

# Joel Kimball Diary - February 1874

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## Sunday, February 1, 1874

"Done chores and went on the hill and fed cattle and went over to Col. Moore's. Stayed until about 5 o'clock and came home and done chores.

Cool day. Juliet and mother went to DeBruce."

Joel Kimball

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*Colonel Moore's farm was midway up Johnston Mountain, on the road that led from James Sprague's to Beaverkill. Well, you know that is not exactly true, because the boundaries of his farm were not actually on the road, but along a tributary brook that ran parallel with the road and to gain access to the road from his farm, he needed to ford the brook, which he did by way of a pole bridge, and, for a short distance, cross the lands of Thomas Collins. Now that had never been a problem before, I mean crossing Collins' land, since Thomas was married to the Colonel's daughter and, to keep peace in the family, never objected to that particular use of his land by his in-laws. But now, in 1874, Collins, the Civil War hero, though he had yet to be honored as such and whose pension was considered meager at best, was beginning to have difficulties in keeping up with the payments on his own farm and soon would eventually lose it.*

*Realizing the predicament he was in, Moore decided to rectify his problem with the hopes that it would not cost him a cent. On June 9, 1880, Moore invited the town highway commissioner, James Sprague, to his house where he proposed that the town lay out a private road, a distance of sixty feet, which happened to be the same road that went over Collins' land and which Moore had been using ever since 1857, which was well before Collins owned the land. Now, it is unclear just what the final outcome of this meeting was, but the town did act on Moore's petition and have the sixty foot road surveyed, and the family has been using this same road ever since that meeting, even up to this very day. - Fred*

## Monday, February 2, 1874

"Cut wood before noon and shelled corn. Went on the hill and drew down load of wood.

"Commenced snowing in afternoon, wind blowing from the east."

Joel Kimball

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The snowy day kept Joel close to home, perhaps a chance to enjoy the tea he had picked up at Gray & Davis, the general merchandise store at Parksville, during his return trip from Uncle Asa's. The Gray brothers, James D. and Cyrus, were prominent business men of Parksville, involved with numerous enterprises.

Parksville was a busy community in 1874. The falls along the Little Beaverkill Creek, below the town, provided an ideal location for water-powered mills and both a saw mill and grist mill were located near there. The Reynolds grist mill was one of only two mills in operation in the area at the time, the other being at Westfield Flats, and was heavily used by the Morsston farmers until 1882, when Frank Reynolds, one of the proprietors of the Parksville mill, erected the mill at Purvis. This mill was eventually purchased by the Gray brothers, the next generation; Cyrus, not to be confused with his uncle Cyrus, and Byron, both being the sons of merchant James D. Gray. - Fred

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### **Tuesday, February 3, 1874**

"About six inches new snow. Drew some wood and shelled corn. Called at post office in evening.

"Can't think of more to write."

Joel Kimball

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*Another slow, uneventful day for Joel, an opportunity to revisit the hoop-pole industry.*

*Most of the barrel hoops used in the New York City's cooper shops came from the rejuvenating forests of Sullivan and Ulster counties. The industry provided income for farmers, such as Joel's uncle, who cut the pole wood off of their woodlots and made the finished hoops in a barnyard shed. Others would move out into the forests, some with their families, living in small, crude cabins or shacks and spend the winter cutting poles and shaving them into hoops. When their supplies would get low, they would haul a load of the finished hoops to the nearest merchant, where the hoops would then be used the same as if it were currency, the hoopsters then returning back into the woods.*

*Matt Decker, Willowemoc merchant and brother of "Alphabet" Decker, was perhaps the most prominent local dealer of hoops. Throughout the winter his yard would become filled with stacks of bundled hoops, one hundred to a*

*bundle, until the roads became passable enough to allow load after load to be taken to the railroad depot for shipment to New York hoop speculators. Depending on the grade and quality of the hoops, the final cost was about four dollars per thousand. Even when steel bands began to replace the wooden bands towards the end of the century, the hoop industry was still viable as late as 1898 when Decker signed a contract with a down-state speculator to deliver over one million nail-kegs hoops. - Fred*

### **Wednesday, February 4, 1874**

"Went to Westfield to mill with steers, called at Jos. Green's. Saw James Johnston and wife and others. Got some valentines.

"Started for home about two o'clock, arrived at six, all OK.

Called at J. Rush's to get library, could not carry it as I had no box.

"Cool and windy."

Joel Kimball

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*After spending two days "shelling" corn, Joel took the grain to the gristmill at Westfield Flats. The mill was built, or rather rebuilt after a devastating fire razed the original structure, in 1850 by Joseph Reynolds, next to his tannery. Five years later, Ezekiel Palen, whose family were noted tanners from Greene and other portions of Sullivan counties, bought out Reynolds and eventually his brother-in-law, Horace Utter, joined in the venture, both businesses operating under the name "Utter & Palen". By 1872, Utter was the sole proprietor of both businesses.*

*The mill was a large building, its wheels powered by water, and considered the finest mill of its kind in the region. The revolving millstones ground local farmer's buckwheat and rye into flour and corn into meal, with Utter either retaining a share of the product or else bartering with the farmer. - Fred*

### **Thursday, February 5, 1874**

"Drew a load of wood and went to depot to go to Flats to practice with the band. Train did not arrive until about seven o'clock, then rode to Flats with gravel train, found Dr. Tuttle and Jay Morton and M. Duhr. Got to Flats about eight o'clock, practiced some with Ger. R. Green."

Joel Kimball

JOEL KIMBALL

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*There was always one thing that you could depend on with the Oswego and Midland Railroad; that the train service was undependable. Weather was always a problem; slides and washouts required constant track maintenance; before the advent of the Munshell snowplow, crews of workers laboriously removed snow by hand-shovelling; equipment failure and derailments were all too common, all creating further delays. During the spring of 1873, the scheduled arrival of the "mail train" was delayed by several days. When the train finally did arrive, those who patiently waited for mail delivery were informed that there was not mail to be delivered; the mail-agent had forgotten to load the mail onto the train. - Fred*

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**Friday, February 6, 1874**

"Rode to Uncle H. Hodge with Joe Green. Stopped and saw folks, intended to to to Benj. Pratt's to buy back crank augur and Hiram told me it had not come back from down the river. Started for home about 3 o'clock, arrived about 5.

"Sent for the New York Weekly."

Joel Kimball

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*"Uncle H. Hodge" was the brother to Joel Kimball's mother. Their father, also named Joel, along with his young family, left the Hodge farm at Neversink, sometime before 1825, and came to the still relatively untouched forests of Rockland township. Settling along the road between Purvis and Westfield Flats, this branch of the Hodge family were woodsmen, sawyers and rafters who obtained numerous woodlots on the Willowemoc's forested hillsides. One of these lots was located along Stewart Brook, which followed along the road that led from Westfield Flats to Callicoon Depot, then known as the Callicoon Turnpike.*

*Numerous sawmills were located along this section, including the smaller mill of Robert Stewart along the Turnpike and the large wood mill of Cochran & Appley, on the Willowemoc at the mouth of Stewart Brook. The Hodge lot, located along the Turnpike above Stewart's mill, was purchased by Hiram in 1871 and was where he was residing when his nephew came calling. - Fred*

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**Saturday, February 7, 1874**

"Cut wood and read Scottish Chiefs until noon. Went on the hill and drew a

load of wood and cut some more. Went to post office and received letter from father. Sharpened saw for B. VanGaasbeck, brought cross-cut home from J.E. Sprague."

Joel Kimball

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*As Joel's daily journal entries suggest, he enjoyed reading. William Wallace was a Scottish patriot who led the fight against King Edward's invasion during the war for Scottish independence at the end of the thirteenth century. Over the succeeding centuries, Wallace's achievements have become legendary to his fellow countrymen, leading Jane Porter, in 1810, to write the historical fiction "Scottish Chiefs". This romanticized version of Wallace's achievements, to some contemporaries, seemed to have been greatly exaggerated, but the legends Porter helped expand persists to this day, being depicted in the recent, highly acclaimed film, "Braveheart". - Fred*

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### **Sunday, February 8, 1874**

"Read some in Scottish Chiefs and went on the hill and Col. Moore's. Stayed short time, saw Wm. Wagner who brought mail. Heard Matt is coming home."

Joel Kimball

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*In the early 1840's, farmers from the Catskills and upper Hudson valley, who were bound with leases to their aristocratic landlords, reminiscent of a semi-feudal system, went on an area-wide protest when they refused to pay their rent. When representatives of the landlords attempted to get the back rents due them, the tenants rebelled, gaining support throughout the whole region.*

*Many of the farmers within the valleys of the Neversink and upper Willowemoc were tenants of the Livingston family or their heirs. As a result of the Anti-Rent War, the uprising spread into these valleys, with Colonel Moore one of the rebellion's leaders from the Neversink area. - Fred*

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### **Monday, February 9, 1874**

"Drew wood and chiseled some by the house. Cold and windy. Finished reading Scottish Chiefs."

Joel Kimball

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*The New York and Oswego Midland Railroad's line was completed on the*

*evening of July 9th, 1873, with the laying of the last rail being driven by the last spike along the route west of Westfield Flats. The joining of the eastern and western sections of the trunk line brought out the road's dignitaries, newspaper reporters and a brass band, all accompanied with a blast from a howitzer in celebration of the occasion.*

*The celebration was short-lived for the company experienced financial difficulties during the project, unable to pay off the interest on the bonds and back-pay due to the contractors, who created work stoppages and delayed the road's completion. On September 18th, after only two months in full operation and with employees not receiving wages for nearly five months, the company became bankrupt and was put into the hands of a receiver. Still maintaining rail operations under these financial hardships, labor unrest against the company continued to mount going into the month of February. - Fred*

## **Tuesday, February 10, 1874**

"Cut and drew wood all day. Snow quite deep and wind blowing quite hard."

Joel Kimball

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*Instead of wages, employees' back wages from the New York and Oswego Midland were paid in company script, promissory notes which were not honored by the company until the first of the coming year, 1874. Meanwhile, on November 1st, the company had laid off the force of men who worked the gravel trains and who were not included in the script exchange, thus denied their back pay. Out of work and out of money, the men seized control of the railroad's property at Summitville on February 2nd, spiking the switches and turntable, chaining up locomotives and cutting telegraph wires, stopping freight and passenger service along the line. - Fred*

## **Wednesday, February 11, 1874**

"Drew two loads of wood, H.E. Rose helped me some. Wood in the afternoon. Pretty cool and windy. Sawed large soft maple tree."

Joel Kimball

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*Five freight trains were being held up at Summitville by the unemployed railroad workers who were demanding back wages, and whose actions were now generating excitement up and down the line. New York and Oswego Midland officials, the company's receiver and the United States Marshal with a posse of men, rushed to the scene on February 3, where a confrontation was avoided when the men were promised back pay in the form of receiver's*

*avoided when the men were promised back-pay in the form of receiver's certificates. Trains were again moving by the next morning. Though the immediate crisis was over, the company and the workers would soon discover that the problem had yet to be solved. - Fred*

### **Thursday, February 12, 1874**

"Drew two loads of wood and went to Sprague's and got Decker's horse and sleigh and went to Flats and practiced with brass band. Jim Sprague and A. Vernoooy went with me. Donation at Andrews, did not attend, had a pleasant time.

"Got new fur collar.

"Sent two letters, one to Lida and one to L.T."

Joel Kimball

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*The spiritual needs of these early settlers, before they had any churches, were administered by "Circuit Riders", ministers who traveled from community to community, delivering their message wherever a congregation could be assembled; the school house, living room parlors or an outdoor "camp meeting". In 1869, the residents of Westfield Flats banded together and erected their first church building, of the Methodist denomination, on lands donated by Austin Dodge. To help pay the salary of the church's resident minister, donation parties were held on a regular basis.*

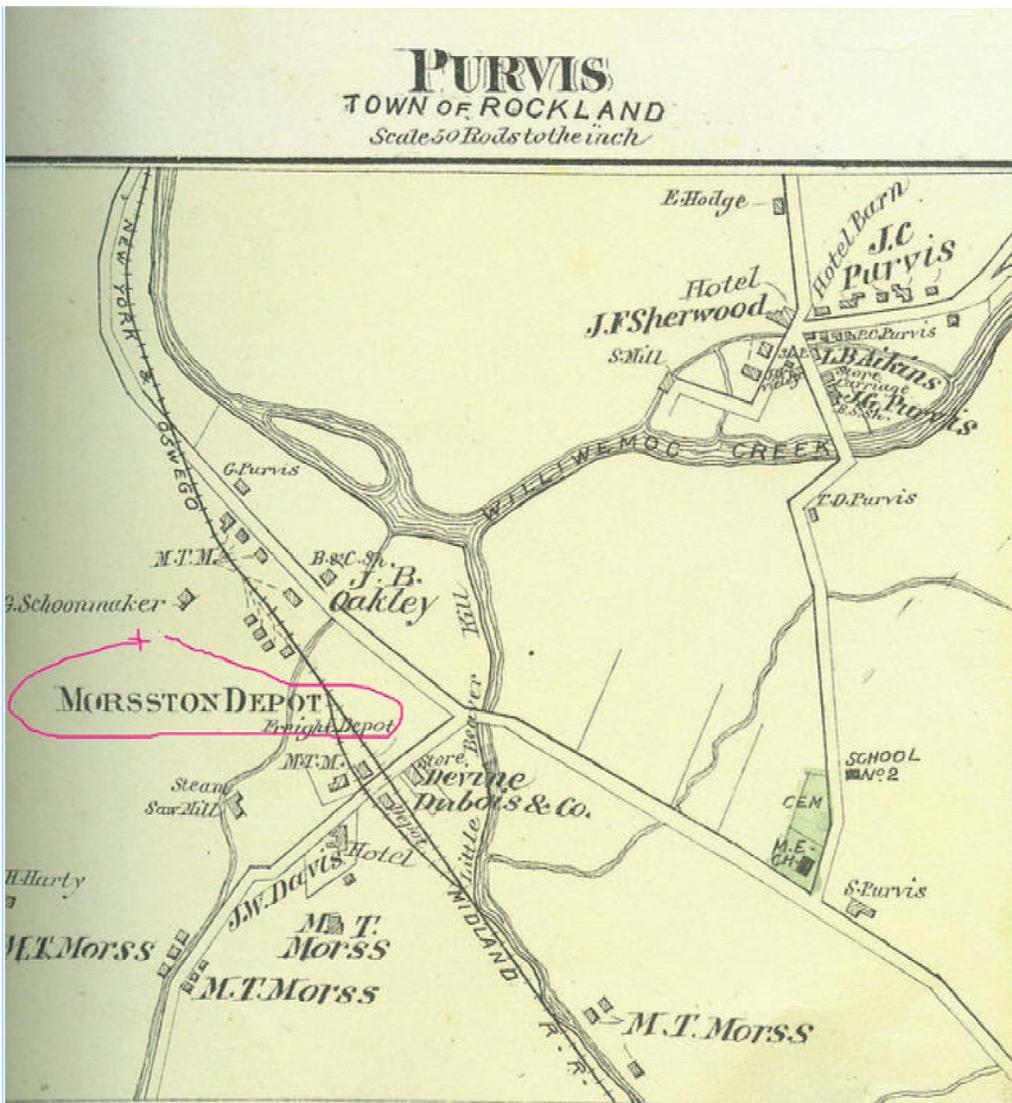
*Frances W. Andrews, The Westfield Flats' forty-year-old minister, began his calling at the M.E. Church in the Delaware County community of Downsville, while still serving as a circuit rider. By 1870, he had relocated into the town of Neversink. He eventually took charge of the Westfield Flats' church, and was serving that congregation during the year of 1874. - Fred*

### **Friday, February 13, 1874**

"Drew one load of wood from the hill and cut some. After noon went to depot, called at Deckers' and J. Velies. Read New York Weekly. Sent two letters, one to M.S. and one to L.D.

"Weather warm and rainy, snow disappearing fast."

Joel Kimball



Joel has been in correspondence with "L.D." since the first of the year [presumably Lydia Dodge, though Joel is not telling], but now, since his visit to Neversink last month, he has begun a new correspondence, one that will eventually be long-lasting, with "M.S.", Mary Schoonmaker, the daughter of Ben Schoonmaker from Krum's Settlement. Mary's great-grandfather, Garrett Van Benschoten, was one of the pioneers who settled in the Neversink Valley. A veteran of the Revolutionary War, he joined a company of volunteers and served in George Washington's rag-tag army throughout the war, participating in its military campaigns, including the bitter winter at Valley Forge.

After the war, Van Benschoten's military service was rewarded with the opportunity to receive a one-hundred acre lot under the Beekman and Schoonmaker grant titles of the Hardenburgh Patent [today near the hamlet of Hasbrouck]. Ownership of these grants was challenged by heirs to the Hardenburgh family and eventually, through questionable and devious means, came into the ownership of Gross Hardenburgh, who now became the new absentee landlord of the valley. Fred

*absentee landlord of the valley. - Fred*

### **Saturday, February 14, 1874**

"Worked around house before noon. After noon H.E. Rose and I went on hill and cut wood and fed cattle. Saw Wm. P. Rose. Finished sawing maple tree, have a fine lot of wood. Called at office and read papers."

Joel Kimball

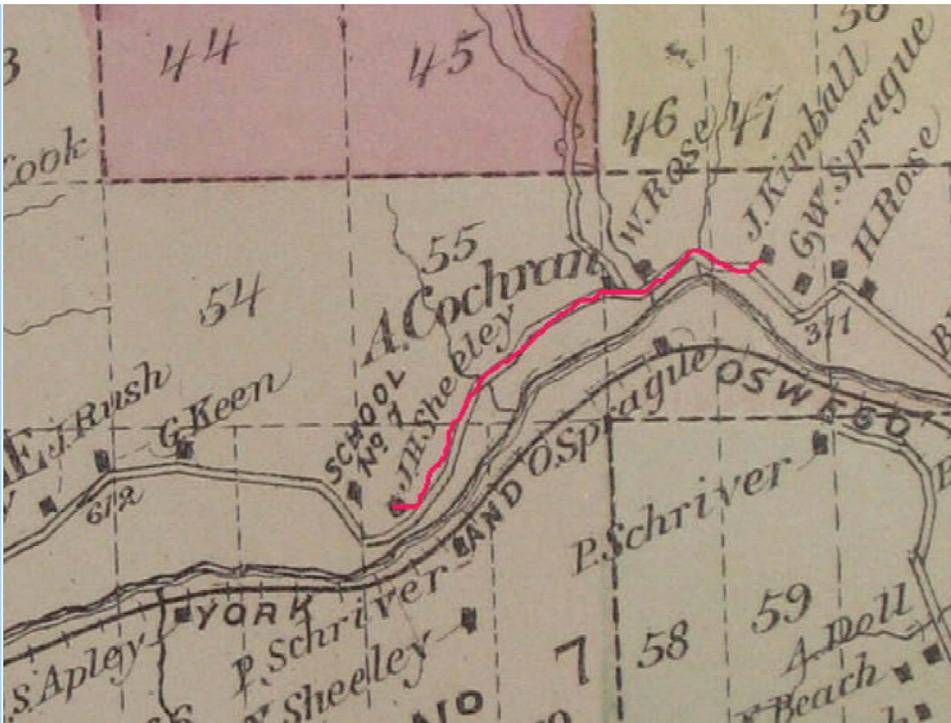
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*If anyone could be blamed for pouring fuel onto the fire of the Anti-Rent Wars, Gross Hardenburgh would probably be considered as being the one who struck the match. An aristocratic blowhard and a drunkard with a fiery temper, he rode up and down his "serfdom" demanding excessive rents, threatening eviction and bullying the population. As the general temper of the tenants became hostile, resistance to Hardenburgh's tactics increased and it was no surprise to anyone when on a cold, November morning in 1808, Hardenburgh was found lying unconscious along-side the road from what at first appeared to be the result from a fall off of his horse.*

*Gross Hardenburgh was carried to the Van Benschoten tavern where he laid until death overcame him in the afternoon. Meanwhile, as news of the day's event spread through the valley, a large celebratory crowd assembled at the tavern. Examination of the body soon discovered a small bullet wound in the dead man's shoulder, the trajectory of which led to his spine and resulted in his instant paralysis and eventual death. Since many of his former tenants had expressed ill feelings toward the hated landlord, most everybody in the valley were considered suspect to the murderous deed. Though no witnesses were willing to testify as to the guilty party, all who were questioned denied taking part in the shooting, but expressed that they would have done it themselves if given the opportunity. The culprit to the murder was never identified. - Fred*

### **Sunday, February 15, 1874**

"Quite a pleasant day. Went to church at school house, heard sermon delivered by Andrews. Called at John Sheeley's, saw Sid and Charlie. Freight train came and stopped in cut near Sheeley's and engine went to Morsston for water, leaving train in cut. Mother and Adilie went to meeting at Purvis church and I went on hill."



Joel Kimball

*Locomotives for the New York and Oswego Midland Railroad were driven by steam, generated within its boilers requiring the train to make numerous stops along its route to maintain sufficient water level. Since many of the small communities along the line had yet to have municipal water systems, adequate water for the railroad's use often was unreliable, especially in times of drought or in the dead of winter when the rivers, a chief source of water, were frozen solid.*

*The railroad line from East Branch to Morsston was a slight, but steady uphill grade. The locomotive hauling the freight train must have labored as it pulled its load up the grade, passing the small lumbering communities along the way until Westfield Flats, which had yet to have a water tower to serve locomotives. Pushing on to Morsston, gauges on the engine must have shown the water level to be at a critical level. When not enough water is in the boiler, the fire in the engine's firebox could eat through its chamber's walls causing the destruction of the locomotive with a catastrophic explosion. Knowing the danger that they may have been in, the crew unhooked the train of cars at the rock-cut behind the Sheeley farm, across from the school house about a mile below Kimball's, and continued on with the locomotive, now without the burden of the full train, to the water supply of the Midland's water tower at Morsston. - Fred*

**Monday, February 16, 1874**

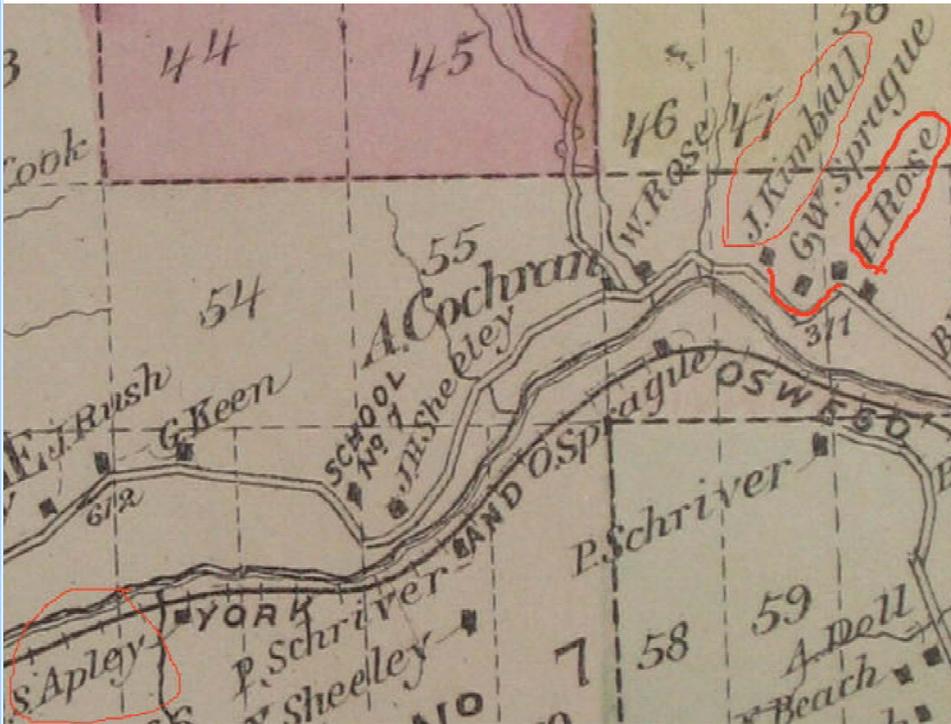
Snowy morning.

"Done chores and cut wood before noon. After noon went up to Hiram Rose's and helped H.E. Rose cut wood until night. Saw ten partridges as we were coming out of woods.

"Cool and windy in the evening."

Joel Kimball

*The long and continuous grade of the Midland's railroad bed between East Branch and Livingston Manor presented another type of hazard to any unsuspecting railroad crew. In early November of 1892, Train No. 31 stopped at Appley's switch, a lumber camp site along the line between the Livingston Manor and Roscoe stations, to pick up a car loaded with wood. Uncoupling a section of cars from the rear end of the freight train, the engine backed down the switch for the pick-up, leaving the uncoupled cars on the main track. The rear brakeman went to assist the train's crew when, to his consternation, noticed the uncoupled cars begin their own, engineless, journey back toward the direction they came.*



*With the continuous grade, the runaway train gained momentum as it rolled past the Roscoe station. It gathered speed as it whizzed past Cook's Falls and Horton. Those who happened to be near the track were startled with the site of the train flying by, approaching speeds of sixty miles an hour, sailing through Trout Brook and East Branch. Before approaching Fish's Eddy, the railroad bed reverses its grade which, fortunately, slowed the train's*

*momentum and it eventually came to a stop without doing any real harm, except for maybe some heart palpitations of the railroad's employees and those who witnessed the train's harrowing journey. - Fred*

## **Tuesday, February 17, 1874**

"Cold and windy, snow squalls.

"Cut some wood, went on the hill and fed cattle. Filed saw for E. Sprague and sent it to him, he sent it back.

I helped H.E. Rose saw wood in the afternoon. Called at post office, did not get any mail. Saw Truman the apple man."

Joel Kimball

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*One of the unanswered mysteries of Livingston Manor, one that probably will never be solved, is just who is buried in Mott Cemetery. Located on the flats across the river from Sprague's, it is the oldest burying grounds for this section of the town. Many members of the Mott family are buried in this cemetery but neighboring their burial plots are many of their neighbors, many of whose identities and burial locations have become lost over the passage of time. The few fortunate ones have stones of marble that have survived the years, inscriptions still able to be deciphered. Others are marked with slabs of sandstone, local rock cut and quarried from the hillside overlooking the valley, but whose inscriptions have long been worn away with the stone's slow disintegration. Those less fortunate, and probably with less means when in life, have their sites marked only by fieldstones, standing upright above the tall grass to mark the deceased individual's location. For many, these stones have all disappeared, the identity of the site of these buried souls now noted only by the elongated depression left in the ground's surface. For those least fortunate, perhaps the majority of the cemetery's inhabitants, are those whose stones are gone, washed away by floods, and the depression caused by their decomposition being filled in with the river's deposition.*

*Somewhere within the midst of these unmarked stones and tall grass are the remains of the ancestors and family of Hiram Edward Rose, the neighbor of Joel Kimball. John Rose, the grandfather whose life's journey wound its way Schoharie, Ulster and Delaware counties, came to live in the Willowemoc valley and died in March of 1833, buried in the Mott Cemetery on March 13. Next to him lies his grandson, Willard, a brother to Hiram, who died in 1892. Hiram's other brother and sister, George and Helen Louise, are also buried somewhere in the Mott Cemetery. Both died as young children within two weeks of each other in 1842. Their story of this family tragedy, as well as the final resting place for all of the family members, are buried and now lost within the tall grass of the old burying grounds of Mott Cemetery. Fred*

*I have heard that the DAR cataloged the Motts Flats Cem back in the early 1930s, but try as I may- I can not find a member who knows about or has access to this listing. (I can't find a list for the Neversink removals either.)*

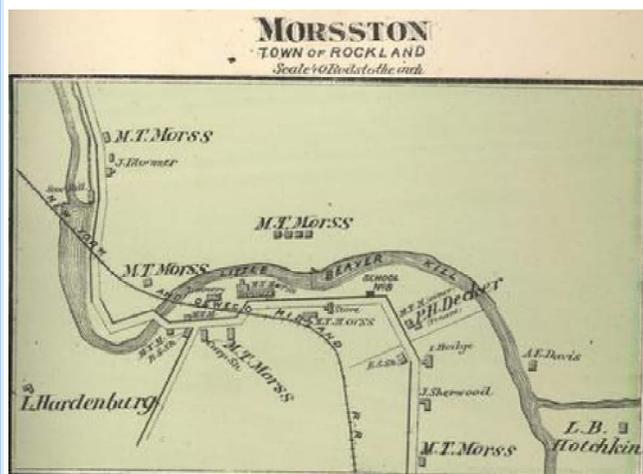
*Note: John Rose did not come from Schoharie, that is an error sold by a professional researcher who had her facts mixed up. John's youngest daughter, Christinia Rose who married Andrew Longyear Bush, said John came from New England, he most likely was born in the eastern section of New York called "the Oblong" or "the Gore". Family history, meaning -people actually descended from-, says family is of Scottish origin. evelyn*

*I know I'm threading on thin ice when I bring up the Rose family. I had seen somewhere, perhaps from the same researcher, that the Rose ancestors were of German descent, with the original spelling being "Roos". The Rose family that migrated to Shandee via Callicoon Center had come originally from Germany, and the original spelling, as it is spelled in the German cemetery at Callicoon Center is "Ros". Fred*

### Wednesday, February 18, 1874

"Cut wood until noon, then went up to depot and to Morsston. Fisk paid me one dollar for Patrick Kief and I got neck-tie and came home and had very bad head-ache. Read paper and a letter from L. Dodge, Iowa. Did not go to spelling school."

Joel Kimball



*Before the coming of the Midland railroad, the community surrounding the tannery enterprise of Henry Osborn and Medad Morss was then known as Morsston. Small businesses in this factory town served both the tannery and its employees. Easy access to leather allowed the shoemaker George Akins to flourish. The wagon and two blacksmith shops served the tannery, teamsters and local farmers. Both Bishop VanGaasbeck and John DuBois were*

*the village's blacksmiths, the latter also operating the company store of dry goods and groceries. Besides selling Joel his neck-tie, the store's space also served as a general gathering place for the local residents; early meetings of the town board as well as court sessions of the local magistrate were held at*



"Started for home about half past five, arrived about seven, found Matt Moore and Johnny Collins here, ate breakfast and done chores and went to school. Came home at noon. Johnny and I sawed some wood and he went home. Adele and Martha came from school and M went home. I called at Decker's and got papers."

Joel Kimball

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*During this era, young boys often did not finish their schooling; the obligation of earning wages to help the family or the lure of adventure enticing the lads away from the classroom. Perhaps this was also the case for Joel, but now, being older and wiser at the age of 28, sought to improve his education, as noted in his dairy this day and earlier in the week as he states that he was attending "spelling school". Or maybe it was just that he, along with the Moore boys, were sweet on the new young teacher.*

*As more and more early families settled in the valley between Westfield Flats and Purvis, the increase of school-age children warranted a separate school district. In 1848, Amos Sheeley, whose farm was less than a mile from the Kimball place, donated, for rental purposes, a small lot of land off of his farm to the trustees of the newly formed school district [Elam Rose, James Wright and Joel Hodge], allowing them the use of the premises as long as the district maintained a school-house. Eventually, in 1862, the trustees bought the Sheeley lot and built a new schoolhouse on the site. This one-room school house would later become known as the Hazel school, but not until well over thirty years have passed. - Fred*

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### **Saturday, February 21, 1874**

"Cut wood and read Weekly. Commenced to make a harrow. Called at post office and received letter from Lillie and one from Geo. R. Green.

"Weather warm and foggy, snow melting some.

"Joel Hodge and Nettie called and we cracked butternuts. Worked down in shop making auger crank and wrote caucus notice. Wrote to father."

Joel Kimball -

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*The Kimbells were now receiving the New York Weekly, a weekly newspaper, or more accurately put, a "story-paper," that featured serialized stories, poems and current events. First published in 1859, it now [1874] had over 350,000 subscribers. Many of the scrapbooks that were put together by these families, and which few still survive today, often had poetry and stories from the*

*Weekly pasted onto the scrapbook pages amongst the local news articles and obituaries.*

*Joel Hodge was the grandfather to Joel Kimball, his mother's father. The original Hodge farm in the valley of the Willowemoc, located in the Buck Eddy section [Hazel] sat at the base of Burnt Hill. In 1859, Hodge and other woodlot owners up the hill, petitioned the town to build a road, which was to begin below Hodge's wagon house, pass up and over Burnt Hill and down to the Beaverkill valley, to Kimball Flats, where Hodge's cousin, George Kimball, operated a sawmill. This road, today, is now known as the Burnt Hill Road. - Fred*

### **Sunday, February 22, 1874**

"Stayed at home until after noon, then went up to Sprague's and called at Laf's, saw Warren and Jeffrey Campbell. Called at B. VanGaasbeck's in evening, saw H.E. Rose.

"Still warm and rainy.

"Wrote to Tillie."

Joel Kimball

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*Jeffrey Campbell and Lafayette Sprague, young men who were about Joel's age, were cousins; Catherine Campbell, Jeffrey's mother, being the sister to James Emmett Sprague, of Purvis Post Office, and Erastus Sprague, whose farm was next to the Mott covered bridge.*

*Archibald Campbell emigrated to America from Scotland in 1800, eventually settling in the Town of Colchester, Delaware County, his family becoming one of the largest lumbering operations along the East Branch of the Delaware. Robert, the second oldest son and well-known raft-steersman, continued the large operation. He also became a leader in the Anti-Rent War rebellion and, like Colonel Moore's younger years at Neversink, was a captain of general training amongst the Colchester home-guard.*

*Archie Campbell's younger son, John, married Catherine Sprague and moved to a farm in the lower Willowemoc valley, east of Westfield Flats. He died on January of 1867, leaving his widow with the farm and three young sons, Jeffrey being the oldest at thirteen years of age. - Fred*

### **Monday, February 23, 1874**

"Went to shop and Bish and I finished crank and I put handles on. After noon went on the hill and made two bar posts. Laf Sprague came up and stayed

went on the hill and made two bar posts. Lar Sprague came up and stayed until I finished them and we came down and cracked butternuts and fixed saw.

"Weather warm all day, beautiful sunset. Growing cool and windy."

Joel Kimball

*Lafayette spent two years employed by the new railroad, working on building the wooden trestles and bridges along its route; the railway's passage through the tortuous, rough terrain of the Catskills providing plenty of work. Besides the numerous river crossings, especially along the Willowemoc, deep valley ravines had to be crossed which were done by use of trestles, connecting the valley walls with ribbons of iron rails. These lofty structures required skill in engineering to build as well as nerves of steel to cross.*

*Perhaps the grandest of these structures was the trestle that crossed the branch of the Mongaup Creek at Liberty Falls. The iron bridge over the creek was over a thousand feet in length, exclusive of the trestle work at each end. Trains passing over would find themselves precariously perched one hundred feet high above the valley's floor below, its weight supported only by the skeleton of timber and iron. - Fred*

**Tuesday, February 24, 1874**

"Cold and windy.

"Cut wood until 11 o'clock then went to J. Decker's and saw G.R. Green and A.S. Rockwell and M.R. Dodge. Went to depot, telegraphed to M.N. Dodge for A.S. Rockwell, no caucus until Saturday.

"Sent to Joe Corey and Nevel for two augers. Two hours for H.E. Rose, one and one half for myself. Left \$1.00 in silver with Denman, received currency.

"Saw Lida at Motts. Ritta Crippen at home when I arrived."

Joel Kimball

*Though the introduction of the Midland Railroad is considered to have brought these isolated communities into the modern world, by 1874 standards, perhaps just as important, and seldom mentioned, was the telegraph wires that ran along the railroad's right-of-way allowing these rural folks to be able to instantly communicate with the rest of the world with just .- . . - . . . . - . - . . . . - . - . . . . (Morse Code)*

*Montgomery Dodge and Abram Rockwell were merchants at Westfield Flats*

Montgomery Dodge and Abram Rockwell were merchants at Westford, Mass. Since both men were also leaders in the town's Republican Party, the reason for the telegraph message from the Morsston depot's office was most likely for political purposes. Political party caucuses for the township were soon going to be held with the selection of party candidates for the upcoming general election, and with Rockwell the current supervisor of the Town of Rockland and Dodge as a potential candidate, final preparations for the upcoming vote ran over the wires. - Fred

### Wednesday, February 25, 1874

"Went on the hill and rolled some blocks of wood off the hill and split them up. John Collins came over and we cut some beech and fed cattle and came home. Commenced snowing about 10 o'clock and snowed remainder of the day. Went up to blacksmith shop and made handle for grafting bob, called at Decker's and came home."

Joel Kimball

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*Again, trouble erupted along the route of the New York and Oswego Midland when the unemployed workers, who were given company script instead of back wages owed, found out that the paper was unredeemable and worthless. As before, the aggrieved men assembled at the Summittville station, spiked switches and lock up cars in an effort to delay the passage of trains.*

*The disruption was more serious than before since the striking workmen carried revolvers with them, in an effort to intimidate the company and the law enforcement agents sent to reopen the road. Fortunately, no violence took place even though three of the men were arrested. - Fred*

### Thursday, February 26, 1874

"Snow about six inches deep.

"Cut wood at the house until noon, then went on the hill and hunted rabbits some and cut wood. Finished cutting beech tree. Came home and called at Decker's in evening. Talked of giving John Cotter a donation.

"Weather cool and pleasant, snow melted a little."

Joel Kimball

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*It is not much different today in our community than it was one hundred and thirty-five years ago; when a family suffers through a tragedy, the town-folks*

*gather, raise funds and offers their support to the stricken family. Though no area newspapers have survived from this particular time period, the John Cotter family appear to have suffered some problem, perhaps a devastating fire. Before fire protection became organized with the formation of local fire companies, little could be done to save a rural homestead when a fire was discovered, except to save as much of the furnishings and household goods as possible before the family was driven back by the heat and flames and the structure turned into a pile of smoldering embers.*

*The John Cotter family lived at the Little Ireland section, an isolated valley within an isolated town, located on the hill above Purvis Post Office. The wooded trail following the tributary leading up from the Willowemoc Valley was a steep climb, but once on top, at the James Vernooy homestead, the picturesque valley known as Little Ireland opens up. Fields established where virgin forests once stood, the timber cut off twenty-five years before, the stumps pulled and rocks cleared, now were pastures for grazing sheep. Numerous cabins dot the valley's landscape, the homes of early immigrants who settled in the valley over twenty years before; most of Irish ancestry with names such as Dougherty, Donahue, Waters, Woods and Cotter. The Bernard Cotter family moved to the valley in 1848, by way of Dover, New Hampshire. The youngest son, John, would take over the homestead when he became old enough, along with his new bride, Johanna Collins, the older sister of the Collins brothers, Tom and John. - Fred*

### **Friday, February 27, 1874**

"Went on the hill and cut some wood. After noon went to the depot and got pair of overshoes for mother, paid for them. Received augur from New York by express.

"Democratic caucus at Cyrus Mott's today;

John Davidson - supervisor  
A.R. Purvis - commissioner  
Thos. Seeley - justice  
Geo. Preston - justice  
Geo. W. Sprague - assessor  
E. Hodge, Jim Bailey - overseer of the poor  
Gillett, Viele and Knickerbocker - constables  
Calvin Knickerbocker - collector  
Captain Davis and B. Akins - directors of election"

Joel Kimball

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*Just as the lumbering and rafting professions ran through the Kimball*

*family blood, so did politics. Many members of his ancestral and current family have served in various elected offices for both the townships of Rockland and Neversink. Though registered as a Republican, Joel had more than a passing interest in the Democratic party caucus results.*

*At the head of the Democratic ticket was John Davidson, sawmill proprietor and lumberman, carpenter and summer boarding-house operator, who resided along the popular fishing hole known as the Beaverkill River, below the community of Shin Creek. As carpenter, he was associated with the construction of many of the early structures that were built in the upper Beaverkill valley, but probably none were more important, and longer-lasting, than the bridges he built that spanned both the Willowemoc and Beaverkill rivers.*

*Up until the early nineteenth century, crossing a stream almost always was done by wading across at some shallow section. Bridging these locations became possible when engineers created a bridge design that utilized a pair of trusses, placed side-by-side, connected by the bridge decking. This design refocused the weight of any load on the bridge to the end of the structure, onto the bridge's supportive foundation abutments. This design allowed the bridge to span greater river widths and carry heavier loads without the need of supportive piers placed in the river below. To help preserve the bridge's wood beams and planks from the effects of the elements, a roof was added. Davidson perfected the typical design by radiating the end diagonal beams away from the abutments, adding more strength capability at both portals of the bridge.*

*By the second half of the nineteenth century, there were eight of these covered bridges within the boundaries of the Town of Rockland. Of these, three currently survive. The quality of Davidson's work, and also the perseverance of later generations that fought for the bridges' preservation, is proven by the fact that these surviving structures are all John Davidson bridges.*

*Davidson would soon be involved in a freak accident at his mill that cost him his life. In August of 1875, a pyramid of logs piled high ready for the sawyer's cut, shifted and broke loose, sending a stampede of logs tumbling through the mill's yard, one of which struck and rolled over Davidson.*

*He was laid to his final resting place in the small family cemetery next to the Davidson home. Today, the site shows few signs of any human activity that ever occurred at the site, except for the Davidson monuments, lying within the midst of the ferns and lofty pines that have since reclaimed the Davidson homestead. - Fred*

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**Saturday, February 28, 1874**

"George Hodge and I went on the hill and killed a rabbit, came home about noon. Found Uncle Oliver here and Thos. Collins and family.

"Went to Republican caucus."

Joel Kimball

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*The candidates for the upcoming general election have been chosen by both parties and Joel has thrown his hat into the ring, seeking the position of town clerk. The current supervisor for the Town of Rockland, Abram Rockwell, the Westfield Flat merchant, is not seeking re-election so his neighbor and fellow Flat's merchant Montgomery Dodge, is running in his place on the Republican ticket.*

*Joel will be running against Aaron Royston Purvis, who is the incumbent town clerk. Often, elections in our township become family affairs; the larger the family and number of relatives, the larger number of votes you receive (though on occasion it works in just the opposite way). A.R. Purvis, a young man like Joel at the age of thirty-four years, is the son of Manley Purvis whose farm was along the road to Woolseyville. The Purvis family, being amongst the earliest settlers in the township, extended into many of the area's other pioneer families, especially in and around the community of Purvis. Likewise, Joel's family extended into many of the pioneer families in and around the Westfield Flats section. Just as it would seem, many folks within the township were somehow related in some fashion to either one or the other candidate, and in some cases, to both young men. - Fred*