

Wetmore's Mystery Man

James Sears a loner who never spoke much & kept to himself. Many stories have circulated in the Wetmore area concerning this man. It is believed that he may have been Jesse James. Ola Everhard says she is Jesse's 3rd cousin. She says that his death was a faked and Missouri Gov. Thomas Crittenden and Bob Ford was in on it. Bob Ford shot Charles Bigelow an other outlaw who resembled Jesse. For Fords part in the scam he was set up in the saloon business in Creede, Co.

J. Frank Dalton on May 19, 1948 at the age of 100 declared he was Jesse James. His story was good he did agree with Mrs. Everhard faked death, Crittenden was in on it, Charles Bigelow was the one shot and Bob Ford was set up in the saloon business. However as a teenager Jesse accidentally shot off the tip of his left middle finger while cleaning his gun, Dalton had all his fingers.

James Sears arrived in Florence in 1895. He met Bill White Jr. at the rail road depot and demanded to be taken to the lumber camp. Bill White became about the only one that Sears talked to and trusted. Anthony Madonna knew Sears because he bought support timbers from him for his coal mine and described Sears as an elderly gentleman who looked well preserved for his age and always wore a heavy beard, kept his hat pulled down close to his glasses and never took off his gloves or hat. White told Madonna Sears told him "Kid someday I am going to tell you something."

Louis Draper a longtime resident of the Wetmore area remembers that Sears had good horses and always took care of them. For years he kept an old horse worthless because of his age he could do no work someone asked why he had not sold or killed it he gave no reason. On Sears death bed he told Bill I kept old twister because my horse back in Missouri was called Twist and that horse got me out of more scrapes than I can count. Twister looked just like Twist and I couldn't part with him. It's believed that Jesse's horse was named Twist. Draper was a friend of Fred Walters the postmaster in Wetmore. Fred told Draper that he met a man by the name of Frank James in Wetmore. Frank was part of a vaudeville troop and was traveling in the Salida area at the same time that Fred met him.

For a time he lived in a room at the Greenwood Hotel. He came to my Great Grandma Snow's house often she did his washing for him. He would sit in the barn door and watch the chickens he would never come into the house but he loved to read and borrowed books from Grandma Breece. Aunt Margaret remembers when she was in first grade and going to school in Greenwood—across the road from G Grandma Snow's house all the kids were scared to death of him and would run past the hotel. Some of the school boys made a game of jumping on to the back of Sears's wagon as he returned from a delivery the boys were afraid of Sears's mysterious character so that made it a daring game.

At the time of his death he was living in a dugout up the road behind the old Harnes place. He had pneumonia and wouldn't let any one rub him down but he was too weak and sick to argue

with Mr. Harmes. Harmes reported later that his body was covered with scars from bullet wounds. Sears called Bill White to his bed side in the Canon City hospital and told him of his true identity he was Jesse James and he didn't want any one to know until after he died. Jim Sears died in 1931. Florence Daily Citizen July 2, 1931 Aged Recluse died Wednesday in Canon City, James Sears 74 of North Hardscrabble and old time resident of the district died at a Canon City hospital a nine Wed evening. Sears lived in Wetmore district for about 25 years, but always a recluse little is known about him and as far as is know he has no relatives living. Several weeks ago he suffered a paralytic stroke at his home and was brought to a Canon City hospital but failed rapidly and died last night. The body is being cared for at the Easton Mortuary. Funeral services will be held at the Wetmore church with Rev JR Burchfield officiating Friday afternoon at three o'clock. The burial will be at the New Hope cemetery in Wetmore.

Many people have reported seeing lights in the cemetery one night. It is believed that his body was dug up and returned to Missouri by his family. It was also reported that officials from Denver dug up and reburied after taking pictures of the body supposedly Mr. Holt from the mortuary was in on this he found papers that let them to believe he was Jesse James.