Jane Moorehead Thomas was the third child and the second daughter of Preston Thomas and Sarah Ann Jane Morehead. She was born 5 March 1843 in Tipton County, Tennessee.

Jane’s father was a large man. He stood six feet four inches tall. He was large boned and physically strong with a fair complexion, blue eyes and brown hair.
Jane when she reached maturity was a large woman, as were her son and daughters.

How much schooling Jane received is not known. However, she was well educated for her time. Jane’s father was a well educated man and deplored the fact that so many of the early day settlers were uneducated. He advocated free education for the poor as well as for the rich. His views were not well receive. Knowing these facts, it stands to reason that Preston Thomas married a fairly well educated woman and wanted his children to be educated. Jane went to school when schools were available and she was also taught at home by her parents. Her father also taught school off and on through out his life.

In the spring of 1845 Jane’s family moved to Nauvoo, Illinois. They remained in Nauvoo until the city was burned by a mob in 1846. The family fled from Nauvoo and went to Memphis, Tennessee where her Grandmother Moorehouse lived.

In the spring of 1847 the family packed their belongs and moved to Winter Quarters, Iowa.

Jane’s family made the trek to the Great Salt Lake Valley during the summer of 1851 and settled in the Lehi area. Part of the time the family lived in Cedar Valley some 20 miles to the west of Lehi. Jane was now eight years old.

We have no record of Jane’s childhood or of her teenage years. However, because of trying times and circumstances she learned the skills that were necessary to cop with pioneer life and prepare herself for marriage.

In June 1860 Jane’s father was called by Brigham Young to established the settlement of Franklin on the northern edge of Cache Valley. It would be some 13 years later before a survey was run and the settlement found itself in the Territory of Idaho. Preston Thomas was also set apart as the first Bishop of Franklin.

Along with her family, Jane packed her belongs into a covered wagon, hooked the oxen on and made the trip to the Franklin area. The distance from Lehi to Franklin was about 126 miles and the trip took two weeks. Jane was seventeen when she moved to Franklin.

Many families were also called upon to help settle Franklin. One of these families was the Thomas Charles Davis Howell family. There is a good possibility that the two families knew each other from their Tennessee days.

Jason Elihu Howell, the oldest son of Thomas C. D. Howell courted Jane. They were married by Bishop Thomas 7 July 1861 and in October they traveled to the Endowment House in Salt Lake city and received their endowments 26 October 1861.

In the spring of 1865 the family moved to Round Valley into a group of cabins called “The String” or “Rushvile.”

Because the Indians became such a problem, the families were move to Oxford. In July 1866 the families were called back to Franklin where there would be more protection from the marauding Indians. It was late in the fall of 1866 before it was thought safe enough for the families to move back to “The String”.

Jane and Martha and her family remained in Franklin to await the birth of her third child. Sarah Louisa Howell was born 3 September 1866. Shortly after Sarah’s birth, Jane and her children returned to “The String” now named Clifton.

Jane’s fourth child, William Preston Howell was born in Oxford 14 February 1867. Oxford is about two miles north of Clifton.

When Jane and her family moved to Dingle, Idaho (now Dingle) and how longed they stayed is not known. However, Jane’s fifth child, David Taylor Howell was born here 9 September 1871.

The Howell family moved back to Clifton, Idaho. Lydia Angeline Howell joined the family 23 February 1875 and Joseph Elihu Howell joined the family 22 July 1877. This would be the extent of Jane’s family.

On 12 December 1870, Jason married Jane’s younger sister, Mariah Thomas. The sisters lived together for many years.

Calamity struck the Jason Howell family when Jason died 29 November 1876. The death of Jane’s husband and the father of her children must have placed hardship on Jane and her family. She was left with sole responsibility for the support of her family as well as that of her sister. Undoubtedly other members of Jane’s family contributed to their well being.

Jane received a call from Brigham Young to be a mid-wife for the Clifton area. She traveled to Salt Lake City and took a short course in obstetrics.

In Idaho history we find the following excerpt: “Midwives were “Angels of Mercy” and as far as it is known the record of service in this field was made by Jane Howell. “Aunt Jane”, as she was called, lost only one child in 500 confinements. Neither snow, rain, wind or storm prevented her from going on her mission of mercy. She traveled in all types of conveyances and accepted only what was offered for her services. Not only did Jane deliver babies but was often called upon to help with other sicknesses as well.
Little did Jane know that on her last call of mercy that it would end in tragedy. On the way to her destination something startled her horse. The horse bolted and threw Jane from the buggy. She suffered a broken back from the fall. How long she lay by the side of the road is unknown, however it could have been for a considerable length of time. Jane survived the accident, but spent the rest of her life confined to a wheelchair.

A few years after the death of her husband, Jane petitioned the United States government for some enumeration for Jason’s services during the Walker Indian War.

Jane said of Jason, “He was a minute man standing guard to help protect the settlers and their property during the Indian raids from 1862-1865.” Jane was awarded a small stipend of $5.00 a month.

In 1900 Jane’s son David and her son-in-law Lorin P. Walker homesteaded in the Warm River area. The boys built a small cabin down on the flat for her and Aunt Mariah to live in. Jane was provided for by her children. Jane and Mariah spent many hours making quilts.

About 1920 Jane’s daughter, Sarah and her family moved to Basalt, Idaho several of her other children lived. Later Jane and Mariah also moved to Basalt. Again her sons and daughters made sure she and her sister had the necessities of life. Granddaughters that were old enough to help take care of their grandmother would go and spend a week or so to help her.

In 1922, Mariah died leaving Jane alone. Jane then lived with her children going from home to home for a short period of time.

What type of woman was she? As near as can be determined she was a perfectionist. She had a sharp tongue and used it freely whenever things didn’t go her way. She was dedicated to her calling and her church. She was a woman to be proud of.

Jane died in Basalt, Idaho 12 March 1926 and was buried in the Firth Idaho cemetery. She was 83 years and 7 days old at the time of her death.

Written by Elwood W. Chambers
Acknowledgments: Granddaughters, May Hill, Lois Klas, Beryl Harris.
Idaho History.
"Angels of Mercy" garner a place in medical history

By Woody Chambers

History often short changes the true "History Makers". This is certainly true when it recorded the events of the "Angels of Mercy".

"Angels of Mercy" were a select group of women that were asked by Brigham Young, then the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to become midwives. Doctors being very scarce, midwives were needed in the many new settlements in the South Eastern area of the Territory of Idaho.

This select group of women traveled to Salt Lake City, Utah and took a short course in obstetrics.

In Idaho history, we find the following short excerpt. "Midwives were 'Angels of Mercy' and as far as is known the record of service in this field was made by Jane Howell. 'Aunt Jane', as she was called, lost only one child in five hundred confinements. Neither snow, rain, wind or storm prevented her from going on her mission of mercy. She traveled in all types of conveyances and accepted only what was offered for her services." End of excerpt. Now the rest of the story.

Not only did Jane deliver babies but was called upon to set broken bones and provide nursing services for those suffering from various illnesses that often hit early settlements.

Her service lasted about 24 years. Unknown to her and the community the last call to be answered ended in a tragedy for Jane. The horse she was driving was frightened and bolted throwing her from the buggy. Jane suffered a broken back in the fall and was found several hours later laying alongside the road.

Jane Howell survived her broken back and was confined to a wheel chair for the rest of her life. A loving family, the best social security in the world, took care of her needs and wants for the rest of her long life.

"Aunt Jane", a maker of history, died in Basalt, Idaho, March 1926 at the age of 83.