interview he had had with the daughter of Drury W. James, in which she reported, "While working under Charles Morehouse, the manager of the La Panza rancho, Jesse and Frank James often rode the range with a cowhand named Scotty who was able to shoot jackrabbits with his revolver, using either hand." She also told the reporter that Jesse James would never ride in the center of a group of riders but always kept to the outside.

La Panza ranch was sold in 1869 and Thompson returned to Kentucky. The James boys returned to Missouri, sailing around the Horn from San Francisco, their passage paid for by their Paso Robles uncle. Jesse James was shot to death in St. Joseph on April 3, 1882.