

WEAPONS OF THE AMERICAN BAD MAN



GUNS OF OUTLAWS

GERRY AND JANET SOUTER

CHAPTER 1

Residue of War: The Raiders

"We were outlaws the moment the South lost. Why we had as much chance of settling down, tilling our farms and being decent as a tallow dog chasing an asbestos cat through hell."

—Frank James, bushwhacker and Quantrill Raider¹

THE AGREEMENT ENDING the Civil War—signed in the parlor of a home in the village of Appomattox Court House, where two exhausted armies camped in nearby fields—was an unsatisfactory conclusion for other battlefields left in limbo. One of these bloody slaughter grounds had spread across Kansas and Missouri, where Free State Jayhawkers fought Confederate bushwhackers without quarter. Whole towns had been put to the torch under conditions of total war. Male civilians were shot down in front of their families. Captured raiders became slowly turning corpses strung up by the neck. It was a hit-and-run war, a cavalry war of civilian guerilla bands armed with a dog's breakfast of hunting, sporting the same aged firearms any farmer might own, but mostly shotguns and coveted Colt revolvers.

The strategy was always the same. Put out the call for volunteers, form up the biggest mounted band on good horseflesh, and move out toward the unsuspecting town or troop encampment. Each man loaded all the revolvers he possessed. The Colts and any other large caliber weapons fired three-piece ammunition (percussion cap, gunpowder, and ball), and the six-shot cylinders



The nighttime raid on Lawrence, Kansas, August 21, 1863, by the guerrillas of William Quantrill (right) left 150 male residents dead and most of the town's businesses and homes in ashes. Teenaged Jesse James and Cole Younger were among the raiders who swept into the Kansas town.

required time and attention to reload. Each guerilla tried to carry at least four revolvers within easy reach.

The Springfield or Enfield rifled muskets used by the Union and the Confederacy were clumsy weapons to handle astride the hurricane deck of a galloping, ducking, and dodging horse and only offered one shot before requiring the tedious job of dismounting the ram rod, biting the paper end off a cartridge, pouring the gunpowder into the muzzle, and then pressing the greased lead ball down to be rammed into the barrel to the breech where a percussion cap was fitted over the nipple and detonated by the triggered hammer. All for just one shot. This was okay for infantry, but impossible for mounted cavalry.

For a long gun, the raiders favored the double-barreled shotgun. Virtually every farmer owned one to put meat in the pot, discourage predators from the hen coop, or send two-legged varmints on their way with a dose of rock salt. Loaded with buckshot, the shotgun was lethal up to about seventy-five yards and required little skill to operate. In the 1860s, these shotguns were also muzzle loaders, but less fussy when cramming in loose powder, loose shot (or roofing nails, nuts and bolts, and other makeshift ammunition), and a wad of cotton

¹ *Pittsburgh Press*, March 21, 1915



Frank and Jesse James in 1863, the time of the Quantrill raid. On the right is Jesse, packing one Colt Navy revolver and two other percussion pistols. Revolvers were slow to reload, especially on horseback, so each guerilla tried to carry at least four.

linsey-woolsey to hold everything in place. Sometimes half a tobacco chaw would do. Staring down the twin three-quarter-inch barrels of the standard ten-gauge weapon cleared a path through any mob of defenders without firing a shot. Larger guns also were available. Known as “punt guns,” these six-gauge cannons had almost one-inch bores and were used by meat hunters to blast flocks of sitting birds. Exit the passenger pigeon into extinction. However, their kick was almost as lethal as their blast.

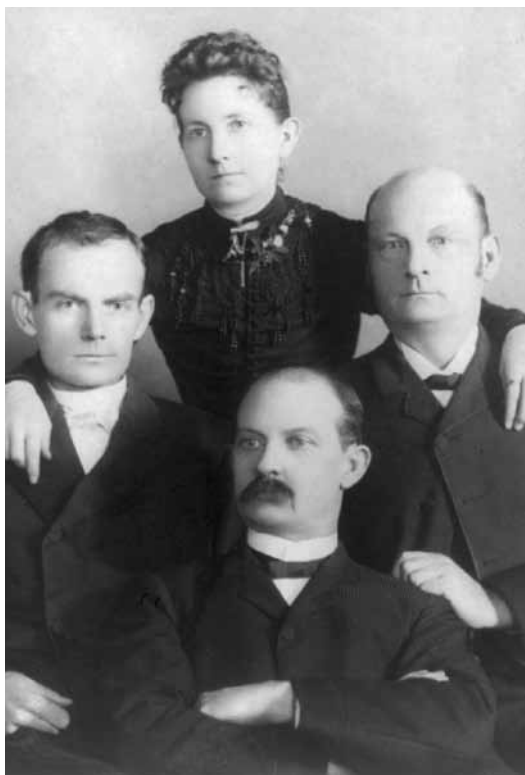
The end of the war cut short the raiders’ depredations, but not their taste for it. Riding with William Quantrill or Bloody Bill Anderson into these breathtaking butcher jobs, stirrup to stirrup with vengeance- and blood-crazed comrades was a rush. Living to tell about it imparted an ego-swelling invulnerability. With the Union declared the winning side, those bushwhacker Confederates who survived became war criminals. The Scotch-Irish, who became the majority of the lower- to middle-class “cavalier” citizens of the slave-owning states, had already been booted out of their mother country generations before. Time had not softened their chip-on-the-shoulder grudge against most authority, be it the British Crown or the U.S. federal government. And now in the postwar, peacetime United States, who held most of that authority? The wealthy

LOADING THE PERCUSSION REVOLVER 1830-1870

The percussion revolver required the shooter to perform many steps to reload the six chambers in the cylinder. With the hammer at half-cock, the gun is held with the barrel pointing up and a dose of gun powder is poured into a chamber. A lead ball is pressed into the chamber on top of the powder. The cylinder is rotated so that the ball is in line with the loading lever beneath the barrel. The lever is raised sliding a plunger into the chamber to seat the ball firmly against the powder. When all chambers are loaded, if the pistol is not to be fired immediately, a gob of grease is spread over the face of the cylinder, plugging the chambers to assure the balls will remain seated—and to prevent the other chambers from igniting from the flame of an aimed shot. Finally, the nipples on the rear of the cylinder are each fitted with a copper percussion cap that will provide the spark when struck by the triggered hammer. In combat, the fouling of the black gunpowder usually was enough to hold the ball in place between shots.



Two Confederate soldiers carrying double-barreled shotguns, a favorite weapon early in the Civil War. The muzzle-loaders required no special ammunition or training and were effective out to about seventy-five or one hundred yards.



Left: Robert, James, Cole Younger (left to right) with their sister, Henrietta (rear), in 1889. Robert died of consumption in prison; James was paroled and shot himself. Cole served twenty-five years in Stillwater Prison, wrote a book about his life, created a Wild West Show with Frank James, and died in 1916.



Cole at the time of his capture.

politicians in the North reached into the dazed national vacuum with both greedy hands. The plutocrats who pushed the railroad west and the speculators who bought up plots of the ruined South and hustled the Native Americans off their hereditary lands each took their slice. These individuals and institutions gave out-of-work guerillas a whole new all-you-can-eat buffet of banks, railroads, payrolls, express shipments—anywhere ready cash was stored or transported—as tempting targets for the trade these raiders knew so well.

And so it was on September 7, 1876, that eight men rode out of the Minnesota woods down a dusty road toward the town of Northfield. Frank and Jesse James rode alongside Cole and Bob and James Younger. All were graduates of the Quantrill Raiders, skilled in ripping into a sleepy town just to see the feathers fly and crashing out the other side, leaving death, flames, and misery in their wake. Riding with them were Clell Miller, Bill Chadwell, and Charlie Pitts, hard and resolute men at the top of their game. There was a familiarity to this morning ride in an early fall chill as the canopy of trees rustled above their heads, calling to mind the days when Navy Colts flashed and bucked in

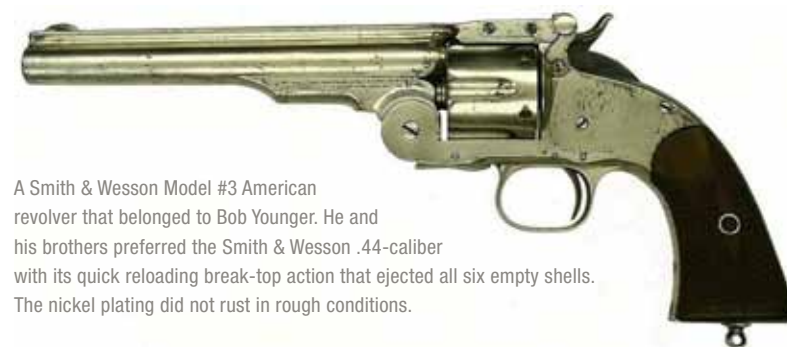
the “Cause” of the Confederate States of America—but also a difference. Today, they were on their way to rob Northfield’s First National Bank.

The men had taken the train from their home ground in Missouri, purchased fine horses and McClellan saddles, loaded their cartridge belts with .44-caliber bullets, and cleaned their Smith & Wesson American Model #3 revolvers, each one nickel plated as befitted true professionals. The gang needed the money to maintain their high-living lifestyle, but Jesse James also had vengeance in mind. One of the bank’s largest investors was Adelbert Ames, former Mississippi governor—a “carpetbagger” installed during postwar Reconstruction who was hated by Southern whites and married to the daughter of the reviled governor of Louisiana, Benjamin “the Beast” Butler. In 1875, to avoid impeachment—and a brutal tarring and feathering—Ames had fled to Northfield and become a flour miller. This bad-blood raid would be just like the good old days.

Four of the gang rode from the south, up Division Street into Northfield and past the bank. Two stopped there while the other two rode through Mill



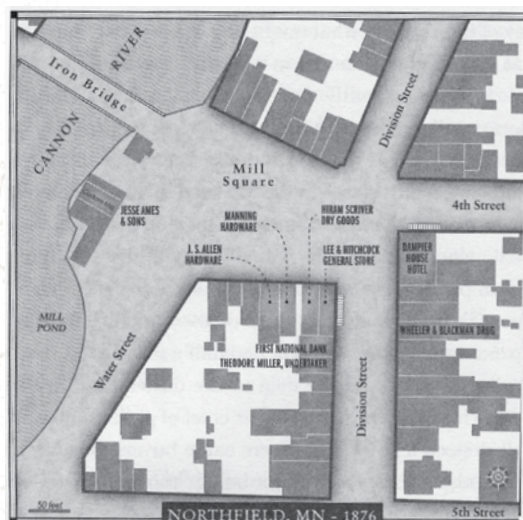
The 1851 Navy Colt, one of the most popular Civil War weapons. The six-shot percussion revolver was reliable, but slow to reload. Wild Bill Hickok carried a pair of Navy Colts.



A Smith & Wesson Model #3 American revolver that belonged to Bob Younger. He and his brothers preferred the Smith & Wesson .44-caliber with its quick reloading break-top action that ejected all six empty shells. The nickel plating did not rust in rough conditions.



The Northfield Iron Bridge over the Cannon River looking into Miller Square. The building with the arches on the right is the Scriver Building. Just around its corner is the First National Bank on Division Street. Straight ahead is the Dampier House Hotel.



Downtown Northfield map showing the Iron Bridge, Division Street, and locations of the businesses mentioned in the text. The outlaws spent four hours riding and walking around the area before raiding the bank.

Square to the Exchange Saloon. The pair at the bank dismounted and went inside, where Bob Younger got change for a twenty dollar bill—while he and Charlie Pitts had a good look around. From there, they mounted up and crossed the square to meet three other of their party. They conversed, shook hands, and split up. Over the next four hours, the men wandered in twos and threes about the town, chatting with passersby, talking politics over ham-and-egg breakfasts, and waiting for the crowded street to thin out. This casual “casing” of the bank

was hardly the raiders’ style, but they knew the Pinkerton Detective Agency was on their tail for previous crimes and the gang wanted this to be an easy score with no fuss from a cowed bunch of dirt farmers.

However, Northfield was a close community. Everybody knew everyone else and eight strangers arriving and meandering about in the middle of the day began to cause a stir. Each of the men wore an off-white linen duster—a loose, two-piece garment consisting of a sleeveless caftan beneath a shoulder-draping cape. While it was a practical accessory, giving the arms great freedom and covering the loaded cartridge belts and a pair of large Smith & Wesson revolvers, the duster also looked like a sort of uniform. The men were also very well mounted, and it was unusual to have so many saddle horses in town at once. Most townsfolk traveled in buggies and spring wagons. And finally, these riders had the look of men “on the prod,” a swagger and watchfulness that was not simple curiosity.

At 2:00 p.m., Clell Miller and Cole Younger rode across the iron bridge over the Cannon River, walking their horses toward Division Street. Frank James, Bob Younger, and Charlie Pitts saw them coming and entered the bank. Bill Chadwell and Jesse James waited across the square guarding the other road out of town. Inside the bank’s cramped lobby, employees Alonzo Bunker, Frank Wilcox, and Joseph Lee Heywood stared at three nickel-plated revolvers aimed by three grim-faced and resolute robbers.

The shortest of the bandits, Frank James, shouted, “Throw up your hands, for we intend to rob this bank—and if you holler we will blow your Goddamned brains out!”

Outside in the square, a number of citizens had noticed the meandering strangers come together in front of the First National Bank. Hardware store owner J. S. Allen leaned out and looked around the corner of the Lee & Hitchcock Store next to the bank and saw the three duster-clad men go inside. He hurried down to the bank as Clell Miller pulled the door shut. Seeing Allen, Miller grabbed him by the collar and hissed, “You son of a bitch, don’t you holler!” Across the street, Henry Wheeler had been sitting in a chair on the wood sidewalk and saw Miller snatch at Allen. He had been aware of the parade of duster-men strolling about town, and now their purpose suddenly became clear. Wheeler leaped to his feet, shouting, “Robbery! They’re robbing the bank!” With that, he took off at the dead run into the Wheeler and Blackman Drug Store. Miller fired a shot that sizzled over Wheeler’s head.

That gunshot brought Cole Younger, Jim Younger, Jesse James, and Bill Chadwell into action. As Miller stood by the horses in front of the bank, the others began galloping and dodging about, their revolvers clouding the street with gun smoke. The Northfield residents realized that it was *their* money the bandits were after and set about with a grim resolve of their own as weapons



The Remington Rolling Block rifle had a simple, reliable single-shot action that was very strong. The rifle was accurate—with proper sights—out to one thousand yards.

and ammunition was passed out from every store that had a stock. Mostly, these were long guns and this was hunting country.

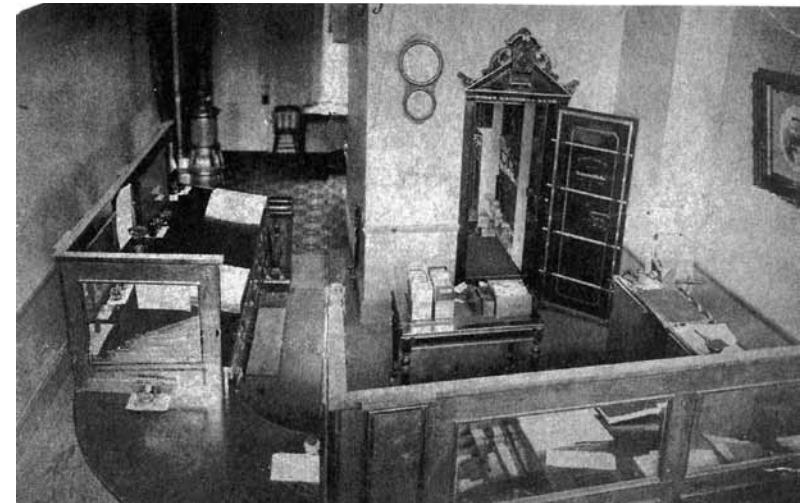
The Lee & Hitchcock Store and the Manning Hardware Store around the corner on Mill Square became ready arsenals. Elias Stacy snatched a shotgun from J. S. Allen Hardware, pressed in two brass shells, clapped the barrels shut, and aimed at the nearest outlaw. Clell Miller was swinging his leg over his saddle when Stacy triggered a load of bird shot that hit the gunman in the head, knocking him from his horse. Dazed and disoriented, Miller remounted with blood running down his face.

Anselm Manning left his hardware counter and watched the bandits galloping up and down the street, shooting at everyone who stuck their head out, and saw residents waving pistols, shooting out windows, and spraying lead everywhere. He remembered a Remington Rolling Block rifle that was propped in the store window. This rifle fired .45-70-caliber buffalo killers and he knew how to use it. Stuffing his pockets with ammunition, he raced out the door, cocking the hammer and opening the breech block as he ran. He slid a cartridge into the chamber, closed the breech, and paused to look around the corner of the Sriver Building, down Division Street toward the bank entrance. He spotted the saddle horses and two robbers hiding behind them. Without hesitation, he laid his sights on the nearest horse and killed it. When he went to reload, he found the empty shell wedged tightly in the breech. Manning turned and ran back toward his shop to extract the shell.

In the bank, all was chaos. Frank James and Charlie Pitts were beating up on bookkeeper Joseph Heywood, who claimed he could not open the safe because of a time lock, which the robbers knew to be a lie because they were familiar with the Yale Chronometer Time Lock. No bank would have it engaged during banking hours. They cut his throat and beat his head with a pistol butt. Alonzo Bunker spotted a .32-caliber Smith & Wesson revolver on a shelf beneath

the counter and moved toward it. Bob Younger snatched the pistol away and dropped it into his pocket. Frank James, at the end of his rope, cursed and fired his revolver just above Heywood's head. The blast was deafening. Powder smoke filled the air. Bunker threw his hands in the air and made a mad dash for the back door, screaming, "Murder! Murder!" He crashed through the door; trampled over undertaker Theodore Miller, who was coming into the bank; and pounded away. Pitts took steady aim and put a ball in Bunker's shoulder, but adrenaline and pumping feet kept Bunker going until he was out of sight.

Henry Wheeler had been searching for the nearest gun when he remembered an old Civil War breechloader he knew was at the Dampier House Hotel two doors away. The carbine was a Smith .50-caliber that fired crude fixed ammunition, a greased lead ball held in a gunpowder-filled cylinder made of gutta-percha (latex derived from the sap of a South Pacific tree) with a hole in the other end. It was ignited with a percussion cap on a nipple once the breech



Interior of the First National Bank, showing the open vault door. The safe containing \$15,000 that Heywood refused to open is inside the vault. The robbers leaped over the counter with guns drawn. Alonzo Bunker fled out the rear door that is closed in the photo.



One of the earliest breech-loading cavalry weapons issued to Union troops during the Civil War, the Smith .50-caliber carbine broke open like a shotgun to chamber a single fixed cartridge containing a greased ball, wad, and gun powder. Ignition through a hole in the rear of the gutta-percha (rubber) cartridge case came from a percussion cap struck by the rifle's hammer.

was closed, much like closing the barrels of a shotgun. Wheeler took four cartridges from the hotel desk clerk and ran upstairs to look down on Division Street. Below him, Jim Younger was a perfect target, mounted in front of the bank. Breathing hard, spots dancing in his eyes, Wheeler aimed the old carbine, cocked the hammer, and pulled the trigger, but only a puff of dust went up behind Younger. Wheeler broke the barrel downward, removed the blackened cylinder, put a fresh cap on the nipple, shoved in another cartridge, and closed the barrel back up in place with a clunk. Next, he aimed at Miller, who was bent over in his saddle. Wheeler aimed lower this time, cocked, and fired. Clell Miller lurched in the saddle as a slug the diameter of a quarter slammed into his shoulder, chopped through bone and tissue, and severed his subclavian artery. He rolled from his saddle, said something inaudible, bled out, and died.

Down the street, pausing in their desperate game of “cowing” the citizens of Northfield—who would have none of it—Bill Chadwell broke the action open on his Smith & Wesson revolver to eject the empty shells and cram fresh .44-caliber bullets into the cylinders. Anselm Manning, desperate to get off another shot at the gunmen as bullets whistled around his head, saw the six-foot-four-inch Chadwell astride his horse, looking for targets. Bringing his Remington Rolling Block rifle to his shoulder, Manning aimed, cocked the hammer, and squeezed the trigger. Chadwell reeled back and pitched off his horse with a hole in his chest. He lay on his stomach, propped up on his elbows and obviously in great pain, then shivered and rolled over dead in the street.

One of the outlaws dismounted, stripped off Chadwell's cartridge belt and revolvers, and leaped back into the saddle. At the same time, Cole Younger was imploring the outlaws inside the bank to give it up and get out.

“For God's sake, come out! They're shooting us all to pieces!”



The Smith & Wesson .32-caliber revolver was a very popular “hide-out” or “stingy” gun that fired either a rim -fire or center-fire cartridge. By the late nineteenth century, the “spur” trigger that popped out when the gun was cocked had fallen out of favor.

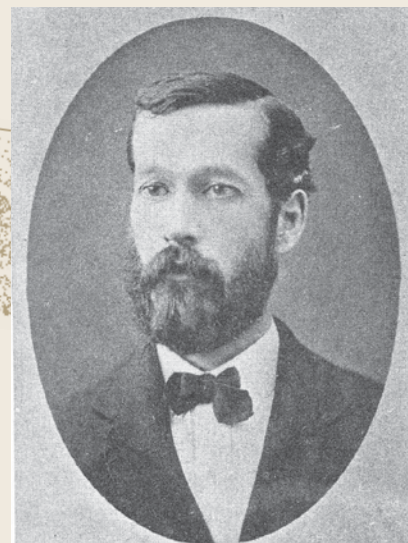


Smith carbine breech broken open to receive a rubber .50-caliber cartridge packed with fifty grains of black gunpowder. Image at right shows the percussion cap in place on the carbine's nipple.

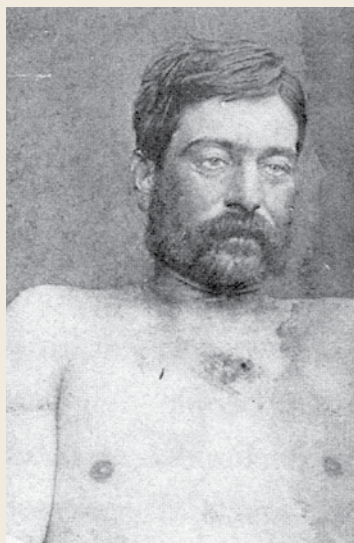
As the horsemen continued to fire in all directions from the center of Division Street, a group of patrons streamed up from the basement entrance of a nearby saloon to see what all the fuss was about. Cole Younger desperately reined his horse forward and back, circling to find targets in the haze of gun smoke, when he saw these men come rushing into view. He cocked his Smith & Wesson, aimed at the last man up the stairs, and fired. Nicolaus Gustavson, a Swede who knew little English and was deep in his cups, toppled over backwards with a fatal head wound.

Charlie Pitts and Bob Younger came piling out of the bank, carrying a grain sack containing a little over eight dollars and change for their troubles. Their guns joined the others. Behind them, an angry and frustrated Frank James paused in the bank to vent his fury. The beaten and bloody bookkeeper, James Heywood, slumped in a chair. Frank fired one shot at the injured man and missed. He crossed the lobby to point-blank range and fired again into Heywood's head, blowing brains out the other side.

Across the street, while some unarmed citizens began throwing rocks at the beleaguered robbers, Manning had reloaded his Remington rifle and was playing duck and dodge with Bob Younger, each trying to get a clear shot at the other. Meanwhile, Henry Wheeler, upstairs in the Dampier House, had reloaded his Smith carbine and saw Younger shooting in Manning's direction.



James Lee Heywood, bookkeeper who refused to open the safe and was murdered by Frank James.



Charlie Pitts, James-Younger gang member killed near Madelia, Minnesota, on September 21, 1876, by a posse.



Bodies of Bill Chadwell (left), killed by Anselm Manning with a .45-70 Remington rifle, and Clell Miller (right), wounded from a shotgun blast of bird pellets fired by Elias Stacy and then killed with a Smith .50-caliber carbine fired by Henry Manning on Division Street in front of the bank.

With his third cartridge, Wheeler sighted Younger and fired. The shot shattered Younger's elbow and spun him. The savvy outlaw tore the revolver from his useless right hand and kept up the fight.

Frank James and Charlie Pitts mounted their horses and headed for the road out of town. Bob Younger, with his horse dead and blood drooling down his white duster, trotted after them. He cried out, "My God, boys! You're not going to leave! I am shot!"

Cole Younger saw his brother loping along, his shattered right arm dangling at his side. Cole swung his horse from the getaway road and galloped back into the furnace of smoke and flaming guns. He reined to a halt, shucked his boot from a stirrup and reached down. Bob Younger jumped up into the stirrup, caught the arm with his left hand, and swung onto the back of the saddle. Twice wounded himself, Cole put his rowels to his horse and galloped out of the deadly trap, the last to leave.

The raiders split up, with Frank and Jesse James escaping and leaving the Youngers and Charlie Pitts, shocked and wounded, to survive in the great Minnesota woods. The three abandoned their played-out horses and were eventually driven onto the open prairie by scattered posses and hunters. On September 21, they were finally cornered near the town of Madelia, Minnesota, in tall weeds at the bend of the Watonwan River. Charlie Pitts was killed by a rifle shot. James Younger had his face and jaw shattered, and Cole ended up with eleven separate wounds. The bold Raiders had been reduced to shabby, filthy scarecrows. Their captors actually took pity on the wretches. Cole admitted to his captors, "We tried a desperate game and lost. But we are rough men used to rough ways, and we will abide by the consequences." When they were paraded in a wagon, swathed in oozing bandages, down the center of Madelia, a large crowd gathered and cheered them for their grit. Cole and Bob managed to wave back at the start of that long road to Stillwater Prison.