

A life sketch of

Mary Jane Watkins Hymas

1859 – 1941

Wife of John Atkins Hymas

Mary Jane Watkins Hymas was born August 18, 1859 at St. Louis, Missouri. She was the daughter of Thomas Watkins, who was born at Staffordshire, England, and Ann Derricott, born at Shorpsire, England. Two sons, Charles and Thomas, were born to this couple in their homeland. The family came to America and settled in St. Louis, Missouri where Mary Jane was born, and also a son named Joseph.

Mary Jane's father was a locksmith by trade, but this business was slow and he went to work in the coal pits in Missouri. Some of the pits were very dangerous being filled with poisonous gas and people were warned to stay away from them. One day during the noon hour, while the workmen were home for dinner, a child fell into one of the pits. Cries for help from the other children were heard by Thomas and he offered to go down into the pit for the child. He was lowered with ropes into the pit and got the child's body. Before they could get Thomas out, he died from the poisonous fumes. Thomas died May 28, 1863, leaving Mary Jane's mother and her children alone. Her mother was expecting another baby who was named Annie.

It was necessary for Mary Jane's mother, Ann, to go to work and even then she could not earn enough to support her family. Finally, Ann put Mary Jane and her two older brothers in a home for orphans. The children were put in different wards of the home. Mary Jane had the assignment to help to keep the children clean. This training taught her to keep herself neat and clean all of her life.

A man and his wife came to the home one day to adopt two children. Mary Jane and one of her brothers were chosen. When the mother of the children was contacted for her consent to the adoption, she refused but did consent to the children living with the couple where they could work for their board and clothing. The children were taken to the couple's home in Illinois where they were treated very well and given everything they needed. While at this

home their mother came to get them as she was going to marry a Mr. Brown, who had a farm and had promised to take care of all her children. The children did not like their stepfather because he was unkind to them and worked them very hard.

Mr. Brown wanted to move to Arkansas. He told them that he had a place there and that there would be work for the boys. Ann did not want to move her children there, but finally made plans to move. All of their belongings were packed and put on a boat with Mr. Brown accompanying them. The rest of the family was to go the next day. When they arrived at their destination they did not find Mr. Brown nor any of the belongings and they did not hear from Mr. Brown thereafter. Mary Jane's mother and her family had no home or possessions. They were permitted to live in a two room log house and people nearby helped them. They found some work, planted a garden and the boys did some hunting and fishing, but conditions were very poor for the Watkins family.

One day, a man from Tennessee came to the Watkins' home looking for a girl to work for his wife. Mary Jane decided to go with him. She and the man walked into town and bought her a new pair of shoes. The clerk laced the shoes too tight and Mary Jane, not used to wearing shoes, developed a sore on her leg. They traveled by boat and Mary Jane got very sick, but the man was kind to her and his wife was pleased to see Mary Jane upon their arrival in Tennessee. The couple was considerate of Mary Jane and when the sore on her leg got worse and proud flesh set in, a doctor was called. The doctor thought the leg would have to be amputated, but Mary Jane's mother objected to this and another doctor was called whose treatment proved successful. Mary Jane's leg got better, but she always carried a deep scar on her leg from this ordeal.

With the help of the man for whom Mary Jane worked, her family was moved to Tennessee. The boys worked in the cotton fields and her mother was given other work. The members of the family saved their money and finally had enough to make the trip to Utah. The Watkins family boarded a train and went to Morgan, Utah, where Mary Jane's Uncle Joseph Derricott and his sister lived. It was a happy reunion for all, and the mother was thankful that she was able to bring her children to Zion. The family later went to Bear Lake Valley, Idaho and settled in the town of Liberty.

Mary Jane worked for different people in the community. Among them was the John Hymas family. Mary Jane became well acquainted with John and his wife Mary Ann, who lived in a small house in East Liberty where John farmed land for the support of his family. John's wife died two weeks after the birth of their son David on January 22, 1878. This left John devastated and the sole provider and caregiver of ten children.

Mary Jane helped John with household chores and the children. John's association with Mary Jane led to their marriage in the Endowment House on October 24, 1878. John and Mary Jane lived in the small Hymas home at Liberty until 1884. John and his sons built a new house that was a grand home with seven rooms, which included a pantry and a milk house. A smoke house was behind the house where they cured their meat.

Mary Jane assumed the role of mother to John's ten children and through the next twenty years, six children were born to John Atkins and Mary Jane Watkins Hymas. They are:

Thomas Nephi	1879-1964
Martha Jane	1881-1955
Bertha Ann	1882-1887
Rebecca Rose	1884-1962
Charles Eugene	1887-1951
Emily Elizabeth	1889-1889
Wilford Watkins	1890-1971
Lottie	1892-1980
Melvin Morris	1894-1975
Mabel	1896-1976

John was very public-spirited and served as School Trustee, Road Supervisor, manager of a local dramatic association, and when the YMMIA was organized in Liberty in 1876, he was sustained as second counselor to President James H. McMurray. He also built caskets and performed many acts of charity and kindness. On one occasion in the early days, he and Samuel Matthew, a close neighbor and very close friend, carried hay on their backs in the winter time to feed a cow belonging to David Kind. The cow was stranded in the mountains north of Liberty.

Mary Jane assisted John in his many labors and besides taking care of their large family, she also served as Relief Society teacher and drove a span of mules through Lanark to visit her district. She also sang in the choir, which John conducted.

John passed away on November 8, 1917 at the age of seventy eight years. His faithful wife and his sixteen children were at his bedside when the end came. He was greatly loved by all those who knew him and for twenty years before his death, all his family gathered at the old home on his birthday, September 1st, to honor him. On such occasions, the family would present programs, sing songs and play games in the big beautiful yard. Dinner would be served on long tables on the lawn under the trees and every one would have a happy time together.

The John Hymas Family Reunion was held annually after the death of John until August of 1952, when a reunion was held of all branches of the William Hymas Family and this reunion was held thereafter.

Ten years after the death of John Atkins Hymas, Mary Jane married John Thomas Passey on December 7, 1927. She sold her home in Liberty and lived at the Passey home in Paris, Idaho. Several years later, John T. Passey died. Mary Jane then bought a small home in Paris. She later sold it and moved to Rigby, Idaho where she lived with her son Wilford.

Mary Jane Watkins Hymas Passey passed away October 9, 1941 at the age of eight-four and was buried in the Liberty Cemetery, Liberty, Idaho. Her final resting place was next to her loving and devoted husband, John Atkins Hymas.

The author of this Life Sketch of Mary Jane Watkins Hymas (Passey) is unknown. The original account has been revised and additions made to make it more complete from stories, documents and other records collected and kept in the Family History Library of K. Oswald.