



The Last Ride of the James-Younger Gang - Jesse James & the Northfield Raid 1876

Sean McLachlan

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It was the beginning of the end for the James gang. In the past ten years Frank and Jesse James had risen from unknown ex-Confederate guerrillas to become the most famous outlaws in the world. A string of daring robberies had brought them fame, admiration, hatred, and a surprisingly small amount of wealth. In 1876 they planned their most daring raid yet--to ride hundreds of miles from their home state of Missouri to rob the First National Bank at Northfield, Minnesota. With them were Cole, Bob, and Jim Younger, famous outlaws and ex-bushwhackers like James brothers. Charlie Pitts, Bill Chadwell, and Clell Miller, no strangers to gunfighting and outlawry, rode with them. They hit the bank on 7 September 1876.

At least they tried. The tellers fooled the outlaws into thinking they didn't have a key to the safe, and as half of the gang wasted time inside arguing, the outlaws standing guard outside were attacked by the enraged citizenry. A bloody gunfight ensued on Northfield's town square, and before the smoke cleared Chadwell and Miller lay dead and nearly all of the gang had been wounded. They hurried out of town with a posse hot on their trail. Frank and Jesse James split off from their comrades and fought a running battle with several posses before escaping, but the Younger brothers and Pitts made slow progress. They were eventually got cornered and fought a last-ditch gun battle with their pursuers.

This book tells the story of one of the most daring bank jobs in American history. With most of the gang being former bushwhackers, they used many guerrilla tactics in the planning and execution of the raid, yet failed because of poor discipline and their own fame, which meant that every town in the Midwest had their guns loaded waiting to fight off bandits.

Just before the Northfield job, the James gang robbed the Missouri Pacific No. 4 train in order to get money for horses, equipment, and traveling expenses. This heist is also covered in meticulous detail.

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