

Joel Kimball Diary - January 1874

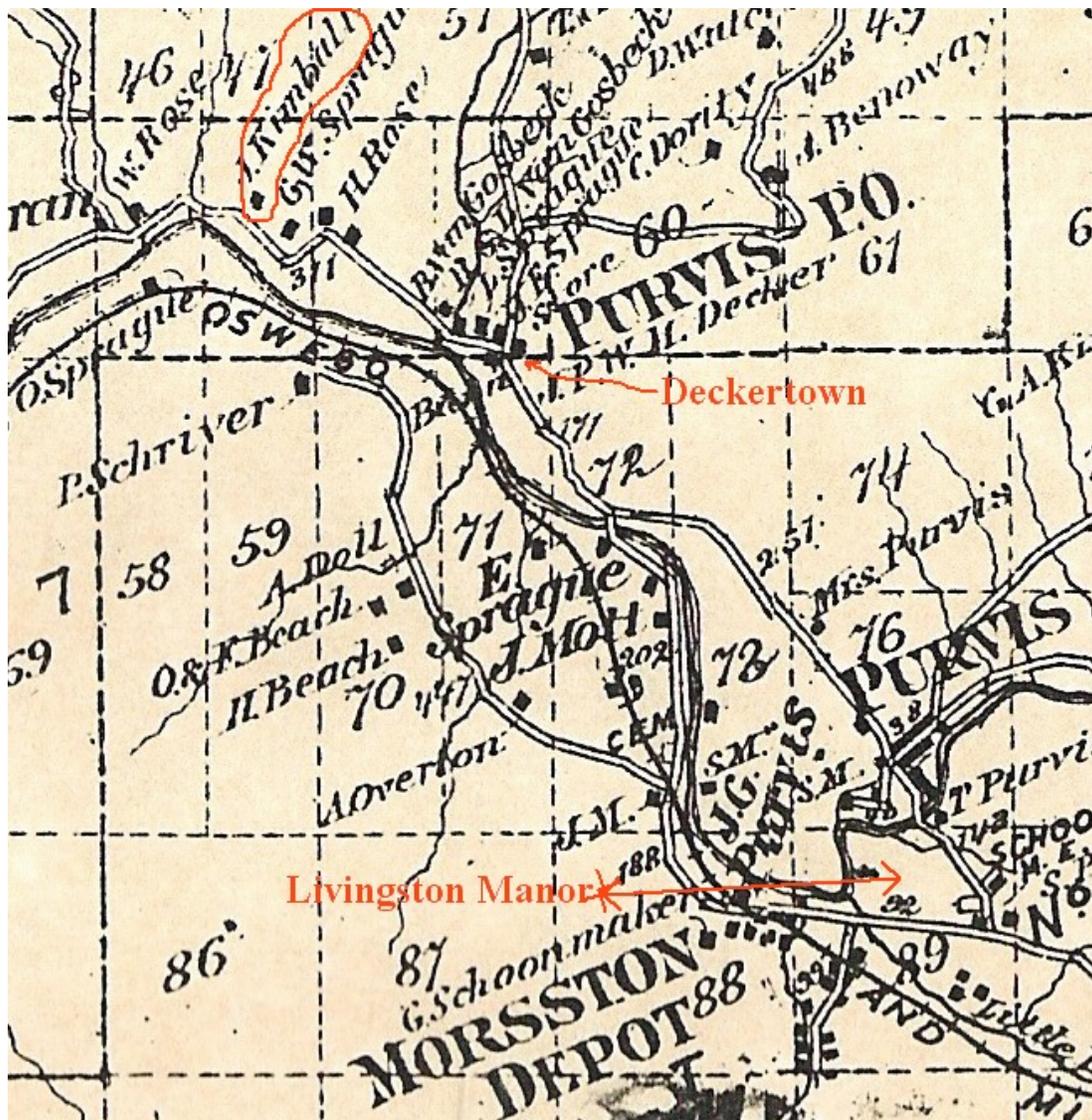
Thursday, January 1, 1874

"Cloudy morning. Charley Sheeley went down to Orrin Sprague's and got his hound and got John Decker's gun and we went hunting rabbits on the hill, found plenty of tracks and set out the dog but did not see any. Came home and in the evening went up to the depot, saw Nathan Murdock and Manley Sprague, pretty tight, got some cigars and sardines and came home. Commenced snowing about 8 o'clock and continued all night, snowfall about 8 inches." -

Joel Kimball

Thus begins the first entry for the year of 1874 into the diary kept by Joel Kimball; what was to become a year-long journal. Kimball, an active young man, lived with his family on a farm along the flats below what was then known as Purvis Post Office. The journal that he kept not only recorded his own daily activities and wanderings, but also introduces us to the whole cast of characters, his neighbors, friends and business associates, who made up the local community. These daily narrations offer us a glimpse into the past and a mental image of what life was like one hundred and thirty-five years ago. - Fred

As with other local, adventurous young men, Kimball rafted lumber down the creeks to the Delaware River and beyond. Mudock and Sprague, a generation older and from an earlier era when lumbering the wilds of Rockland township was the major economic activity, also rafted the rivers and no doubt have made some impression on the young man. Murdock moved into the valley of the Willowemoc from the family's farm on the Beaverville after his marriage to Mary Kimball, a cousin to Joel, during 1848 and became one of the first settlers on the flats above Purvis. His farm would eventually become a boarding house known as the Valley Farm and later, after the building of a cottage and small trout pond, Spring Lake Lodge. - Fred



Purvis (Livingston Manor) - 1875

Friday, January 2, 1874

"Stormy morning. Done chores and went on the hill and fed the cattle and went to Cochran's, stayed until two o'clock. Wm. P. Rose cut birch to make a yoke near my fallow.

"Mother and the girls came home just before dark. I cut some wood and made fires. They brought some apples from Neversink and a pea hen from Sheldrake.

"Weather warmer. Took John Decker's gun home."

Joel Kimball



William P. Rose was the immediate neighbor to the Kimball's, owning the farm located along Bascomb Brook where it joins into the Willowemoc. Rose, being the age of 48 years at that time,

bought the property back in 1859. He also was a lumberman and with his farm bordering along the waters of the Willowemoc Creek, he now had access to the main transportation link of getting his lumber to the markets of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. - Fred

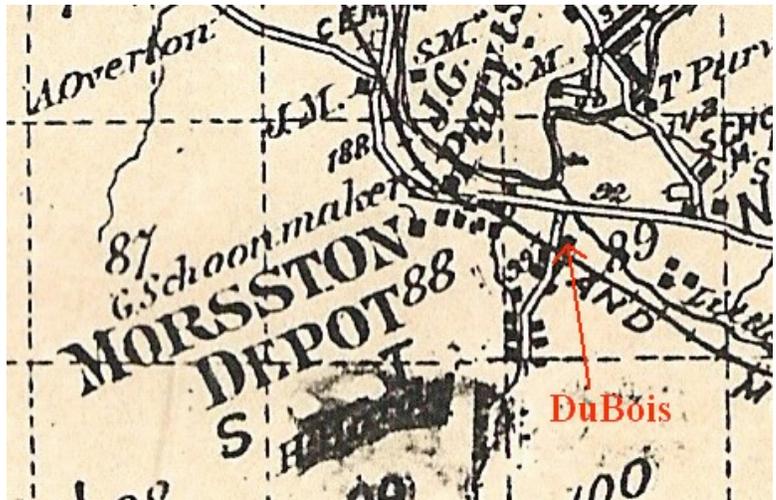
Saturday, January 3, 1874

"Done chores and went to flats. Called on Mrs. Campbell's and got my revolver. Called at A. Cochran's and C. Darbee's. Stopped at Greene's and practiced some with Ger. Sheeley and Geo. Greene on band instruments. Rode to depot with B. Rowe and to Livingston Manor on train. Took my horn home with me and left it at the new store in care of W. Denman. Rode to Decker's with Thos. Collins, got mail and came home.

"One meal at Greenes."

Joel Kimball

Joel's trip to the "flats" would be to Westfield Flats, today's Rockland, and "Greene's" most likely the hotel there, now the location of the Rockland House. On his return home, he stopped at "the new store". Located next to the railroad depot, the building was erected in the summer and fall of 1873 and the mercantile business was established of Divine, DuBois, Parks & Co. A little over a year later, John Divine and William Parks, two of the above named partners, sold their interests to the remaining partner, Alvin Dubois, who reorganized the firm into the A.P. DuBois & Company. - Fred



Sunday, January 4, 1874

"Warm morning, snow disappearing very fast. Went on the hill and fed the cattle. Stayed around home until about 8 o'clock when Dave started for home and I rode up above Collins' and went to Col. M.'s

"Snow nearly all gone, sleighing very bad. Mother went to church, Julia stayed at home and did not go with Dave."

Joel Kimball

Warm weather during the winter was always a mixed blessing. Winter travel relied on riding sleighs and cutters ovetop packed snow; warm weather turned the roads slick with ice or into a quagmire of mud. Also, with the rapid melting of the snow-pack, the rivers and streams tended to rise quickly, filling their channels and leaving little room for any additional precipitation. - Fred

Monday, January 5, 1874

"Fixed rack under hovel for calves to eat from. Cut some wood and commenced to make a smoothing plane stock. Went to John Decker's in evening and sent letter to Poughkeepsie.

"Weather warm and squally."

Joel Kimball



The post office at Purvis Post Office (the community that is known as Deckertown today) along with the little general store associated with it, was operated then by post master John Decker. Because of his unusually long name, John Daniel Waniel Moore Decker, he became known throughout the area as "Alphabet" Decker. - Fred

Tuesday, January 6, 1874

"Went on the hill and got a load of wood with steers and drew it up to Bishop VanGaasbeck, nearly three-quarters of a cord. After noon went up to shop and made a wrench to tighten skates with and then went to the depot. Saw Wilbur Denman, looked at boots. Went to Hiram Beach's and bought deer-skin for 20. Saw J.E. Schriber; they arrived home from Pennsylvania last evening. Came home and done chores and put skin in tub to soak.

"Mother went to meeting.

"Another warm and rainy."

Joel Kimball



"Wilbur" Denman [other accounts know him as William F. Denman], being a nephew of John Divine, one of the partners of the new mercantile company, was the store's clerk and lived overhead his place of work. The area was pretty lawless at the time with thievery, incendiarism and even the occasional murder being common. The Divine, DuBois & Company store was easy prey to local hooligans; in fact the store was broken into so many times during its first years that young Denman was initially thought to have been involved in the misdeeds, until it was later proven to be the handiwork of the Maffett gang, a local family of reprobates along with a couple of their neighbors, who were the cause of this and other mischief about the area. - Fred

Wednesday, January 7, 1874

"Raining.

"Done chores and worked in shop making plane stock and repairing Decker's fishing rod. Finished plane and cut some wood.

"Flood in the river, made a pike pole and caught some planks.

"Tried to grain deer-skin, could not.

"Wm. P. Rose called and borrowed two inch augur. Worked some at J.D.W.M. Decker's fish rod.

"Very wet day."

Joel Kimball



A second day of rainy weather, coupled with the melting snow which resulted from the previous days' warmth, raised the level of the waters of the Willowemoc. With the Kimball farm in the lowlands near the river's channel, Joel stayed close to home and probably kept an eye on river, which turned out to be to his benefit.

Waiting for the early spring's snow melt and increase in the river's volume that allows them to set off their rafts of lumber downstream, lumbermen lined the riverbanks with timber and lumber throughout the winter, in anticipation of the spring's first freshet. This early January's thaw and resulting high water washed away some of this lumber into the flooded river from upstream saw mills, allowing Joel to "pike" out the floating wood as it passed by. - Fred

Thursday, January 8, 1874

"Still raining, water very high, running in road down near the bridge.

"Grained deer skin and cut some wood, went to blacksmith shop and made pike of broken pieces of pick. Went to store and got pair of boots for 500, came home and dried deer skin and put it in oil. Wm. P. Rose brought auger home. John Sheeley paid me 15c.

"Rainy and warm."

Joel Kimball



Apparently Joel had decided to get the new pair of boots and neither hell nor high water would keep him from going to the store at Morsston. After a third day of rain, the Willowemoc finally overflowed its banks, flooding Mott's flat below the covered bridge at Sprague's. There were two routes that Joel could have taken from his home to get to town, one being the road to Purvis where he probably would have encountered, with the rivers running high, a swamp between the Purvis covered bridge and the old log and plank bridge that crossed the Little Beaverkill, or else continue across the covered bridge at Sprague's leading onto Mott's flat, trudging on through the flooded section. Either way, he would not need to worry about ruining his old pair of boots. - Fred

Friday, January 9, 1874

"Very fine morning. Went on the hill and cut wood and set up sap troughs until noon, came home and washed out deer skin and piled some stone along the river edge. Drew two loads of stones into the road where the water had washed it out. Spliced whip for Robert Schriver, paid 25c. Called at post office in evening. Mother went to meeting at Wm. P. Rose. I worked at deer skin some.

"Very fine day."

Joel Kimball



Joel's ancestors were amongst the earliest of settlers in the wilderness area called Westfield Flats. Levi and Abigail Kimball, his great grandparents, made the arduous journey over the rugged Catskill terrain from Connecticut in 1796 and, along with Samuel Darbee, settled in the valley of the Beaverkill River. - Fred

Saturday, January 10, 1874

"Wm. P. Rose and I fixed road below the house where the flood tore it up. Went on the hill and cut some wood and fed cattle. Oiled deer skin again. Split some wood.

"Went up to the depot and saw Rob Brown and J. Cochran. Way freight got off track near Woolsey's switch. Got putty and rode home to Decker's with Laf Sprague, received letter from Poughkeepsie. Came home and commenced to dry deer skin. Saw Lida and said good-bye.

"Warm day, some snow squalls."

Joel Kimball



When the Willowemoc overflows its channel, the water rips into the riverside bank at the river's bend below the eddy located in front the Catskill Fly-Fishing Center. To minimize the damage, large stones have been placed over the years on the bank of the outside curve. This is probably the area of the damaged portion of the road that Joel mentions above, since it is located just below the old Kimball homestead.

Road maintenance on the township's roadways during Joel's days was done by the local residents. In 1874, the township divided its network of roads into twenty-eight districts, some of which may have been a just a single road, or a section of road or several sections within a neighborhood. Residents who resided along these routes would take the responsibility of maintaining that district, under the guidance of an appointed "overseer", who took the responsibility for the work done at that section. Besides overseeing the work that was done, he would also keep track of the hours and days each man spent on the district's roadway maintenance, including work-teams of horses, and submit the bill to the town.

District Fifteen, which included the portion of the Purvis-to-Westfield road that passed in front of the Kimball residence, and followed alongside the river, was a particularly troublesome district. Town records show that bills submitted to the town were consistently higher than all but two other districts. For the year of 1874, eighty-seven and one quarter days of work was submitted by the overseer, compared to the previous year's work of only seventy-one days. Other districts also showed increases in daily road work that same year when compared to the previous year, perhaps partially due that January flood, and its resulting bridge and road damage. - Fred

Sunday, January 11, 1874

"About two inches of snow. I'd done chores, barbarized and went up to Col. Moores, saw W. Wagner, E.L. Vernooy and W.H. Waters. Stayed until about four o'clock and came home.

"Mother and Julie went to meeting down to school house. I remained at home in the evening. Called at John Decker's in morning and got two bottles Roos Syrup for Adele.

"Snow squalls."

Joel Kimball



"Col" Moore may have been a favorite neighbor of Joel's for there are many references to the "Colonel" in his diary throughout the coming year. James Moore, sixty years of age at the time and one of the little-known but colorful local characters during this era, grew up near the Grahamsville area where he married Susanah Hall, the daughter of Squire John Hall from Mutton Hill. John Hall was an active political figure in the early days of the Town of Neversink, serving many political positions at the town level as well as sitting on the State Assembly. He served in the army during the War of 1812, with the rank of corporal, thus he was often referred to, so as not to be confused with his father who had the same name, as "Corporal" Hall; a man of many titles.

The title of "Colonel" was bestowed on James during the time that was noted in his obituary "from the old training days", probably from his service with a locally organized home guard unit at Grahamsville. Though he failed to have as many titles, his lone nickname "outranked" his father-in-law's. - Fred

Monday, January 12, 1874

"Went on the hill and got a load of wood and drew it to Bishop VanGaasbeck's. Finished tanning deer skin and cut out some lashes, made one for D.S. Gillett. Drew some stones into the road in the afternoon. Mrs. VanGaasbeck got a needle in her hand and Dr. Bennett took it out. Grandfather came in the afternoon and stayed all night.

"Pretty fair day."

Joel Kimball



In 1874 Bishop VanGaasbeck worked as the blacksmith at Purvis Post Office (Deckertown), though he was originally associated with the blacksmith shop at Morsston. Medad T. Morss took sole possession of the Henry Osborn tannery at Morsston in 1864 and, with being the proprietor of two other tannery operations in the county, one at Woodbourne and the other at Black Lake, became one of the wealthiest men in Sullivan County. The Morsston blacksmith shop was essential in the tannery's operation by assisting in the maintenance of the factory's and related operation's equipment. Eventually, financial and legal problems overwhelmed Morss during the early seventies.

Sometime between 1870 and 1873, VanGaasbeck relocated to Purvis Post Office. As for Morss, he eventually filed for bankruptcy early in 1877, creating a long list of creditors who were not going to be paid. Numerous fires broke out, thought to be deliberately set, one by one, diminishing to embers his various Morsston and Morsston Depot business concerns, including the Morsston blacksmith shop. On the evening of August 9th, 1879, the old tannery, now sitting idle, was completely consumed by flames - Fred

Tuesday, January 13, 1874

"Grandfather braided a lash for me. I went to the post office in the morning and mailed letters for Julia and worked at lashes. Feel rather dull. Mother went to Decker's and got Register. Ida Sheeley called in the afternoon. father called and got broad-axe, axe half and cant-hook.

"Looks like snow."

Joel Kimball



Newspapers had yet to be published within the Town of Rockland, its residents relying on getting the news from publications of other communities in the county. By 1874, twenty-three local newspapers had been started in the county since the year of 1821, but by the time of Joel's diary, only four remained in operation. The Republican Watchman and the Sullivan County Republican were published at the county seat in Monticello. The "Register" that Joel refers to would be the Liberty Register, which was a fairly new publication at the time, starting in 1870. It continued in operation until 1971.

The fourth newspaper was the Sullivan County Record, a Jeffersonville newspaper but which had its beginnings at Youngsville, being published for the German speaking immigrants of that section of the county. In 1870, Dewey Boyce purchased the paper but after only a year's operation, sold out. He remained in the newspaper business and by 1882, after dealing with some personal problems, he became the proprietor of the Willowemoc Valley Times, the new newspaper that was to be printed at Purvis, and with Moses Pride as its first editor, the first edition was published on March 16th. - fred

Wednesday, January 14, 1874

"Snow fell, about six inches last night. Drew a load of wood off the hill and fed cattle. Made two lashes and cut out four more. Called at post office and received letter from Irwin A. Hodge. Ida Sheeley still here. I tried to catch some bait fish and failed. Cut some wood.

"Snow squalls all day and windy in evening."

Joel Kimball



After working for a week on preparation of the deer skin, it was now ready to be made into its intended use; the making of lashes. Long, narrow strips of leather were sliced off the newly tanned hide, which were then braided together forming strong ropes of leather, or lashes. Rafts of lumber that negotiated the currents of the smaller tributaries of the upper Delaware River were kept small to be better able to handle the twists and turns of the rough and tumble ride down the smaller creeks. Where the river becomes wider, these "colts" were then assembled together into a raft by being tied together by use of the leather lashes, giving the larger vessel both strength and flexibility as it rode over the river's waves down the Delaware. - fred

Thursday, January 15, 1874

"Cold, snowy morning.

"Went up to J. Decker's and asked if I could have his horse to go to Neversink, found it all right. Saw Hiram Crippen. Went on the hill and fed cattle. Mrs. L. Sprague, Miss S.J. Sprague and Miss A. Vernoo called and made a visit. Made some lashes.

"So cold I did not go to Neversink. Went to depot with J.D.'s horse, got cutter at Purvis.

"Very cold in the evening."

Joel Kimball



The Sprague farm, neighbors to the Kimballs, was located two miles north of Purvis at the intersection of the Rockland Road with the road going up over Johnston Mountain to the Beaverkill community. In June of 1847, James Emmitt Sprague erected his home from lumber sawn and timbers hewn by himself. The large colonial style house was capable of housing his growing family as well as that of his younger brother, Erastus. The house still stands today and is still in the family, descendants of the Spragues.

The young ladies who "made a visit" were visiting Joel's sisters, young sixteen-year-old Adela and her older sister, Julia, who had just been married the previous fall and was now soon to be a mother. The visitors were James Sprague's daughter, Samantha, Abigail Vernooy, daughter of James Vernooy who had the farm at the top of the Little Ireland section a mile above Purvis Post Office and Sprague's daughter-in-law, Lucy Dickenson, the wife of Lafayette Sprague. - Fred

I'm really liking this diary and the insight it gives into daily life in that time period.

A couple of Questions:

- An Augur- is a tool for cutting holes in ice ???
 - Julia- sister of Joel; Who was her husband ?
 - Is this the Julia who married Wm P Rose ? He had 2 wives. I've always thought one was a Borden and one an Appley.
- evelyn

Augurs, of the gasoline powered kind, are used today for drilling holes in the ice for ice-fishing. When I ice-fished in my younger days, before the roar of the gasoline engine, long-handled ice spuds were used to chop the hole. A rope was attached at the loop on the top end of the handle or else when the spud broke through, it could continue on down through the ice to the lake's bottom. The augur that William Rose borrowed was only a two inch augur, probably too small for ice fishing, especially for Shandeleee fish. Its just a guess, but perhaps he was building a post and beam structure at the time, such as a barn, and used the two-inch augur for drilling out the beams for the pegs.

Julia Kimball married David Munson, who Joel will introduce shortly.

fred

January 16, 1874

"Very cold, wind blowing from the northwest.

"Made four lashes before noon and done chores. Went to blacksmith shop and made iron for work bench, made cant hook stock for Laf Sprague. Called at post office.

"Came home and cut wood and piled wood. Made lash in eveining, went a lash to D.G. Gillett by Ben Shaffer.

"Cold, cold, cold."

Joel Kimball



Lafayette Sprague came from a family known up and down the river as being lumber and rafts men, In 1874, the Purvis area had at least five wood mills in operation; the older mills of Purvis and Mott, the Hardenburgh mill on the Little Beaverkill and the new mills erected along the Cattail Brook by John Woolsey and Medad Morss, all of whom mostly, at that time, relied on experienced raftsmen to get their lumber to market. Young Lafayette, being a steersman, no doubt got his feet wet many times rafting on the Willowemoc, and hopefully only his feet, by steering these colts down the Willowemoc and Beaverkill.

"The steersman was the pilot of this cumbersome vessel in which negotiating the rapids, cross-currents and all the hazards found along these rain-swollen streams was a risky endeavor. On the back side of the assembled colt was attached a long oar, which was used as a rudder. The steersman's challenge was to keep the raft pointed downstream in the right direction, for once the vessel was turned around in the river, its fate was at the mercy of the stream's current. - Fred

Saturday, January 17, 1874

"Filed skates for Hiram Crippen and skated a little. Cut some wood and braided lashes. After noon went down by Sheeley's and tried to hook some suckers, could not find any, tried to catch some bait and failed. Rode to depot with J.W. Davis.

"Weather some warmer. Did not get any mail. Called at T.C.'s and played euchre."

Joel Kimball



Thomas Collins was a genuine hero. "T.C.", who Joel visited at the end of the day, was a young veteran of the War of the Rebellion who was honored by being awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for various act of personal bravery.

Upon returning home after the war, he married Ellen Moore, the daughter of Colonel Moore, who was five years and senior and a teacher for a time at the local school district. In 1874, they resided on the farm a mile above Purvis Post Office, at the base of Johnston Mountain, just below his father-in-law's farm. - fred

Sunday, January 18, 1874

"Stayed home all day, done chores and read some of Byron's Don Juan. Mother and Julia went to meeting, grandfather came in afternoon.

"Weather some warmer."

Joel Kimball



Sunday was a day of rest, religion and reading for the Kimball family. Four generations since Levi and Abigail Kimball first settled on the Beaverkill flats at Westfield, the Kimball lineage, through marriages, had become interwoven with most of the families of early settlers of the Willowemoc-Beaverkill valley. By 1874, the families of Dodge, Darbee, Sheeley, Cochran, Stewart, Apply, Sprague, Hodge and Bennett, among others, had all become part of the Kimball extended family. - Fred

Monday, January 19, 1874

"Stormy day, rained all day. Grandfather and I made lashes nearly all day. Grandfather went to Uncle Billings'. Uncle Asa Hodge called and stayed all night."

Joel Kimball



Joel's mother was the former Lavinia Hodge. She married Isaac Kimball on July 1st of 1841 and between them they had seven children. By 1874, three of the oldest children had already passed away, Joel now being the oldest surviving child at twenty-eight years of age.

Besides Joel, his two younger sisters, Adela and Julia, the latter just recently married, remained living at the Kimball home with their mother. Though the father is mentioned in Joel's diary on occasion, it appears that he was not living with the family at the time. - Fred

Tuesday, January 20, 1874

"Uncle Asa and I went on the hill and saw cattle come back and I made an axe handle for Uncle Asa. Grandfather called and we went to depot. Stayed until about three o'clock, rode home with Hiram Rose. I cut some wood. Received \$4.00 of A.J. Bennett for road work.

"Asa Hodge Sr., one axe handle, 50

"Dave came over."

Joel Kimball



Hiram Rose's family were neighbors to the Kimballs, early settlers on the flats below Purvis Post Office. Besides operating the small farm, he was also a steersman, piloting colts down the Willowemoc and Beaverkill.

Throughout the winter, woodsmen would fell trees, either for themselves or for lumber merchants,, and "teamed" the logs over the winter's snow to be "banked" along the riverside. With the coming of spring, snow melt and spring rains would create a freshet, the river's flow being high enough to allow the bank lumber to be quickly made into colts and set out into the stream's current. As the length of time for the freshet may be of short duration, additional manpower was always needed to ride these rafts as steersmen or oarsmen. Men of various occupations would drop their daily endeavors at a moment's notice, glad for the opportunity to escape the tedium of the past winter, for the excitement of going down the river.

Hiram E. Rose, who was living with his father on the farm, piloted colts down the river since a young age, but for now, during the winter of '74, kept busy, like Joel, by doing the chores about the farm. - Fred

In a couple of his diary entries, Joel mentions making trips to Morsston, once to the store there, and I think to the blacksmith shop. Do you have any other information as to what the town of Morsston consisted of in those days?

Thanks - Jim P. - The Morsston House

When the Oswego and Midland Railroad passed through and began through operations in 1873, the railroad depot that was built became known as Morsston Depot. The name Morsston was then generally used as the name of the community that built up by the depot and eventually the older community of Purvis across the river.

As businesses were only beginning to be built around the depot area, the main business district, including the blacksmith shop, at the time would have been in Purvis.

The original Morsston now took on the name of Old Morsston and what businesses that were located there, where I believe John DuBois had a general store and post office, were already closing with the demise of the tannery and a few years later the devastating fires. - Fred

Wednesday, January 21, 1874

"Stormy. Went on the hill and drew one load of wood. Cut some wood and finished making lashes.

"Snowy, blowing and hailing."

Joel Kimball

Thursday, January 22, 1874

"Grandfather and I took Davis' team to Flats, sold lashes to Sheeley and Wilson. Got some writing paper, paper collars and ink. Cut some wood. John Decker went to Mongaup Pond and caught fourteen pickerel.

"Warm and sloopy day.

"Sheeley and Wilson for forty lashes - \$13.80

"Called at Decker's in evening.

"Geo. Green Co., bought a new horse shoe - 45"

Joel Kimball

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Joel's initial investment of "20" (cents?) for the deer skin from Hiram Beach has now turned a profit of over thirteen dollars. Sheeley and Wilson were lumber merchants and Joel's lashes would be utilized by them for the assembling of colts and rafts this spring.

Amos Y. Sheeley and Burr Wilson were both merchants at Westfield Flats and both had large interests in the lumber industry. Wilson, a man of forty-five years of age, married the former Lydia Dodge and, with other members of her family, formed the business of Wilson, Dodge & Company, merchants of dry goods and groceries. Besides being the postmaster for Westfield Flats during this time, Wilson was also very prominent in town politics, representing the Town of Rockland as supervisor. Besides the selling of lumber down-river, he was also one of the early pioneer's in the area's growing blue-stone industry. - Fred

Friday, January 23, 1874

"Warm, foggy day. Worked on John Decker's cutter's thill, put in two new crop bars. Went on the hill and cut some wood and trimmed some trees. Uncle Oliver called and ate dinner. Aunt Katie and Charlie went away in afternoon. Carried thill up to Decker's in evening."

Joel Kimball



The Oliver Borden family were part of the Kimball extended family. "Aunt Katie", Catherine, and who was Oliver's wife, was the sister of Joel's mother, Lavinia, and Charles was their ten-year-old son. - Fred

Saturday, January 24, 1874

"Cut wood until noon, then went on the hill with steers and sorted out wood and cut some wood. Julia and Dave went up to Ireland after Julia's money, came back just before night, having been successful. Mother came home just before they did. I called at B. VanGaasbeck in the evening. Mail came, received Register."

Joel Kimball



Julia Kimball, Joel's sister, was just recently married the previous October to Davis B. Munson, a native of the northern Delaware County section. The family farm, Benjamin and Mary Munson being the parents, was located in the Town of Franklin, but according to one family historian, the farm was sold by Benjamin and the family moved to the Town of Rockland. The large Munson family included at least ten children but tragedy struck in February of 1841 when the three oldest children, ages ranging from three years to six years of age, perished with disease, all three within a two-week period. David, only one year old at the time, now became the oldest surviving child in the family. - Fred

Sunday, January 25, 1874

"Cold, windy weather with snow squalls.

"Stayed at home reading Byron's Childe Harold until about four o'clock then went on the hill and fed cattle and called at Col. M's.

"Dave and Julia at home."

Joel Kimball



Again, Sunday is a day of rest for Joel, spending the harsh wintry day inside reading the classic Romantic poems of Lord Byron.

Colonel Moore's was a favorite destination for Joel on his day of leisure, enjoying listening to the Colonel's stories, classics in their right. One favorite story told by the Colonel was about the time that he pulled up stakes and set out for California, becoming a "forty-niner". On his return a few

years later, little was ever revealed on how successful his search for gold was, and "Col. M." would never tell. It was generally thought, though, by friends, neighbors, family and those with little else to talk about, that he had "done all-right". - Fred

Monday, January 26, 1874

"Very cold morning."

Done chores and filed cross-cut saw. Helped Laf Sprague saw wood nearly all day, came home just before night and went on hill with steers and drew load of wood.

"Weather some warmer in evening. Granfather started for Loch Sheldrake, Julia and Dave started for Munsons."

Joel Kimball



The economic times were changing. The lumber industry, or some derivative of it, was the most important activity for the town's residents, in most cases adding additional income for farm families and laborers. Then the railroad came, bringing the world to the doorstep to each backwoods depot along its line; providing goods, mail and employment. Workers were needed to build the road; workers were needed to maintain the road; workers were needed to operate the line; all an attractive alternative to the strenuous work and drudgery of lumbering in the winter woods.

Lafayette Sprague came from a well-known lumbering family. The young man had already piloted many rafts down the Willowemoc when the lure of working on the railroad pulled him out of the water and onto the rails. He signed on with the Oswego and Midland Railroad construction crew, working on the construction of the many iron and wood trestles and railroad bridges built over the same rivers he had previously rafted. - Fred

Tuesday, January 27, 1874

"Cut wood until noon at the house, Laf helped me sawed it with cross-cut saw. After noon went on the hill with steers, cut some wood off a large maple tree that had fallen down, cut two logs.

"Commenced snowing. Drew load of wood to B. VanGaasbeck, three quarter cord."

Joel Kimball



One of the railroad bridges that Lafayette Sprague helped build, Bennett's Bridge over the Willowemoc Creek which was located two miles from Westfield Flats, would soon have to be rebuilt.

As the new rail-line of the Oswego and Midland wound its way through the rugged terrain of the western Catskills, the numerous rock-cuts and dug-outs along the grade would soon prove to cause great difficulty for the railroad. With heavy rains, great mudslides often spilled over onto the tracks, or worse, wash the iron rail, ties and base away. In the winter, the depressions became a magnet for blowing snow, filling in with snow-drifts tens-of-feet thick. To combat this, the railroad experimented with a new type of snow-plow during the winter of 1876.

The plow consisted of a large augur, powered by its own steam engine, and which was hooked onto the front end of a steam locomotive. The wheels of the plow were lowered as to better clean the snow off of the tracks. On February 2, 1876, the plow-train, followed by the scheduled mail-train, left the station at Middletown on its maiden voyage. All went well until it came upon the last of the Willowemoc bridge crossings, behind Sam Bennett's, when the smaller wheels of the plow rode off of the rails as it entered onto the bridge. The locomotive continued to push the plow, both machines passing over the first span of the bridge. Midway over the second span, the plow became caught on bridge supports and toppled over the side, dragging the locomotive and the second span of bridge sixteen feet down into the river below, the plow becoming hung up above the water in the bridge's rafters.

Five men were used in the operation of the plow and luckily all escaped, though with somewhat serious injuries but which would not be fatal. This was not true for those in the cab of the locomotive engine where the Superintendent of the line, H.M. Flint, was riding. When the engine landed on its side in the river, many of the steam-lines burst. Flint received a blast of steam in his face, which burned his mouth, throat and lungs. These injuries eventually proved fatal, the first railroad related death along this section of the new railroad line. - Fred

Wednesday, January 28, 1874

"Went to blacksmith shop and helped repair cutter. Came home and ate dinner and started for Neversink with John Decker's horse and sleigh. Called at Morsston Depot and Parksville. Found sleighing quite thin. Arrived before night and found folks all well.

"Warm, rainy day."

Joel Kimball



Before Rockland became a township in 1809, it was originally the part of the Town of Neversink whose boundaries extended into the valleys of the Willowemoc and Beaverkill. Before Neversink became a township in 1798, it was originally the part of the Town of Rochester whose lands extended into the valley of the Neversink. Soon after the American Revolution, heirs to the original large tract land-holders of the Hardenburgh Patent, began selling portions of their land in the Neversink Valley, inducing early settlers to come and clear the broad, flat valley that was nestled amidst the high ridges of the southern Catskills. The Abel Hodge family, ancestors to Joel Kimball's mother, were amongst these early families attracted to this valley, migrating westward from Connecticut. Abel and his son, Asa, would eventually live the remainder of their lives at Neversink while other members of the family continued their move westward, over the divide into the Willowemoc Valley. - Fred

Thursday, January 29, 1874

"Stayed around house until noon, Irwin and Uncle Asa drew some hoop-poles. After noon, Newell and I went to post office and back on horse-back. Went to prayer meeting in evening, Newell, Irwin and I.

"Weather colder."

Joel Kimball



The Asa Hodge family, which included sons Newell and Irwin, resided on a large farm near the hamlet of Neversink. Active in town affairs, Asa Hodge, who was the great-uncle to Joel, was a natural leader and was elected to local political positions, including township supervisor.

When hostilities caused by the War of the Rebellion broke out, the nation called upon young men to volunteer for enlistment in military service, many who were recruited and organized by leading figures within the community. Throughout the county, the 56th NYV Regiment, the Tenth Legion, began recruitment drives in the early fall of 1861 and Asa Hodge, like many other men of this era, immediately signed up. His leadership ability caused him to take charge of the recruitment drive in the Neversink Valley, and when the roster was filled, he was awarded by the men by being elected captain of the unit, which became Company K. Commissioned as captain, his service in the army was short lived for he resigned his position early in 1862. Fred

Friday, January 30, 1874

"Newell and Uncle Asa went cutting hoop-poles and Irwin done chores and we played euchre. After noon we went to B.S., had pleasant time, played dominoes. Went home at night.

"Quite cold and snowy. Saw B. Bogart and E. Smith."

Joel Kimball



By the second half of the nineteenth century, over-cutting of the virgin forests by the lumber and tanning industries began to deplete this valuable resource. Without the hemlock bark, essential for the tanning process, tanneries closed down and moved their operations to the still hemlock-rich forests of Pennsylvania. With lumber becoming increasingly scarce, lumbermen began to drift westward to the forests of the upper Midwest. With the decline of these activities, another industry emerged, the hoop-pole industry.

Wooden barrels were the popular means of transporting and storing goods; butter, cider, vinegar, pork, flour, powder and other perishable goods were all stored in barrels, tubs or kegs. Wooden hoops were used on these containers as a means of holding the barrel staves together. As the old forests of hemlock and hardwood disappeared, a new "crop" of saplings emerged from the forest's floor, some growing out of the stumps of recently cut trees. These saplings would be harvested, cut into hoop-poles, then split and shaved into slats that became the hoops for barrels or straps for packaging crates.

This is Joel's first mention of "B.S." This visit to the Benjamin Schoonmaker place, located above the Hodge farm, would soon have a long-lasting effect on Joel. - Fred
