

ATKIN, THOMAS SR.

Compiled by Willard G. Atkin, Jr.

Son of John Atkin and Mary Ashley of Barkworth, Lincolnshire, England.
Born Feb. 10, 1804, Legsby, Lincolnshire.

His education was limited but he served an apprenticeship as a carpenter and builder, and became a first class mechanic. He enjoyed excellent health, was industrious, and had a good head for business.

Married Mary Morley February 13, 1826, at Newgate, Newark, Nottingham, England. She was the daughter of Thomas Morley and Mary Hole of Lincolnshire, England. Born February 24, 1800.

Their children: Eliza born January 15, 1827, died April 5, 1827; George born June 3, 1828, died September 9, 1828; Emily born October 17, 1830, married Richard Warburton; Thomas Jr. born July 7, 1833, married Mary Ann Maughan, May 20, 1856; George born March 12, 1836, married Sara Matilda Utley May 20, 1856; Hannah born August 29, 1839, died March 18, 1846.

Soon after their marriage Thomas went to Louth, Lincolnshire, England to find employment and by April or May a house was rented and Mary left her father's home to make her life in her own home. Thomas was able to purchase a piece of land pleasantly situated in Louth, on which they built four substantial dwelling houses, one of which the family occupied. The rent of the other three furnished an income.

Their three children were given an education, raised in a religious home, The Atkin's were known for their kindness and liberality to the poor and needy. Thomas felt that he was established in his Louth Home for life, although glowing accounts of the splendid opportunities for settlers in America, were continually circulated and many were emigrating to that choice land-still he was content to remain in England, his native land.

About the year 1840 Mary became dangerously ill with a rupture in her side. It was beyond the power of the doctors to aid her, and it was felt that nothing but the power of God could preserve her. Thomas in his grief, resolved in his heart that he would be more devoted in serving the Lord, if only the prayers and desires of he and his children could be granted. Their prayers were answered and Mary lived to bless her husband and her family for many years.

To Thomas religious matters took on a more important place in his life, and he sought for more spiritual advice from his Methodist minister, on what he should do to be saved, but was unsatisfied with their answers. In 1843 when Elder Henry Cuerdon brought the revealed Gospel of Jesus Christ to Louth, Thomas having been prepared by the Lord was able to accept the truth as taught by the Christ of Jesus Christ of Later-day-Saints. He was baptized and confirmed March 25, 1843 (from the record it looks like he then worked with the members of his family tell they were all baptized). Mary and Emily baptized July 1, 1843; Thomas Jr. baptized July 3, 1843; George baptized September 13, 1846.

In the town of Louth, about eighty intelligent and respectable people out of the twelve thousand inhabitants joined the Church and were organized by Elder Cuerden into the Louth Branch, with Edward Warburton as president, Thomas Atkin, Sr., and William Thompson were counselors.

A respectable hall was rented at Louth where Sabbath meetings were held regularly, Apostle John Taylor and other prominent Latter-day Saints visited Louth at various times and stayed briefly with the Atkin family.

They did a great missionary work there, Thomas Atkin, Sr., and a number of other brethren frequently performed short missions on the Sabbath day in preaching to the people of the surrounding villages. Thomas would take his two sons and other young boys with him to do the singing, but very little success attended these meetings.

As soon as the principle of gathering was taught, Thomas tried to dispose of his property and to gather with the Saints. Not being able to succeed in doing so, he concluded to leave his property in the care of his brother John Atkin, and to emigrate to Nauvoo, which was at that time the headquarters of the Church. All the necessary preparations were made, waiting only for the sailing of the next shipload of Saints, when the startling news of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith reached England. On account of the unsettled condition of the affairs of the Church, the gathering of the Saints was suspended for a time.

On December 23, 1847, a general epistle was sent from the Church leaders to the Saints in England, with the directive; "We say emigrate as speedily as possible to this vicinity . . . bringing with you all kinds of choice seeds, of grain, vegetables, fruit, shrubbery, trees and vines, everything that will please the eye, gladden the heart, or cheer the soul of men, that grows upon the face of the whole earth, also the best stock of beast, bird, and fowl of every kind, also the best tools of every description, and machinery for spinning and weaving . . ."

On February 1, 1848, Orson Spencer, Church leader in England, proclaimed: "The channel of Saints' emigration to the land of Zion is now opened. The long-wished-for time of gathering has come, Good tidings from Mt. Zion! The resting place of Israel for the last days has been discovered."

Thomas Atkin disposed of his property advantageously and, after bidding farewell to relatives and friends, the old schoolhouse and teacher, William Foster, and other places dear to them, they left Louth on January 16, 1849, on the morning train. Although it was early, the station house was crowded with friends and associates who were there to say farewell, Those departing at the time were the families of Edward Warburton, William Thompson, Thomas Atkin, Sr., and others, which left the Louth Branch in a disorganized condition.

They sailed on the ship Zetland, January 29, 1849, presided over by Orson Spencer. March 31, the pilot came on board to take the ship into the Mississippi River. Sunday April 1st they came in sight of the shores of America after 10 weeks at sea. On April 4th they left the ship Zetland and boarded the steam boat Ioway bound for St. Louis. Arrived at St. Louis on April 12th. Purchased wagon covers, chains, plows, etc. to out fit for crossing the plains, and to establish a home in the mountains, over one thousand miles from any supplies. May 4th arrived at Council Bluffs where out fit of wagons, oxen, cows, provisions, cooking utensils, etc. . On May 28th left Council Bluffs for Utah. The Orson Spencer Company entered the Valley early in the afternoon of September 25th.

In the spring of 1850, a garden was planted, with the good supply of early vegetables, and their scanty supply of flour they were able to subsist until harvest time.

The Tooele Utah Stake History 1847 to 1900, put Thomas Sr. in Tooele in 1850, "Alfred Lee, Peter Maughan, Francis Cunnell, Benjamin Clegg, Wilson Lund, Thomas Atkin and a widow by the name of Smith came to Tooele toward the close of 1850." Thomas Atkin, Jr. writes, "Early in the spring of 1851 my father and I went out to Tooele Valley . . . where we purchased a farm of 40 acres, and commenced to establish a home and make arrangements for our family to join us . . . "

Thomas's first home was built near the mouth of Settlement Canyon where a fort was laid out and enclosed on three sides by joining the log houses of the settlers together for their protection from hostile Indians. On the fourth side was built a large corral in which all of the animals were driven every evening and guarded through the night and carefully herded through the day.

In the spring of 1853 a city plat was surveyed about a half mile north of this fort and after putting their crops in all of the settlers moved out of the fort and began to make homes and locate upon their city lots, and began making permanent improvements. Each lot extended from the street back to the lane. Thomas chose the corner lot on the southwest corner of First East and Vine street. The next lot running south was chosen by Benjamin Clegg the next by Thomas Atkin Jr., and the next by George Atkin.

The first crops they planted were almost a complete failure on account of the scarcity of water to irrigate and the visit of clouds of grasshoppers which swept off everything green in the fields and gardens. This made it necessary for them to subsist on sego bulbs, wild roots and herbs of the mountains and prairies to sustain life as they were so far away from supplies.

Their first home in this new plat was made of logs. The logs were dove tailed together and fastened with wooden pins. Thomas had all kinds of tools and they were the finest in the country. After a few years he built a nice home, and the log house was later moved across the street to be used as a grainary and the rafters which were put together like furniture were placed on a barn and used for many years.

Thomas was a cabinet maker and he built and finished some very fine log houses by smoothing and planing the walls on the inside, then whitewashing them with clay and water. The cracks between the logs were filled with cloth and then chinked with clay. A large fireplace in one end of the cabin supplied both warmth and a place to cook. Through community cooperation many such log houses were soon built and the first dugouts were deserted for these much improved homes.

Thomas was a cattle man having a large herd of cattle, with a large corral to hold them. When drives were held the stock gathered were held in these corrals until the owner would come and claim them.

Thomas was a great one to walk and being tall and thin he could take real long strides. The settlers would drive their cattle up the canyon, especially their dry stock and all had to walk. He could walk all day, one time he took Peter M. Clegg and Thomas Jr. and set out for the canyon. On the way back he left the boys behind and when they reached home found he had eaten, changed clothes and was out working on the farm.

One of his characteristics was to always go bareheaded, he never wore a hat. His face was brown as a berry and his hair was white as snow. The Indians said of him that he was "Heap Sorry" meaning that he had had much sorrow on account of his white hair.

One time when wheat was scarce, he was known to have had some in his grainary. Several of the pioneers came to him to borrow some of the wheat to make bread for their families but he refused to let them have it and they left feeling that he was stingy, but when planting time came he gave each one some of the grain so they could plant and raise some for themselves.

Mary Morley Atkin was a very small person, light in complexion and very neat and tidy about her home, her person, and her surroundings. She took no active part in the community, she was just a very good mother and made a good home for her family. She had a very kindly and lovable disposition. She and her husband always attended Church regularly. She would say. "It doesn't matter much for this earth. We are living for the hereafter."

Mary died January 3, 1882, in Tooele, she was 82. Later Thomas married Hanna Morley Thompson, Mary's sister.

When Eli B. Kelsey was appointed to preside at Tooele, Thomas Atkin, Sr., and Alfred Lee were appointed his counslors. Brother Kelsey presided over the settlement until the spring of 1856, when John Roberry, who had located temporarily at the mill, returned to Tooele and again took charge of the ecclesiastical affairs of the settlement, succeeding Eli B. Kelsey. He retained Thomas Atkin, Sr. and Alfred Lee as his counslors. Thomas filled a mission to England from 1860 to 1863.

In summing up Thomas life historians may say he had a very kindly but stern disposition, he had a mind of his own and knew how to use it, was very religious, was a carpenter and builder, a farmer and stockman. Thomas passed away December 16, 1888 in Tooele and was buried in the Tooele Cemetery, almost 85 years old.

Thomas's three children lived out their lives in Tooele; Emily the matriarch of the Warburton descendants; Thomas, Jr. much loved bishop of the Tooele Ward for 24 year, and then patriarch of Tooele Stake until his death; George a great worker in a civic, business and religious way in building up this community in the early days.