

13 Stories III
Story Options 2022

Option #14: James Oscar Baker

In May of 1885, James Oscar Baker, 10, shot and killed E.T. Williams in Soda Springs, Idaho. Born in Missouri, one of thirteen children, James regularly followed and protected his father, James W. Baker, who was described as a drunk and a “n’er-do-well.” Williams, the proprietor of a large new hotel, entered a saloon where the elder Baker worked. The two men began fighting. Young James grabbed a gun from behind the bar and fatally wounded Williams to protect his father. Authorities arrested James, and he was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to five years at the Idaho State Penitentiary. During his incarceration, his father waived guardianship of James. After eight months in prison, Governor Edward Stevenson pardoned young James and sent him to a foster family in Bannock County. He attended school and wrote a letter to Stevenson thanking him. The governor responded by asking James to keep in touch and to reward his decision to pardon the young boy early by becoming a “gentlemanly young man.” In 2013, Leah Pileggi wrote *Prisoner 88*, a fictionalized young-adult novel based on James Oscar Baker’s incarceration.