



CHASING DOWN THE JAMES GANG

By: Joe Martelle

Jesse and Frank James are two of the most fabled and legendary figures in U.S. history. The Wild West outlaws, whose folklore is recounted anywhere from being cold blooded killers to being the cowboy equivalent to Robin Hood, have seemingly stolen the heart of American history. Does Eastern Ontario also get bragging rights to having a link to the most famous bandits of all time? Local legend in several South Grenville communities says we do.

Did Frank James really hide out in Mallorytown?

Media reports of Frank James hiding out in the region surfaced in the early 1980's. Those accounts revolve around local claims that in 1882, in the wake of his Brother Jesse's assassination, and while on the run from U.S. authorities, the elder

James sibling was harboured by a local guide and reputed rum-runner, John Gibson.

Lifelong resident Historian David Wells, is the author of *The History of Mallorytown: Fact, Folklore and Fiction*. He confirms that the James story has always been part of the local culture. "I'm 67 years old and never really lived anywhere but in this township. Back when I was a kid you always heard legends of stuff, and rumours of stuff, and Frank James's name would always come up...because I hung around with the kids who lived in the house he was supposed to have stayed in."

While researching his book, Wells discovered a similar account about a local resident. "His great grandfather was a Gibson who owned that brick house

Top: Pic of Gibson house in Mallorytown which was a tavern where he hid for a year; Right: Frank James circa 1898; Far Right: Did American outlaw Frank James really frequent the hamlet of Brouville?

in Mallorytown, where Frank James was supposed to have stayed. The story goes, and what this guy said, is that when he was a kid he was talking to a Gibson lady. She was a relative of his, and she can remember seeing Frank James ride into town from the west on Number Two Highway on the first motorcycle they had ever seen in the village. He came to visit this Gibson, (who was) her uncle or father, because he apparently stayed there with him when he was running away from bank robberies in the States. He stayed for about a year, they said, in this room upstairs. This Gibson guy was a rum-runner. Then James went back to the states and served about eight years for bank robbery. He came back over to visit one time, apparently he was headed down towards the Cardinal/Brouville area to buy horses."

Wells is not the only Historian to raise accounts of the possibility of Frank James being in this area of the province. The 1995 book *Edwardsburgh Township History*, authored by a group of local Historians, also makes mention of the James

connection. In this account, Frank James is reputed to have visited the Anderson Farm in Brouseville on multiple occasions. Mr. Anderson was a breeder and dealer of race horses. Legend has it that James spent many nights as a guest of the family while watching local races and purchasing horses. The horses were said to have been ferried across the St. Lawrence, back into the U.S.

Eric F. James is a co-founder of The James Preservation Trust and one of the world's leading authorities on the genealogy

and history of the Jesse James family. Contacted at his Kentucky residence, Eric could neither confirm nor deny any truth to whether Frank James ever visited Eastern Ontario. He did offer a link to the James family and Canadian horses via his research on a fellow historian and author. "William Preston Magnum III wrote the book *My Kingdom for a Horse*. A review of Preston's book doesn't show anything about Frank in Canada. It does, however, show horse sales in Canada during the Civil War years by R. A. Alexander, whose

farm sits behind the ordinary where Frank's mother was born. This is the same period when Quantrill and Frank came through this area stealing horses from that farm."

Did one of American history's most colourful characters really spend time in Eastern Ontario or is this just a rural urban legend of epic proportion? In this case, perhaps the truth is in the mind of the believer. [LH](#)

