



## Will the Real John Wasson...

*No Scottish church parish birth or baptism records match the information about John (Jemima) Wasson in the Jones County History books or on his Wyoming Cemetery headstone. So how do we know that we have the right John Wasson?*

The History of Jones County (1879) includes the following biographical sketch of John and Jemima Wasson:

JOHN WASSON, Sr., farmer, Madison Twp., Sec. 2; P.O. Onslow; born December 9, 1812, in Ayrshire, Scotland; in 1832, he came to New York; in 1853, he came to Jones Co.; he owns 140 acres of land. Married Jemima Russell in 1844; she was born in Ayrshire, Scotland, June 12, 1814; have seven children – John, Jane, Mary E., William, Jennette, James and Joseph; lost George, aged 2 years and 9 months. Republican; belongs to the Presbyterian Church.

John's obituary also lists his birthdate as December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1812, and yet my Dailly Parish birth record for him gives his birthdate as September 10, 1813 and date of baptism as September 13.

There are several differences between the biographical sketch and other articles and records I found.

- John did move to New York in the 1830s. One obituary said he came over with his parents. But his parents and sister emigrated to New York on separate ships in 1834, not 1832, and passenger logs show that John did not cross the Atlantic on either of their ships. I have not found a record for John's crossing, so 1832 may or may not be true.
- John did return to Scotland by 1841 where he met and married Jemima Russell at the end of that year, not 1844.

- Jemima was born on June 12, 1816, not 1814. She was born at Dykenook, Avondale Parish, which is in Lanarkshire, not Ayrshire, although John and Jemima met and were married in Riccarton Parish, Ayrshire.
- The Wassons moved to Iowa in 1854, not 1853. Census records from 1854 and 1856 and the birth location of their son Joseph in 1857, however, put John and Jemima in Jackson County, Iowa rather than Jones County until the late 1850s. Their 1860 U.S. Census record is the first known document to have them living in Jones County, where they were tenant farmers in Clay Township, although a farm schedule from that same year suggests that they had also been living on that Clay Township farm in 1859.

Because of all these differences, I looked for additional information to confirm that John (Jemima) Wasson of Jones County was John Watson of Dailly Parish, born on September 10, 1813 to John Watson and Jane Lambie.

I first checked for birth records for anyone named John Watson or any of its variant spellings in the Scottish parish records for December 9, 1812, but I did not find any. Then I considered other evidence. Discrepancies were not uncommon back then – people sometimes did not know their exact birthdate. And of course, some records never existed or have been lost to history.

- The baptism record for John and Jemima’s son who was born at sea listed John as being “late of New Daly, Ayrshire”. This in fact is the record that first directed me to the Dailly Parish Church registry. The baptism record documented son John’s birthdate as May 16, 1842 (born at sea) and date of baptism as June 19.
- When John moved back to Scotland, the 1841 census indicated he was living with a James Wasson in the home of William Gordon, his wife Jane (Jean) Cameron and their family. The 1841 Scottish Census rounded adult ages to numbers divisible by 5, but James’ age range fit that of John’s brother James, and Jane (Jean) Cameron was the daughter of Jane Lambie’s sister Margaret and thus would be a first cousin to John and James.
- John and Jemima settled in Amboy Township, Oswego County, New York, the same place as parents John Watson (now Wasson) and Jane Lambie, and their son Hugh. Other Lambies from Galston Parish, where Jane Lambie was from, had previously settled in the area. Hugh was the right age to be John’s brother Hugh.
- When John, Jemima and their son moved to New York in 1842, they indeed settled on John/Jane/Hugh’s farm.

- John's obituary description of his first move to New York fits the timeframe of John/Jane/Hugh's move to New York.
- John Wasson, Sr.'s 1844 will named all of his children as I had originally identified them in Dailly Parish Church birth records, except for son Robert, who I believe died young. The two sons who lived on the farm with John, Sr. inherited the farm; the other children received small monetary bequests.
- John sold his share of the farm to Hugh in 1846, and moved to a small farm down the street. He sold this farm in 1854, the same year that John, Jemima and their family first show up in Iowa records.
- The Anamosa Eureka's April 28, 1887 edition reported on an accidental stir caused in Jones County following the death of John Wasson's brother Hugh. Hugh's son William Wasson sent a telegram to David Sim saying, "Father is dead". Sim mistook the source of the telegram as William Wasson, the son of John and Jemima who had moved to Kansas, and "Father" as a reference to L.G. Ransom, his father-in-law and longtime Madison Township, Jones County resident who moved to Kansas with his wife at the same time William moved there. The news quickly spread through the community before David Sim noticed that the telegram was from New York, and was referring to Hugh C. Wasson, John Wasson's brother and the uncle of David's wife Jeannette Wasson Sim.

### ONSLow ITEMS.

ONSLow, Ia., April 5, 1887.

Quite a sensation was created here on Sunday morning when it was reported at the M. E. Sunday School that L. G. Ransom, of Onaga, Kansas, formerly an active member of this school, was dead. It caused a deep feeling of sadness to pervade the school, but later in the day it was found out to be a mistake. It seems that Mr. David Sim received a telegram saying, "Father is dead," and signed Wm. Wasson. As Mr. Wasson is a son-in-law of Ransom Mr. Sim, without noticing where the dispatch **Wasson** came from, supposed it to be Wm. Wasson, of Kansas, and so reported, and the sad news spread before he noticed that the telegram was from New York, from a Mr. Wm. Wasson, of that state, announcing the death of his father **Wasson** as a brother of Uncle John Wasson, of this place, and uncle of Mrs. David Sim.

*Anamosa Eureka, April 28, 1887*

- In 1908, the Monticello Express (Jones County, Iowa) reported that Mrs. Jessie Hodgdon of Pontiac, Michigan was visiting relatives locally including Mary Gridley, her cousin. Jessie was the daughter of Agnes Kirkwood Watson Robertson, making her a first cousin to John's daughter Mary if Agnes and John are siblings.

...  
Mrs. Jessie Hodgdon of Pontiac, Michigan, is visiting in the home of R. M. Corbit and family and also in the homes of C. B. Gridley and W. G. Krouse and other relatives. Mrs. Hodgdon is a cousin of Mrs. Gridley.  
... Col. G. W. Evans accompanied the

*Monticello Express, March 19, 1908*

Thus, the evidence clearly supports that John Wasson of Jones County is John Watson, born September 10, 1813 in Dailly Parish, Ayrshire to John Watson and Jane Lambie, and that there are numerous errors in The History of Jones County biographical sketch.

### What about the Date Difference?

It is not unusual to see a year's difference in some records. But what about the December vs. September dates? In the U.S., a date expressed 12/9 is December 9. But in much of Europe, 12/9 is the 12<sup>th</sup> of September. September 12 is close but not quite September 10 or 13.

### What about the Popular Alternative Explanation?

The most common alternative identification of John (Jemima) Watson's ancestry was posted to the internet several years ago, and then was widely copied. It was a working hypothesis that John (Jemima) Wasson was instead born as John Wason in Rutherglen, Lanarkshire in 1805, and was the son of John Wason and Margaret Walker of Govan and the grandson of John Wason and Janet Park of Paisley.

Like the Dailly Parish birth record I found, its surname spelling doesn't match "Wasson" exactly, and its dates don't match the Jones County documentation or headstone. It was, however, one of the better-fitting records at a time when only a limited number of records were available online.

The three generations of John Wasons in that proposed line are indeed related to one another just as described. But the youngest John was incorrectly reported as having married Jemima Russell and emigrating to the United States. As Scotland's statutory records became available online, they showed that this John's wife was named Margaret and he remained in Scotland until his death in the Tradeston area of Glasgow in 1855. His age, place of birth and parents' names on his statutory death record were wholly consistent with his Rutherglen Parish birth record.

RECORDS OF THE BIRTHS				RECORDS OF THE DEATHS			
No.	Sex, Ed., Ethnic, or Complex	Age	Place of Birth	When and where born	When and where died	When and where buried	Signature of Registrar
919	Wason, John born to a Scot	Male 50	Rutherglen Govan	1805 12/27	1855 12/27	Govan Govan	John Wason Margaret Walker John Wason Janet Park

*John Wason, born in Rutherglen as the son of John Wason and Margaret Walker, died on December 27, 1855 at age 50 (thus born in 1805), and was buried in the Govan Parish Church churchyard, according to his Scottish statutory death record.*

Thus, the most common alternative has been solidly ruled out.

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