

## Welcome Readers!

Years ago, I wondered why so little was written about the woman who married the most infamous outlaw of the Old West. I became interested enough to dig into what I could find to learn more about her. As bits and pieces of Zee's life were uncovered, an idea grew. I wanted to flesh out the skeleton of her story and turn it into a book. *I am Mrs. Jesse James* is the result. I couldn't be more excited to introduce you to my debut novel, a project that took more than five years to bring to fruition.

I'm incredibly grateful for the reception the book has been given from readers and book clubs; and humbled by the honors it's received, such as Western Fictioneers' Best First Novel of 2018 and the Walter Williams Major Work Award.

The James family is indeed fascinating, and one-hundred forty years after Jesse's death, the public continues to hunger for more on the man... and the woman behind the man.

Thank you so much for choosing to read my book. I hope you enjoy the journey!

With warmest regards,

*Pat*



## Discussion Questions for I am Mrs. Jesse James

(Printable-with two bonus questions!)

1. The story is told from Zee's point of view. Do her observations change or confirm your opinion about her husband? Why?
2. How does Zee's relationship with her parents evolve over time? Do you think this is typical of young people today?
3. Family and friends in the novel keep secrets from the outside world to present a united front. Why do you think they remained silent and loyal even when they didn't approve of Frank's and Jesse's activities?
4. After the war, Jesse is determined to get revenge for the North's treatment of the South. Do you think many Southerners during Reconstruction agreed?
5. What events helped Zee to justify Jesse's behavior? What events caused her to question it?
6. How do you feel about Governor Crittenden's strategy to facilitate the murder of Jesse James? Did the agreement change the lives of Charlie and Bob Ford?
7. It appears likely that Zee may have suffered from depression. As a society, have we improved our perception of mental illness, or is it still, in some ways, the same?
8. Zee comes to blame herself over Jesse's choices. Do you think she could have done something to change her husband's behavior?
9. Jesse's mother remained an important influence on Jesse throughout his life. Do you think this impacted on his decisions and Zee's relationship with him?
10. One theme of this novel is redemption. Did Zee fully come to terms with what happened during her marriage? If so, how?
11. What surprised you most about Zee and Jesse's story?
12. Did this book give you any new insights into the American Civil War?



## James Family Trivia

(Printable)

1. **Jesse Edwards James**, the son of Jesse and Zee James, eventually became a lawyer, with a practice in California. Jesse married Stella McGown, a young woman who attended every day of his trial after he was accused of committing a train robbery. Following Jesse's acquittal, the couple wed. They had four daughters.
2. **Mary Susan James Barr**, the daughter of Jesse and Zee James, wed Henry Lafayette Barr in 1901, a year after her older brother's marriage. They had three sons and one daughter. The family lived in a sprawling home across from the James farm in Kearney, but any mention of the outlaw Jesse James was strictly forbidden in the Barr household.
3. **Robert "Bob" Franklin James**, the only child of Frank and Annie James, moved with his wife, Mae, to the farm in Kearney after Frank's death. At one time, Bob operated a small golf course on the property, and for a \$5 fee, would play a round with guests.
4. **Zerelda Cole James Simms Samuel**, the matriarch of the James family, received a lifetime railroad pass for her and her kin after much negative publicity following the deadly Pinkerton raid on the James farm. She frequently "adopted" friends to travel with her. The railroad apparently decided not to object.
5. **Dr. Reuben "Pappy" Samuel**, the stepfather of Frank and Jesse James, was never the same after being repeatedly hanged by the Federal militia during the Civil War. His condition worsened as years passed, until he was finally committed to State Hospital for the Insane Number 2 in St. Joseph, Missouri, where he remained until his death seven years later.
6. **Jesse James Under the Black Flag** is a low-budget film made in 1920 by a studio known as "Mesco Pictures". The studio hoped to capitalize on the public's unending interest in Jesse James. To finance the movie, stock was sold to various friends and relatives of the James family. Filmed in the Kansas City area, the son of Jesse James played the part of both his father and himself. Unfortunately, the film was a poorly done disaster, and quickly tanked. According to his children, Jesse used his earnings and personal assets to repay the investors.

