

Biography of  
Sarah Jane Thomas Stewart  
Utah Native and Pioneer

By

Ruth Stewart

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Sarah Jane Thomas was born in the pioneer village of Lehi, Utah County, Utah, on Dec. 21, 1852. Her parents, Daniel Claiborne Thomas and Jane Gaither Thomas arrived in Lehi in September 1850, they being in the first group of white settlers in that community.

When Jane was three weeks old her parents, along with several other were called to colonize Cedar Valley, about 18 miles from Lehi and on side of Utah Lake.

Life in Cedar Valley was difficult for the settlers. Although Jane was only seven years old when the family moved to Cache County, she never forgot the fear of Indian raids, the drought, grasshoppers, dust, and the eternal wind. The Indians in Utah County were very troublesome at that time and harassed the settler's continually, stealing horses, cattle, or anything they could find. Two of Bishop Weeks sons were murdered by the Indians and Jane's father and her teen aged cousin, Harrison Thomas, had a harrowing experience and barely escaped with their lives. Because of the Indian depredations, Brigham Young advised the settlers to build a wall around the settlement, and from that time it was called Cedar Fort.

The frightening experiences of the first seven years of Jane's life made such an impression on her childish mind that she never forgot them during her long life. Whenever she spoke of Cedar Fort she would tell of the difficulties they endured and of her father's narrow escape and the death of the Weeks boys.

On the happier side, she had her beloved cousin, Elizabeth (Lib) Morehead near her and with an idolized teen-age cousin, Harrison Thomas, living in their home, things were not all bad.

When her uncle Preston Thomas, was called by Brigham Young, in 1860, to colonize Franklin, Idaho and act as bishop, all the Thomas clan went to Cache Valley with him. Jane's father and the Morehead families settled in Smithfield while the Preston Thomas family lived nearby in Franklin, Idaho.

After the dreadful experience of Cedar Fort, five very happy years were spent in Smithfield. Lib's older sister Ann said it was heaven on earth, and so it seemed to Jane. She and her cousin Lib were inseparable. When they were eight years old they were baptized the same day and where one went the other was always there. Jane always said Lib Morehead was the only sister she ever had.

When Jane was twelve years old her father decided it was too cold in Smithfield, so he decided to move to Plain City, in Weber County, where the winters were not quite so long. Jane was broken hearted to think of leaving the things she had known and loved, and especially Lib and Ann and Harrison. However; she was young and it didn't take her long to find friends and happiness in Plain City.

Jane attended school in the old adobe schoolhouse. It had a dirt floor and split logs for seats. The schoolmaster was Daddy W. W. Meguere. He was a disciplinarian and if one of the students misbehaved and he didn't know which one had perpetrated the deed he would thrash them all so he would be sure to get the culprit. The punishment couldn't have been too severe because Jane always added, "But he was a fine old man".

Life in a small town couldn't have been too exciting, but they made their own fun. They had dramas, many surprise parties, and especially dances. Jane loved to dance and often told

of the many dances they had where they danced all night. They had to stop several times during the night and sweep out the dirt. Usually at midnight refreshments would be served.

Just one month after her eighteenth birthday, Jane was married to William Lyle Stewart. Her older brother Claiborne and his bride to be, Elizabeth Sharp were married the same day. They were married in the Old Endowment House in Salt Lake City, on January 29, 1872. The two young couples were accompanied to Salt Lake City by William's sister Martha Geddes and her year old baby Maggie. They traveled in a spring wagon and although it was the latter part of January, it had been a mild winter and there was no snow, so the trip was not too difficult. It took a good part of a day to reach Salt Lake City and when they arrived they all went to William's oldest sister Mary Campbell's home.

Jane was naturally a rather quite, shy girl, and she had never been to the city and had not met any of her future in-laws. She was terrified and to make matters worse, the vivacious Campbell twins, Agnes and Ann, just sixteen years old, teased her about getting married and being their aunt, until she was ready to cry. In later years she always spoke of "those twins!"

After a few days spent in Salt Lake City visiting her husband's relatives and sister Martha's friends, the six returned to Plain City. Jane and her husband settled down to married life in a two-room log house just south of the Town Square. Jane's father had given them a lot next to his home and William built the house. Of the ten children born of this union the first four were born in the little log house. After the birth of their fourth child, Archibald, they decided they needed more room, so a tall two story four-room house was built in front of the log house, which still served as a kitchen and dining area. All the other children were born in this house.

Both of the Stewart's were active in religious and social life in Plain City. Shortly after Jane's marriage Eliza R. Snow visited Plain City and organized The Retrenchment Society, and Jane was chosen as one of the counselors. The procedure for the Retrenchment Society was taken after the 13th Ward in Salt Lake City which served as an example to follow in inducing attendance at Sacrament meeting and the curtailment of extravagance in dress; also the promoting of faith among the members. Most of the women in Plain City became charter members of this organization.

Shortly after the Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association was organized in Plain City, Jane became President, which position she held for nearly twenty five years until the family moved from the ward.

Jane's husband, William Lyle Stewart, was very active in Church, Civic, and political affiliations. He was a member of almost every committee and organization not only in Plain City but throughout Weber County, and Jane found so on after her marriage that anyone from an Apostle, to a congressman, or any stranger in town would be apt to be invited to dinner with out any previous notice. However, she was a good cook and organizer and always managed to put on a good meal.

In 1888 Jane's husband was called to serve a mission to Great Britain, leaving her with seven children, a baby not quite one year old, the oldest being a daughter 14 years old. It was a struggle, but she managed to support her family and her husband in Scotland for 26 months. The last 14 months of his mission he served as President of the Scottish Mission. During the

time her husband was on a mission her father was gravely ill and she took care of him as well of her mother. Her father passed away shortly before her husband's return.

In 1896 her husband was called to serve as bishop of the newly organized Warren Ward, which was formed from the western part of Plain City. Consequently the family moved to Warren where her responsibilities increased many times. Besides her large family they usually had one or two hired men living in the house, then to Jane's dismay, when a school was organized in the district her husband told the two teachers if they couldn't find a place to board they could live at his house. Needless to say, adjustments had to be made. Children had to be crowded into two beds in two of the rooms and the hired men had to sleep in their own homes, although they still ate with the family. Somehow they managed. Being in the sheep business, living on a farm they had all the fruit and vegetables they needed, as well as lamb, mutton, pork, chickens, beef, milk, etc., so there was always plenty of food supplies and they had several daughters to help with the work.

Warren being such a small ward all the family who were old enough had to hold at least one office and sometimes several. When the Relief Society was organized in 1904, Jane was made president so additional duties were added to her already crowded life.

There were very few Sundays during the year when there were no church officials or board members to dinner. Those being horse and buggy days the church people come to Sunday School and stayed to Sacrament Meeting in the afternoon. Jane's daughter Nettie, would go to Sunday School and count how many strangers were present, then hurry home to report to her mother how many extra people would be to dinner. This arrangement allowed Jane to fry another chicken or two, bake another pie and make another batch of baking powder biscuits.

In her husband's church, civic and political activities he had to attend many functions, which he loved, but Jane endured. She was a perfect complement to her husband. He was energetic, ambitious, and nervous, with a temper, while she was calm and serene, taking things as they came. However, she was not a mild or meek woman, but had a mind of her own. Her husband had never had a real home until his marriage and he wouldn't leave, even for a short time unless she went with him, and if she left for more than two days he would be sure to get sick and phone for her to come home. She watched ever him very carefully, and before he left the house she would be sure everything in his attire was in good order, and he had the long lock of hair in the right place.

After her husband had been bishop for ten years they decided to let the boys run the farm and move to Ogden. Her husband was not in good health and they had one daughter working in Ogden and a daughter and son attending Weber Stake Academy, and a couple more coming up for an education, so they bought a house at 2451 Taylor Avenue. It was far enough away to have a garden and a cow. They lived in the Ogden 5<sup>th</sup> ward which then extended all the way to the mountain. While Jane did not again hold any office, she was very active in relief society and was an expert quilter and knitter.

Jane's husband's health was failing, so she spent most of her time taking care of him. He was suffering from pernicious anemia, and while not confined to bed he was not able to do any work or go away from home for two years. After his death, March 15, 1917, she more or less retired from activity. She was perfectly healthy but just didn't want to go out. After 47

years of married life she had no desire to go out without her husband, so she just stayed home.

She spent her time knitting rag rugs. She would tear rags into strips, sew them together, then crochet them with a large wooden hook. She was really quite artistic in the way she combined the colors, and she never had any trouble getting the rugs to lie flat, although other people who tried the same method could never get the rugs to stay put. Her family had a hard time supplying her with rags. If any of her daughters had a bright blouse or dress she would say, "That would look nice in a rug," and before long it would be in a rug.

Over the years her reputation as a rug maker spread and strangers from all over Ogden and Weber County brought rags to be made into rugs. She never charged for her work, the only pay she would take was a little candy. She didn't care much for chocolates, especially the milk chocolates, but preferred hard filled candy. She would sit in her bedroom in her rocker, with a piece of hard candy in her mouth and crochet all day. She would hardly stop for meals. She loved to get a new batch of rags and could hardly wait to start on a new rug. Her eyes were dim and the last two or three years of her life she could hardly see and her work was not up to her usual standard, so she gradually stopped crocheting rugs.

Early in the evening of May 11, 1950, she passed peacefully away at the age of 97. She was buried in the Ogden City Cemetery, beside her husband, the day before Mother's Day, May 13, 1950.

Submitted by Ruth Stewart  
Daughter  
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