

Mary Burnetta “Bernetta” Alphin

Mary Burnetta Alphin was born 28 June 1866 in Salt Lake City, Salt Lake, Utah Territory. She was the oldest of six children of John Henry Alphin and Elmira Sprouse.

The family moved from Salt Lake City to Corinne, Box Elder, Utah Territory, by 1870.¹ This was when the transcontinental railroad was completed nearby, perhaps her father worked on the railroad?² They moved that summer to Helena, Lewis and Clark, Montana Territory,³ traveling by stagecoach. Tickets for the family had to be purchased weeks ahead. It took five days and nights to make the trip, stopping just to eat, change horses and rest for an hour.⁴

After one year in Helena, her father sold his business and headed for the gold fields of Nevada by way of Corinne. Unfortunately, they were traveling on a stagecoach that carried an unusually heavy shipment of bullion from the mines and money from the miners to their families back east. The second day they were held up by stage robbers. The “shotgun messenger” was killed and the bandits disappeared after warning the driver to drive on rapidly and not look back. They reported the incident at the next station, but the bandits were never captured.⁵

They spent the winter in Salt Lake City, and her father headed to Pioche in the spring of 1871, leaving the family behind until he could prepare a place for them to live.⁶ By 1874, the family was living in Pioche, Lincoln, Nevada, where her father was as a musician.⁷ By 1879, her father was the proprietor of the Adriatic Saloon in Silver Reef, Washington, Utah Territory.⁸ He was listed as a musician, living with his wife and five children in Silver Reef, on the 1880 census.⁹ Bernetta’s grandfather and uncle and his family also lived in Silver Reef. In 1882, Bernetta was hired as an assistant school teacher in Silver Reef because Mrs Hall had to resign because of ill health. Bernetta taught under Carrie Walker, the head teacher, for the last eight months of the school term. They averaged 87 students with a daily attendance of about 79 pupils. Carrie was paid \$125 per month and paid Bernetta out of that amount (probably \$20-\$50 per month).¹⁰

By 1885, her family was living in Mesa, Colorado.¹¹ Her mother died in 1886 and was buried in Durango, La Plata, Colorado.¹² Bernetta married Herman Lathrop Gray Atkinson about 1887 in Salt Lake City. They had four children. They lived in Grand Junction, Mesa, Colorado. On the 1900 census, her husband was a railroad conductor and they lived with their three children in Cripple Creek, Teller, Colorado.¹³

¹ United States Census, 1870.

² Biography of John Henry Alphin, by Marge Becraft, at *Familysearch.org*

³ United States Census, 1870.

⁴ *Overland Monthly and the Out West Magazine*, 1868-1875, 1916, pp. 501-506.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Nevada State Census, 1875.

⁸ *Silver Reef Miner*, 1 October 1879, p. 1.

⁹ United States Census, 1880.

¹⁰ Silver Reef School Board Minutes.

¹¹ Colorado State Census, 1885.

¹² Biography of John Henry Alphin, by Marge Becraft, at *Familysearch.org*

¹³ United States Census, 1900.

In 1910, they were living two children and her brother and sister-in-law in Burbank, Los Angeles, California, where Bernetta's husband was a railroad agent.¹⁴ On the 1920 census, Bernetta is widowed and living with her daughter and son-in-law in Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California.¹⁵ She was a member of the Woman's Press Club,¹⁶ the Southern California Press Club,¹⁷ and a third vice president of the League of American Penwomen.¹⁸ She was also a member of In 1930, she is living with a different daughter, son-in-law and two grandchildren in Los Angeles.¹⁹ She died on 18 January 1935 in Los Angeles, California.²⁰ It is not known where either Bernetta or Herman were buried.²¹



Bernetta A Atkinson (image from *Overland Monthly and the Out West Magazine*, 1868-1875, 1916, p. 501)

Research by Elaine Young, 2016

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¹⁴ United States Census, 1910.

¹⁵ United States Census, 1920.

¹⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, 18 April 1920, p. 47; 30 May 1920, p. 28.

¹⁷ *Los Angeles Times*, 2 September 1923, p. 40.

¹⁸ *Los Angeles Times*, 13 April 1924, p. 26.

¹⁹ United States Census, 1930.

²⁰ California Death Index, 1905-1939.

²¹ Biography of Mary Burnetta Allphin Atkinson, by Marge Becraft, at *Familysearch.org*