Diary of a Tamworth Boy
1849-1852

Journal of
S. James Mills Kingsbury

who lived near
Hollow Hill Road
in
Tamworth, New Hampshire
“S. Kingsbury” homestead indicated at center of 1860 map, above and left of “W”
Foreword by Jean Ulitz

This diary was found among letters, records, diaries, etc. which had been given to the Tamworth Historical Society by the descendants of the Kingsbury family. Samuel James Mills Kingsbury was the son of the Reverend and Mrs. Samuel Kingsbury and he lived on his parents’ farm in Tamworth off the Hollow Hill Road with his brothers, William, Josiah, Harlan, Edward and his sister, Susan.

James began his journal on January 1st, 1849, the day of his 14th birthday. His father probably suggested that this special day was a good time to start a diary of his thoughts and activities and, for that purpose, donated his Common Place Book which has been used through the first third only.

Nothing was ever wasted! This young lad writes cautiously at first but, as he warms to the task, he gives us a sharp and concise picture of the life of a teenager of that period. Each member of the family worked hard and long on the farm. They were active in town and church. Family life was close and loving; school was fitted into the farm schedule where practicable; religion was a basic part of their life; and there were also some lighter moments to savor and remember. There was much visiting near and far among family and friends. There were birthday parties, berry picking, mountain climbing, swimming, picnics, sleighing, orating, debating and entertainers coming to town. The Fourth of July was perhaps the highlight of the year and long to be remembered. Read on
and see life in the mid 1800s through this teenager's eyes.

Jean Ulitz, 1975
Librarian, Cook Memorial Library, Tamworth, NH

Dedicated to Marjory Gane Harkness

The first page of S. James Kingsbury’s diary in his own handwriting, January 1st, 1849
Journal

S. James Mills Kingsbury

Tamworth, New Hampshire

January 1849

January 1

1  This morning we all went to the School-house but found no teacher.

2  We went to the school-house again today and learned that the teacher was detained by reason of the death of some of his friends and that school would not begin till next week. There was a church meeting. Mr. Bedee excommunicated.

3  Very windy and cold and Mother made me a new warm cape. also winnowed nine bushels of oats. roads badly drifted.

4  Received a letter from William - lives with Uncle William.
William Henry Kingsbury, James’ older brother

5 Roads drifted so bad below our house that it was not broke out - made a break in our upper field.

7 Today is Sabbath— also Mr. Polard sent for our horse— is a going below with it this week.

8 Went to the school-house— The Master had not come back.

9 School begun. We all went. Teacher is a Mr. Bean from Conway-about 30 years old.

10 Funeral of Mr. John Remick. Also wrote a letter to

30 We ploughed. Also got out manure.
31  Sowed oats and harrowed.

May 1849

1  Ploughed and sowed oats.

2  Mother's meeting. I went to the village.

3  We got out 18 loads of manure. Also mother had company - Sarah & Eliza Hiven? Hilden? Also Mrs.
8 “AM” laid down ½ an acre. ‘PM’ sowed an acre with oats.

9 Very rainy. I went down to auction of Mr. Sanborn. He lets his farm to Wm. Price at the halves. Father who is chairman of superintending committee visited school at the village, & at 3 o'clock delivered lecture on education.

10 Mrs. More, Noah Sanborn’s sister, came up from below. We got out 20 l(0)ads manure.

11 Plowed stubble with Mr. Pollard’s cattle.

3rd Rainy. Made rakes.

4th Lucien & Harlan Page came down here in the morning & with Susan, Josiah & myself went to celebrate
the day at S. part of town. In the forenoon Levi Fulsom delivered an oration full of interest and eloquence. He was applauded very much. When he sat down two cannon were fired - one of which exploded without hurting anyone however. After the exercises the congregation marched in military order about 50 rods with martial music. There were between 4 & 500 persons present. We came to a grove & partook of a good dinner. There was a cheese weighing perhaps 100 lbs.—plenty of lemonade. After dinner audience were seated. The 25 speakers occupied a platform. Toasts were given—sentiments volunteered. An address was given by a man just returned from California on the subject of “Against slavery.” A heavy shower come on at about 4 o'clock after which we returned home. Harlan & Lucien P. took supper with us. Excepting shower, we had a fine day - a day long to be remembered.

5th Begun to hoe potatoes.

6th Hoed potatoes.

7th Sab. fine day. Mother, Susan, Josiah, Harlen & myself went to the Iron-works. Text from Prov. 16.32. Rom. 6.23.

8th Begun to hoe corn 2nd time.

9th Hoed corn.

Jan. A.D. 1851

1st Wed.
Another year has rolled away, been numbered with past
eternity, millions of human beings enter upon the new year with unclouded anticipations of future happiness. But how many; alas! How many are destined to have their brightest anticipations scattered & withered by time’s destroying hand. In the season of youth we are apt to look forward to coming years with bright anticipations of happiness. Many are the reflections suggested by the end of the old and commencement of the new year. Ere another year shall have passed, we may be numbered with the forgotten and the dead. And our words- with however bright a luster they may shine while we live- be covered with oblivion’s pall. If our deeds are worthy of heaven’s countenance, they will be registered in heaven and will endure when earth’s provided monuments have fell.

Had a party of 18 in the evening - Also a meeting of the Society.

4th School does not keep today. Father visited a School.

5th Sab. Went to the ‘M. H.’ (meeting house.) Found only Mr. Page who come to our house. This week Mr. Roberts married Miss Judith Cogswell. On Wednesday we declaimed.

12th Sab. We went to Meeting-House. Had a short
Conclusion

by Jean Ulitz

Through the Kingsbury papers stored at the library, we found that James’ brother, Josiah, became a minister and married Mary Jackson, sister of Lucy Jackson Blake. His brother, Harlan, died in Andersonville Prison during the Civil War. His sister, Susan taught school, and his brother, William, became a minister and a professor.

Edward, the youngest, stayed on the farm, and according to the 1870 census, only Edward and his mother were still living at the homestead off Hollow Hill Road by that year. In the 1880 census, only George D. Kingsbury (son
of Josiah & Mary Jackson Kingsbury) is registered as a Tamworth resident; a seven year-old boy living with his widowed aunt, Lucy Jackson Blake, in her Tamworth home. (Census notes added by the Editor.)

Our diary writer, James, desired above all a college education and the ministry but was forced to set that goal aside due to financial reasons. He taught some school, worked on his father’s farm and then entered the Army during the Civil War. In summer of 1863 he disappeared off a military ship on the Mississippi River under mysterious circumstances while serving his country. He was presumed dead.

In a letter dated August 27, 1863 to his son, Josiah, the Rev. Samuel Kingsbury mentions he has -

“a letter from S. (Sam) Chesley last night. He is in Ken. (Kentucky) near Cincinnati. James went ashore at Helena & was left behind. He was expected next boat.”

Then the following letter arrives from Sam Chesley (A Tamworth youth in the same company as James) on October 25, 1863 from Cynthiana, Kentucky in answer to Rev. Samuel Kingsbury’s appeal for more information about James’ disappearance:

“Dear Sir, I received a very welcome letter from
The cellar hole is barely discernable on the west side of the Class 6 road off of Hollow Hill Road in Tamworth Village. When Chris Clyne and I went looking in early April, we were pleased to find it flanked by a clump of day lilies on one side and a gnarled old apple tree on the other, both sprouting new growth and bearing witness to the family who lived there so long ago.

James should have the last word,

“Ere another year shall have passed, we may be numbered with the forgotten and the dead. And our words- with however bright a luster they may shine while we live- be covered with oblivion’s pall. If our deeds are worthy of heaven’s countenance, they will be registered in heaven and will endure when earth’s provided monuments have fell.”