

Long transcripts of the newspaper accounts...but only some of them because this was really big news at the time and was probably national news.

Iowa Train Robbery on the Rock Island

SITE OF THE FIRST TRAIN ROBBERY IN THE WEST, COMMITTED BY THE NOTORIOUS
JESSE JAMES AND HIS GANG OF OUTLAWS
JULY 21, 1873.

Jesse James and the Rock Island Lines by James and Lucille Sampson

The life of the Rock Island Lines contains many firsts and interesting stories but the lines' brush with the James Gang marked a day in history.

Jesse James, fabled outlaw of post-Civil War days, cut his teeth in the business of train robbery by wrecking, robbing and looting a Rock Island Lines train on July 21, 1873, near Adair, Iowa.

The gang robbed the express messenger of cash and relieved the passengers of their watches, cash and jewelry. It was one of the first recorded train robberies west of the Mississippi and expanded Jesse James and his gang's operations from his specialty of bank holdups to train robbery.

It was about 8:30 P.M. when Rock Island Lines passenger train No. 2 was climbing a steep grade and approaching a sharp curve. The train, made up of two Pullman sleeping cars, five coaches and an express-baggage car was about four miles west of Adair.

Near the end of the curve the James gang lay ready with a rope tied to a rail they had pried loose. As the train rounded the curve the engineer, John Rafferty, saw the rope tied to the rail and immediately reversed his engine. However, the train ran into the gap and turned on its side, killing Rafferty and injuring the fireman.

The locomotive tender and two baggage cars were thrown from the track. Out of the bushes came the outlaws firing their guns in the air and causing panic among the crewmen and passengers. Jesse and his brother, Frank, with .44's cocked, confronted the express messenger. He quickly opened the safe, was tied and thrown into a corner.

The passengers, slightly injured in the accident, were confronted by armed men masked in full Klux Klan garb. Panic set in with women and children screaming and crying and men hiding their cash, watches and jewelry. All the loot was dumped into bags and the robbers rode off, uttering a rebel yell characteristic of the Civil War period. They disappeared as quickly as they had come.

According to an account at the time, on July 22, William A. Smith, conductor of the ill fated train, testified today at the coroner's inquest on the body of John Rafferty, the engineer, who was killed when 'the train was wrecked 2-1/2 or three miles west of Adair station, and 600 or 700 feet east of Turkey Creek bridge.'

According to Smith's statement, "I was in the smoking car near the front end. From the noise I thought the engine was in the ditch, with one or two cars piled upon it. I was thrown under the seat in front of me. Don't remember which of the car I got out, but know that I reached the engine on the north side. I went forward to see what was up. The first person that I met was one of the masked men, near the baggage car door, who pointed a revolver in each hand toward me and told me to get back, firing at me at the same time. I backed down as far as the sleeping coach before I felt I was out of his way. There I met Dennis Foley, the fireman, who said 'Bill, Jack is dead'. The passengers were in a hubbub, and the women and children were crying. I told the passengers that I thought the masked men were trying to rob the baggage car and tried to borrow a revolver but failed.

"I could still see the man from where I was. I saw another passing up and down the opposite side of the train. I think he was firing at me, also. Some of the passengers asked me to get into the train as these men were firing at me and I would be the cause of some of them being killed. I then went into the sleeping car at the rear, still trying to get a revolver, urging the passengers to keep quiet, as these men were robbing the baggage car. I went out of the ladies' car, up the back and thence to the engine.

"Two balls passed through my clothing while I was on the bank. These shots came from the south side of the train. I did not see a man on the north side then; did not see or hear anything more of the masked men. After the passengers got quiet, I went forward to investigate the cause of the wreck. At the hind truck of the smoking car I found a fish-plate had been removed from the rail at the west end and the rope was passed under the south rail across the ditch and up on to the bank. A piece of the rope was also found which seemed to be taken from the other. It was a new rope, the size of a common bed cord.

"The west end of the rail, when I saw it, was only a few inches from the south rail. The hind trucks of the smoking car were still on the track. We had been running 18 or 20 mph."

Law enforcement agents formed a posse and went in pursuit of the robbers and in September, 1873, the Lafayette County Vigilantes Committee, "traced the train robbers to Johnson City, St. Clair County, and surrounded the house where they were supposed to be hiding, but the birds had flown. The band consisted of three Youngs and the James brothers. McCoy was not with them. There was a reported fight between the robbers and vigilantes and the wounding of one of the Youngs. It was believed that the robbers had started for Texas." The Rock Island Daily Argus, July 25, 1873, stated that "A telegram from Wells, Fargo & Co., at San Francisco, Cal. fixes the sealed package taken by the robbers at \$637, making the total amount secured by the robbers \$2,337. Of that, \$950 belonged to the CRI & P Company, and was being transported for them."

It had been at Council Bluffs, Iowa, the James-Younger gang learned that the No. 2 train of the Rock Island Lines would be carrying \$100,000 or more in gold on July 21, 1873, for eastern banks. At the last moment the shipment had been changed to a later train. The United States Express Co. offered a reward of \$500 each for the arrest of the railroad bandits. This made a total of \$12,000 to be paid to the man who produced the arrest and conviction of the villains. A total of \$5,000 was put up by the railroad company, \$3,500 by the state and \$3,500 by the express company.

Rock Island Daily Argus, Thursday, July 24, 1873: "Des Moines, July 23. - Nothing entirely reliable in regard to the pursuit and capture of the railroad robbers has been received at this place today. It is thought that they have crossed into Missouri and are making for the wilds of Mercer County in that state. The total amount taken by the robbers from the train is now known to be twenty three hundred and thirty seven dollars.

"The latest advices from the railroad robbers is that last evening between Creston and the State line, pushing for Missouri with the utmost speed. They passed a farm house last evening, about dark, their horses being well jaded. The company divided, one-half going in another direction. Dispatches received from the officers in pursuit, this morning, state that they have got between

them and Missouri, whither the robbers are going. They are evidently regular Missouri guerrillas, who understand the business they are in. The country is all alarmed and hundreds are in pursuit and it seems impossible for them to escape although they are mounted on horses of racing stock.

"The engines on the Rock Island road are draped in mourning for the death of Rafferty, the engineer killed at the railroad robbery."

The robbers were too wily for those in pursuit and headed for their hideout in the hills of western Missouri where they were fairly safe from lawmen among their friends and relatives.

Besides Jesse and his brother, Frank, the gang included Jim and Cole Younger, brothers; Robert Moore, whose home was in the Indian territory of Oklahoma; Comanche Tony, a Texan; and Cell Miller. Jesse Woodson James was born September 5, 1847, in Kearney County, Nebraska. Robert Ford, a member of the second James gang, murdered Jesse in his home, April 3, 1882, at the age of 34 years, 6 months, and 28 days.

This article appeared in in a special edition of the Rock Island Argus newspaper on August 7, 1985, called "Iron Horse Days", and was entitled "Jesse James got his start on Rock Island Lines". The article is used here with permission of the Rock Island Argus and the authors, James and Lucille Sampson of Rock Island, IL. Mr. and Mrs. Sampson are both members of the Rock Island County Historical Society, and Mrs. Sampson is still an officer there (February, 1997).

The Great Train Robbery

John Rafferty was a railroad engineer. He high-balled for the Rock Island Line with regular runs between Des Moines and Council Bluffs, Iowa, then back again. John and Ellen Crelly had two sons: Jack and James.

IOWA (DAILY) STATE REGISTER Tuesday morning, July 22, 1873

HELL-DEVILTRY

A.C., R.I.&P. Train Attacked by Robbery 64 miles West of Des Moines

The Train Ditched--The Engineer Shot Dead--The Express Car Robbed--Several Persons Injured

The Robbers in Mask--They Make Their Escape on Horseback

TCI, R.I.&P.R.R. train, due here from the west last night at 10:30 o'clock, did not arrive on time, and about 11 o'clock the news spread over the city that it had been attacked, ditched and sacked by a masked gang of robbers, half-way between Anita and Adair, 64 miles west of Des Moines. The first dispatch received was about 10 1/2 o'clock from Superintendent Royce, (who fortunately happened to be on the train) sent from Casey:

Casey, July 21--Four miles west of Adair train No. 2 was ditched by robbers, and the express safe gone through. There was some kind of an obstruction put on the track on a sharp curve, and as Rafferty, the engineer, saw it, they shot him dead from the bank. the engine is on her side in the ditch and one of the baggage cars is up on the bank. The other upset on the side. The passenger coaches are nearly all right. The track is some torn up. Several persons on the train are slightly hurt; don't think any of them are dangerously injured. There was at least seven of the robbers, all masked, and they went off south on horseback.

From the OUTLAW YOUNGERS, A CONFEDERATE BROTHERHOOD

Jesse James and his gang of Missouri Outlaws had expanded their operation. Previously, they made a specialty of bank holdups.

It was 8:30 at night. Darkness was beginning to gather on the rolling countryside of western Iowa.

The train, made up of two pullman sleeping cars, five coaches, and an express baggage car, was about four miles west of Adair, eastbound. It was moving slowly upgrade, approaching a sharp curve.

At this moment in the bushes near the far end of curve lay the James gang, six shooters cocked and ready. Further off the right of way were the horses of the seven robbers, nervously sensing the drama of the chase about to begin.

Saw Rope--Engineer John Rafferty, alert but unsuspecting, was at his throttle. The fireman was throwing fuel into the boiler to spur on the hard pressed engine.

As the engine came into the curve at the top of the grade, Engineer Rafferty spied a rope tied to a rail. The rope was being pulled from the bushes; the rail, its spikes removed, was being jerked out of line.

Mr. Rafferty immediately reversed his engine in a desperate, vain effort to avert a wreck. He couldn't stop the heavy train. The engine ran into the gap, turned on its side, killing Rafferty instantly and fatally injuring his fireman.

July 23, 1873--Probably from a newspaper in Des Moines, Iowa

Mr. Rafferty, who was killed so suddenly, resides in East Des Moines and leaves a wife and two children, one of the latter being in Clinton with his grandfather. His body was taken in charge by the Masons on the arrival of the train. He was a member of Pioneer Lodge, No. 22. We learn that he had \$3, 000.00 insurance on his life, but the policy had lapsed, but he was member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, which is worth about \$3,000.00 at the death of any of its members. An inquest was held over his body at 2 o'clock this afternoon.

(I have included the above excerpts from publications, because it is interesting to see how the reporters dramatized events in those days. The correct story is, John Francis Rafferty was killed when the James gang derailed the train and engine fell over with him in it. He was killed instantly.)

(Promotional tri-fold of Adair, Iowa)

Jesse James and his notorious gang of outlaws staged the first train robbery in the west and the world's first robbery of a moving train the evening of July 21, 1873, a mile and a half west of Adair.

Early in July the gang had learned that \$75,000 in gold from the Cheyenne region was to come through Adair on the recently built main line of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad.

Jesse sent his brother, Frank James, and Cole Younger to Omaha to learn when the gold shipment was to reach there. Jesse, Jim and Tom Younger, Clell Miller and Bill Chadwell remained camped in the hills in the Adair area.

Finally Frank James and Cole Younger got their tip that the gold shipment was on its way east and they brought the report to Jesse, who had made plans for the train robbery. The afternoon of the robbery (July 21, 1873) the bandits called at the section house and Mrs. Robert Grant, wife of the section foreman, sold pies and other food to them.

In the meantime, the bandits broke into a hand-car house, stole a spike-bar and hammer with which they pried off a fish-plate connecting two rails and pulled out the spikes. This was on a curve of the railroad track west of Adair.

A rope was tied on the west end of the disconnected north rail. The rope was passed under the south rail and led to a hole they had cut in the bank in which to hide.

When the train came along, the rail was jerked out of place and the engine plunged into the ditch and toppled over on its side. Engineer John Rafferty of Des Moines was killed, and the fireman and several passengers were injured.

Two members of the gang, believed to have been Jesse and Frank James, climbed into the express car and forced John Burgess, the guard, to open the safe. In it they found only \$2,000 in currency--the gold shipment had been delayed. They collected only about \$3,000 including the currency and loot taken from the passengers, in the world's first robbery of a moving train.

Levi Clay, employed in Adair by the railroad, walked to Casey and spread the news of the train robbery. Pursuit was soon started with many vigilantes volunteering their services. The trail led to Missouri, but the gang apparently split up and no further trace of them could be found at that time. they never were apprehended for this robbery.

A locomotive wheel which bears a bronze plaque with the inscription: "Site of the first train robbery in the west, committed by the notorious Jesse James and his gang of outlaws July 21, 1873" was erected by the Rock Island Railroad in 1954. Many tourists stop to see this marker--and take photographs.

LYONS WEEKLY

The remains of John Rafferty, the engineer, who was killed at the place of the train robbery in Adair county, were brought to Clinton and buried from that city yesterday.

CLINTON AGE--July 25, 1873

Bold Robbery. Des Moines, July 23.--From Superintendent Royce, who was on the train, I get the particulars of the robbery of the night express train on the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad, last night.

The train left Council Bluffs at 5 o'clock, with four coaches and two sleepers, the rear sleeper being filled with a company of aristocratic Chinese on their way to New England Colleges. There were, also two baggage and express cars, in which was the through California mail and express matter, consisting, in short, of nearly \$2,000 in the express safe, and three tons of bullion.

When about sixty-five miles west of this city, about half-past 8 o'clock, at a sharp curve in the road, and an isolated spot, with no house within several miles in any direction, the train moving about twenty-five miles an hour, the engineer, John Rafferty, suddenly saw one rail move from its place, about sixty feet ahead of the engine. He instantly reversed his engine and applied the air-brake, and while in the act of doing it, bullets came pelting into the engine like hail. The engine ran into the bank, and turned over, throwing out the engineer, John Rafferty, and the fireman, the former falling on the latter, dead. It is supposed that he was killed by the concussion, as no bullet wounds are found on his body. The fireman escaped unhurt. The train being...

CLINTON AGE--August 1, 1873-Rafferty.

CORONER's INQUEST. The inquest over the body of John Rafferty closed with the following verdict:

An inquisition holden at Des Moines, in Polk county, on the 22d day of July, 1873, before A.M. Overman, Coroner of the said county, upon the body of John Rafferty, there lying dead, by the jurors whose names are here subscribed:--We, the said jurors, upon our oaths, do say that the said Rafferty came to his death by reason of the train on the C., R. I. & P. R. R., from Council Bluffs to Chicago, on the night of the 21st day of July, being thrown from the track between Anita and Adair, Iowa, without any negligence on the part of said company, but misplacement of the rail with felonious intent by a certain number of masked men, to us unknown. And we further find that the

said John Rafferty refused to abandon his train when apprised of the danger, and died manfully at his post. J. G. Morgan, F. W. Burtch, Jas. Garretty., Jurors.

(From the St. Louis Democrat.)

Rafferty, the unfortunate engineer who was killed by the desperadoes on the Chicago & Rock Island railroad, leaves a widow and three children unprovided for. He was shot down while nobly standing at his post and endeavoring to thwart the fiendish purpose of the marauders by reversing his engine. It was first reported that he was killed by the fall of his locomotive; but it is now evident that he was fatally shot before the train struck the misplaced track.--He might have saved his own life by jumping from the engine when he saw the terrible danger ahead, but by doing so he would have imperiled the lives of hundreds, and some would certainly have sacrificed some of them. there is not in the history of railroads a more heroic deed than his. He belonged to a class to whose faithfulness, and courage the public are greatly debtors. Those who travel on railroads little realizing the extent to which they are at the mercy of the man at the throttle valve. In a dangerous crisis he may save them by his pluck, or sacrifice them by his cowardice. Rafferty saved every man and woman under his charge; but he did it at a fateful cost to himself and to those dependent upon him. Why should not a generous public deal generously with those whom his heroism widowed and orphaned? There ought to be a large subscription raised for his little family at once, and St. Louis is as good a place as any to start it. Railroad companies do nothing for those who are killed in their service, and the widow and little ones of this brave man will probably be in want of bread to eat if there be no charitable effort in their behalf. We would like to see the good work started in St. Louis, and, if properly encouraged, we will do our share in making it successful. What says the great railroad center of the West?

IN MEMORIAM

The Avoca Delta, referring to the railroad robbery, says: "As it was no one but the engineer, John Rafferty, was killed; and he, like many a noble-hearted, unselfish hero before him, died at his post, regardless of self in the vain effort to save the precious freight of human lives committed to his charge. Let it be written upon the hero's monument: "Whether on the gallows high, Or in the battle's van; The fittest place for man to die, Is where he dies for man."

God help the fatherless children and widow! She, who roused from her slumbers at midnight's quiet hour, to have her heart grieved with anguish at the intelligence that its best stay and comfort was gone. -- "Died at his post!" and the angels stoop low to greet the soul that faithfully performed its duty to the last.

(From the Des Moines Register.)

Soon after Mr. Rafferty's death it was reported that he was insured in the Locomotive Brotherhood Association for \$3,000. This is an error. He was a member of the organization of Locomotive Engineers, but not of the insurance branch. He was connected with that unit about one year ago, at which time he permitted his policy to lapse. The widow will have little left beside the homestead.

...duty of danger, those for whom he performed it, always well, knew that in the bosom of John Rafferty was the soul of a quiet hero, and knew that to his cab, in night or in storm, could come no peril so instant or so dread that it would find in him a coward. This work was humble and unobserved. The good he did to thousands, and the thousands of dangers from which he guarded them, they never did know and never will. The knowledge of them, the record of his many a feat of faithful daring and timely kindness all unknown but to himself, are in his grave with him; they are simply the unwritten story over again of that better heroism whose modesty gained it no historian, and wanted none. The life of this hero must be told in short words

MONTICELLO, IOWA, THURSDAY, JULY 31, 1873--THE RAILROAD BANDITS.

Full Details of the Murder and Robbery an the Rock Island Railroad--The Train Attacked by Masked Ruffians Heavily Armed--The Express Agent Forced to Deliver at the Pistol's Mouth--Only \$1,700 Secured by the Highwaymen.

(Des Moines (July 22) Cor. Chicago Tribune.)

I interviewed Mr. H. F. Royce Superintendent of the Iowa Division of the Rock Island railroad, who was on the train when it was ditched and robbed. He stated that the train was the Atlantic express, which left Council Bluffs at 4:15, and consisted of an engine, two baggage-cars, three coaches, and two sleepers. All went well until they reached a point midway between Anita and Adair, and about sixty miles from this city. It was about 8 o'clock and growing rapidly dark. They were traveling at the usual speed, about twenty-six miles an hour, through a wild, uninhabited prairie; there was not a house in any direction between them and the horizon. Mr. Royce was seated in the second baggage-car conversing with a friend, when he felt the application of the air brake. He wondered for a moment what it meant. There was no station there, and something must be amiss, or the train would not stop in that lonely locality. He jumped to his feet, but had hardly stood up before he felt the shock caused by sudden stoppage, and simultaneously the car was thrown from the track against the embankment, the floor inclining at an angle of thirty degrees. He was pitched against the side of the car, the bridge of his nose colliding with the stanchion, causing a painful wound, which bled copiously. He was roughly shaken up and stunned. Recovering his faculties, he saw what he described as "a very powerful mixture of men, baggage, bullion, and express packages."

He heard the sound of shots, supposing it to be torpedoes. Stepping from the car to the bank to ascertain the cause of the trouble he was met by two men, masked and equipped with navy revolvers, one in each hand. One of them remarked, "G--damn you, get back into the car. Get back, or I'll kill you." Accepting the preemptory invitation he got back as far as the door of the car, when another masked man,, standing inside, also with a revolver in his hand, observed, "Get out of here, G-- damn you; get out of here or I'll kill you." He got out, bewildered between two threatening fires. He went out on the platform again. Another armed ruffian pointed a pistol from the other side of the car, and using the same expletives, advised him to get out of that or he would kill him. A bullet whistled past his ear, and Mr. Royce retired into one of the passenger coaches, remaining there until the highwaymen left.

In the meantime three of the robbers had captured the express car, where they expected to find from thirty to fifty thousand dollars, the amount usually carried on through trains. The route agent, Killingsworth, was scarcely contused by the concussion. Burgess, the express messenger, was raising him from where he fell, when the robbers entered. One of them acted as sentinel to stop any one from coming in, and another held a cocked pistol to the expressman's head, while the third demanded the key of the safe.

Burgess, finding that discretion was the better part of valor, and that it was useless to resist, handed over they key with which the robber opened the safe and took out money packages amounting in all to \$1,700. He was disappointed at the small amount, and demanded information as to where there was more. The robber called Burgess by a foul and nasty epithet. Burgess then volunteered to prove there was no more money by opening the package box. The robber cut some of the packages with a knife, and was enraged at finding they contained nothing of value. there was a large quantity of bullion on board, but it escaped notice. A mailbag was taken up and an effort made to cut it, but not thinking it inexpedient to lose time with letters, the thief threw it aside. While the messenger was being cross-examined by one of the road agents, another invited Killingsworth to fork over his pocketbook and knife, and he did so. The car was then evacuated, the thieves scaled the embankment, mounted horses and galloped away in a southerly direction, disappearing at once in the gathering gloom.

While the car was being ransacked, four men with navy revolvers, two on each side of the train, kept guard outside, to intimidate the passengers and prevent them from interfering with the operations of their confederates. The passengers were alarmed, not knowing the moment a volley would be poured into the windows, or how long they had to live. Some adventurous heads were pointed out, when the highwaymen, with horrible profanity, ordered them to disappear inside, or they would put a bullet into them.

A passenger asked if they mean to to kill innocent women and children, when one of the robbers answered: "If you get back we won't hurt you. We are not petty robbers. We are big robbers. We take from the rich, from those who are able to lose, for the use of the poor. We are Grangers by G--." Mr. Royce says the reference to Grangers was Pickwickian. The passenger took in his head, and no others ventured to put theirs out.

The fatal part of the business was enacted at the moment the engine struck the gap in the track. A volley was fired into the engine. Dennis Foley, the fireman, who was stooping down shoveling coal into the furnace, saw the engineer shut off the steam with one hand and put on the brakes with the other. "Jack, what's the matter?" shouted Foley, and then he heard a crash, a fusillade of shots, and Jack fell over on him dead, the wood and coal on top of both. When Foley, who was bruised and stunned, came to, he extricated himself and his faithful comrade, who died at the post of duty. No marks of pistol shots were found upon the body, and it is thought death was caused by concussion.

Mr. Royce said he could have sworn that Rafferty shut off the steam and applied the brake, and he knows the thought of saving the hundred lives that rode behind him was the last that entered the mind of the heroic Rafferty. He says that Rafferty was one of the most careful, faithful and brave men that ever traveled over an iron road. He had been in the service of the company five years, during which he gained the confidence and respect of his employers. The remains were brought to the city, and taken home to the bereaved family, who have the sympathy of every one.

Mr. Royce thinks there were not less than six nor more than eight in the gang. The masks seemed to have been cut out of white flannel. They covered the entire face excepting apertures for the mouth and eyes, reached back behind the ears, where they were tied, and down the breast, rendering identification absolutely impossible. They were thick set, powerful men, and judging from their dialects and language, Mr. Royce believes they were genuine border-ruffians, and not persons residing in the vicinity. The claw-bar and spike-maul used in removing the rail were taken from the section-house before mentioned.

There were from 90 to 100 persons on the train. A small ivory-handled revolver was the only weapon in the crowd. Of course it was of no avail, and was not brought into action. None of the passengers were injured. The coaches and the sleepers stuck to the track. the rear sleeper was filled by a party of aristocratic students, on their way to Springfield, Mass., to be educated.

The manner in which the robbers threw the train indicates that they knew the business. At an obscure curve where the engineer could not see the track 250 feet ahead, they removed the plates and drew the spikes from a rail outside of the curve, so that the rail could be easily removed. To the rail they attached a rope which ran up over the steep of the cut into a surface ditch on the bank, which completely hid them from the view of the approaching train. when the train was within three rails length, they pulled the rope, removed the rail, and what followed is detailed above.

Gov. Carpenter to-day offered a reward of \$500 each for the arrest of the persons engaged in robbing the train.