

Joel Kimball Diary - May 1874

Friday, May 1, 1874

"Fixed fence at foot of the hill and copied mortgage and sent to Horace Everts, Loch Sheldrake. After noon, went on the hill and blasted rock out of the road and wrote to L. Went to post office in the evening.

"Weather cool and windy."

Joel Kimball

Dynamite was a farmer's favorite tool when clearing off his land for fields and pastures. Besides breaking up large boulders, tree stumps were blown out of the ground. In poorly drained areas, dynamite sticks were placed in a line. When exploded, each charge would set off the neighboring charge. As the exploded dirt, rock and sod finally settled, a crude ditch has been formed which would hopefully help drain the field. - fred

Saturday, May 2, 1874

"Drew load of slabs down to the road and commenced to repair fence. Col. Moore came down and I went on the hill and we weighed hay for him.

"After noon I went to depot and sent some M S to L. by express. Came home by Jack Sherwood's and got boots sewed up

where I cut it. Recorded two mortgages, received 37c.

"Weather more mild.

"Called at J Sheeley's in evening."

Joel Kimball

Joel had recently erected a barn on his lot "on the hill", and was now using the leftover slab lumber to repair fences. The new barn allowed him to store last year's cutting of hay. With the new spring grass now beginning to sprout, the hay was no longer needed and he was able to sell the excess to his neighbor. - fred

Sunday, May 3, 1874

"Very clear, pleasant morning.

"Went down to Arch Cochran's with Sid and E. Huntington. Came home and ate dinner and went to Col Moore's, saw Bish and Laf and then to Thos Collins and home and finished doing chores and writing in diary.

"Wore new boots and found them quite painful, thank you."

Joel Kimball

Yesterday's visit to the shoemaker at Purvis became a painful experience. Peter B. Akins was the village shoemaker at Purvis. The forty-five-year-old cobbler began this trade at the southern Sullivan County township of Forestburgh before moving to Purvis with his wife of twenty-three years, Phoebe. He also studied law and eventually began a legal practice in the community, opening an office on Pearl Street. The soon-to-be lawyer not only fixed the soles to your shoes, but gave legal advice to boot. - fred

Monday, May 4, 1874

"Attended meeting board of excise at J.W. Davis'. Met John Davidson, supervisor; W.W. Purvis, Geo. Preston and Joseph Kile, justices of the peace. Granted one license to J.W. Davis, fee \$30.00

"Paid 35c for dinner."

Joel Kimball

"The consumption of alcohol was considered by those who were part of the temperance movement to be the source of society's problems. Though their push for outright statewide prohibition lacked the majority's support with the legislature and court at Albany, they did have minor success with the passage of the Liquor Excise Law of 1857, prohibiting the sale of alcohol outside of a building used for hotel purposes. The hope of the temperance leagues with the passage of this law would be that it was the beginning of "restoration" of those "victims" of alcoholism.

The Excise Law, soon to be amended later in the coming fall, banned the sale of alcohol on Sundays and election days and required a saloon proprietor to obtain a license from the local board of excise commissioners. To obtain such a license, the applicant had to prove that his establishment had at least three spare beds and stable space on the premises and a voucher had to be submitted that attested to the good, moral character of the applicant, signed by twenty respectable, resident landowners. James Wallace Davis, who had just become the proprietor of the old mansion house of the late Edward Livingston, came before the board and received his license. - fred

Tuesday, May 5, 1874

"Took up some apple trees and set out forty apple and two pear trees on the hill. Grafted some apple and grafted some pear on thorn trees back of the flat.

"Mother went to Oliver Maffett's.

"Drew some hay of the hill."

Joel Kimball

Oliver James Maffett's grandfather, Robert Maffett, was one of the early settlers near the Old Morsston area, moving here around 1798 onto what was to become the family farm, located up the small valley that later would be known as Benton Hollow.

Oliver Maffett married Lovila Borden, Joel's cousin. Lovila was the daughter of Oliver Borden (the Westfield Flat shoemaker) and Catherine Hodge (Joel's mother's sister), her young family now residing near Hancock, Delaware County. - fred

Wednesday, May 6, 1874

"Fixed wagon and drew load of manure on the garden. Weather cool and some wind. Aunt Eunice Appley came to make a visit.

"Tapped some maple trees to make vinegar. Called at Uncle Billing's in the evening."

Joel Kimball

Many of the local landmarks acquired the names of creatures the early settlers found inhabiting that particular locality, names still used today; Beaverkill, Buck Brook, Fox Mountain, Panther Rock Brook, Wildcat Mountain, Porcupine Ridge and, just above the Robert Maffett place, Elk Point. Here, at the very head of Benton Hollow, is a steep escarpment overlooking the valley below with a commanding, wide panoramic view clear to the state of Pennsylvania. When Robert

Maffett first came to the yet untamed Benton Hollow section, Elk were still known to winter on this precipice. Maffett was known to be an excellent hunter, these early settlers needed to be if their families were to survive this rugged territory, and these noble animals represented, besides the challenge of outwitting these wary and elusive beasts, food on the table for his family. With the likes of Maffett and his neighbors, elk soon vanished from the local scenery.

Feeding the Benton Hollow Maffett family was indeed a challenge for it was a large family. Twelve children were born to Robert and Sarah Maffett, nine of them being boys. Most of the children remained within the area of the townships of Liberty and Rockland, two of the brothers marrying Levi Kimball's granddaughters [see January 9th], and one of these couples, John and Sarah Kimball Maffett, were the parents of Oliver James Maffett, the source of this particular discussion.
- fred

Thursday, May 7, 1874

"Joel Hodge came up and helped me plow the garden until after noon, he then went home and I plowed alone. Steers ran away with plow.

"Called at B.V.G.'s in evening.

Planted some potatoes. Went on the hill in the morning and cut some wood."

Joel Kimball

Like Bishop VanGaasbeck, the blacksmithy at Purvis Post Office, one of the Maffett boys also seemingly worked the same profession. George Maffett, another son of Robert Maffett of Benton Hollow, married Olive Banks and first resided on a backwoods farm in the high country above Shin Creek known as the Barkaboom until 1869, when they moved onto a portion of the William Overton farm along the road to Debruce, a mile outside of Purvis. Here, in 1874, he supposedly operated a blacksmith shop.

George Maffett also had another occupation of sorts, one of a more unsavory kind. Since the Maffett's moved back into the

Purvis area, chicken thievery became a common occurrence. Tubs of butter, left by farmers on loading docks for shipment by the railroad, disappeared. Merchants soon noticed the petty theft of stock items such as shoes and boots. George Maffett, his boys and other rowdies were suspected of this crime spree but had yet to be caught doing the misdeeds. Besides his two sons, Eugene and Uriah, the "Maffett Gang's" other members included William Finkel, Thomas Turner and Will French, and the young woodsman who married George's daughter, Matt Brown. - fred

Friday, May 8, 1874

"Went to Westfield Flats, called at Sheeley and Wilson's. Ate dinner with Geo. Sheeley, played croquet some.

"Called at Utter's office and engaged side of sole leather. Saw Geo. R. Green. Coming home saw Jeff Campbell, called at Uncle Oliver's, arrived home just before night.

"Very warm and windy.

"Snowed this morning."

Joel Kimball

The Cochran tannery had closed the previous year and though it was set to reopen this spring, no tanned hides were in stock so Joel went to Westfield Flats to purchase leather. The tannery of Horace Utter was the smallest of the four tannery operations within the township, the business begun by Joseph Reynolds. Coming from the town of Fallsburgh, the young Reynolds became interested in the tanning industry there while with Palen Flager & Company. He erected the tannery at Westfield Flat around 1848, and along with the gristmill operation, went into partnership with Ezekiel Palen, the company surviving until 1855 when the general business of tanning hides suffered an economic downturn. Reynolds sold his share of the company, dissolved the partnership and headed west for bigger and more profitable ventures.

Joe Reynolds married Mary Ester Morton, the daughter of Westfield Flat farmer James Morton. With the success of the tanning and grist mill businesses at Westfield Flat, Reynolds was able to save a little money. He and Mary moved to Chicago in 1856 where he became engaged in the business of trading pelts. Soon, as his business expanded, he had four

steamboats navigating the Mississippi River from St. Louis to St. Paul, buying furs, hides and grains at river ports up and down the river. Joe had now become known as "Diamond Joe" Reynolds. - fred

Do you suppose this James Morton may have been related also to Ruth Morton who married Preston Ward? - Harriett Schultz

Saturday, May 9, 1874

"Went on the hill and helped Col. Moore weigh hay, whole amount some more than one and one-half ton. Came home and planted potatoes and finished harrow, planted some peas. Mrs. Joseph Mott and Mrs. Cyrus ditto called and made a visit. Went to post office and received papers.

"Wrote to Irwin.

"Warm and windy."

Joel Kimball

"Diamond Joe" Reynolds' business affairs began to amass a fortune for himself. He invested in several silver mines in Colorado and Arizona, granite quarries at Arkansas, owned the Malvern & Hot Springs Railroad and operated the "Diamond Jo Line" of steamboats that navigated the Mississippi River. He accumulated wealth that was thought to be up to twenty million dollars.

It was generally thought that the name "Diamond Joe" came from his numerous mining ventures in the west but, according to Joe himself, this was not the case. He told the story that when still in the business of the trading of pelts, he would ship the hides in crates stamped with the initials of "J R". When he found that another supplier was using the same initials, he

included a figure of a diamond and changed the "R" to an "O", becoming known thereafter amongst his business associates by the signature stamped on the crates; "Diamond J O". - fred

Sunday, May 10, 1874

"Went to meeting at the school house, I heard the new minister Rev. A. Van Kueren, like him quite well. Came home and called at Col M., came home and done chores.

"Very warm, pleasant day."

Joel Kimball

George Maffett was not considered the most upstanding member of the Purvis community, generally thought to be the source of the rash of burglaries and other incidents now occurring within the area. He and his gang always seemed to be one step ahead of the local constables, becoming more and more brazen with their actions over time. Though never proven, this sometime blacksmith also had his own way of dealing with his business competition.

Joel's diary never mentioned the following event of one night in mid-April at Purvis, which seems unusual, for it must have created quite a stir within that community. The exact date is unknown, but one evening the residents in the neighborhood awoke to the red glow of fire lighting the sky in the evening's darkness. What they soon discovered were that the two barns of James Purvis along with the barn and blacksmith shop in the village were being consumed by flames, all of which were totally destroyed. The origin of this conflagration were never known for certain, or whether any culprit was involved, but for now, within this one-horse village, George Maffett has the only blacksmith shop for shoeing that horse. fred

Most interesting about the suspected arson. I presume that the barns mentioned had been owned by James C. Purvis (1831-1886). He was the son of James Purvis Sr. (1791-1876), who was the son of settler George. James C. Purvis was married to a woman named Katherine "Kate" Reed and the original proprietor of what of then called the Purvis Hotel (in Purvis) at the

base of Jacktown Hill. ...later known as the Sherwood Hotel. From info provided on this site it appears that James C. sold the hotel around 1870 to James W. Davis who was 29 at the time but then Davis sold it back to James about a year later. Jack Sherwood then leased and managed it beginning in 1871. James became quite ill around 1885 and was unable to care for his farm. He and his wife and teenaged son, Leland (their only child) went to board at the Sturdevant House. A George W. Purvis (James' nephew) took over the farm to work it. James died soon after at the age of 54. His wife died only two years later at the age of 42. James was said to have accumulated quite a fortune and this was left to their son Leland who remained a bachelor. When Leland died he willed his inheritance to the Methodist Church and cemetery, the Presbyterian Church, Syracuse U. the SPCA, two hospitals as well as other organizations.

It sounds like George Maffett (and his gang) may have been jealous of James Purvis' success. (We may have had our own Hatfields and McCoys right there in LM!)

This brought to mind that James C's brother, Thomas D. Purvis' barn also mysteriously caught fire on July 13 1883 while he and his wife were out of town attending the wedding of Thomas' step-son, Seward Etts. The barn and contents...a light cutter, harness and wagon...were completely lost and the cause never known. The George W. Purvis mentioned above would have been Thomas' son.

Thanks so much for these amazing stories Fred! - Susan

Monday, May 11, 1874

"Went to blacksmith shop and got steers shod, saw old Mr. Mosier and Abe, came home about noon, ate dinner and went on the hill.

"Geo. Sprague burned his fallow and the fire caught on mine, did not burn much. Sowed two bushels oats and harrowed some.

"Weather some cooler than yesterday."

Joel Kimball

While converting forested lands into fields and pastures, farmers often made use of fire. Forests recently harvested into lumber would have a great deal of slash, or fallow, left behind which was burned, reducing the slash to ash and removing unwanted vegetation. Older clearings used for pasture lots would soon find tree saplings sprouting up, reclaiming what was once their's. Fires were set to reclaim the clearing. The danger of this method of clearing land can be imagined, neighboring farms and all of the surrounding area put at risk. - fred

Tuesday, May 12, 1874

"Worked on the hill sowing oats and harrowing, weather warm and pleasant.

"Sent to D. D. & Co. for some timothy seed by Wm. P. Rose, got one peck."

Joel Kimball

Neither George Maffett or his gang of rowdies were ever proven to be in any way connected with the series of fires on that April evening. Perhaps it was just a coincidence that three barns and the village blacksmith shop were destroyed on the same evening, but beginning in 1869, with incident after incident coinciding with the arrival of George and his boys, these events seemed more and more than just bad luck, and in some cases, there was evidence of human involvement.

Arriving home about midnight from a town meeting in mid-March of 1871, David Waters found the barn doors on his Little Ireland farm wide open. Upon further investigation, Waters discovered the flooring of the barn to be on fire. Battling the blaze, he was able to extinguish the flames when he soon realized that the barn belonging to his neighbor, Lawrence Rose, was also ablaze along with the sighting of someone in the glow of the fire fleeing the scene. Though sounding the alarm, the fire had gained such headway that little could be done before help arrived, except save what livestock that could be saved. It was a complete loss for Rose, losing eleven head of cattle and ten tons of hay, besides the complete destruction of the structure. Waters and Rose were able to get the flock of sheep away from the inferno, their wool being scorched off of their backs. The constable, William French, had no suspects so no arrests were made following the fire, but the townsfolk had their suspicions - fred

Wednesday, May 13, 1874

"Worked on the hill sowing oats. Abe Mosier came up and commenced working for me for six dollars per month. I sowed some timothy seed."

Joel Kimball

The large farm of Erastus Sprague is located next to the covered bridge on Mott Flat. Helping the aging farmer with the work is the Moshier family; James, along with his son's family. While at the VanGaasbeck blacksmith shop on Monday, Joel ran into James and his grandson, fourteen-year-old Abram. Since Johnny Collins had earlier ceased working for the Kimballs and with the planting, and soon the harvesting, seasons now fast approaching, Joel is in need of assistance to help with the farm work. The result of the blacksmith shop meeting was the hiring-on of young Abe to work on the Kimball farm.
- fred

Thursday, May 14, 1874

"I took potatoes out of the cellar and separated them. Abe went on the hill and drove the steers harrowing oats.

"Wm. P. Rose set fire on the side hill and I was obligated to watch it to save my fence, wind blew hard.

"Abe one day."

Joel Kimball

Again, one of Joel's neighbors set fire to the fallow on his property, burning off the remains left from earlier timber cutting.

Unfortunately, William Rose picked a windy day, putting his neighbors and the whole neighborhood in danger.

Lumbering operations, along with the debarking of hemlocks to supply bark to the local tanneries, left considerable debris in the area's denuded forests, conditions that were dangerous when accidental or careless fires flared up. When the conditions were right, an unguarded fallow fire or a spark from a steam locomotive's fire box would ignite this forest waste, setting off a blaze that would sweep the countryside. These fires could last for days, blanketing the sky with smoke and destroying everything in its path until considerable effort or rainy weather would finally subdue the flames. Such conflagrations were a common occurrence, the most recent documented local fire taking place in early May of 1870, when all of Sullivan and Delaware counties seemed to be on fire. The hills surrounding Westfield Flat burned out of control, the fire consuming acres of timberland, cut lumber, piles of tannery bark, homes and saw-mills. One farmer from along the Cold Spring Brook Road, just north of the village, was plowing when the field he was working became completely encircled by flames. In his dash for safety, all of his clothing, save for his boots and pantaloons, were burned off of him, as he just barely escape the ring of fire. - fred

Bark Peeling. The Bark was used in the tanning industry and a tree totally stripped of its bark died. This is why early photos show a lot less wooded area.

In 1936 when my father bought his farm from Harley Miner in the Barkaboon area of Union Grove the Deed stipulated that my father was not allowed to Peel any bark from the trees. Of course by then there weren't any tanneries left in the area to sell the bark to anyway.

Barkaboon or Barkaboom was said to be an Indian name. Boon was actually what happened when the bark was sent down the river. Boom is an abundance of something- like in Boom Town. No Indian origin at all. - evelyn

Friday, May 15, 1874

"Went on the hill and harrowed in oats all day. Abe dug stumps and brush. Wind blew so I could not sow timothy seed."

Joel Kimball

Though Joel would never mention it in his daily entries, James Eldridge Quinlan died yesterday at his home near Monticello. To his contemporaries, Quinlan was well known as being the editor of the Republican Watchman, perhaps Sullivan County's most popular newspaper. He was also the author of the earlier published book titled "Tom Quick", a collection of tales about this legendary Delaware valley hunter and Indian fighter.

His last literary endeavor, just recently published last fall, will eventually have a much greater impact on the inhabitants of Sullivan County. Quinlan's "History of Sullivan County" is now considered to be the authoritative source of early historical information that relates to the county. This voluminous work, a collection of facts and tales, of people and places, township by township, represents an era in the county's early development, a time when little else had been recorded, preserved or survived. Stricken with the effects of typhoid fever during his later years, he worked throughout this sickness to complete this work and lived to see it published. He was only in his fifty-fifth year when he died. - fred

Saturday, May 16, 1874

"Finished harrowing oats and sowed the remainder of the timothy seed. Called at Uncle Billings' and left one dollar to send for buckwheat. Came home and went to the Flats, grafted some for A.Y. Sheeley.

"Boys had a serenade for B.F.H. and C.E.G., stayed all night with Geo. A. Sheeley."

Joel Kimball

Benjamin Hardenburgh, the young baggage master on one of the Midland Railroad's mail trains, has just married Carrie E. Green, the daughter of Joseph Green, proprietor of the Rockland House at Westfield Flat. Traditionally, friends of the newlyweds would gather outside of the married couple's home and all join in with a "skimelton", a rousing celebration of noise and song. "Rusticus", the correspondent for the local newspapers, best describes this particular evening;

"... On the night of the wedding, the other good fellows and boys of the village gathered together all the bands of Westfield;

consisting of the tin horn band, cow bell band, light artillery (or shot-gun) band and the heavy artillery (or anvil) band and proceeded further to serenade the young couple in a lively manner." - fred

Sunday, May 17, 1874

"At A Y Sheeley's, Geo. and I came up to depot and called at O.O. Horton's.

"I went to A.P. Appley's and I and Chester Cochran went to church at R. Stewart's, heard sermon delivered by Rev. Mr. Sanderson, very good sermon, subject; the Christian does not die, they go home which is far better. Called at H.'s and saw Miss J.H., ate dinner and came home."

Joel Kimball

Reverend Sanderson is the pastor of the Methodist Episcopal congregation at Sandburgh, a small Sullivan County community along the line of the Midland railroad. This Sunday, he was filling in with the Westfield Flat congregation as a temporary minister, but by the coming September, Sanderson took over the pastoral duties full time.

The Methodist church at Westfield Flat was built on land donated by Austin Dodge five years earlier. The church's bell up in the belfry over-top the structure was donated by Mary and Joseph Reynolds. Engraved upon this gift was the well-known signature of "Diamond Joe", a shape of a diamond with the name "J O" etched inside. - fred

Monday, May 18, 1874

"At home, commenced to plow for corn. Weather some cool and rainy. Abe made fence and cut heelbone."

Joel Kimball

Diamond Joe's bell atop the Methodist church at Westfield Flats sounded the calling for Sunday services since the church's dedication in August of 1869; until the morning service of January 20th, 1901. With the conclusion of Sunday's worship that cold, winter morning, members of the congregation, as they were leaving the church, noticed thick smoke billowing out of the belfry. The bell, often rung to call out the local hose company onto a scene of a fire, now needed to toll to save itself.

Mr. D.L. Dodge rushed back into the building, grabbed the bell's rope and began pulling to sound the alarm. No sound came from the belfry and with a second pull, the rope came down on top of him, having been burned completely through by the flames. When the firemen finally arrived, the building was completely engulfed in flames. The bell crashed down through the charred remains of the belfry into the conflagration below and became consumed by the fire's terrific heat. - fred

Tuesday, May 19, 1874

"Wm. P. Rose and I repaired line fence. Abe cut brush. Uncle Ed called and stayed until after dinner. In evening I called at post office and read paper, two mortgages and letter from G."

Joel Kimball

When searching the old records, William P. Rose should not be confused with William Rose, though both similarities and differences exist between the two men. William P. Rose lived on a farm in the Town of Rockland; William Rose's farm was partially in the Town of Rockland but he lived in the Town of Callicoon. William P. Rose was a lumberman who rafted on the river; William Rose was a lumberman who rafted on the river. Amongst fellow raftsmen, William P. Rose was known as "Tucker"; William Rose was known as "Deacon". William P. Rose was twice married; William Rose was twice married. William P. Rose's grandfather was John Rose; William Rose's father was John Rose. William Rose was the uncle of William P. Rose.

John Rose's brother, a great-uncle to William P. Rose and uncle to William Rose, was also named William. Their family first settled near the vicinity of Schoharie, near the Mohawk valley, where they resided until the American colonies resisted British rule and declared their independence. During the conflict, the British enlisted the help of Indians to raid, burn, murder and terrorize settlers within this area. William was captured in one such raid and kept in captivity for seven years. - fred

Wednesday, May 20, 1874

"Worked at plowing until noon and as it rained did not plow any more. Went fishing in Sprague's brook, caught nine, poor luck. Abe split wood."

Joel Kimball

Since their move to the Midwest, Mary Ester Morton Reynolds returned to Westfield Flats to visit her brother, Jay Morton, and friends on a regular basis, often with the accompaniment of her husband, "Diamond Joe". On one visit back east, Joe was on his way to his old grist-mill when he came upon two young girls playing about the mill. At his feet were two unusual, colorful pebbles, which he picked up, giving one to each of the girls, telling them to "Send these to me when you are married."

Well, time went by and the young girls became young ladies. One of the girls had kept the pebble that "Diamond Joe" had given her so many years earlier. After her wedding day, remembering the words of Diamond Joe and in accordance with his instructions, she sent the pebble off to him, not knowing the consequences. Soon, she received a "substantial" wedding gift from Joe.

The other girl had not kept the pebble, so after her wedding day she was not able to complete the deal that Joe had made with her. Mary Reynolds soon got wind of the arrangement that her husband had made with the two young girls. One morning at the depot at Roscoe, a large, heavy crate was dropped from the mail train, addressed to the newlywed. In the

crate was a handsome piano, a wedding gift from Mary Reynolds to the new bride. - fred

Thursday, May 21, 1874

"Abe went home to help his father move. I went to depot and mailed letter to G.

"Called at wagon shop to find tire for wagon. Came home and went to J.H. Sheeley's and got tire, took it and wheel to shop and had it placed thereon.

"J.H. Sheeley for 37 inch iron tire, .74

"A.H. Robertson cash, \$2.00"

Joel Kimball

John B. Oakley was the proprietor of the wagon shop at Purvis, who became another victim to the infamous Maffett gang; more than once. One evening, after leaving his shop, he was viciously attacked by ruffians in an effort to relieve him of his money. Oakley fought off his attackers and escaped with all his money, though he was somewhat battered and bruised. Oakely, who was pretty sure that the thugs were members of the Maffett gang, reported the incident to the town constable, William French. After an investigation, French's conclusion was that since Oakley was not actually robbed, that perhaps he fabricated the incident to frame members supposed members of the gang. French's report stated that Oakley "suffered from escapes not assaults." - Fred

Friday, May 22, 1874

"Charles Vernoooy came home last evening and he and I peeled bark until noon. After noon, plowed some and furrowed corn ground, H.E. Rose helping me."

Joel Kimball

Perhaps it was the accusations, the lawlessness, or just the increased brashness of the thieving gang, but John Oakley's troubles were far from over; along with the rest of the Purvis community. On the evening of the 25th of July, 1877, fire was discovered at Oakley's wagon shop. Efforts to contain the fire were unsuccessful and the building became a complete loss. Besides the loss of all of his tools, the shop contained numerous wagons that were in various states of repairs and wagons he was in the midst of building, all being consumed by the flames. Since he had not operated the stove inside for quite sometime, the community had little doubt to the cause of the combustion; incendiaries. - fred

Saturday, May 23, 1874

"I finished furrowing corn ground by drawing chain. Abe came after noon and we drew compost. Wm. P. Rose turned my cattle loose on the road.

"Received letter from Irwin.

"Uncle Billings and I went to depot and got bushel buckwheat from New York, cost 3.70.

"Warm day.

"Abe, one half day."

Joel Kimball

The Midland was beginning to handle more freight along its line. Prices for logs and lumber rafted down the Delaware to the Philadelphia market remained low as lumber was steadily becoming overstocked at the city's wharfs. Meanwhile, the lumbermen who used the Midland found that the new railroad opened new markets for their lumber, offering higher prices.

Also, a special express freight was added on the line this spring, riding from Norwich to Middletown to handle dairy products and livestock from the farms between these two railroad hubs. Labor and money still were a problem to this railroad company but now, even as it was just beginning to become more prosperous due to the increased traffic, other problems emerged.

Due to the difficult topography the railroad line traveled over, and perhaps the less than satisfactory original construction work, the tracks required constant attention. Washouts and soft spots would shift rails, leading to numerous derailments and other mishaps. To upgrade the railroad's bed, the Midland had crews from the gravel trains working continuously to maintain and fixing the tracks throughout the spring of 1874. These work trains themselves presented a hazard; the line having only a single track, they were often in the way of the ongoing traffic. At Cadosia, this congestion became deadly. On the previous Thursday, as the gravel train was running back to the depot at this Delaware County community, it ran into cars of another train on the tracks. The work train was thrown off the tracks, killing two laborers. - fred

Sunday, May 24, 1874

"Went to church at school-house and heard sermon delivered by Rev. O. Van Kuren, called at John M. Sheeley's. Came home, stayed at home all the afternoon. Betsy Borden called a short time and went home.

"Pleasant day."

Joel Kimball

The Midland's tracks were in such a desperate state of disrepair during the spring of '74 that passage over the line, especially between Morsston and Cook's Falls, became hazardous, and at times impossible. The events during the afternoon of March 25th was an indication of the problems the money-strapped railroad company was now facing [see March 25].

The west-bound mail train had already passed through Westfield Flats that afternoon when, further down the line at Cook's Falls, it ran into difficulty. With the railroad bed under the line's tracks soft with the late winter thaw, the position of the rails shifted under the weight of the locomotive, causing the trailing cars to jump off the tracks. Though the baggage car

was somewhat destroyed, none of the crew or passengers were injured.

News of the wreck quickly made its way back to Westfield Flats, where the gravel train and work crew were sent down the line to the disabled mail train. With the engine facing south-bound, the work train sped off towards Cook's Falls, traveling backwards with the engine's tender in the lead. Speeding down the track, the tender jumped off the track two miles below Westfield Flats, destroying the car, derailling the engine and tearing up a long section of tracks. Again, fortunately, nobody was hurt.

And then, later that same day, two cars of the north-bound Express Freight derailed at Buck Eddy, between Morsston and Westfield Flats. This was the accident that Joel and Bishop VanGaasbeck visited. The results of the day's events along the railroad line shut down rail service until the accidents were cleared and tracks repaired. - fred

Monday, May 25, 1874

"Drew out two loads of compost and as it rained could not draw more. Made one new whiplash and worked some on the river beach."

"Wm. P. Rose got his last two oar sterns that I sold him. Abe went after float and I went to E. Spragues and got two halve sticks.

"Wm. P. Rose due for four oar sterns, \$4.00"

"Abe one day"

"Paid Eras Sprague, \$1.00"

Joel Kimball

... .. William Rose is buried at Rose City, Michigan; William P. Rose is buried in the Methodist Church cemetery at Livingston Manor. Both of William Rose's wives are buried at the Westfield Flats Cemetery; both of William P. Rose's wives are buried at the Methodist Church cemetery. William Rose's wives are buried in plots next to each other; William P. Rose's are buried in plots some distance apart. William Rose is not buried with either of his wives; William P. Rose is buried near his first wife.

Often, the story of a family's struggles to survive these early, uncertain times can be found inscribed upon the stone markers that note their final resting place. These "written" stories are usually brief, perhaps only a single word or date being the only clues left to their triumphs or tragedies. At the end of the row of grave markers that locate the family plot of William P. Rose, is the headstone of Sarah Ann Borden, his wife. The record carved upon its marble face, telling of the family tragedy, perhaps does not tell the whole tale. She died at an early age, yet to reach her 18th birthday. She was about to become a young mother, when she had difficulty with the delivery of their child. Both mother and child were said to have died



Tuesday, May 26, 1874

"Abe and I went on the hill and made fence all day between me and Geo. Sprague.

"Weather cool and squally.

"Called at post office and read papers. J.D.W.M. Decker and Samantha were married today.

"Bennett floated logs."

Joel Kimball

It has been a cold, dry spring in these parts. The grass crop has been slow in growing, leaving farmers little choice but to continue feeding their livestock with last year's hay, and if they had none, to rely on extra hay from their neighbor. Recent cold mornings resulted in heavy frosts and a shortened growing season, the latest killing frost occurring on the 23rd, which damaged many potato crops and other early plantings. Normally, apple trees would now be in full blossom but the cold weather has either delayed or killed off this spring's swelling buds. Snow was reported throughout the county on this day. On a day when white apple blossom petals would normally be falling, instead the sky was filled with white snowflakes, certainly not the weather expected for this time of year when planning a wedding.

"Alphabet" Decker, the popular post-master and merchant at Purvis Post Office, married Samantha Sprague, the daughter of the popular past post-master and merchant at Purvis Post Office, James Emmett Sprague. They were married at Parksville. Decker was born and raised in the Brown Settlement area above Willowemoc. After the war, he and his brothers returned home to engage in numerous business ventures at Willowemoc, forming the mercantile business of Matt Decker & Co. "Alphabet" soon moved to Purvis and the Sprague household where he assisted at Sprague's store and post office, now becoming the proprietor and new post-master. - fred

Wednesday, May 27, 1874

"Commenced planting potatoes. Went on the hill and weighed six tons hay, sold to Geo. W. Sprague at \$10.00 per ton.

"Came home and finished planting potatoes, ploughed some and went on the hill and drew down some hay. Orrin Sprague called and left mortgage.

"Fine day.

"Abe one day."

Joel Kimball

Joel and his parents' farm consisted of over one-hundred acres, of which forty-five were considered, for assessment purposes, as being "improved". This would include cleared land that is now in use as pasture, meadows and tilled ground. Joel spent the last week plowing and preparing four acres on the flats next to his parents' house which were to be planted in crops that would be stored or milled for winter use. One acre was devoted to potatoes, where in the coming fall, he would gather over forty bushels. Another acre was planted in Indian corn, in which he would later harvest over 30 bushels. - fred

Thursday, May 28, 1874

"Planted corn all day, finished piece on the flat, below the house.

"I went up to the depot in the evening and rode to Westfield Flats and practiced with the band. Stayed all night with Geo. Sheeley.

"Weather fine.

"Abe, one day."

Joel Kimball

Coming into Westfield Flats, Joel may have noticed the improvement to the cemetery there; the placing of an iron fence around the old cemetery. The original portion of the Westfield Flat Cemetery is situated on land donated by Robert Cochran, who joined the early settlers already living in the Beaverkill valley in 1791. Coming from the Westfield, Massachusetts, area, Cochran and his family journeyed here with Henry Shaw, who lived with the Cochran family until his early demise on March 6, 1796. His burial upon this portion of the Cochran lands would become the first grave within the Westfield Flats Cemetery.



For the past year, residents of Westfield Flats were worried about the deteriorating condition of the community's burying grounds. Doctor Leroy Wheeler's farm was located on one side of the cemetery while his pasture lot for his cows on the other, the cemetery being the cow-path in between. Though the earthly residents of the cemetery were not ones to complain over a few plops on their plots, those who were more lively thought the trampling over ancestors' graves a disgrace. With the completion of the fence around the cemetery, Doc Wheeler's cows now utilized the highway to get to their destination, the road becoming hazardous to the lively's foot traffic as bovine deposits were now littered along its route. The good fence had only transferred the neighboring problem, from the dead to the living. - fred

Friday, May 29, 1874

"At A.Y. Sheeley's, ate breakfast and went in the store, got suit of clothes, \$10.00, and a hat for Abe, 25c. Came home and finished planting corn. Drew manure on the potatoes.

"Abe, one day.

"Abe Mosier due for one hat, 25c."

Joel Kimball

On his way home, Joel would have passed another improvement at Westfield Flats. With the coming of the railroad, Westfield Flats was now becoming popular with anglers as passengers, along with their fishing gear, arrived seemingly on every train. The James Murdock farm, situated along the banks of the upper Beaverkill, advertised the finest fishing grounds in the area and attracted many who would brave the harrowing ten mile streamside wagon ride up the valley from the depot. Montgomery Dodge's hotel at Westfield Flat, one mile from the depot, was the most popular of the area's early fishing resorts, but it was soon to have competition.

George Hunter, the founder of the Midland Hotel within the village of Liberty, decided to build a hotel at Westfield Flat. Hoping to attract anglers, along with the general traveling public, the hotel was built along the rail-line, with the Willowemoc Creek nearby, just below the depot. By the end of May, the finishing touches to the building had been completed and the hotel opened to the public, known as the Blue Fish Hotel. For reasons one can only surmise, the hotel's name was soon changed within the month, its new, more conservative name being the Willowemoc House. - fred

Saturday, May 30, 1874

"Abe and I went on the hill and peeled some bark and chopped fallow some. Abe went away in evening. Received letter from T.

"Abe, one day.

"Abe Mosier due for cash, 53c."

Joel Kimball

May 30th is Decoration Day. This day of remembrance was designated in 1868 by General John Logan, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the newly organized national veteran's organization, to remember those who died in defense of their nation during the recent war, both Union and Confederate, by decorating their graves with flowers or in some other fashion. In 1874, the day was honored at local towns such as Port Jervis and Monticello with parades of veterans, community bands and long-winded patriotic speeches by long-winded patriotic dignitaries. Other towns would not yet participate in the observance. The town fathers of Hancock decided that the village would not observe Decoration Day since there were no veterans buried within the local cemetery.

Joel hints, indirectly, that Westfield Flats also did not officially observe the holiday in 1874. Being a member of the community band, he had just recently visited the village where he practiced with the band. If the community observed this day with a ceremony, it would seem highly likely that the band would have been asked to perform. Joel left for home the day before the holiday, without a word within his diary of the band participating in any Decoration Day observances. - fred

Sunday, May 31, 1874

"Very warm, pleasant day.

"Went to J.E. Sprague's and Laf and I went to depot. Walked down the rail and waded river on our way back. Called at Laf's and quite a shower came up. Came home and wrote to T. Mother came home in evening."

Joel Kimball

The beginning of the custom for decorating the graves of veterans who had fought in the recent war had been the claim of numerous communities throughout the nation, from both the North and the South. The most likely candidate for this claim, though, would be the story of Mary Anna Williams, considered to be the "Mother of Decoration Day."

Mary was the wife of Charles Williams, a colonel with the first Georgia Regulars, a unit that served with the Army of Virginia. While with his regiment, Colonel Williams contracted a disease from which he died in 1862 and was buried back home in Columbia, Georgia. His wife and young daughter would visit the gravesite every day, often decorating it with flowers from the season. While Mary would be deep in thought next to her husband's tombstone, her daughter would visit the unmarked graves belonging to the unknown soldiers buried nearby, pulling the weeds and decorating the markers with wildflowers.

The daughter soon took ill and died, the grieving mother now having double the reasons for visiting the cemetery. To honor her daughter, Mary took charge of her daughter's practice of decorating the unknown graves along with her husband's. It was then suggested to her that perhaps a day of remembrance should be set aside each year that would continue the tradition that she had begun in which "love may pay tribute to valor". In March of 1866, Mary made this proposal to the Soldier's Aid Society for the creation of a national memorial day to honor the fallen soldiers, and its custom of decorating the graves with flowers.

Mary Anna Williams died on April 15, 1874 and was buried with military honors. - fred