

"JESSE JAMES WAS MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER, AND HE IS BORN IN TEXAS" *Betty Dorsett Duke*

JESSE JAMES LIVED UNTIL 1943

To say I was skeptical of this story when I first wrote about it in the June 2000 *Montage* is an understatement. I was first alerted to it by Dr. James Courtney of Murray, who also had his doubts, but because it originated in a book written by a relative of his, Betty Dorsett Duke of Liberty Hill, Texas, Dr. Courtney was so fascinated he contacted me. The book is titled *Jesse James Lived and Died in Texas*. "After you read the book, you may not be so skeptical," Dr. Courtney said. He was right. And the more I have delved into the mystery since then, the more fascinated I have become.

Mrs. Duke, in the meantime has written another book. In 2007 she published *The Truth About Jesse James*, a 664 page book that is well annotated, with an extensive bibliography. It has enough twists and turns to match even O'Henry's best efforts, and is a fascinating read for anyone. It is available at www.jessejamestatexas.com, and includes many familiar outlaw names and some surprising discoveries about them. But this edition of *Montage* is concerned with Jesse James/James Courtney, and some startling new evidence that Mrs. Duke is correct — Jesse James did live and die in Texas.

The dust cover on her first book relates that as a child Betty Dorsett Duke often heard the family legend that her great-grandfather, James L. Courtney, of Blevins, Texas, was actually Jesse James. She discounted that as a tall

tale for most of her life, until she began researching family history and collecting family photos to find out more about her Native American roots. She believes her grandmother Courtney (Jesse James wife?) was half Choctaw Indian. When she talked with older relatives, some still hinted about the family "secret."

There was the trunk that had belonged to her great-grandfather which contained many unidentified photos. And a diary he kept in the

1870s, which he inadvertently signed "J. James" on one page. When she compared historically accepted photos of Jesse James and the James family in Missouri with the photos which belonged to "Grandpa," the shocking truth was revealed. Facial identification experts at the Visionics Corporation verified that the people in her family photos were the same people pictured in James family photos. How did it happen?

The mystery she has unraveled has made believers out of doubters — and may lead historians to tell the story of Jesse James with a new twist! He died in Texas in 1943 when he was ninety-six years old.

Recently Betty (I feel free to call her by her first name now) sent me this e-mail"

Hello Chuck:

I've had a stroke of good



James Lafayette Courtney, alias Jesse James. Courtesy family photo



fortune! My scanner bit the dust last week so I can't send a photo I won on EBay that provides strong evidence my family story is true about Jesse James being my great-grandfather, but I'm sending three attached copies of

it: a screenshot of the original; a copy of the screenshot which has been cropped; and a copy of the tintype (which is one of my old family photos of my great-grandfather) for comparison purposes to the EBay picture.

The EBay photo (on page 9) has typed around the edges that it is reversed. Frank James is the man in the white suit seated on the ground and the tall man with the dark mustache, also seated on the ground, is Jesse James (who is an identical match to the tintype (page 9) of my great grandfather.)

The woman sitting between Frank and Jesse is not their sister but Annie Raiston, Frank's wife. Also pictured is Frank and Jesse's mother (Zerelda Cole James Simms Samuel; (her husband) Dr. Rueben Samuel, Frank and Jesse's step father; and Mary Ellen Barron (Jesse James wife and my great grand-mother).

I think this is Annie and Frank's wedding photo and I think they were married in Blevins, Texas because I have pictures of his original home and it looks like the

A Pharmacist you can talk to.



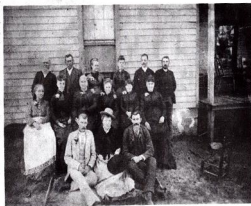
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FROM BETTIE'S RESEARCH FOR THE JAMES AFFAIRS



RESEARCH COURTESY OF THE TEXAS ARCHIVES. THE SMALL MAN WITH WHITE HAIR, GRANDPA'S MOTHER, WAS A GREAT

Issue in the EBay picture.

The story in the 2000 edition of *Montage* began with Betty seeking information about her grandmother, not her great-grandfather. "She was said to be half Choctaw Indian." It was while researching this possibility that Mrs. Duke "discovered my parents had been telling the truth about Grandpa's identity all along. I found a wealth of information about him, including numerous old photos, old diaries, documents and letters that sparked my memory of all the stories I had heard about him.

"Daddy said, for example, that when someone would ride up to Grandpa's house after dark, he would blow out all the coal-oil lanterns and lie down on the floor in front of the doorway. Even though I was only seven when I heard the story, I thought that was odd behavior. Daddy also told me that Grandpa buried gold and silver in different locations, and that he left maps with encoded messages and symbols to document their location.

"Grandpa's shooting prowess was legendary. He could shoot the head off a chicken while riding his horse full speed. He was far from being the ordinary farmer he wanted everybody to believe he was. I decided to compare the



The author, Betty Dorset Duke, at her Texas home.

old family photos of Grandpa Courtney to historically accepted photos of Jesse James and his family. Words cannot express the astonishment I felt when I realized that the family photos and known photos of the James family



Above: Zeeelda James Samuel, mother of Jesse James. Her missing right arm is covered. Right: Family photograph of James Courtney's mother. Her missing right arm is covered.



matched!

"One family photo of Grandpa Courtney's mother matched a photo of Jesse James' mother, Zeeelda James Samuel, right down to identical dresses. Even more remarkable, another family photo showed that Grandpa's mother was missing an arm. Jesse James mother was also missing an arm.

"I knew from these photos that Grandpa Courtney's mother and Jesse James' mother were one and the same. How many women could be running around Missouri



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looking just alike, wearing the same dress and missing an arm?

"My family photos match known photos of Jesse James, Zerelda James Samuel, Dr. Reuben Samuel (Jesse's step-father), Archie Payton Samuel (Jesse's half brother), Zee Mims (purported to be Jesse's wife) and Tim Howard, a.k.a. Jesse Edwards James (purportedly Jesse James' son).

"Even though I could see that the two sets of photos matched I knew they would need to be examined by experts in facial identification to lend credibility to my claim.

"A noted forensic artist at the Texas Department of Public Safety examined them first and was impressed with the similarities. Arrangements were made for the family photo of Grandpa's mother and the known photo of Jesse's mother to be scanned through a computer so sensitive it can lift hand prints off material. The computer verified what I already knew: the print and pattern of the two dresses were identical.

"Next I contacted the Austin Police Department's Forensic Multimedia Lab, where supervisor William McCann agreed to visually examine both sets of photos. He concluded that the "faces in question matched up with a high degree of certainty."

"Visionics Corporation in New Jersey, world leaders in face recognition technology, conducted the final and most thorough examination of the photos. Dr. Joseph J. Atick and Megan G. Torney issued this statement: 'After examining the photography through computerized matching analytical as well as visual inspection techniques, we conclude with reasonable confidence that the faces in acquisition match each other and belong to the same individual.'

So who was the victim of Robert Ford in the shooting in St. Joseph, Missouri? Whose body was buried in the grave bearing Jesse James' name?

Mrs. Duke has no answer to that question, but in her new book she does challenge the reader to consider possibilities he may have never pondered before. As Mrs. Duke points out, tabloid journalism was alive and well even in Jesse James' day, and operating in the same way.

"No one knows the complete story of Jesse James. Much of the historical version of his life and death is based on hearsay from the very individuals who were trying to protect him."

Mrs. Duke completely rejects the DNA testing in 1995 that has been held up as proof that the Missouri burial site is the final resting place of the iconic outlaw. In both her

books she goes to great extremes to disprove their conclusions.

"However," she says, "Legitimate DNA testing can tell if he is buried in that questioned grave. But until this happens the traditional version of his death is nothing but folk lore. Jesse James may have died just as history reports but if he didn't the domino effect begins — Zee Mims was not his wife; Jesse Edwards James was not his son; Mary James was not his daughter, and so on down the line.

"A man who was capable of eluding capture for twenty-five years could also be capable of pulling off his biggest heist ever — getting away with his own murder.

"It is historical fact that in 1879 Jesse James tried faking his death at Short Creek, Joplin, Missouri so why wouldn't he try it again?"

As Mrs. Duke challenges in the introduction to *The Truth about Jesse James*, "Saddle up!!! Together we'll retrace Jesse's discovery trail as I have replaced the fiction often told with the facts... You decide, perhaps you will catch a glimpse of a great mystery solved as I have; and maybe those rich insights will bring to you a new understanding of Jesse James' life in the old wild west. Most of all, for Jesse's sake, the real story of his life and death, never told before, unfolds.

Ride with me to a time, a place, and find **THE TRUTH ABOUT JESSE JAMES**.

Betty Dorsett Duke

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