



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

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 reach there. Jesse, Jim and Tom Younger, Clell Miller and Bill Caldwell 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 obtained some pies and other food from Mrs. Robert Gran, wife of the section foreman.

In the meantime, the bandits broke into a handcar 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 near the Turkey Creek bridge on old U.S. No. 6 Highway (now County Road G30).

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, the fireman, Dennis Foley, died of his injuries, 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 by the railroad in Adair, a town which was then not quite a year old, walked to Casey where the alarm was sent by telegraph to Des Moines and Omaha, and soon the news was spread all over the nation. A train loaded with armed men left Council Bluffs for Adair and

dropped small detachments of men along the route where saddled horses were waiting.

The trail of the outlaws was traced into Missouri where they split up and were sheltered by friends. Later the governor of Missouri offered a \$10,000 reward for the capture of Jesse James, dead or alive.

On April 3, 1882, the reward reportedly proved too tempting for Bob Ford, a new member of the James gang, and he shot and killed Jesse in the James home in St. Joseph, Missouri.

A locomotive wheel which bears a 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.

In addition to the historical marker, The Jesse James Historical Park consists of 7 acres of prairie and is owned and managed by the Adair County Conservation Board, Greenfield, Iowa.

