

Joel Kimball Diary - March 1874

Sunday, March 1, 1874

"Went to J.E. Sprague's and to Purvis. Left tickets at J.C. Purvis' for S. Hammond. Saw Viele and Peter Ellis. Bish VanGaasbeck and G.W. Sprague went with me, called at Cyrus Mott's and at Gil Schoonmaker's. Crossed the river in the boat at Emmett's Eddy.

"Very pleasant and warm."

Joel Kimball

By the end of winter, road conditions were most likely a problem. Throughout the snowy season, road crews would send a roller over the roads to pack down the snow to allow for easier sledding. Now with the weather turning warmer, this packed snow is turned into ice, making roadway travel dangerous for both man and beast.

The winter of '74 was the first year that through traffic travelled along the Midland railroad, the route being kept free of the winter's snow by plowing and shoveling. Keeping the tracks clear of snow, warm rays of the sun and warmer weather cleared the railroad bed of snow, allowing an easier and safer walkway. Instead of traveling the roadway from Purvis, George, Bishop and Joel returned home from their political jaunt via the railroad tracks. The only trouble, the rail-line passed on the opposite side of the river from their homes.

By Joel's entries, the winter of '74 appears to have been relatively mild, with no mention of any major snow-storms or prolonged cold weather. As a result, since the flood of early January, the Willowemoc Creek probably remained ice-free the rest of the winter, allowing boat passage. At the eddy across from Purvis Post Office, on the farm owned by James Emmett Sprague, the Midland's rail-line joins up with the channel of the Willowemoc, becoming the river's southern bank. Here, the boys maintained a boat for fording the river, and thus able to utilize the snow and ice free railroad bed for passageway to and from Purvis and the depot. - Fred

Monday, March 2, 1874

"Worked at home until noon cutting wood and doing chores. After noon went

up to the depot and rode to Hiats on Express Freight, saw Asa Appley. Rode to Green's with stage, saw George and others. Came home in evening.

"Weather pleasant and warm."

Joel Kimball

With the coming of the railroad, its tracks became a popular route for traveling. But these track walkers, both man and beast, needed to be wary of the danger that loomed when sharing the road with the "iron horse". The rural route of the Midland's line traversed, unfenced, through fields and pastures of local farms which created an immediate problem. No sooner had the train service begun in the summer of 1873, the locomotives' cowcatchers would dislodge, dispatch, disembowel and discard grazing sheep and cows on an all too frequent regularity, much to the dismay of the farmer and the displeasure of railroad employees.

Switch sidings were particularly dangerous. To escape the operations of coupling and uncoupling cars at the siding, walkers and workers, often distracted with the noises at the scene, would unsuspectingly step onto the main line, only to be plowed over by an express train. George Preston, the Democratic party's candidate for town justice in 1874, unwittingly stepped onto the main line in front of an oncoming engine nine years later, being run over and completely mangled in an unimaginable fashion under the train's wheels.

Along the railroad tracks across the river from the Kimball farm, Lafayette Houghtaling, an aged man who lived in the neighborhood, was walking the track back home, during the summer of 1888, when he heard the train bearing down on him. Though he stepped aside, he did not venture far enough away from the rails and was sideswiped by the passing locomotive, throwing him fifteen feet down over the embankment with multitude broken bones and deep lacerations, injuries that he would not survive.

Philip Smith, an employee on the O&W and father-in-law of the town barber Charlie Fallon and Manor station agent David Fitzgerald, and father of Frank Smith, the town's first veterinary, while working at the Livingston Manor yard sidings uncoupling cars during the summer of 1893, stepped off the main line onto the siding to let the express train to pass by. The freight train backing onto the side track struck Smith, knocking him under the wheels and crushing his leg, which required amputation. The shock of the accident was too severe, though, and Smith succumbed to the injuries. Similar incidents of track walker-train collisions became more numerous when the railroad line was double-tracked in 1904. - Fred

Tuesday March 3 1874

Tuesday, March 3, 1874

"Town meeting, spent the whole day at the polls at J.E. Sprague's. Was elected town clerk by 76 majority over A.R. Purvis.

"Weather pleasant and some rain."

Joel Kimball

Today was the town-wide general election. Without meeting halls, which were mostly non-existing within the township in 1874, except for the few taverns and churches, both of which may have been unacceptable for use as a polling place, meetings were often held at stores or in the spacious parlors of private residences. Spending the day at the home of James Sprague, used as the polling place, Joel found out the results of the election which proved him to be victorious over Aaron Purvis for the race of town clerk.

Other elections results saw bridge-builder John Davidson, the Democratic party candidate, become supervisor for the town as he defeated the Rockland merchant, Montgomery Dodge. Two of Joel's good friends were elected to positions; Bishop VanGaasbeck, the Purvis Post Office blacksmith, became Overseer For The Poor and George Green, the son of Joseph Green, proprietor of the hotel at Rockland, was newly elected as town justice. William Purvis, brother of Aaron, and George Preston, who later would have a run-in with an Ontario & Western locomotive, were both re-elected as town justices. - Fred

Wednesday, March 4, 1874

"Came home from canvases after six o'clock, did not go to bed. Worked all day, cut brush and wood. Johnny Collins commenced working for me today; is to work March and April for \$10.00 per month and for \$15.00 per month from the first of May until first of December.

"Collins, 1 days work."

Joel Kimball

Johnny Collins, eighteen-year-old young man, had been living with the Colonel Moore family for the past three years. The Collins family doesn't appear to have been the traditional family, where the parents and youngsters all live under one roof; in fact, the opposite appears to be true.

John D. Collins was the son of Morris Collins and Margaret Foley. Census records taken during this period show his siblings residing with other families throughout the area, the sisters working as "domestic" help. Thomas, the older

brother, in 1860 at the age of thirteen, was living with the David Purvis family. As for John, when he was nine years of age, he was living with the family of his older sister, Joanna, now the wife of John Cotter, the same John Cotter from Little Ireland mentioned just recently in the diary. At the age of fifteen, young Collins moved to the neighboring farm of Colonel Moore. - Fred

Thursday, March 5, 1874

"Went with Johnny to commence drawing stone and then went to depot with H.E. Rose. Came around by J.F. Sherwood's and got town clerk's office of A.R. Purvis and brought it home. Cut some wood on the hill.

"John Collin - 1 day."

Joel Kimball

Since the town did not have town offices or a hall to hold meetings, town records and offices were kept at the residences of the town officials. One can only imagine the mood generated and the feelings felt between the two former candidates for town clerk, one victorious and the other vanquished, when Joel visited Aaron Purvis to pick up the town records; especially so soon after the election.

The old Purvis Hotel, owned by James Purvis, was now under the proprietorship of John Fanton Sherwood. Young Sherwood just recently taken up residence at the Purvis community and began the management of the Purvis Hotel in 1871, having gained experience for the hotel business while living with his older brothers, James and Henry Sherwood, who operated the Sherwood House at the village of Parksville. - Fred

Friday, March 6, 1874

"Started for Neversink with steer, arrived at Parksville about eleven o'clock and waited until about two. Started for Neversink, arrived about five o'clock and stayed all night at Uncle Asa's.

"Snowed in afternoon and all night.

"Ate dinner at Sturdevant's."

Joel Kimball

George Sturdevant was the proprietor of the other hotel at Parksville. The

Sturdevant family was living near Mongaup Valley when George was born in 1840. George's father, Elias, would later move to the towns of Cochection and Callicoon, where politically he became a prominent citizen. He died at North Branch in 1864.

George Sturdevant himself had become a prominent figure, prior to 1874, within the locality. Residing at Briscoe, in the Town of Bethel, he was the post master of that cross-road community as well as being the proprietor of the local inn, the Briscoe House. He had just recently relocated to Parksville, operating the hotel in the center of town, that snowy March day when Joel passed through on his way over to Neversink to exchange cattle with his uncle. - Fred

Saturday, March 7, 1874

"Irwin and I started up the hill with Taurus on the sleds and the oxen drawing it and came to E. Stickles. There we found Arthur's sleigh and went to Parksville, all OK. Some ladies rode on the sleigh, I guess they thought they had stranger company.

"John one day."

Joel Kimball

At the end of January, Joel and his Uncle Asa Hodge had come to an agreement on swapping cattle, Joel to give up his yearling steer for his uncle's bull calf. Joel's trip to Neversink was for the purpose of closing the deal.

According to the entries into Joel's diary, the winter of '74 had relatively mild weather, especially since mid-February when several periods of warm weather, resulting in snow melt, were recorded, and by early March, sleighs were no longer needed. Leading his steer as he traveled on foot, a March snow storm came upon them midway through their journey.

For the return trip the next day, Joel's cousin hitched up the oxen to the Hodge sleds, loaded Taurus the bull on board and started back on roads now covered with the newly fallen snow. Midway up the hill that forms the divide between the Willowemoc and Neversink valleys, they stopped at the Stickles place to secure a better sleigh, perhaps one with side fenders allowing better travel accommodations for Taurus. As for the ladies who rode along on the sleigh with Taurus, hopefully they knew what end of the sleigh to sit on, or what end of the bull to sit next to. Either end, though, seems to have some disadvantages. - Fred

Sunday, March 8, 1874

"Stayed at home all day. Johnny went to Tom's last night. Read papers and some of M. Twain's Innocents Abroad.

"Weather cool and windy, snowed some."

Joel Kimball

Samuel Clemens was early in his career as a writer of humor and political satire when Joel read Clemens' second published book, a collection of letters written while Clemens traveled through Europe, published in 1869. He soon would become the most popular American writer during this era.

Clemens and Joel did have one thing in common, both being river pilots in their younger days; Clemens on steamboats up and down the Mississippi River while Joel piloted lumber rafts down the Delaware River. - Fred

Monday, March 9, 1874

"John and I cut some wood and went on the hill after noon, cut wood and killed two rabbits.

"Wind blowing very hard and very cold."

Joel Kimball

John Collins, who was now working for Joel helping out with the chores, spent the weekend visiting with his brother, Thomas Collins. Tom, as were so many other young men from that era, was a Civil War veteran, but was decorated as few others had been by being awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. On his return home after the war, he married the daughter of Colonel Moore, Ellen, and built a residence and small farm on the land of Cyrus Gray, between Purvis Post Office and the Moore farm. Gray, the Parksville merchant, was involved in numerous business ventures in the area, among being the ownership of several woodlots along the Willowemoc, one of which Tom and his bride became tenants of. By 1874, Tom began negotiating with Gray for the purpose of purchasing the small farm. - Fred

Tuesday, March 10, 1874

"I went down to the Flats, called at Uncle Oliver Borden and ate dinner. Called at Green's and Sheeley & Wilson's store. Called at Gus Dodge's and stayed all

nigt.

"Weather still cold and wind blowing very hard."

Joel Kimball

Joseph and Lavina Green were the proprietors of the Rockland Hotel at Westfield Flat, the site known today as the Rockland House. The original farmhouse was considered to be the first establishment to accept summer boarders in the area. Associated with the hotel was a large farm, covering an extensive portion of the Beaverkill flats, which managed a large herd of cattle and had much of the fields kept in grain. The Greens had two children of note; George, the village blacksmith, and a daughter, Ahiva, who eventually took over the business from her parents. - Fred

Wednesday, March 11, 1874

"Still at the Flats, read paper and wrote to have address changed to Purvis, New York. Came up to depot and rode to Morsston, came down to E. Sprague's and bought two axe halve sticks for 50c. came home and recorded mortgage for B. Wilson.

"Very cold and windy.

"One meal at Green's

"John one day."

Joel Kimball

Joel's excursion to Westfield Flat was mainly a business trip, associated with his new role as town clerk. Ambros Rockwell, the retiring supervisor for the Town of Rockland and who most likely maintained his office at Westfield Flat, was probably receiving town-business related mail at the post office there. Now that John Davidson, who resided near Shin Creek, was newly elected as supervisor, Joel changed the address for this mail to be sent to Alphebet Decker's post office at Purvis Post Office.

Thursday, March 12, 1874

"Filed saw for Laf Sprague and went to J.E. Sprague's and helped Thos. Seeley make out road warrants, worked all day.

"Weather still cold

weather still cold.

"John drew wood to B. VanGaasbeck.

"Recorded two mortgages.

"John one day."

Joel Kimball

Thomas Seeley resided on the old Joel Hodge homestead [Joel Kimball's grandfather] along the road to Westfield Flat, at the base of Burnt Hill. The forty-three year old man was active in the Rockland's political affairs, serving many elected offices of the township, but during the recent election of 1874, running as a Democrat for Justice of the Peace, was defeated.

Thomas Seeley became the "overseer" of town highway district 15, which included a portion of the road that went from Purvis to Westfield Flat. Work done to repair this road after January's flood was costly, both in material and labor. The residents who did the repair work handed over their bills to the overseer and with an upcoming board meeting, Joel, the new town clerk, met with Seeley for the preparation of this warrant which was to be submitted before the Town Board for approval. - Fred

Friday, March 13, 1874

"Went down to Thomas Seeley's and helped make road warrants. Finished after dark and went to Uncle Oliver Borden's. Stayed all night.

"Cold and windy.

"John Collins one day."

Joel Kimball

Thomas Seeley's ancestral family consisted of a long line of Seeleys, ... or Seely, ... or Seelye, ... or Seley, variations of the surname used by the different family generations. Some given names within this family, however, would follow through each generation. Those who have researched their family's genealogical history often find one or more given names that were passed on from one generation to the next. As for the Seeley, ... or Seely, ... or Seelye, ... or Seley family, the given name of Abner was like a common thread woven through each generation. Thomas' great-grandfather's name was Abner; Thomas' grandfather's name was Abner; Thomas' father's name was Abner. Though Thomas had no siblings with the name Abner. he would

continue the old family traditional name with his first-born, named Abner.

Abner, the great-grandfather, served in the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War, joining Seth Warner's Green Mountain Boys, commissioned as captain. Much has been said about families being divided during the American Civil War, with brothers joining opposing armies. The same was true for the Seeley family. While Abner became a patriot, his brothers, Joseph and Justus, remained Loyalists, joining the British army. - Fred

Saturday, March 14, 1874

"At Uncle Oliver's, ate breakfast and came home and went up to Purvis and to Cyrus Mott's. Distributed road warrants. Came home in the afternoon.

"John Collins one day."

Joel Kimball

Cyrus was the great-grandson of Thomas Mott, another veteran of the Revolutionary War who was enticed to purchase farm lots from the aristocratic family of John R. Livingston in the wild and unoccupied valley of the Willowemoc. Four generations of Motts cleared the land and established the finest of the early farms within the area. With the Willowemoc River running through the farm, its waters were used to operate the Mott sawmill erected along its banks and used to send the lumber to market by raft down river.

The farm was also the location of the area's first common burial grounds, used by the Mott family and other early settlers in the valley, where Thomas now lies. His life is condensed into one sentence, now indelibly written, almost two hundred years ago, on a slab of weathered sandstone;

"Sacred to the Memory of Lieut. Thomas Mott, a Revolutionary Patriot who died June 18, 1813, aged about 70" - Fred

Sunday, March 15, 1874

"Done chores and went on the hill and fed cattle. I went up to Col. Moores. Chas. Sheeley came up and we stayed until two o'clock and came home. Ate dinner and I went home with Chas., saw Sid and H. and B. Ronalter, Arch Cochran.

"Warm, dry."

Joel Kimball

Joel introduced us to Charlie Sheeley early in his diary [see January 1st] when the boys borrowed Sprague's dog [see January 15th] and Decker's gun [see January 5th] to go rabbit hunting. Charles and Sidney were the sons of John Sheeley whose farm was just done the road from the Kimball's, across from the one-room school [see February 20th].

The road that was built from Joel's grandfather's farm [now Thomas Seeley] [see March 13th] at Buck Eddy, over Burnt Hill to the Beaverkill valley [see February 21st] now gave easier access to the former woodlots on the hillside. Henry and Barbara Ronalder were German immigrants who finished clearing the logged off lot into a small farm at the crest of the hill. Henry and William ["H. and B. Ronalter"] [see above] were their boys. - Fred

Monday, March 16, 1874

"Johnny quit, came back and settled 84c due him. I went on the hill and cut some wood. Went to Morsston and got jug and one gallon tanner's oil to tan deer skins. Heard Ed Dawson has the small pox.

"Called at William Purvis' and got town meetings, read and came home.

"Some mistake, did not go to Morsston until tomorrow."

Joel Kimball

John Collins ended his employment with Joel. Collins, when at the age of sixteen years, moved to Colonel Moore's in 1872, eventually spending the rest of his life on the farm. He married the Colonel's daughter, Martha, in 1881 and the couple took over the farm in 1886.

John died at the farm in 1924. His obituary states that he lived by the motto "Give a little more than you were paid for", a creed that he followed throughout his life. Apparently, he felt that his employer should follow the same principle. - fred

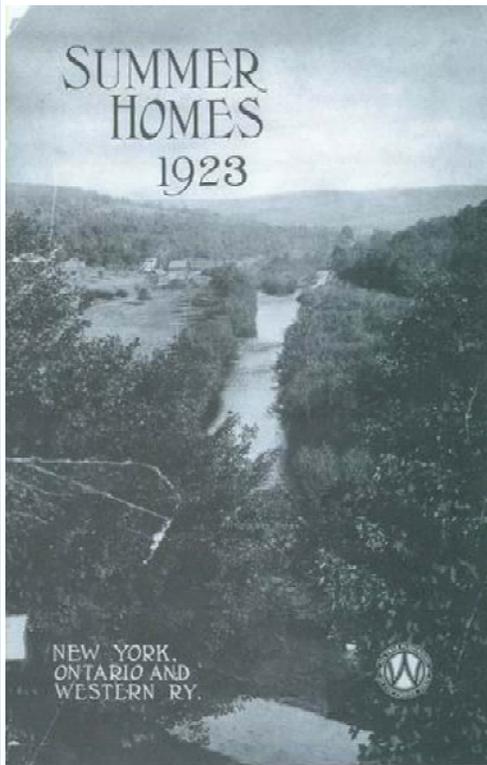
Tuesday, March 17, 1874

"Went to Morsston after done chores and I got jug and one gallon of oil. Came back and heard Ed Dawson had small pox.

"Hiram Rose commenced to raft his lumber today. I did not get much mail.

"Weather warm and some rainy. Notified town board to meet one week from today."

Joel Kimball



With the rain and the recent warm weather, the ice is now completely out of the river and the water level is high with spring snow-melt. The riverbank in front of Hiram Rose's, Joel's neighbor, as stacked with logs, the result of Hiram's winter work and now the staging area for assembling "colts" to be sent down the river.

The accompanying photograph, which shows the Willowemoc valley in front of the Kimball residence, was on the cover of the O&W railroad magazine "Summer Homes" published in 1923. The photo itself, however, was taken much earlier, for it shows the Purvis to Westfield Flat highway along its original route. It was later moved, in 1913, closer to the river, near the road's present location. The farm shown near the center of the image would have been the site of the 1874 Rose farm. - Fred

Wednesday, March 18, 1874

"Wm P Rose and I went on the hill and cut set of lash poles for him and I chopped fallow some. After noon, tossed my boots and helped H E Rose raft his lumber.

"H E Rose due for 1/2 days rafting, 75.

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

Joel Kimball

William Rose, the forty-eight-year-old lumberman who was the immediate neighbor to the Kimballs, was also assembling his lumber into colts along the river. Logs would be placed side-by-side and held in place by "lash poles", smaller tree saplings, that were laid perpendicular to the logs. Sets of two-inch

noies were then borea into the end of the logs, into which wooden dowels, or stakes, would be driven. These dowels would then be used to fasten the pole to the logs, holding both the logs and the pole in place.

Back on January 7th, William Rose borrowed the raft augur from Joel. The raft augur had a two-inch bit, turned by a crank that could have been up to five feet in length. Rose returned the augur the next day, but there is reason to believe, though it is not mentioned, that it may have not been returned in the best of condition. Throughout the rest of the winter, Joel had helped Bishop VanGaasbeck at the blacksmith shop, one project being the making of an augur crank, perhaps fixing his own augur, which was finished on February 23rd. - Fred

Thursday, March 19, 1874

"Done my chores and went down to Cochran's and rafted for Hiram Hodge. Nearly finished one colt, 27 feet wide. Ate dinner at Geo Crippen's. Went home with Hiram at night. Water raised nearly to a freshet.

"H Hodge due day's work rafting, 1.50."

Joel Kimball

In early spring, lumbermen watched the river as the winter's snow-pack melted, raising the water level, in anticipation of launching their rafts of lumber into the current. Misjudgment of the river's flow, from normal high levels to freshet to outright flooding, can lead to disastrous results. During the early rafting season of the previous spring [1873], rapid snowmelt and spring rains raised the rivers' level to flood conditions creating havoc with raftsmen and their rafts up and down the Beaverkill and Delaware rivers.

During the winter before this episode, an unusual amount of lumber had been stacked along the riverbanks. In an attempt to rush as much lumber as possible to markets downriver, lumbermen were anxious to start the rafts of lumber early, too early. As the rivers quickly swelled to flood stage, the swift currents made the rafts unmanageable, many of them smashing onto the rocky shores, bridge piers or river islands and breaking up. - Fred

Friday, March 20, 1874

"Worked all day rafting, finished one colt and ran it across the river and commenced another. Put in 13 streaks. I went to Mrs. Campbell's and went to Cochran's to a little dance, had a pleasant time.

"H Bennett started three colts, landed one at Cochran's pond and stuck two on Granny's Island, got them off and landed at foot of Coalbit Dift

Granny's Island, got them on and landed at foot of Coapit Hill.

"H Hodge, one day's rafting, \$1.50."

Joel Kimball

Rafting on the smaller streams such as the Beaverkill and Willowemoc under normal conditions can be a tricky affair, but during a freshet the fierce rapids of these narrow creeks would become extremely difficult to negotiate. Pilots for Abner Bennett, whose sawmill was midway between Kimball's and Westfield Flats, soon discovered that they had launched their colts too early. After struggling to keep the rafts off the river's rocky shoals, they were probably only too happy to reach the relatively quiet waters of the eddy behind Cochran's dam, only a mile or so from their departure point.

Cochran & Appley was the firm that operated a sawmill and small tannery, both situated along the banks of the Willowemoc, below Westfield Flats. A dam was placed across the river, creating a millpond that served two



raceways, one that led to the sawmill and the other to the tannery. The accompanying image, taken twenty years later, shows the mill, which stands in front of the covered bridge, and millpond. The tannery is no longer in existence when this photo was taken but the second raceway still remains, leading up to and under the building behind the mill. - Fred

Saturday, March 21, 1874

"Worked all day rafting.

"Weather pretty cold and windy. Finished second colt and commenced another, swung number two across the river. Put twelve streaks in number three. Went to Uncle Hiram's in the evening and stayed all night.

"Hiram Hodge due for one day's work, \$1.50."

Joel Kimball

Raft pilots needed to learn everything about the streams they were rafting, an education that had to be treated as if their life depended upon it. Geographic landmarks would map out the stream in their head, hint at the height of the water level, warn of mid-stream obstructions and forewarn the experienced pilot of dangerous currents ahead. Tributary creeks feeding into the main river could bring dangerous cross-currents that would throw the vessel cross channel onto the opposite bank. At sharp bends in the channel, an outside route would could catch the raft in a current that would slam the raft against the bank, the raft and contents subject to any danger that may exist there.

John Mott's family operated a sawmill along the shores of the Willowemoc below Purvis. On the morning of April 12, 1839, John set out with a colt of milled lumber on a trip the experienced pilot had taken many times before. He was only in the water for a short distance when he came upon the bend in the river in front of the Kimball and William P. Rose farms. To keep from being hung-up on the shoal inside of the bend, Mott steered the raft along the swifter outside current, riding alongside the outside bank. Unknowing to Mott, recent river conditions had toppled a tree from the bank into the creek, its branches sifting the waters as they passed through. As Mott's raft came upon the tree it became entangled underneath, the tree's branches acting like a broom, sweeping everything clear off of the raft and into the current. Mott, now in the water, became caught in the branches like a fly in a spider's web, the rushing current holding him underwater where he perished.

John Mott was the grandfather of Cyrus Mott. - Fred

Sunday, March 22, 1874

"Got Hiram's mare and wagon and came home, found things all OK. Called at Emmitt's and saw J.D.W.M. Decker, recorded mortgage and went on hill and fed cattle and went back to Hiram's."

Joel Kimball

J.D.W.M. "Alphabet" Decker was the enterprising merchant and post master at Purvis Post Office. His duties as clerk for both positions usually kept him quite busy. One morning, during a lull in his store, he noticed that he was missing one bag of flour. Being preoccupied all morning with customers he had failed to note who had walked off with it, so he decided to bill each of the twenty customers that he served that morning. Decker, being known as fair, honest and upright in his dealings with his customers, received payment for the flour from nineteen out of the twenty. It was now obvious who the culprit was; the one "left holding the bag." - Fred

Monday, March 23, 1874

"At Hiram Hodges, came down to the river but it was cold we did not work any. I went to Flats and came back to Wm. Keener's. Played Eucre and came home.

"Weather very cold and windy."

Joel Kimball

When the rail line of the Oswego Midland Railroad passed by Westfield Flats, it missed the village by a mile. The closest neighbors to the new railroad were the inhabitants of the Westfield flats Cemetery. To make matters worse, the passenger and freight depot the company built was placed in the perennially flooded mudhole. Without access to the highway, a road was built to the depot which was continuously drifted shut with snow a good portion of the year. The other portion, the road was a bottomless quagmire. Still, the attraction of railroad transportation lured businesses into the area and eventually a new community developed.

The earliest businesses in this section served the traveling public, the Horton House, and the not-so-traveling public, Keener's Saloon. Located next to the depot, O. Horton's hotel was built during the winter of 1874, opening its doors in February. Young William Keener's establishment, across the tracks from Horton's, had also just recently opened and already had become a favorite amongst the mill and tannery workers and lumbermen. - Fred

Tuesday, March 24, 1874

"At home. Attended town board, appointing officers to fill vacancies at J.D.W.M. Decker's. We appointed constable, collector and inspector of elections.

"Cold, windy day.

"Town of Rockland due for one days's work, \$2.00."

Joel Kimball

The first meeting of the town board since last month's elections was held at the store of Alphabet Decker's. Joel would probably have done more than just "attended" the meeting, for being the newly elected town clerk, he would have been responsible for recording the minutes. Little of the town's records have survived from this era, one reason being that records were not required to be

saved before the 1880's.

Two of the appointments by the town board included that of John C Wilson, who had a farm along the Beaverkill River, and William French, a carpenter from above DeBruce, as constables. - Fred

Wednesday, March 25, 1874

"Started for Westfield Flats with Bishop VanGaasbeck. Saw where accident happened on railway at Buck Eddy. Stayed there until noon, went to Cochran's and to Hiram Hodge's. Did not work any.

"Asa Cochran, 30c."

Joel Kimball

The location of the depot along the Midland's line at Westfield puzzled many of the local residents, as it was placed in the flood-prone valley section of the Willowemoc. Many thought that it should be moved to the higher ground near the Callicoon Turnpike railroad crossing. Besides being above the flood plain, it also had the advantages of being along the main highway between Purvis and Westfield and near the small industry community that had developed there.

Asa Appley and William Cochran began a small tannery operation along the shores of the Willowemoc at the Turnpike's crossing of the Willowemoc. Forming the firm of Cochran & Appley, they also erected a sawmill in the same location. These operations resulted in the formation of a small settlement which included, besides the homes of the families who worked at the mill and tannery, a blacksmith shop, wagon shop, merchant store and hotel. - Fred

Thursday, March 26, 1874

"Helped Hiram raft all day. C Cochran helped in place of Geo. Crippen. Billings Hodge finished his colt.

"Weather windy and cool. Went to Flats and practiced with the band.

"Hiram Hodge due for one day's work, \$1.50.

"One meal at Green's."

Joel Kimball

George Crippen's family resided across the river from the Cochran & Appley

miis. He was raised at Cannonsville in Delaware County coming to the town of Rockland after the Civil War. He, like so many of the other men during this era, worked the lumber and rafting industry along with being a carpenter. In the winter of 1874, the forty-five year-old man built a wagon shop and began a career as wagon-maker. - Fred

Friday, March 27, 1874

"At Joseph Green's in the morning, went up to Cochran's and helped Hiram raft for three quarter of a day, finished from the cold and hung one pair of oars. Chet Cochran helped us.

"Hiram Hodge due for three-quarter day's work."

Joel Kimball

Chester Cochran was the nephew of Asa Cochran, one of the partners in the firm of Cochran & Appley who operated the sawmill at Westfield Flats. Chester, thirty-two years old at the time, and his brother Wesley both worked as lumbermen, perhaps being associated with the family business.

Both Cochran boys were Civil War veterans, enlisting in October of 1861 with the 56th New York Infantry Regiment, the local Sullivan County regiment organized during that summer and fall. Chester's military career was brief, however, for he received a disability discharge the following May. - fred

Saturday, March 28, 1874

"At Hiram Hodge's in the morning, came to Cochran's and started for home, sold pike to Hiram. Came home, concluded not to raft anymore.

"Weather quite cool and two inches of snow. Hiram and others went to fix Brown's race.

"Hiram Hodge due for one pike, \$.75."

Joel Kimball

For whatever reason, Joel seems to have lost his enthusiasm with rafting. Perhaps it was the weather, with the two inches of fresh-laid spring snow, or perhaps the workload of the town clerk's position, coupled with the usual chores on his own place. He sold his pike and went home. - fred

Sunday, March 29, 1874

"At home, Bish and Ida here. I went with them to J. Sheeley's and then went over to river. Sid and I went down near Appley's and saw car off tracks. Came home in afternoon.

"Pleasant and windy."

Joel Kimball

The accident that Sidney Sheeley and Joel observed was the third such incident in the past few days. The previous Wednesday, Joel noted the rail accident at Buck Eddy and yesterday he noted that the raceway to one of the mills needed repair. Apparently the spring thaw had created some havoc along the Midland railroad's line, perhaps the rail bed being undermined by mudslides or slumps with the rails being repositioned, allowing the cars to be derailed.

The Midland's rail route from Appley's switch to Buck Eddy, a distance of less than a mile, crosses the Willowemoc no less than four times. From Buck Eddy toward Westfield Flat, the valley becomes narrow, with the highway, railroad and river all funneled into the scant space within the valley's walls. As we all have well learned over time, when the highway, railroad and river compete for position, the river usually wins out. - fred

Monday, March 30, 1874

"Made sap spiles, went to shop and made a spile punch. Went on the hill and worked in sap bush all day, tapped about thirty trees, did not boil any.

"Went to post office in the evening.

"Pleasant day."

Joel Kimball

After a long winter, early signs of the coming spring become evident with the swelling of buds on the limbs of trees. Food that had been produced by last year's tree leaves has been stored during the dormant period at its roots and now, with the warmer weather, rise back up the trunk to provide nourishment for the coming year's growth.

The sap of maple trees is noted for being particularly sweet, though diluted, and after being processed was used during Joel's era as a sweetener, candy and syrup. The "river" of sap flows up the tree through a layer behind the

and grasp the river. Or sap flows up the tree through a layer behind the outer bark. When a hole is punctured through the bark, the sap would be released outward through the hole by use of a "faucet", spiles made of either wood, as in Joel's case, or metal, and collected in containers placed below.

Tuesday, March 31, 1874

"Went in the woods and boiled sap until noon, came home having finished, weather so cold sap did not run. After noon went to the depot, saw Cyrus Mott, Sam Maffett and others.

"Received six mortgages to file and record, cash 85c.

"Cool day.

"Mother went to Billing's."

Joel Kimball

The amount of sap rising up the trunk of maple trees is highly dependent upon the weather's temperatures. Ideal conditions for the best flow are when temperatures fall below freezing over night and rise into the 40's during the next day. Prolonged periods of cold or warm temperatures tend to slow, or shut down altogether, the "run". - Fred