

WILLIE MOSS WATKINS

August 18, 1884

February 28, 1990

Willie Moss ("W.M." or "Bill") Watkins was born on August 18, 1884, in the Grove community of Casey County to [Albert Osborne "A.O." Watkins](#) and Sarah Frederick Patterson.

A. O. Watkins was born in Arkansas in 1855, the son of a doctor who had moved from Vanceburg, Kentucky, to Arkansas. He came to Casey County as an official of the Eugene Zimmerman Company which had bought some 13,000 acres of timberland (the Enoch Burdett land) in eastern Casey County and was constructing a railroad from Kings Mountain to Yosemite.

In 1881, A. O. Watkins married Sarah Frederick Patterson, a young widow with a child, Lela Patterson Hollingsworth Noll (b. 1880; d. 1948). To the union of A. O. and Sarah were born Marietta "Etta" Watkins Russell (b. 1882; d. 1966), Willie Moss Watkins and Albert S. Watkins (b. 3/5/87; d. 5/10/43). A. O. Watkins was shot to death by Frank Flinchum in 1894, when Willie was ten years old. In 1898, Sarah married Bert McKinley who proved to be an excellent father for the children.

Bill was very close to his brother [Albert](#) and loved to tell of what an unbeatable team they made as pitcher and catcher in baseball. Bill played his first baseball game at Yosemite in 1900, and over the next two decades played for Union College, Western Kentucky State Teacher's College, and on various community and semi-pro teams.

In the spring of 1902, at the age of 17, Bill set out for Texas to fulfill his dream of becoming a cowboy. He found work near Anna, Texas, on the Yarbrough ranch which was owned by a lady from Adair County, Kentucky. Instead of breaking wild horses, however, he found himself breaking eggs as a cook, so he returned to Kentucky in the Fall of the same year.

From 1902 until the late Fall of 1904, Bill studied at Middleburg Academy, which at that time offered courses from the grade school to the college level. In 1904, he obtained a teacher's certificate by passing an examination, even though he did not yet have a college degree. He then taught the Grove school for five years from 1904 to 1909.

Mr. Watkins persistently sought a formal college education and attended Union College, Bowling Green Business University, Cumberland College, Western State Teacher's College, the University of Kentucky, and ultimately received a degree from Eastern State Teacher's College in 1929. Through this period, undistracted by the nuisances of radio and television, he studied and learned classic literature and poetry ... his constant companions for the rest of his life.

In memory of William Moss Watkins

August 18, 1884, to February 28, 1990

In 1909, Bill again developed wanderlust and traveled to California. From Southern California, he decided to take a ship to Seattle, Washington, to attend the World's Fair. By the time the ship reached San Francisco, Bill was so sea sick that he paid a stevedore one dollar to carry his trunk from the ship. He then headed inland, finding a job based in Sacramento as a timekeeper and materials clerk for the Sacramento Electric, Gas and Railway Co. After seven months in California, he came back to Kentucky.

In December of 1909 he enrolled in Western Kentucky State Teacher's College for the three month Spring Term. He then returned to teaching at Golden Pond in Trigg County, the original location of which is now under Lake Barkley.

Near the end of 1912, he resigned as principal of Golden Pond to take a job based in the Cincinnati area as a railway parcel post mail clerk. He took pride in having quickly learned all the post offices in Kentucky and how to route mail to each of them, but he soon found the repetition boring.

Education drew him back to Casey County as principal of the Liberty school system from 1915 to 1919. While principal of the Liberty system, he married a student, the lovely Miss Edna Lee Murphy, on June 19, 1916. Their first child, Josephine Lenore Foster, was born in Liberty on September 20, 1918.

As principal of the Liberty system, a high school was started. In early 1919, the Liberty school was closed due to a flu epidemic and Bill, Edna Lee and Josephine moved to Albany, Kentucky, for Bill to become principal of the Albany system.

Elizabeth Lee Baker was born in Albany on July 4, 1921. Sharleen Murphy Power was born in Albany on January 23, 1923. While in Albany, Bill successfully motivated the community to build a [high school](#).

In 1923, the family moved to Kings Mountain where Mr. Watkins taught until 1926. Dr. James R. Watkins was born at Kings Mountain on February 17, 1926.

In 1926, Mr. Watkins became superintendent of the Casey County school system, a post he held until 1950. As superintendent, he made a practice of visiting the numerous one room schools throughout the county, where he would entertain the students with songs, magic tricks, athletics and poetry.

In 1939, he completed his book, **The Men, Women, Events, Institutions & Lore of Casey County**. This history has been very popular due to the sections on genealogy of many of the original families in Casey County.

After teaching for three additional years at Middleburg, he retired in 1953.

After retirement, he continued to play with his "ranch" at McFarland where he experimented with a wide variety of fruits and vegetables and bees.

From the early 1930's until late in the 1070's, Mr. Watkins was a prolific writer, taking a public stand on many issues. In the 30's, he wrote a regular column in the Casey County News called Educational Notes in which he dealt with promises, problems and politics of the Casey County School system. He was a frequent contributor to the Louisville Courier-Journal, and his favorite topic was, of course, education. But he was frequently ahead of his time in other positions he took: supported the lottery to fund education (1965); supported school and community center bond issues; supported road bonds (1965); opposed American involvement in Viet Nam (1967); recognized man's threats to the environment. He was an early supporter of racial integration and an admirer of poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. His writings spoke with reason and many listened, making him a dynamic force in guiding public opinion.

In 1970, Morehead University honored him as an Outstanding Educator of Kentucky. In 1974, he was inducted into the Eastern University Hall of Distinguished Alumni.

W. M. Watkins is survived by his wife, all four children, all ten grandchildren, and all eleven great-grandchildren:

Edna Lee Murphy Watkins (9/2/1898), Widow, Liberty, Kentucky

Josephine Lenore Watkins Foster (9/20/18), Daughter, Liberty, Kentucky

John Watkins Foster, Jr. (12/6/39), Grandson, Waterford, Conn.

Ainslie Elizabeth Watkins Foster (1/12/76), Great-Granddaughter, Waterford, Conn.

Jonathan Watkins Foster (9/11/78), Great-Grandson, Waterford, Conn.

Jerry Lee Foster (7/10/44), Grandson, Liberty, Kentucky

Alice Lenore Foster (11/10/65), Great-Granddaughter, Boston, Mass.

Rebecca Jane Foster (11/6/70), Great-Granddaughter, Liberty, Kentucky

Elizabeth Lee Watkins Baker (7/4/21), Daughter, Kihei, Maui, Hawaii

In memory of William Moss Watkins

August 18, 1884, to February 28, 1990

Sherry Jo Baker (10/6/46), Granddaughter, Cincinnati, Ohio

Benjamin William Baker, III (4/23/48), Grandson, Arcadia, California

Sharleen Murphy Watkins Power (1/23/23), Daughter, Richmond, Kentucky

Jo Anne Power Johnson (3/30/47), Granddaughter, Glasgow, Kentucky

Heather Elizabeth Nichols (2/28/74), Great-Granddaughter, Glasgow, Kentucky

Laura Ellen Nichols (7/22/78), Great-Granddaughter, Glasgow, Kentucky

Kathryn Lou Power (5/23/50), Granddaughter, Richmond, Kentucky

Amy Jo Sorrell (7/27/70), Great-Granddaughter, Lexington, Kentucky

Melissa Kathryn "Kate" Sorrell (9/8/72), Great-Granddaughter, Richmond, Kentucky

Sarah Elizabeth Power Carl (4/18/57), Granddaughter, Brooksville, Kentucky

Justin Bowman Bonnell (7/19/78), Great-Grandson, Brooksville, Kentucky

Trebor Lloyd Bonnell (6/4/81), Great-Grandson, Brooksville, Kentucky

James Robert Watkins (2/17/26), Son, Lexington, Kentucky

Lauren Lee Watkins Leatherbarrow (2/13/56), Granddaughter, Philadelphia, Pa.

Sara Rhea Leatherbarrow (10/13/87), Great-Granddaughter, Philadelphia, Pa.

Pamela Marie Watkins Shields (6/15/58), Granddaughter, Ludlow, Kentucky

Jamie Ruth Watkins Carney (5/25/62), Granddaughter, Hollywood, Florida

Revised: January 22, 2008 (5:00pm)

In memory of William Moss Watkins

August 18, 1884, to February 28, 1990