**MASTER COPY ~ "The Amazing Life of James Jesse Strang"**
**Paper Presented to the Chaut. Co. Historical Society**

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. If I may, I am going to sit down to operate the slide projector and to narrate. If you cannot hear me, please raise your hand or speak out. In the next 31 minutes you will be taken on a whirlwind tour of the life of one man who grew up in Chautauqua County. ~ Today history is being repeated. #1 Welcome

In 1928 at the annual meeting of the Chautauqua County Historical Society, Charles M. Reed, President of the Society offered his report, "James Jesse Strang, a Chautauqua King." So much interest was generated that at the next fall meeting, Roscoe B. Martin, of Forestville, presented "James Jesse Stang – A Moses of the Mormons and a Chautauqua King". #2 Logo of CCHS

I became interested in J.J. Strang while writing a book, "The History of Ellington and Its People". J.J. Strang had lived in the town of Ellington and had been postmaster of Ellington from 1838 to 1843 Research indicated that he was the only man in American history crowned king who ruled his kingdom for 8 years within the territorial boundaries of the United States. He lived only 43 years but packed into that brief time span a most romantic and fascinating life. #3 The History of Ellington and Its People"

Let me begin by clearing up some confusion about this man's name. He was named Jesse James Strang, after his grandfather when born on March 21st 1813. At the age of 19 he decided to reverse his first and middle name, and was there after always known as James Jesse Strang. Tongue-in-cheek, Jesse perhaps had a vision that in the year 1847 there would be the birth of another boy called Jesse James, and that he would become a notorious American outlaw. Young Jesse didn't want the word association. #4 Jesse James Strang

Jesse lived in Chautauqua County for 28 years. Our county had a great influence upon his development. The 1800's were a time of a great religious revival in New York State. Our area was known as "The Burned over District"! #5 "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

Camp meetings and revivals were held drawing hundred, even thousands of people. Sinners confessed their sins and hundreds of people were converted in a frenzy of religious enthusiasm. Jesse, a bright young boy, absorbed all those events. #6 Camp Meeting

The 1800's were also a time when people were encouraged by our founding #7 Founding Fathers to involve themselves in experimentation in many aspects of everyday life Fathers ~ religion ~ marriage ~ economic arrangements ~ sexual customs ~ even diet and wearing apparel. Hundreds of experimental groups were formed.

Besides the Mormons in Chautauqua County, examples in our immediate area were:

Spiritual Springs or Harmonia at Kiantone. #8 Spiritual Springs

The Spiritualists at Lily Dale. #9 The Spiritualists

Thomas Lake Harris and the Brotherhood of New Life at Brocton. #10 TL Harris

Some people living in his era considered J.J. Strang a charlatan and evildoer. #11 JJ Strang His followers thought him to be the prophetic successor to Joseph Smith Jr., the founder of the Mormon Church in 1830. Whatever he was, he was a charismatic and brilliant man. Yet, he was a man of many contrasts ~ kind and loving, yet, he could be cruel ~ a strident opponent of polygamy, yet, he would marry 5 wives ~ a bookish editor, yet, he was an incendiary propagandist ~ a legislator for 2 terms in the Michigan legislature; yet, he was a lawbreaker ~ a Mormon prophet; yet he sometimes considered himself an atheist ~ a progressive and a innovator, yet, he was controlling and restrictive. Truly, he was a man who walked a tightrope in his life.

Jesse James Strang was born in Scipio, Cayuga County, in central New York. #12 Map of Scipio and Cayuga C

When he was almost 3, his family moved to Walnut Flats, adjacent to Walnut Creek, near Forestville, NY. #13 Map #14 Walnut Creek

His parents were Abigail and Clement Strang. He was the middle child # 15 Parents with two siblings; David, his older brother, and Myrette his sister. Jesse's infancy period was one of continual sickness and extreme suffering. At one time his parents thought he was dead and prepared him for burial.

From an early age Jesse kept a diary; much of it written in a secrete code. This code was not deciphered until the 1960's by Jesse's grandson, Mark Strang, a banker from California. His diary revealed a sincere desire to be of service to others. #16 Diary

Jesse attended rural school in Forestville. Here, in his own words from #17 Rural School

ideas, entirely reputable, large confidence in himself, and very anxious for distinction.

for holding opinions contrary to church doctrine. Probably his affair with Nancy had something to do with his expulsion. The depths of his anti-church feelings were expressed in his diary.

In 1831 Joseph Smith Jr. and his family passed through Chautauqua County by sleigh on the way to Kirkland, Ohio. Jesse was teaching school in Silver Creek at the time. You will learn that the lives of Joseph and Jesse repeatedly crossed. #25 Joseph Smith

Also in 1831, Jesse began to teach school in Randolph, NY. He began teaching with 7 students. By this time, Jesse had changed his first name to James. I will now always use the name he chose for himself. #26 Randolph

Eight weeks after his arrival in Randolph, the town gossip was that James was romantically involved with Mary Torrance She was a Randolph resident who already had a husband. He admitted that the woman had playfully kissed him a couple of times, but noted he did not want to get involved stating, "I really wanted to do other things!" Among those things was organizing a debating society in Randolph. #27 Another Romance?

At the end of the term in February, he commented, "There is no complaint against me and they offer me a good recommendation. I return to Forestville shortly." #28 A good recommendation

After his teaching experience he wrote in his diary, "I am 19 years old and yet no more than a common farmer. 'Tis too bad! I ought to have been a member of the assembly or a Brigadier General before this time if I am ever to rival Caesar (or) Napoleon which I have sworn to do. #29 I'm a Common Farmer #30 Caesar #31 Napoleon

Later that same year, he said, "My mind has always been filled with dreams of royalty and power!" He was plotting about getting ahead in life by marrying the future Queen Victoria of England. At that time, she was only a 12 year old girl. #32 Queen Victoria

In January of 1833, he began studying law with Esq. Frazier and Esq. Rathbone of Silver Creek. His diary stated, "Whether I shall ever #33 A student of Law

make a first rate lawyer or not is uncertain but my study for 2 years to come will be useful in business which I can follow if I do not practice that profession." Perhaps James had also discovered the key to his future as he wrote, I am eager and mankind is frail. I shall act upon it for time to come for my own benefit!"

Another key to his though process may be these words in his diary discussing the fiery issue of nullification. "Admist all the evils of the disturbances of our national affairs there is one consolation. That is, if our government is overthrown, some master spirit may form another one. May I be the one! I tremble when I write this, but it is true!!" #34 Nullification

About the same time, on his birthday, his diary indicated his depressed spirits, "I have rejoiced in the sunshine and smiled in the shade of another year...It is gone, passed as others who passed their days and died in obscurity...Curse me eternally if this be my fate! I know it is in my power to make it otherwise!" #35 Depression

In 1835 James contracted smallpox. He was nursed back to health by his good friend Wealthy Smith. #36 Smallpox

But, James soon began to court Mary Abagail Perce, a young woman from Ellicottvile who lived with her mother while attending school. He wrote in his diary, "I am most attracted to Mary Perce because of her great morality and her intellectual worth." They were married in the Presbyterian Church in Silver Creek on November 20, 1836. #37 Mary Abigail Perce

Also in 1836, James was nearly killed when he fell into his brother's millpond and was swept over the dam. He was thinking about death when he wrote, "O! time, how quickly thou fliest away! What has become of the past? It is almost blank, while ahead is only thick darkness. Should I die now, I have lived in vain. O! the curse; to have done nothing for posterity!" #38 Avioding Death

After their marriage, James and Mary lived apart for a few months. The two finally set up housekeeping in a small home at the crossroads in Clear Creek. #39 Clear Creek

Over the next few years James became a land speculator. #40 Land Speculator

During this time, he also passed his bar exam, being one of 36 lawyers in the county. He found the law quite tame and wrote, "I have not seen enough of the world nor acted my part of its contention."

Mary was quite often ill and depressed. After she and James visited her father in Virginia, the couple lived with his parents in Cherry Creek. They were back in their own home in Clear Creek, when their oldest child, "Little Mary" was born. #41 Mary's Illness

On November 26, 1838, James became postmaster of Ellington. He was recommended by all the judges of Chautauqua County, the editor of the Mayville Sentinel, and leading citizens of the county. #42 Sign and Seal

James was a busy man, not only a husband and father, but a practicing Attorney, a postmaster, a land speculator, a temperance lecturer, and a Baptist minister. #43 Site of PO

In 1843, James bought the weekly newspaper, "The Randolph Herald" and served as its publisher and editor. At this time Mary and James joined the Baptist church in Randolph, even though James professed to be an atheist and a religious skeptic. #44 Randolph

Mary's illness and depression continued and her relatives in Burlington, Wisconsin urged the family to move there. This fact and the reality that James had developed "the 7 year itch" formed the impetus to leave for the mid-west. On August 18, 1843 the family loaded their belongings into a carriage and headed for Burlington. #45 Moving to Burlington

James lived almost 15 years in the mid-west. That chaotic, turbulent and sensational time period in his life placed him as an important American figure. Here, as Paul Harvey would have said, "...is the rest of the story!" #46 The Rest of the Story

When the family arrived in Burlington, they lived with Moses Smith, Mary's relative. James purchased a home and set up a law practice with a partner, Caleb P. Barnes. In 1843 tragedy befell the entire family when they all became very ill and "Little Mary" died. #47 Tragedy

In Burlington James met Lyman Wright, one of the "Twelve Apostles" under Joseph Smith Jr. Wright was a dynamic preacher, known as "The Wild Ram of the Mountains". James was impressed. He later went to Nauvoo, Illinois to hear Joseph Smith preach. Before he left town, he was baptized on February 5, 1844. A month later he was made an Elder of the Mormon Church. Joseph was so impressed with the young lawyer from Burlington that he urged him to scout for land along the White River for a possible Mormon settlement. By March 3rd, he was ordained an Elder of the church by Hyrum Smith, Joseph's brother.

#48 The Wild Ram of the Mountains

James soon began a colony he called Voree, "the Garden of Peace" on the outskirts of Burlington. The village was later known as Spring Prarie.

#49 Burlington

His followers, now called Strangite Mormons, opened a stone quarry and constructed many fine stone houses, some of which still exist today.

#50 Stone Quarry #51 Strangite Homes #52 Home sign

The members excavated a foundation for a large temple.

#53 Temple

James also operated a print shop which published the "Voree Herald" the "Zion Revielle" and the "Gospel Hearld".

#54 Newspapers

Shortly after James was baptized by Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet realized that he and his followers should prepare to leave Nauvoo. James wrote Joseph a letter, urging him to bring his flock to Voree.

#55 Persecution

Joseph Smith, Jr. and his brother, Hyrum, were killed by a mob in Carthage, Illinois on June 27, 1844; only 4 months after James had been baptized.

#56 Jail and Lithograph

Even though Brigham Young was placed in charge of the church, the church struggled and various factions vied for leadership includidng Sydney Rigdon, (Rigdonites) and James's group (Strangites)

#57 Brigham Young

James, even though he had been a Mormon only 5 months,

#58 Letter of

took advantage of the death of the prophet by declaring himself the new leader of the Mormon Church. He told his followers that at the exact moment of Joseph's assignation, at 5:30 PM, an angel had visited him and anointed him him as Joseph's heir.

Appointment

Back in Voree, there were nearly 2000 people. But James was beginning to have his own troubles. James saw a future need to isolate his group from competing viewpoints.

#59 James has troubles too!

"Ilumanti" is a name given to several groups, both historical and modern, both real and imaginary. It was founded on May 1, 1776 by Aden Weishaupt. It was adopted by James to prevent opposition to himself. James's "Illumanti," the Halcyone Order o the Illumanti, was a secret enforcement agency. The members were sworn to uphold and obey James as "the imperial primate and actual sovereign Lord and King on Earth!" New members were inducted by being taken into a darkened room and their heads were anointed with oil. Mysteriously, their heads began to glow in the dark ~ caused by the liquid composed of phosphorus.

#60 Aden Weishaupt and the Illumanti

On September 1, 1845, James experienced another angelic visitation. Twelve days later he disclosed to his followers his revelation about ancient plates of brass buried on a nearby hill called "The Hill of Promise". The unearthed plates were called the Voree plates and contained the records of the "Rajah Manchou of Vorito".

#61 The Voree Plates

The plates were supposedly the history of an ancient people who had lived in the area and who had all died in a fierce battle.

#62 Location/Monument

Just as Joseph Smith Jr. had used glass spectacles, the Urim and the Thummin, to translate brass plates found at Hill Cumorah in western NY, writing the Book of Mormon, James translated his plates using similar spectacles. James later discovered more plates called "The Plates of Laban". With the previous plates and 9 other revelations the information was placed into "The Book of Law of the Lord".

#63 The Glass Spectacles

In 1846, James was comfortable enough with his position of power in Voree, to leave the village and travel to the east to secure converts. When leaving the east, James stopped to visit his parents in Cherry Creek. They were worried about his health. #64 Travelling East

While on this trip, the "Mayville Sentinel" had accused James of selling a Chautauqua County farm he did not own and leaving the county in an effort not to be arrested. James was not a popular man in Chautauqua County. #65 The Mayville Sentinel

While returning from this eastern trip, James had a vision of a "land amidst wide waters and covered with large timbers and a deep bay on one side of it!" Here, he was told, "Shall God establish his kingdom!" #66 "A Land of Wide Waters"

James chose Beaver Island which was located in the northern part of Lake Michigan near Mackinaw Island. He explored the island in the spring of 1847. By 1848 there were 300 Strangites on the island. #67 Beaver Island"

This is James's home on Beaver Island. #68 James's Home on BI

Focusing on the Preemption Law of 1830 which allowed squatters to purchased 160 acres of public land at the minimum price of $1.25, James set about bringing more settlers to Beaver Island. Some of this land, James paid for in the convention way, but much Of the land he simply took over from the Irish residents and native Indians through confiscation or taxation. #69 The Preemption Law

On January 12, 1848 James and 12 families formed the "Order of Enoch," a share the wealth program.Of course, James had final control of the money. #70 The order of Enoch

Once established on Beaver Island, James became a polygamist. Polygamy was sanctioned on the island although practiced by not more than 20 families. James met Elvira Field in 1849 at a church conference on the island. She was an 18 year old school teacher and a beautiful young woman. They were secretly married on June 13 1849. After the marriage, James left Elvira in her hometown rather than bring her back to Beaver Island. Elvira soon #71 Pologamy

disappeared, not even her family knew where she was.

Elvira soon appeared with James, impersonating #72 Charles J. Douglas
he hew husband's nephew, Charles J. Douglas. She dressed in men's clothing and acted as her husband's personal secretary. The 2 traveled from September of 1849 to March of 1850 throughout the eastern seaboard seeking converts to come to Beaver Island.

Rumors soon spread among the Strangites questioning #73 Rumors
Charles's identity. Especially the Mormon women began to doubt that Charles was a man. As one woman said, "Men don't have bosoms!" In the meantime Mary and her children were living in Cherry Creek with James's parents, not aware of what was transpiring. James's first multiple marriage caused little consternation among his followers. When Mary found out, she was very unhappy. She never liked Beaver Island and was aware that James lacked compassion for her feelings.

This is a picture with Elvira and her new husband, #74 Elvira and her new husband
after the death of James.

Beaver Island was in constant turmoil with conflict #75 Turmoil on Beaver Island
between the Strangites and the non-Strangites, the Irish, and the Mackinac Islanders. They all resented the growing power of the Strangites. There were several conflicts during the winter of 1849-1850. The Strangites felt they had enough power to retaliate by that spring.

When James and Charles (Elvira) were in the east, the #76 The War at Whiskey Point
conflict grew. It culminated when on the 4th of July, 1850 a recently purchased cannon was set up and fired as a national salute. The cannon balls fell in the water near Whiskey Point, site of the trading post run by the Irish. The Irish had secretly decided to drive the Strangites off the island and were meeting at Whiskey Point to make their war plans. They were dispersed and the War of Whiskey Point was over.

A few days later on July 8, 1850, James was crowed #77 King James
King inside a large, but unfinished, log temple. He was seated on a raised throne. James wore a red royal, robe. He was announced by the sounding of a trumpet and escorte into the temple by 70 dignitaries of the church. At the close of the ceremony, the crow cheered "Long live James the King of Zion!" James extracted tithe

from the Gentiles on the island and 1/10 of the taxes collected on the island were turned over to James. King James further angered the non-Strangite islanders by stopping the whiskey trade on the island.

By 185l the Strangites had managed to hold all a political offices on Mackinac Island to which Beaver Island was attached for judicial and elective purposes. Urged on by these Mackinac Islanders, and other of Wisconsin's non-Strangites, President Millard Fillmore, had become so concerned about James's power that he sent the naval paddle frigate, "the USS Michigan to arrest James and his top followers. James spoke in his own defense at his trial. On July 9, 1851, he and 23 of his followers were found not guilty.

#78 President Fillmore

As Chautauqu County residents, you might be interested to know that the bow of the USS Michingan is on display at the Maritime Museum in Erie, Pa. The ship was assembled and outfitted in Erie in 1843. There is a delightful exhibit of the history of the ship and James Strang on the 2nd floor of this museum. It's worth a visit.

#79 The USS Michigan

James's colony grew year by year, numbering 3,600 people by the time of his death. In 1853 and again in 1854, there were enough Strangites to vote James into Michigan's House of Representatives. Even though he had declared Beaver Island a separate country, James thought it was to his advantage to serve in the Michigan legislator.

#80 James the Legislator

Through his efforts the government of northern Michigan was organized for the first time. Two lighthouses were built on Beaver Island by the federal government. He founded the first newspaper in northern Michigan called the "Northern Islander." He was an amateur scientist. He took special interest in the natural history of northern Michigan and became an expert. His work was published by the Smithsonian Institution. He was a correspondent for the New York Tribune.

#81 James's Sucesses

A cast of James's life mask is owned by our Society. The plaster life mask was most likely made in Chautauqua County. Chautauqua County Historian, Michelle Henry, told me an interesting story about this life mask. When she worked

#82 James's Life Mask

for our society, her first task was to find the missing life mask of James Strang. After extensive searching, the mask was found in a drawer, none the worse for wear.

James finally aggravated some of his own people by demanding obedience to many unjust laws. Attempts to oust him by legal means failed. James rule that his women followers must wear bloomers, a discrete pantsuit, named after Amelia Bloomer, a newspaper editor from upstate NY. #83 Aggravation

Two women, Ruth Ann Bedford and Sarah McCullouch refused to wear these pantsuits. James had Ruth Ann's husband, Thomas flogged for his failure to keep his wife in control. James also angered other members of his flock. They began plotting against him. #84 Ruth Ann Bedford

On June 16, 1856, the USS Michigan again pulled into the harbor at St. James. One of the ship's pilots went to James's home to summon him to the ship. #85 President Fillmore #86 The USS Michigan As they were walking to the ship, in front of the Johnson and McCulloch Store, Alexander Wentworth and Thomas Bedford, shot him from behind at close range. #87 Thomas Bedford Bedford then discharged his pistol into James's back. After pistol whipping him both men ran to the USS Michigan for safety. They were taken to Mackinaw Island where they were treated as heroes.

James's head wound had started to heal but the other bullet lodged in James's spine and caused paralysis. #88 James's Head Wound Twelve days after he was shot, the mortally wounded James was taken by boat to Racine, Wisconsin and then by train to his parents' home in Voree. When James's mother first saw his head wounds she remarked that she had seen him in an earlier dream with the same injuries.

James died from his wounds on July 9, 1856 without appointing a successor. Dead at 43 years of age, James was still King. #89 King James Dies

James was first buried in the old Voree Mormon cemetery. #90 The Voree Cemetery

Several years later when the estate of James had to be sold at auction, the land of the cemetery was sold to a Gentile farmer. This man was so angry with Strangites that he built a pig pen in the cemetery and build a pig barn constructed in such a manner that the pigs had to cross James's grave. #91 The Pigs Damage

Later James's daughter Myrette paid to have her father's remains removed to Burlington Cemetery for reburial #92 Burlington Cemetery

Until the early 1930's his grave remained unmarked. Then in the 1930's Myrette took up a $125 collection to purchase a grave stone for her father. You may visit his grave today in this cemetery. His grave is remarkable in its simplicity; a small dark granite tombstone. There are no signs to mark the way to his grave and the grave is without any adornment of flowers. It is a somewhat melancholy resting place for a man who believed he was the divinely chosen prophet of God and America's only King. #93 James's Tombstone

Four relatives of James are buried in the Sherman Cemetery, his mother, Abigail, his father Clement, his sister Myrette Loose, and her two children, Clement James Losse, and Hattie S. Sperry. There are certainly other relatives of James living in Chautauqua County. Recently, I met Mrs. Frank Walker of Sprague Hill Road in Falconer, who indicated she was a relative through J. Samuel Fowler, a prominent attorney from Jamestown, and a NY State Assemblyman from 1899 to 1903, a member of the state senate from 1918 – 1921 and a candidate for US Representative from NY in 1924. #94 Sherman Cemetery

As James had earlier confiscated land in Beaver Island, his property and that of his followers were also confiscated. Inflamed by land speculators, mobs came to the island and Drove out most of the remaining Strangites. With half a days notice, the Strangites were loaded, with few possessions, onto boats. 490 Strangites were taken to Chicago. Others were left at the ports of Detroit, Cleveland and Buffalo to fend for themselves. #95 The Strangites are Forced to leave BI.

Today a print shop built by James is all that remains on Beaver Island of his colony. The shop houses a museum dedicated to James and the history of the island #96 Print Shop/sign

No practicing Strangites remain on the island. There is however an active religious group of about 100 people living in Burlington, Wisconsin. There are 2 churches where members meet for services.

#97 Strngite Churches

In a local bank is quite a quantity of money waiting for release with the signature of the new elected prophet of the Strangite Mormons. No new prophet, since James, has been officially designated. There have been persistent rumors that the Strangites buried a stash of gold in Fox Lake on Beaver Island. Over the years treasurer hunters have attempted to find the gold. It is likely no treasure exists. It could also be that it just has not been found.

#98 Bank Vault

The Irish have returned to Beaver Island. Today the island is mainly populated with Irish citizens whose ancestors come from Northern Ireland. When we were there on a hot August day, we were invited into the home of a resident to have lemonade. We entered this home as strangers and left as friends. Here is a picture of our Irish guide, Shamus, a retired college professor, and my son Scott. If you ever have a chance to visit Beaver Island after a 1½ hour ferry ride from the mainland, you would be delighted with the island and its people.

#99 Shamus

This sketch of King James on Beaver Island appeared in the Smithsonian Magazine in August of 1995.

#100 Smithsonian Magazine

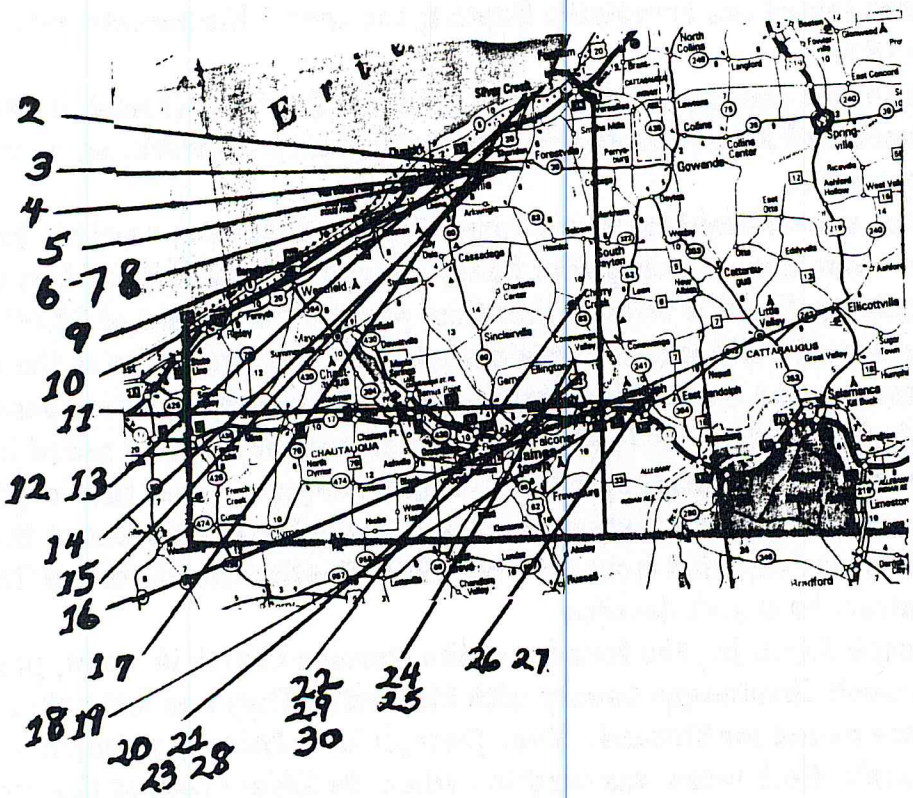
During James's last years of life and after his death, his story and that of the Strangites in Voree, Beaver Island, and elsewhere in the mid-west were greatly exaggerated and sensationalized. This created a lot of interest in the man and his religion. It sold a lot of magazines and books. After a time, the name of James Jesse Strang, the boy from Chautauqua County, disappeared into the dusty, yellow pages of the history books.

#101 James Jesse Strang

That is the end of my presentation. I think I have used up my time, but I will be happy to answer any questions later. I have a souvenir folder for you, of a chronology of James's life in Chautauqua County. Please take one per family.

# Souvenir
# Chautauqua County Historical Society's Annual Meeting
# Saturday, April 9, 2011 ~ Westfield, NY
# Chautauqua County Bicentennial 1811 ~ 2011

## Jesse James Strang/James Jesse Strang ~ 1813 - 1856
## His Chautauqua and Cattaraugus County Connections




1) March 21, 1813 Jesse James Strang was born on March 21, 1813 in the town of Scipio, Cayuga County, in central New York State. He was named for his grandfather. His parents were Abigail and Clement Strang. He was the middle child, having an older brother, David and a younger sister, Myrette.

2) February 1816 Shortly before his 3rd birthday his parents moved the family to a farm on Walnut Flats near Walnut Creek in the town of Hanover, 2 miles outside Forestville.

3) 1816 ~ 1825 During his youth, Jesse kept a diary, which abruptly stopped at the age of 13. and then was continued in his teen years. Much of this diary was written in a secret code not deciphered until the 1960's by his grandson, Mark Strang, who was a prominent banker in California

4) 1818 ~ 1825 Jesse attended a rural school in the town of Hanover. According to his diary, schooling was not a happy experience for him. His school mates and teachers ignored him. Jesse was precocious and loved to read, especially history and the Scriptures.

5) 1825 Jesse joined the Forestville Baptist; the church his parents helped to organize in 1817.

6) 1828 Jesse was sent by his parents to Fredonia Academy (founded 1823), after they discovered he was having an affair with Nancy Crawford, an unwed mother from Forestville.

7) 1829 Jesse was allowed to return home after his first term until his parents discovered his affair was on-going with Nancy. They promptly shipped him back to the Academy. For this term, rather than pay the full tuition of $3.00, Jesse rang the school bell for $1.50. His parents paid the remainder of the tuition.

8) 1829 Jesse became an excellent debater and was elected the president of the Debating Society. As leader, Jess had to appear before a grand jury. The conservative townspeople had brought charges against the society for their free-thinking, liberal viewpoints. Jesse was found innocent of the charges.

9) 1831 Jesse was expelled from the Forestville Baptist Church for holding opinions contrary to church doctrine.

10) 1831 Joseph Smith Jr., the founder of the Mormon Church in 1830, passed by sleigh through Chautauqua County with his family. They had left Palmyra, NY and were bound for Kirtland, Ohio. (Joseph later became an important person in Jesse's life.) Jesse was teaching school in Silver Creek at the time.

11) 1831 ~ 1832 Sometime during this period, Jesse reversed his first and middle name. Thereafter, he was always known as James Jesse Strang, until his assignation in 1856.

12) 1831 ~ 1832 James taught the winter term of school in Randolph, NY. Only 8 weeks after his arrival, the gossip of the community was that James was having an affair with May Torrance, a married lady. James denied these rumors admitting that Mary "had playfully kissed him a couple of times...but that he didn't want to get involved as he had other things to do!"

13) 1833 James began studying law with Esq. Frazier and Esq. Rathbone in Silver Creek.

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| 14) 1835 | James was nearly killed at his brother's mill when he accidentally fell into the mill pond and was swept over the dam. He was thinking about death when he wrote in his diary, "O! Time, how quickly thou fliest away! What has become of the past? I have lived almost 23 years. Behind is almost blank, while ahead is only thick darkness. Should I die now I have lived in vain! O! the curse, to have done nothing for posterity!" |
| 15) 1835 | James contracted small pox. He was nursed back to health by his good friend, Wealthy Smith. |
| 16) 1836 | James began courting Mary Abagail Perce, an 18 year old beautiful woman from Ellicottvile, NY. Mary lived with her mother while attending school there. |
| 17) May 20, 1836 | Mary and James were married in the Presbyterian Church in Silver Creek. |
| 18) 1836 | After their marriage, James lived in Randolph studying law and Mary continued living in Ellicottvile attending school. |
| 19) 1836 | James passed his bar exam, one of 36 lawyers in Chautauqua County. |
| 20) Early 1837 | James and Mary purchased from Frederick Aldrich, for $500, a home in Clear Creek, (Cattaraugus County). Their home was located at the north-east side of the cross roads in Clear Creek. |
| 21) 1838 | Mary and James visited Mary's father in Virginia to help with her illness and depression. |
| 22) 1838 | The couple returned to western NY to live with James's parents in Cherry Creek. |
| 23) July 1838 | Mary and James returned to their home in Clear Creek, where there oldest child, "Little Mary" was born. |
| 24) Nov. 26, 1838 | James became Postmaster of the Ellington Post Office. He used his political connections with the Democrats to secure his position. |
| 25) 1838 | Mary and James led a busy life. James was father, husband, Post Master, lawyer, temperance lecturer and a land speculator. |
| 26) 1842 | Mary and James joined the Baptist Church in Randolph. Previously, he had declared himself the "perfect atheist"! |
| 27) 1843 | James bought the weekly newspaper, "The Randolph Herald", serving as both publisher and editor. |
| 28) August 28, 1843 | Mary and James loaded their possessions into a carriage and headed for Burlington, Wisconsin. Mary had relatives in Burlington, who years earlier had started a Mormon Church with 6 people. By then they had 2 children, Mary and Myrette. |

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| 29) Fall 1846 | James returned to Chautauqua County to visit his parents in Cherry Creek. A life mask may have been made at this time; now owned by CCHS. |
| 30) Summer of 1849 | James visited Chautauqua County for the last time; his 2nd visit to the county since he left in 1843. |

## James's Last 2 Months on Life

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| 1) June 16, 1856 | James was summoned to appear on the deck of the USS Michigan by the ship's captain. While walking to the ship, in front of Johnson & MacCoullough's store, he was shot a close range and pistol whipped by Thomas Bedfored and Alexander Wentworth. |
| 2) July 9, 1856 | Twelve days after he was shot, the mortally wounded James was taken by boat to Racine, Wisconsin and then by railroad to his parent's home in Voree, Wisconsin. James died from his wounds on July 9, 1856. He had not appointed a successor. Dead at 43 years of age, James was still King. He died the day after the 6th anniversary of his coronation. |

## Relatives Buried in Chautauqua County

Buried in the Sherman, NY Sepulcher Cemetery: His mother, Abigail James (1792 – 1873, age 81), his father, Clement (1799 – 1880, age 92), his sister, Myrette Losse, (1818 – 1890, age 71), and her two children, Hattie S. Sperry, (1855 – 1927, age 72), and Clement James Losse, (1833 – 1904, age 51). James and Mary's Resting Places: James was finally buried in Burlington Wisconsin, after being first buried in the Old Mornon Cemetery in Voree. His wife Mary Abigail Content Perce Strang (1818 – 1880) never remarried. After James's assignation, Mary led a rather sad life living in Terre Haute, Indiana. She died April 30, 1880 in Terre Haute.

## Other Relatives

There are certainly other relatives living in Chautauqua County today. Recently, I met Mrs. Frank Walker of Sprague Hill Road near Falconer. She indicated she was a relative through J. Samuel Fowler, a prominent attorney from Jamestown. Mr. Fowler was a NY State Assemblyman from 1899 – 1903, a member of the State Senate from 1918 – 1921, and a candidate for the US House of Representatives in 1924.

# The Western New York Influence of James Jesse Strang

Jesse James Strang/James Jesse Strang was a product of his time. His early years in Chautauqua County and western NY had a great influence on his life. He lived in a time when people were encouraged by our founding fathers to involve themselves in experimentation in many aspects of every day living ~ religion, marriage, economic arrangements, sexual customs, and even diet and wearing apparel. Examples of experiental groups in our geographical area include: Spiritual Springs or Harmonia at Kiantone in the 1850's, the Spiritualists at Lily Dale, and Thomas Lake Harris and the Brotherhood of New Life at Brocton founded in 1867.

The early 1800's were also a time of deep religious ferment in western New York. New York State was known as the "Burned Over District". Camp meetings and revivals were held drawing hundreds even thousands of people. Sinners confessed their sins and hundreds of people were converted in a frenzy of religious enthusiasm. The Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians all vied to see who could gain the most converts. Jesse, a bright you boy, took all this in. He joined the Baptist Church in Forestville in 1825. He joined the Mormon Church on February 5, 1845.