

THE BANK THE JAMES BOYS DIDN'T ROB

BY STEWART H. HOLBROOK

THE pleasant village of Northfield, Minnesota, is, as its citizens like to inform the visitor, the proud home of Carleton and St. Olaf colleges; it is also the Holstein Center of America, with no less than 10,000 head of that excellent breed of horned cattle; it possesses too, the Oddfellows' State Home, ten churches and a golf course.

Northfield is old by midwestern standards. It was settled in 1855 by a group of New England people, and these early Yankees set the character of the place. It still prevails in the midst of thousands of Norwegians. Because of this character, on the seventh of September, 1876, Northfield became a town in the American legend.

It was at Northfield that the celebrated James-Younger gang broke, as the saying has it, its pick. They broke it on the flinty character of men who did not propose to permit their First National Bank to be robbed. Nor was it robbed. In seven seething minutes that clouded the street and village square with the blue haze of exploding powder, the enraged Yankees made history. They killed two on the spot, wounded four, and permitted only two to escape.

And lest present-day descendants of the First National's defenders for-

get, there reposes in a fine plush-lined case in a Northfield home, a relic which I had the honor to see recently — the right ear of one of the raiders, now desiccated and brown as an autumn leaf, but patently an ear.

On its great and wonderful day, Northfield drowsed in the welcome noontime warmth of typical September weather. The melancholy haze of fall hung over the surrounding fields as cicadas ground out their sad farewell to summer. Mild heat waves shimmered around the gristmill and sawmill along the banks of the Cannon River that meandered through the village.

During the noon hour, five strangers, all mounted, all wearing long linen dusters, ate dinner in a restaurant on the west side of town. Presently, three of them rode across the bridge and dismounted in front of the First National Bank. Leisurely, they strolled to the corner and sat down on some dry goods boxes outside Lee & Hitchcock's store. The trio were, probably, Charlie Pitts, Bob Younger and Jesse James.

Just before two o'clock two more strange horsemen, Cole Younger and Clel Miller approached the First National from the south, whereupon the trio got off the packing boxes and

went into the bank. Thereupon, Miller, dismounting, closed the door of the bank. Cole Younger also dismounted and pretended to be fumbling with his saddle girth.

At this moment J. S. Allen, a hardware merchant from his store around the corner, came upon the scene to deposit some money. Before he could get to the bank door, Miller grabbed him. "Stand back," he commanded. Merchant Allen, a man of quick perception, jerked free and ran for his store, shouting: "Get your guns, boys, they're robbing the bank!"

At that instant young H. M. Wheeler, sitting on the steps of his father's store, across the street from the bank, leaped to his feet and gave cry. "Robbers!" he shouted.

As young Wheeler gave his shout, robbers Clel Miller and Cole Younger jumped to their horses and started to ride up and down the street, yelling like Comanches, shooting at everything that moved. As they rode, they were suddenly joined by three more horsemen who came out of nowhere — Frank James, Bill Stiles and Jim Younger — also riding, shooting and yelling.

The sleepy street came to life, swift and terrible, as astonished townsmen made for cover, while bullets broke windows and ricocheted from stone buildings in long mean whines that sang of death. Down went Nicholas Gustavson, a Swedish immigrant, a bullet near his heart.

Captain French, the postmaster, looked out upon the astounding

scene. He locked his doors, then started searching for a weapon. None was at hand. So he stepped into the alley behind his place, picked up an armful of sizable rocks, and started heaving them at the two-gun wild men. This neolithic artillery fire was strengthened as Elias Hobbs and Justice Streeter joined him.

II

Meanwhile, the three raiders inside the First National were encountering a marked lack of cooperation from the bank employees. As they entered, Teller Bunker stepped forward — to peer into the tunnel-like openings of three pistols. "Are you the cashier?," demanded one of the strangers.

"No," said Teller Bunker.

One of the guns waggled at Joseph Heywood, behind the counter.

"Are you the cashier?"

"No," said Mr. Heywood, a book-keeper who was acting-cashier.

Nor would the assistant book-keeper, Mr. Wilcox, admit to being the cashier. It was an impasse new to the raiders. But something had to be done at once; the uproar outside in the street was growing by the moment. The robbers climbed over the counter. One of them indicated Heywood. "You're the cashier. Open up that safe, damned quick."

"I can't, it's got a time lock." The robber belted Heywood over the head with his gun, felling him. Then he turned on Wilcox and Bunker, but these two also insisted on the fiction of the time lock.

Bunker and Wilcox had been compelled to get down on their knees on the floor. But suddenly Bunker took a chance: he jumped to his feet and tore through the directors' room to the rear door of the bank, one of the robbers close behind, shooting. The second or third shot caught Bunker in his right shoulder. But he was now in the alley.

Bunker's pursuer ran back into the bank. Wilcox was still down on the floor. Heywood was staggering to his feet, bleeding. Shouts and shooting outside indicated the street battle was going badly for the raiders. The three inside bandits started to get out. As they departed one of them stepped close to Heywood and wantonly drilled him through the head.

The battle in the street had indeed been going badly for the men in the linen dusters. For one thing, young Wheeler, who had been sitting on the steps of his father's drugstore opposite the First National, had gone into action. He ran into the Dampier Hotel next door, laid hands on an old Army carbine, then took up a fine position at a second-story window.

Storekeeper Allen, who had been prevented from entering the bank, high-tailed around the corner to his hardware shop and proceeded to pass out guns and ammunition from his stock. The embattled farmers of Lexington rallied no more quickly than these Yankees transplanted to Minnesota. Dashing into Allen's place, and coming out armed with shotguns, were Elias Stacy, Ross Phillips, John

Hyde and James Gregg, loading as they ran for the scene of battle.

The action of the battle was swift, and brief. Clel Miller was just mounting his horse. Stacy let him have it, and a handful of buckshot bloodied the bandit's face. But he managed to get up on his horse.

Now came Northfield's other hardware merchant, A. R. Manning, be-whiskered as Moses. He shot the horse out from under one of the raiders, then dropped back around the corner to reload. He returned to the street of battle an instant later and shot Cole Younger, inflicting a bad wound. Again, Manning dropped back to reload, then resumed his firing position. Taking good aim, he shot raider Stiles dead — right through the heart.

Young Wheeler, peering down at the street battle from the upper floor of the hotel, now opened fire. His second shot finished Clel Miller, who was dead when he hit the ground.

Out of the bank charged the three robbers to run into salvos of buckshot, bullets and stones. It was evidently time to get out of Northfield.

The six remaining raiders were now in flight, two of them badly wounded. In front of the First National lay the dead horse. A few feet away was Clel Miller's corpse, pouring blood into the thick dust of Division Street. A few yards beyond lay Bill Stiles, dead. On the plank sidewalk lay poor Nicholas Gustavson, the innocent bystander, who was shortly to die. Inside the bank lay the remains of brave Joseph L. Heywood. ("Faithful

Unto Death," says the bronze plaque marking the spot.)

The battle had lasted seven minutes; the bank's funds were intact.

III

The raid was over, but not the hue and cry, for the telegraph office at Northfield was clicking madly with the greatest story Rice County was ever to send out. Throughout southern Minnesota farmers and townsmen left their work until there were more than a thousand possemen. But the six outlaws hid in the Big Woods, the long strip of mixed hardwoods that marked the region, moving on foot.

It was not until two weeks later that more shots were fired. Spotted by Oscar Suborn, a young Norwegian farmhand, four of the fugitives were soon hemmed in between the Watonwan River and a steep bluff. This was in Watonwan County. Firing again at 30 feet, one outlaw was killed outright, the other three wounded.

The three wounded outlaws were locked up at Faribault for safekeeping. The body of Charlie Pitts, the dead outlaw, was permitted to fall into the hands of a medico, who removed the right ear, which relic in 1947 is the cherished possession of old Bill Schilling, Northfield's most eminent character. Old Bill also has the old First National safe, a bar-and-padlock job — with no time lock.

The capture of the three Youngers, the killing of Pitts, and the two dead raiders back in Northfield accounted for all but two of the gang. Those

two were almost certainly Frank and Jesse James. Frank had a badly shattered foot from the Northfield battle. He and Jesse had broken away from their fellows. The two moved fast, traveling day and night on stolen horses, and turned up, on the seventeenth, in what is now South Dakota. There they took prisoner Dr. Sidney Moshier, of Sioux City, Iowa, from whom they obtained medical aid for Frank James' wounded foot and leg.

The two James brothers then rode on, crossing the Missouri River at Springfield, and continuing as far as Columbus, Nebraska. Here they sold their horses, "took the cars for Omaha," and from there went straight to their native hangouts in Missouri.

The Younger brothers served long terms in the Minnesota penitentiary at Stillwater. Bob died in prison in 1889. Jim and Cole were paroled in 1901, and the former committed suicide. In 1903 Cole was granted a pardon. He later teamed up with Frank James in a Wild West show, and died in bed on March 21, 1916.

Jesse James, as almost everybody ought to know, was shot and killed by one of his own gang in 1882. Frank James lived well into the present century, dying of natural causes.

The James boys, however, were never the same after the Northfield raid. They were virtually cured of hankering after banks. They did stage one train robbery in 1879, two more in 1881; but most of the time they remained in hiding. Northfield had been their supreme disaster.

FRANCO'S SPAIN

BY MELANIE L. PFLAUM

OUR fellow passengers were sleeping soundly, when the gray-haired physician took the empty seat next to me on the plane. I had known him in Madrid, but obviously he didn't remember me.

"Dr. José Orgaz, at your service," he announced. "I am returning from a medical meeting in New York. Superb city! American colleagues entertained me in their homes, presented me to their wives. Delightful. Your first visit to Spain?"

I remained silent, preferring not to mention that I had lived in Spain for ten years, borne my two sons there and kept house for my newspaperman husband during the siege of Madrid by General Franco. Now, in 1947, I was about to revisit the country.

But Dr. Orgaz went on talking. "But those American newspapers — full of lies about Spain! You will see for yourself. In Spain everyone is happy. There is law and decency. No one — that is, no one except assassins and murderers — is molested. The Spanish people are good but primitive. They never know what they want. Franco does what is good for

them." (The good doctor said *gente* — it means the masses, which excluded him.)

I nodded. Later, I learned he was returning to Spain, bitterly disappointed because an offer of an appointment in a New York hospital he'd counted on hadn't been forthcoming. He'd given me the party line I was to hear from dozens of Spaniards who, from conviction or self-interest, uphold the Franco régime.

But the people I looked forward to seeing in Spain were not these.

Miguel met me at Barajas airport in Madrid. He was thinner and more tired-looking than he had been when I last saw him in Barcelona. It was nine years since I had urged him to drive with me into France. I had a car, a chauffeur and enough gasoline.

"They'll shoot you — you know they will. The whole Aragon front has collapsed. The government's in Figueras already. There's nothing more you can do here. You could get a job in an American University."

"No, my dear friend," he said, "New York doesn't need another

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