

Gallery Guide

Large Lithographs

The three large lithographs in this exhibition, done in the mid 30's, were done in preparation for the mural panels Benton created for the Missouri State Capitol. The three: *Frankie and Johnny*, *Huck Finn*, and *Jesse James*, are legends/stories as deeply imbedded in American association as were the saint and secular tales repeated time and again by the early European print makers. There fore, to anyone who is a product of America, these works retell in pictures what has almost too often been repeated in song and story. These are not illustrations, but substitutes for the texts themselves. They are not perfect but their imperfections may be virtues. Benton's exaggerations, confused compositions and forced contrasts may bring intellectual criticism but these over-statements are in tune with the themes.



With a gal named Nellie Bly
If he's your man, he's doin' you
wrong Frankie looked over the
transom
And much to her surprise
There on a cot sat Johnny
Making love to Nellie Bly
She said, "He's my man
But he's doin' me wrong"

1. FRANKIE AND JOHNNY

Lyrics Performed by Johnny Cash

Frankie and Johnny were sweethearts
Lordy how they did love
They swore to be true to each other
As true as the stars above
He was her man
He wouldn't do her wrong

Frankie went down to the corner
Just to get a bucket of beer
She said Mr. bartender
Has my lovin' Johnny been here?
He's my man, he wouldn't do me wrong

I ain't gonna tell you no story
I ain't gonna tell you no lie
Johnny left here 'bout an hour ago

Frankie pulled back her komono
Pulled out her old .44
Root-a-toot-toot that gal did shoot
Right through that hardwood door
She shot her man

Because he was doin' her wrong

Roll out your rubber tired buggy
Roll out your rubber tired hack
She's taking her man to the
graveyard
But she ain't gonna' bring him back
She shot her man
Because he was doin' her wrong

This story has no moral
This story has no end
This story goes to show
That you can't put your trust in men
She shot her man
Because he was doin' her wrong



2. HUCK FINN

Benton wrote about his depiction of Huck Finn in *An Artist in America*:

There is something about flowing water that makes for easy views. Down the river is freedom from consequence. All one has to do is jump in a skiff at night and by the morrow be beyond the reach of trouble. In the past this was a sure method of ridding one-self of difficulty, and fellows who had been too handy with the knife or gun or who found their children too many or their wives too troublesome could float off into a new world and begin again. It is not only for those of reckless or antisocial proclivities, however, that the river waters are suggestive of release. Their currents sing of freedom to everyone. The thought of floating effortlessly away on running water has an irresistible charm whether or not there is any real purpose or end set to it. In Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain has caught the spirit of this, and back of the adventures of Huck and Jim and those with whom they meet there is always the moving river and the promises and hopes that lie around its unfolding bends.



3. JESSE JAMES

Jesse James full name is Jesse Woodson James. He was born in Missouri, of Reverend Robert and Zerelda James, on September 5, 1847. By the time Jesse was eight, his mother had remarried twice more. From the third marriage, Jesse gained two stepbrothers and two stepsisters, in addition to the two natural brothers he had. He was skilled with horses and a natural leader. He was never a very skilled marksman.

In 1861, Jesse's brother Frank left home to fight for the rebel cause. Jesse wanted to join him, but it wasn't until 1863 when he joined Quantrill's raiders. Quantrill didn't really want him, but "Bloody" Bill Anderson took Jesse under his wing. Somehow Jesse acquired the nickname of Dingus. He

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was part of the Centralia massacre in 1864. He is also known to have been a spy for the rebel army. Jesse was wounded towards the end of the Civil War. He took a bullet through one of his lungs. His cousin Zerelda Mimms nursed him back to health. His recuperation was slow.

Frank and Jesse had talked about forming a gang with Cole Younger, but Jesse was not with them when they committed their first robbery in February of 1866 at Liberty, Missouri. Jesse didn't join them until October. Frank and Cole Younger got about \$57,000 from that job. But it wasn't until March 1867 that they pulled their first job together. They tried to rob a bank at Savannah. All three aimed at the bank president, but all were poor shots, and only one bullet barely grazed him. This job failed. Two months later a man and his fifteen-year-old son were found dead, thought to have been killed by Jesse. He was very attached to his mother and usually hid out at her house after pulling a job.

In March of 1868, the James brothers and Younger brothers robbed the banking house of Nimrod & Cin in Russellville, Kentucky. In 1869, they robbed a Richmond, Missouri Bank. That same year they robbed the Daviess Savings Bank at Gallatin, Missouri. On April 29, 1872, five men, including the James, robbed a bank in Columbia, Kentucky.

Jesse is thought to be the mastermind behind robbing railroad express cars. Their first target was the Chicago and Rock Island express near Adair, Iowa, on July 21, 1873. They stopped the train by removing a portion of the track. Jesse killed the engineer during that robbery. They got \$2,000 from the safe and the valuables of the passengers. Two months later Frank and Jesse stole \$10,000 from a Kansas City fairground. By that time the Pinkertons were after them. Pinkerton detective J. W. Whicher was killed while pursuing the James brothers, allegedly by Jesse and Frank. Pinkerton sent more agents after them.

On January 31, 1874, they robbed the Iron Mountain Railroad train in Wayne County, Missouri. While hiding out in Roscoe, Missouri, the Pinkertons caught John and Jim Younger. During the gunplay that resulted in their capture, John was shot in the neck and killed by Captain Louis J. Lull of the Pinkertons. This occurred on March 17, 1874.

On January 25, 1875, they laid siege to the Samuel's home. James and Frank got away. Sometime during the shootout, a device similar to a Molotov cocktail was thrown in the window, where it hit Mrs. Zerelda Samuels, which caused her to lose most of her right arm. Half-brother Archie was killed at nine years old.

Three months later Jesse married his cousin Zerelda, after a courtship of nine years. She always knew he was an outlaw. Others had asked for her hand, but she wanted Jesse. They would eventually have two children, Mary and Jesse. Frank married Annie Ralston about the same time. They eloped and her father had no idea who she was married to. It wasn't until a posse showed up at the Ralston house that he realized who his daughter had married.

The following year, a disastrous robbery attempt at Northfield, Minnesota, resulted in many of those in the James gang losing their lives. Unlike many of their previous escapades, this time the citizens fought back. As they approached the bank, several citizens thought they looked suspicious and alarmed the sheriff. The outlaws rode up and down the street firing randomly to try to get people to stay away while they robbed the bank. Inside the bank, the three tellers resisted handing over the money. One even escaped out the bank. Outside many were fighting the other gang members. The owner of a nearby hardware store killed gang member William Stiles. Henry M. Wheeler, a medical student, killed Clel Miller. He also wounded Bob Younger. The remaining robbers rode away, getting absolutely nothing for their efforts.

Hundreds of volunteers joined posses to go after the gang. Stiles was most familiar with the territory and he was dead. They were also short on horses. Two men had to share one horse. They were cornered at Medalia, Minnesota, where they shot their way out of a gunfight. During this fight, another gang member was killed and three more were wounded. They were jailed at Faribault, Minnesota. They pled guilty and were sentenced to life imprisonment at Stillwater State

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Penitentiary. Jesse and Frank made good their escape, but had to lay low for over three years. Jesse lived under the name of Howard during this time. He kept moving and took up residence across the country in Tennessee, California, and Colorado. For awhile he worked a rich strike in California Gulch in Colorado with Frank and the Ford brothers.

In October 1879, he was back to his old tricks with a new gang. They robbed a Chicago and Alton train. They robbed four more trains in 1881, the last one at Glendale, Missouri. Two of their gang members were captured after that one. After that the James gang was never heard from again. Jesse was killed by Bob Ford, a gang member, on April 3, 1882, reportedly for the reward money. They made sure it was really him by identifying war time wounds on his body. After Jesse was killed his guns and gun belt were auctioned off for fifteen dollars. He had owned a Colt .45 Peacemaker and a .45 Smith and Wesson Schofield. For years afterward, Jesse's mother sold many other guns claiming that they belonged to Jesse. They were obviously old relics she bought by the dozens to sell at outrageous prices. Frank turned himself in after Jesse's death. However, he was never convicted of anything.

For a long time there were rumors that Ford did not kill Jesse, that it was somewhere else. Jesse was thought to be living in Guthrie, Oklahoma as late as 1948 and that he died at Granbury, Texas. The real recipient of Ford's bullet, claim some stories, was a crook named Bigelow, reported to have been living with Jesse's wife at the time.