

## LIFE ON A JONES COUNTY FARM, 1873-1912

By *Merrill E. Jarchow\**

"Jan 1st Thursday — While we were eating breakfast Mr Og. Horton came in to see if father had any fat hogs to sell. Murray came in the evening. A cloudy day." So wrote Miss Sarah Jane Kimball in her diary in 1874. Miss Kimball, one of the most faithful chroniclers of agrarian life in Iowa, came to Jones County with her parents in the summer of 1856, settling on a farm in Madison Township, three miles southwest of Wyoming, where she lived continuously until her death at the age of eighty-five, on January 10, 1924. It is believed she kept a diary during most of her adult life, but only that part of the diary covering the years 1873 to 1912 has turned up. Nevertheless, this segment of her record gives a wonderful picture of life on a Jones County farm during the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth centuries. As such, it portrays an era when old ways of doing things and old habits of living were being modified and displaced by new techniques and new habits. The impact of both the traditional and the novel finds expression on the pages of Miss Kimball's diary.

The oldest of six children, Sarah Jane was born in Massachusetts in 1838. When she was five years old, her parents, Abner and Sarah Kimball, joined the westward trek and moved to Troy Lakes, Wisconsin, where they spent the next eleven years. Then, in the words of Sarah Jane,

. . . father sold his farm and bought again in Green County. We started the 19th day of October and arived [sic] here the 24th after being out five days on the road. We drove nearly 30 cattle sixty sheep and 12 hogs besides two teams that drawed our furniture. We are 75 miles from Troy Lakes but we came in such a circuitous [sic] route to get here that it was nearer a hundred miles the way we came. . . . None of our folks like to live here. . . . It is a very hilly country. . . . When I think how beautiful it was round Troy and then how mean it looks around here, I then wish I had wings to fly away.<sup>1</sup>

\*The letters and diaries of Sarah Jane Kimball are in the possession of the author at Northfield, Minnesota.

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Jane Kimball to Mary, Washington, Wisconsin, Jan. 6, 1856.

After two years in Green County, the Kimballs pulled up stakes again and headed westward once more, this time to Jones County, Iowa. "We bade adieu to the hills and hollows of Green Co., without a tear or sigh," Sarah Jane wrote a friend.

We had two wagons to draw our things and we drove all the cattle. All day we drove the teams or cattle and at night after cooking our supper in a hole in the ground and eating it we would coop up under the wagon and go to sleep. In the morning we would milk the cows, cook and eat our breakfast, get everything to rights again and again start on our journey. At noon we would stop an hour or so, to let the cattle eat and take a cold bite our selves and then go on. . . . We started Thursday. . . . Monday we left Wisconsin and at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon we crossed the Mississippi river on the steam ferry from Dunleith to Dubuque. . . . We got to Anamosa Friday the 13th day of June after being on the road 9 days.

After some time spent in looking for a place to locate, Sarah Jane's father purchased the farm near Wyoming that was to be home for so many years. The farm, consisting of 180 acres lying on both sides of a road, was secured for \$1,800. The area south of the road, 100 acres in all, was covered with scattered timber, while the 80 acres north of the road on which were situated the house and some 20 acres of improvements were a treeless prairie. To Sarah Jane the location was ideal.

And I can say it and tell the truth too that it is the prettiest place in Iowa. Here we can see the grandest scenery that I ever expect to behold. . . . We can see six miles east a vast plain on which is situated Wyoming. . . . Wyoming now contains 4 stores 2 blacksmiths shops and a postoffice and is building up as fast as they can get lumber to build with. people are also building new houses around us and 3 new ones have been built since we came here. We expect to have a new house when we get rich and we think that day is not far distant. . . . The folks around here seem to be very good and I like them what I have seen of them. Our nearest neighbor is about 40 rods and I can stand in our back door and count 20 houses besides the two villages.<sup>2</sup>

Details of the Kimball saga during the winters of 1856-1857 and 1857-1858 are lost. Apparently the Panic of 1857 left less of an imprint on them

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Jane Kimball to Laura, Wyoming, Iowa, Oct. 5, 1856.



Merrill, Sarah Jane, and Father Kimball, October, 1899



Sarah Jane's Greenhouse, September, 1899



Kimball Parlor, September, 1899



Another View of Kimball Parlor, October, 1899

than it did on pioneer families in other areas, for in March, 1858, Sarah Jane wrote:

We have felt hard times comparatively [sic] little though it is hard to collect debts yet. What the farmer has to sell fetches little or nothing but what he has to buy at the store he has to pay a price for. Father and mother went to Anamosa last week and took some wheat along and got 40 cents a bushel. Corn is 25 cents a bushel and last spring it was a dollar a bushel. Everything is low now that farmers have. We have plenty of Wheat and Corn. Father sold 100 bushels of corn last fall. Father sold 3 head of cattle last fall for beef and we now have 22 cattle and a span of horses and a yearling colt. We dont keep sheep. There are too many wolves here for them to be kept with safety. We have lost no hens by the weasles [sic] this winter.

Sarah Jane's enthusiasm for Iowa was still strong, and again Wisconsin suffered by comparison with her new home. "There is no rats here and we are glad of it. In Green County they were so thick that they were a great bother," she continued in her letter. "I tell you this is the place after all to live. At Wyoming they have Lyceum lectures every week and last night I was there and heard a first rate lecture. There was considerable said in praise of Iowa and I begun to think that this is the best state after all. . . . I have always thought we lived in one of the most beautiful of places and now I dont doubt it."<sup>3</sup>

For the next fifteen years we get only glimpses of the Kimballs. Wrinkled and yellowed teachers' certificates indicate that Sarah Jane taught school during the 1860's and that she possessed "a good moral character" and was competent to teach orthography, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, English grammar, and United States history. As a girl of eighteen she expressed her philosophy of teaching: "If I ever keep school I am going to do as Lucy did. Somehow, she always had a way to make the scholars like her and then they would always mind her. I think that is a better way than to scold all the time." With such a philosophy it is small wonder that Sarah Jane was well-beloved by her pupils.<sup>4</sup>

The Civil War undoubtedly occupied the thoughts of the Kimball family, and one of the brothers, Murray, served in the Union army; nevertheless, the effect of the War was not serious on the Jones County homestead. In

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Jane Kimball to Laura, Wyoming, March 7, 1858.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Jane Kimball to Mary, Washington, Jan. 6, 1856.

1873, when Sarah Jane's diary commences, the family, composed of the parents, two boys, and two girls, was living on the home place, and the pioneer phase of its history was long past. A third son and a third daughter were married and living near by. A new barn had just been completed, and it can be assumed that the farmstead had lost any frontier appearance it once possessed.

Much information about the house itself can be gleaned by a careful reading of the pages of Sarah Jane's diary, neatly covered with her delicate, precise handwriting. It was a two-story structure with a cellar and two porches or piazzas, the name commonly given to porches in those days, and it appears to have been relatively comfortable. On Saturday, May 26, 1877, Sarah Jane tells of helping her mother nail on lathes upstairs; several days later she noted the arrival of the plasterers. From time to time she mentions the hanging of wallpaper, usually done in the early years by her mother. For example, in 1883, she wrote: "Mother papered the kitchen. It was a hard days work for her." The woodwork was painted and grained and the entry was kalsomined. Decorating the walls were pictures typical of the time, mainly chromos and crayon portraits, the latter being done by itinerant artists. The frames were handmade, often decorated with shells and buttons. Adding to the Victorian touch were hand-gilded molding, antimacassars, lambrequins, and yarn tassels made by Sarah Jane for the parlor, that formal and forbidding room which was used only for very special occasions. Carpeting and rugs covered the floor. Carpet rags were washed, colored, and wound into balls at home and then taken to some lady in Wyoming for weaving. When finished they were nailed to the floor, much in the modern manner, but during housecleaning time they had to be taken up, beaten, and nailed down again. In 1899, Sarah Jane mentions pasting down oilcloth carpet in the kitchen.<sup>5</sup>

The cellar of the house could be reached by a trap door in the kitchen or via an outside cellar door and steps. It was a cool, dark, earthen floor excavation generally used for storing food and flower bulbs. In the winter there was always the danger of freezing the fruits and vegetables. On one occasion Sarah Jane noted: "Monday Tuesday and Wednesday were very cold

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Jane Kimball Diary, May 26, 31, 1877; March 30, May 4, 17, June 22, 1878; March 8, 14, 23, 1879; Apr. 2, May 14, 28, 1882; Sept. 16, 1883; May 18, 1884; Feb. 22, 1885; Apr. 6, May 4, 11, 1890; May 31, 1891; Aug. 6, Sept. 17, Oct. 8, 1899; Sept. 15, 1900; Oct. 30, 1910.

and we watched the cellar and carried down live coals to keep the frost out." A decade later, in 1889, an oil stove was kept burning in the cellar on very cold days. Newspapers and rags covered by boards were placed on the outside door to keep drafts out.<sup>6</sup>

Not only the cellar, of course, but the rest of the house as well presented a heating problem; the diary makes this fact very clear. In the early years there was no central heating system and stoves and stovepipes had to be set up in each room of the house, a difficult and messy task. Wood and later coal and oil were the fuels used. The wood was usually sawed up by the Burch boys or John Sexton and their "sawing machines." On one occasion, "The wood sawyers came with their machine at between two and three o'clock and sawed nine cords of wood. We got them their supper and they stayed all night. This morning they went away after breakfast." Coal was hauled from Wyoming and stored in the cellar. "We moved the kitchen stove out in the room and set up the parlor stove," Sarah Jane wrote in October, 1877. Then in November: "Our folks took down the kitchen stove pipes to get out the soot and burned out the chimney." In 1880 a new coal stove was purchased, which "keeps us warm and we like it as well as we expected." Two years later Sarah Jane noted: "Father went to Wyoming today and brought home my oil stove. I lighted it this evening in my room. It burns nicely." But even with wood, coal, and oil stoves in the house the family was frequently uncomfortable. In 1884 Sarah Jane complained that it was "hard to do the work in the house and out. Our folks slept by the coal fire. I slept on the lounge. Saturday morning 32° below zero. A clear day but windows thick with frost. Hard to do the work and accomplish anything." And in 1886 she recorded the fact that "Father brought home three stones for foot warmers." On January 1, 1888, it was so cold: "No one said Happy New Year to another. So much do our surroundings influence our actions." And it was as late as April 4 one year when it was "warm enough for me to sit upstairs."<sup>7</sup>

During the late 1890's heating conditions in the home were definitely improved. In June, 1897, registers were put in two of the upstairs bedrooms, and in October, "father and Merrill went to town and took our old

<sup>6</sup> Diary, Dec. 29, 1878; Feb. 24, 1889; Dec. 31, 1899; Dec. 4, 1910.

<sup>7</sup> Diary, Oct. 20, Nov. 2, 29, 1877; Dec. 12, 1880; Sept. 16, Oct. 6, 1881; Oct. 26, 1882; Jan. 6, 1884; Jan. 31, 1885; Apr. 4, Dec. 5, 1886; Jan. 1, Mar. 18, 1888; Feb. 2, 1890.

wood heater stove. Our new stove the 'Garland' has come and is at Tourtelott's." A month later they "had Charley help put up the new Garland heater stove. It is a beauty and easy to manage. We are all pleased with it. Father tends it and sits by it more than Merrill or I." In December a Mr. Wilken "put a pipe of tin from the hot air flue on the stove to lead to my room. He did a good job and my room is getting the benefit of it." In 1900 Sarah Jane mentions seeing a new furnace in town and in 1904 she "went to Rohwedder's. They were having a new furnace put in the cellar." The Kimballs for some unexplained reason, perhaps Yankee thrift, never installed a furnace but continued to rely on stoves. Thus, as late as 1912 Sarah Jane wrote: "This has been the longest continued cold spell that I remember. Every night the mercury below zero and Friday morning the coldest 25° below. . . . We have suffered some with the cold and the two cats we put in the cellar. We had to keep a fire to keep the cellar from freezing. Can hardly do much except the chores and keep three or four fires going."<sup>8</sup>

Chimney fires were constant threats. Sarah Jane tells of one in 1887 and another in 1889. Of the latter she writes: "Evening our chimney caught fire and we had quite a time putting it out. Saturday morning the stoves would not draw so after breakfast we took down the pipes and when the frost was off the roof Merrill climbed up with a chain and cleaned out the chimney. It was nearly filled with soot. After that we had to get dinner and then clean up all the dirt, and that with all our Saturday's work took us until milking time." In 1886 and again in 1897 the Kimballs had new chimneys built.<sup>9</sup>

Under the kitchen was a cistern, a dark and cavernous hole frightening to children, reached by a trap door. Concern over the state of the cistern, the source of water supply for washing, runs through Sarah Jane's entries in her diary. In 1877 she noted that the cistern was filled. At another time she wrote: "Mr. Phelps and his man Atkins came and cleaned out the cistern then plastered it anew." Shortly thereafter the same men dug a new cistern at the barn. In 1893 we read: "Our cistern has been dry a long time and we have had to melt snow for water. Now the cistern is more than half filled. We appreciate it." By 1900 the cistern again needed repairs

<sup>8</sup> Diary, June 20, Oct. 10, Nov. 14, Dec. 12, 1897; Sept. 23, 1900; Nov. 20, 1904; Jan. 14, 1912.

<sup>9</sup> Diary, Nov. 7, 1886; Apr. 14, 1887; Nov. 17, 1889; May 30, 1897.



because, although it filled to overflowing, it leaked, and half of the water went into the cellar. Ten years later the cistern, despite repairs in the meantime, gave trouble again: "The pipe that runs in the cistern leaks so that most of the water went into the cellar. . . . We put up an eaves trough and ran it from the roof through the window into the cistern. So now we have about seven feet of water in it."<sup>10</sup>

Water for drinking had to be carried to the house from a well, in the early days fitted out with a hand pump. In 1874 a new well was drilled with a machine, but as the folks did not think the well would provide sufficient water, "Ellis and boy are digging another beside it and let all the water into one." In 1890 came a landmark: a windmill was erected. Then water could be pumped for the house, for the livestock, and for the flower beds without backbreaking manual labor, that is, if the wind would cooperate. Once when it did not, Sarah Jane complained: "Windmill has not pumped enough for a week for me to get any in my tank." On another occasion she wrote: "The windmills fail to pump and some neighbors are hauling water from the creek for their stock." At times like these hand pumping once more provided water for drinking and cooking. In 1896 and again in 1910 the Kimballs purchased new mills.<sup>11</sup>

Lighting in the Kimball home remained primitive long after 1912. The first mention of the subject in the diary comes in 1882 when Sarah Jane tells of purchasing mutton tallow for candles at McMillan's. In 1883 she notes: "We hung up the hanging lamp in the parlor." Later that year, upon finding herself out of matches, she went to a neighbor's to borrow some. In the wintertime, breakfast was accompanied by lamplight, as was supper. Not until 1908 did a major improvement in lighting find space in the diary. In February that year we read: "Afternoon went to Wyoming and bought a new lamp at Wilken's. . . . Merrill worked at the new lamp to get it started to burning. It is the Fellboelin and burns with a mantle and gives a strong white light." Out of doors, lanterns were used for all activities necessitating artificial illumination, even as aids when driving a horse and buggy on dark nights.

<sup>10</sup> Diary, Aug. 21, 1877; Sept. 1, Oct. 27, Nov. 24, 1889; June 8, 1890; March 12, 1893; Apr. 22, 1900; Mar. 24, 1901; Mar. 27, Apr. 3, 1910; Jan. 8, Feb. 19, Mar. 26, 1911.

<sup>11</sup> Diary, June 18, 26, 1874; Aug. 17, 28, 1881; Nov. 2, Dec. 13, 1890; Apr. 12, May 3, 1891; Aug. 12, 1894; June 28, 1896; June 4, 1899; Aug. 25, 1901; Sept. 9, 1906; Aug. 28, 1910.

The housewife of today, with her many mechanical gadgets, would be appalled at the thought of keeping house in the Kimball establishment; indeed, it was no easy task. Just reading about the daily routine is enough to tire most of us. Two entries, taken at random, will illustrate the point. The first is dated September 15, 1885, when Sarah Jane's mother was seventy years old; the second is dated August 29, 1909, when Sarah Jane was seventy. "Saturday lots of work to do for mother and I. We churned, made bread, dressed a chicken, made sweet pickles, made up a pail of apples into apple sauce, cleaned my bird cage then the rooms and did the work upstairs and it was nearly milking time. Tired at night." "After I had done my out of doors work — feeding the cats and tending the chickens and emptying the ashes I commenced on the work in the house. Filled the lamps washed the dishes. Close came for the cream tended the birds got some apples ready to bake chopped up some cabbage made a cake and got the dinner. After dinner washed the dishes rested awhile swept out the sitting room looked over the papers went out and cut the sage buried a hen I found dead in the granary changed the pork cracklins from the box to some pails rested a little then went to do the chores for the evening." These were by no means unusual days, in fact, they were less strenuous than many, and the mere recital of jobs done does not indicate the difficulties involved in doing them.

Churning at best was a backbreaking business; sometimes it took as long as two and a half hours before butter would form, and when it did form, the amount was not large — "about three pounds" on one occasion. Thus, churning had to be done frequently when cream was available. Once in a while, though apparently not often, the Kimballs had butter to sell. In November, 1874, "Father Mother and I started to go to Clarence to take the butter, 3 firkins and 3 tubs. Not a quick sale for butter. got 24 cts a pound." Three decades later Merrill took some butter to Wyoming and received twenty cents a pound for it. From time to time Sarah Jane tells of buying butter from neighbors. Keeping it sweet in warm weather was left to the cellar, which was not always up to the task.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Diary, Oct. 31, 1882; Feb. 12, Oct. 21, 1883; Aug. 17, 1884; Dec. 8, 1889; Jan. 18, 1891; Feb. 12, 1899; July 1, 1900; Feb. 2, 1908.

<sup>13</sup> Diary, Sept. 21, 1877; May 10, 1878; Dec. 16, 1883; June 21, 1885; Aug. 29, 1886; Mar. 30, May 4, Oct. 12, 1890; Sept. 18, 1892; Mar. 13, 1898; Jan. 26, 1902; Feb. 15, 1903; Apr. 16, 1905; Aug. 15, 1909; Nov. 19, 1911.

Another household chore, involving much manual labor and many steps, was doing the family wash. Sarah Jane leaves out many of the details of laundering in her accounts of this job, but she writes enough to emphasize what the ladies endured to keep the family in clean clothes. "Last Monday we had a big two weeks washing," she wrote in 1891. "I got up before four o'clock and finished a little before noon." And again: ". . . hung out the clothes but they did not dry so we brought them in and hung them on a line in the kitchen but they looked little like clean clothes." Almost twenty years later conditions were little improved; at that time, "a three weeks washing . . . took me three forenoons to finish. A hard time to get them dry and was obliged to finish them around the stoves. Ironed Thursday and Friday." This last statement by its brevity gives a false impression. Even today with adjustable electric irons and mangles, ironing is work; fifty or sixty years ago, when flatirons heated over a fire were used, it was considerably more strenuous. The age of wash boards, several rinses in different tubs, heating water on the kitchen stove, hand wringers, clothes lines, and homemade soap was in full bloom.

The Kimballs made soap, a thick, brown, syrupy liquid, at least as late as 1906, and references to the process are interspersed throughout the diary. "Mother is making soap this week and tonight has a barrell full," was a comment in 1881. Some years later Sarah Jane herself made the soap, noting on one occasion: "Wednesday I worked at the soap, leaching the ashes and boiling the lye." Even birthdays did not interfere with soap making. On her sixtieth birthday, Sarah Jane "worked at getting the lye from a barrel of ashes and stirring it into a barrel for soap."<sup>14</sup>

Preparing meals three times a day for a hungry farm family, plus a hired man and frequent company, demanded much effort and a great deal of know-how. Most of the raw materials were at hand, but the processing of them had to be done at home; particularly was this true in the early period covered by the diary. Butchering was done on the farm and the meat was stored in the cellar. In December, 1877, "Mother and I went to work at the lean meat and fat that was in the cellar to be worked up. We cut up 50 lbs. of meat for sausage and rendered all the fat and made 7 lbs. of head

<sup>14</sup> Diary, Mar. 18, 1878; Feb. 11, 1879; June 17, Oct. 3, 1881; Dec. 23, 1883; Apr. 5, 1887; Dec. 22, 1889; Dec. 13, 28, 1890; Nov. 8, 1891; Nov. 6, 1892; Oct. 20, Dec. 18, 1898; Feb. 12, June 11, 1899; Apr. 10, 1904; Apr. 8, 1906; May 16, 1909; Jan. 2, 1910; Feb. 19, 1911.

cheese." Washing the greasy dishes after this operation took an hour and a half. During the 1880's the Kimballs began to take their cattle and hogs to Wyoming to be butchered. For example, we read in 1888: "Merrill took a big fat hog to Wyoming to get it butchered. . . . Wednesday Merrill went to town to get the pork. Thursday . . . We rendered some of the lard. Friday we worked at the lard all day and Saturday finished it. The butcher made up a lot of sausage which we did not want and used up our lean meat that we did want. They took it back. We cleared up all the grease and cleaned the room." Butchering had to be done in cold weather, of course, since refrigeration was not available. No wonder Sarah Jane complained to her diary on occasion: "We were getting hungry for meat." As early as 1885 a butcher from town visited the neighborhood periodically in warm weather selling meat, but the Kimballs relied on chickens at that time of year. In 1900 Sarah Jane tells of buying meat at Shaeffer's market in Wyoming, but home processing of meat continued in the Kimball home to the end of the period here covered. One of Sarah Jane's final entries on the subject reads: "Monday father and I worked at taking care of the pork. I cut it up and he salted it in the cellar putting it in crocks. I then rendered the lard from the loose fat. Tuesday put in crocks and had a little over two gallons."<sup>15</sup>

Home canning of vegetables other than tomatoes was not done at all in the 1870's and 1880's. Both vegetables and fruits were dried to preserve them; hence, winter diets were lacking in green stuffs and in fresh fruit. To some extent it was a case of summer feast when the garden and orchard were producing and of winter famine when they were not. Under such conditions, the arrival in the spring of the first crops of rhubarb, horse-radish greens, strawberries, asparagus, lettuce, cabbage, tomatoes, potatoes, radishes, peas, and beans was a time for rejoicing. Other items on the summer menu were corn, carrots, cucumbers, salsify, raspberries, currants, gooseberries, watermelons, muskmelons, apples, and cherries. Jellies and jams were made from raspberries and currants, sweet pickles and preserves were made from the melons, and various types of pickles were made from the cucumbers. In the fall, efforts were made to preserve as much of the foodstuff as possible. Pumpkins, squash, potatoes, turnips, beets, carrots,

<sup>15</sup> Diary, Dec. 13, 1877; Aug. 10, 1885; Dec. 5, 1886; Jan. 2, Dec. 25, 1887; Dec. 2, 1888; Nov. 6, 1892; Dec. 12, 1899; Mar. 25, Oct. 7, 1900; Feb. 21, 28, 1904; Dec. 15, 1907.

rutabagas, salsify, and even melons were stored in the cellar. Apples with defects were made into cider, while good ones were stored, in their natural state, or dried; thus, apple pie was a winter delicacy. In 1891, if not earlier, a new method of preserving vegetables became a reality with the opening of the Potter canning factory in Wyoming. Thereafter the Kimballs took sweet corn and tomatoes to the factory to be canned for winter use. A few years before then Sarah Jane and her mother were canning some fruit at home.<sup>16</sup>

Milk played an important role in the diet of the Kimball family. All of the members of the household possessed excellent teeth, a blessing they credited to their liberal use of milk. In getting the milk to the table the womenfolk played an active role. Sarah Jane and her mother helped with the chores regularly. In November, 1877, she wrote: "After four o'clock we went out to milk the 9 cows under the barn in the new stable. They stand pretty thick." The next spring she indicated that she milked four of the seven cows. She continued to help with the milking throughout the period covered in the diary. In spite of heat, cold, and unruly cows she seldom did more than comment on the chore, never really complaining. "While we were milking," she related one time, "there came a heavy rain-storm. I had milked one cow and part of another when it commenced. I ran for the barn with two pails of milk and father and Merrill went to the shed with the cows where they finished milking." In the summertime the milk was kept in cans or pans in the cellar; in the winter it was kept in the house. Before the advent of the separator, the milk was allowed to stand until the cream rose to the top and could be skimmed off. The cream was then used for churning, as has been related, and the skim milk was fed to the calves, chickens, and hogs. In March, 1908, Sarah Jane and Merrill went to Shamels "to look at a separator." A few days later a man brought out the separator and set it up. "It works fine," concluded Sarah Jane. Early the next week she reported: "I did my first churning from the separator cream." In the spring when there was a surplus of milk on the farm, milk was sold to a milkman who made regular rounds of the neighborhood. Each year Sarah Jane noted the date on which the family began to sell milk. Once in a while cheese was made, but apparently the Kimballs were not

<sup>16</sup> Diary, July 6, 13, Nov. 30, 1884; Aug. 29, 1886; July 15, 1888; Oct. 13, 1889; Apr. 26, July 12, Sept. 13, 1891; Aug. 13, 1893; June 10, 1894; Oct. 30, 1898; July 16, 1899; Sept. 15, Nov. 18, 1900; July 6, 1902; Oct. 30, 1904.

experts in this field. "Thursday mother made a cheese. It took her nearly all day because she had forgotten some things in the process," said Sarah Jane in 1888.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately Sarah Jane does not provide anywhere in the diary a daily menu; as a result we get only tantalizing glimpses of the Kimball bill of fare. Once in 1873 she wrote: "I ate dinner at Fuller's — mush and milk." A few years later she noted laconically: "I fried pancakes for supper." In 1880 she goes into more detail: "I built the fire and got a pail of water, Merrill got the green corn and cucumbers, Mother got the potatoes and I made the biscuits and got the pork to fry. Afterward I set the table." At another time baked duck and rabbit "and other things" were on the menu. Each spring the family looked forward to the first mess of greens; one of Sarah Jane's comments on this savory spring delight was as follows: "I cut some horseradish for greens for dinner and Aunt Lucy picked them over. We all enjoyed them for they were the first we had had." In the winter she did considerable baking, but she failed to report much of the detail to her diary. A typical comment reads: "I baked some mince pies and fried some cakes. Also picked and cooked a chicken and made some dumplings." From scattered notes such as these it is at least possible to assume that, although great effort went into the preparation of meals, the end result was pleasing to those who sat down at the dinner table.<sup>18</sup>

Each fall, when threshers were at the farm, an unusual burden was placed on the womenfolk to do a better job of feeding the men than the neighbor ladies did. Threshers' appetites were, of course, legendary. Sarah Jane was usually philosophical about preparing food for threshers, but once or twice she complained a bit about the task. In 1881, the thermometer was "as high as 97° in the shade. . . . Mother and I working at getting ready for the thrashers which will be here tomorrow. I baked bread and did the ironing forenoon. Suffered much from the heat. Mother made some apple pies. She can hardly stand the heat." When the threshing was over, Sarah Jane said simply: "We were glad to have it done." In 1895 came a close call: "Friday we had the thrashing done and the men here for dinner. 18 in all and the last table nearly ran short." Despite their culinary rivalries, the

<sup>17</sup> Diary, Nov. 29, 1877; Apr. 19, 1878; Oct. 20, 1881; Feb. 7, 1882; July 15, 1883; May 4, 1884; July 5, 1885; Aug. 26, 1888; Mar. 29, Apr. 5, 1908; Mar. 14, 1909.

<sup>18</sup> Diary, Sept. 5, 1873; May 4, 1878; Aug. 1, 1880; Nov. 27, 1892; May 15, 1897; Dec. 11, 1898.

ladies of the neighborhood co-operated in feeding the threshers just as the men themselves helped each other with the actual harvesting labor. Once in a while other men who were doing special work on the farm had to be fed several meals. For example, in 1886, three men came to lay some tile in the slough on the south eighty. "They were here three days," was Sarah Jane's comment. "They are enormous eaters especially on bread and butter and it took much of our time to wait on them."<sup>19</sup>

Keeping the house clean was a weekly, yes, even a daily chore, but once each year, usually in early May, especial attention was given to it, and spring housecleaning overshadowed all other household activities. Stoves and stovepipes were removed; carpets were taken up, cleaned, and put down again; nearly always some wall papering was done; curtains and lambrequins were washed, starched, and ironed; the kitchen and dining room ceilings were whitewashed; windows were washed; screens were repaired and placed over the windows; and all the rooms of the house plus the cellar were thoroughly cleaned. The effect of all this activity on the womenfolk is easy to imagine. Sarah Jane put it this way: "All the week Mother and I have worked hard. I have been so tired every night I could scarcely rest or sleep." Or again: "For the last two weeks mother and I have worked with all the strength we had. We have now finished the house cleaning except the dining room and kitchen."<sup>20</sup>

In the intervals between preparing food and doing the other tasks already mentioned, the women somehow found time for still more work. Making mattresses and filling bedticks with corn husks or straw were additional jobs falling to the women, and Sarah Jane comments on the process as late as 1901. Her first entry comes in 1874: "After that we went out and husked corn to get some husks for the beds. We got on top of the open crib of corn and sat and husked. It seemed good to sit down. I was so tired. We husked until time to get supper." Several years later, "mother and I worked at fixing over the husk beds. We emptied out the old husks and sorted them over then husked corn and got new ones and helped fill up the beds. Merrill picked the corn and threw it on the ground for us in the orchard near the hogpen. . . . Friday . . . fixed bed ticks afternoon and sorted husks."

<sup>19</sup> Diary, July 21, Aug. 26, 1878; Sept. 6, 7, 1881; Aug. 16, 1885; Aug. 29, 1886; Aug. 19, 1888; Aug. 4, 1895; Aug. 27, 1899; Sept. 2, 1906.

<sup>20</sup> Diary, May 6, 1877; June 1, 1878; May 2, 1879; May 8, 22, 1881; May 31, 1885; May 8, 1887; May 14, 1899.

The lounges in the house also had cornhusk ticks for cushioning. Mattresses were filled with cotton batting and tacked by hand; then they were placed on the beds over the ticks. In 1887, Sarah Jane noted: "Wednesday mother and I worked at cleaning the husks and fixing the beds. Afternoon I ironed and she put a mattress on the frames and we commenced to tie it."<sup>21</sup>

A final household chore of significance was the making and mending of clothes. Accounts of this activity run throughout the diary. One day in 1877, "Mrs. Newell came to get me to show her how to cut and put together a corset. We were hurried but I showed her. . . ." In October, 1882, "Mother worked at making two undershirts for father and Merrill. I did some baking. . . . Afterward sewed some to help finish the shirts." Several years later, "mother cut out two pairs of drawers for father and I made them afternoon." Another comment reads: ". . . worked at mother's dress waist. . . . I ironed out our skirts and they looked well. Then patched an overcoat that the mice had gnawed the sleeve." After the death of her mother in 1896, Sarah Jane continued to make clothes. Thus, in 1897, she noted: "Friday I cut out some undershirts and drawers from cotton flannel." In 1900 she finished "A winter shirt for Merrill." Toward the end of her diary she mentioned cutting out "some night gowns and drawers" and "some under garments for Esther," a girl whom she raised.

From time to time the efforts of the Kimball women were supplemented by those of a seamstress. For example, "Tuesday Merrill went to Wyoming and brought home Miss Anna Simmons to sew for us and make some dresses. . . . Saturday evening she went home. She made a dress for mother and half made a wrapper and partly made a dress for me." On another occasion the seamstress was a certain Dora Smith, who was "here all the week until Saturday. She has been sewing 9½ days in all. Made Jessie 3 dresses 3 aprons myself a dress and did some other sewing. Has helped me much." Dora continued to sew at the Kimballs for several years. In January, 1903, she "made three waists for calico dresses," and in March, 1907, "She made one calico dress waist and one dress, then a gray woolen skirt and a waist and a thin gingham waist."<sup>22</sup>

Another of Sarah Jane's regular chores was taking care of the chickens,

<sup>21</sup> Diary, Oct. 20, 1874; Oct. 26, 1879; June 17, 1883; Oct. 2, 1887; June 3, 1888; June 21, 1891; Nov. 6, 1892; Oct. 24, 1897; Nov. 5, 1899; Nov. 10, 1901.

<sup>22</sup> Diary, Sept. 26, 1877; Oct. 21, 1882; July 24, 1887; July 30, Oct. 15, 1893; Oct. 31, 1897; Jan. 8, 15, 1899; Dec. 2, 1900; Jan. 4, 1903; May 21, 28, 1905; Mar. 31, 1907; Jan. 9, 16, 1910.



and scarcely a week passed that she did not mention in some manner in her diary chickens, eggs, and the henhouse. Apparently Sarah Jane made no great effort to raise thoroughbred chickens; rather she kept a few fine ones and many more of no particular breeding. In the 1870's and 1880's she had some Buff Cochin, Banty, Brahma, and Houdan chickens, but in later years she spoke mainly of Wyandottes, Plymouth Rocks, and Rhode Island Reds. Caring for the chickens was at best a lot of work and sometimes it was so demanding a task that she was led to complain: "It makes much work for me." Eggs often did not hatch and small chicks were inclined to be frail, so if the weather was too hot or too cold or too wet they would die in large numbers. To save some from the cold in 1878, she "picked up 30 or 40 and put them in a barrel which is turned on its side and put some warmed sticks of wood in and fastened the chicks in." Another time, after a heavy rain, she reported losing over seventy chickens. By way of contrast, in 1900, she rejoiced in the fact that she had two hundred healthy chickens and that few were dying. Lice were a constant threat to chickens and Sarah Jane sought in many ways to fight the parasites. On several occasions she tells of greasing the heads of her little chickens with sweet oil to combat vermin; another time, in 1906, a man came to the farm to sell powder which killed chicken lice, and Sarah Jane bought it. Another means of keeping chickens healthy was to keep the henhouse clean, a chore Sarah Jane performed dozens of times. "Friday I worked at cleaning the hen house," begins one of her accounts. "I took out nearly everything in it then wet it thoroughly with water by using my sprinkler then put kerosene and turpentine in the water and went over it again to kill the vermin. When I had got things all right again it was nearly night." A hawk killed a chicken one day and a mink destroyed a hen and two chicks the same night in 1901, but Sarah Jane remarked that these occurrences were extremely rare. Skunks were menaces periodically and rated notices in the diary several times. Sarah Jane related in 1886:

Thursday night were awakened in the night by the hens making a great squawking. I got up in a hurry, lit the lantern and went out to see what was the matter. Opened the door and saw the largest kind of a skunk eating up my chickens. Some of the hens flew out of the door scared. I shut it and went to the house to see what could be done. Merrill came down stairs and went and got a pole. I held the lantern and threw [sic] the open window he

punched the skunk until he stunned it then he knocked it on the head until it was dead when he took the pitchfork and carried it out of the henhouse. Then we hastened away for the perfume was such that it sickened us. It was near morning and we did not get to sleep again.

In 1906, Sarah Jane went to see Ann's incubator, but she never tells before her diary ends whether or not she purchased one. Probably she did not, because in August, 1912, she "rode to Hale and got some Buff Rock eggs. . . . I bought two settings for one dollar. The road was very dusty. Friday I gave them to the hens." About the only commercial gadget she mentions purchasing was a "Poultry Feeder and Fountain"; her father and Esther set it up and Sarah Jane commented: "I think it will be fine." This was in 1905. A pleasant part of the whole ritual of caring for the chickens were the trips to the Wapsie River to gather clam shells which were later broken up and fed to the chickens. Usually the trips were made in August and September, and wading in the warm water accompanied the gathering of shells. "I . . . enjoyed it immensely," was Sarah Jane's reaction to these outings.<sup>23</sup>

From time to time Sarah Jane sold some of her chickens, and the prices she received seem incredible to the present-day reader. In August, 1878, "Peck the butcher came and bought a dozen of my chickens at a shilling apiece." Twenty years later, Sarah Jane "picked up forty chickens for Merrill to take to town. They amounted to eight dollars and ninety five cents." A year later "the poultry man came and I sold 24 young roosters at five cents per pound." In December, 1900, Roy took fifty chickens to Wyoming for Sarah Jane and sold them for twelve dollars. Finally, fourteen chickens sold in Wyoming in January, 1906, brought 36c each.<sup>24</sup>

Undoubtedly the Kimballs marketed eggs before 1890, but Sarah Jane did not report the fact. From the late 1890's on, however, she gives considerable space to notations of egg sales. In July, 1897, "father went to Wyoming and took 30 dozen and 2 eggs and got seven cents per dozen." At

<sup>23</sup> Diary, May 31, 1876; Sept. 26, Dec. 13, 1877; May 4, 1878; Nov. 13, 1881; Sept. 23, 1883; Aug. 1, Oct. 31, 1886; June 5, 1887; May 18, July 6, 1890; May 14, Aug. 13, 1893; Aug. 19, 1894; Aug. 25, 1895; June 28, Nov. 1, 1896; Oct. 30, Nov. 27, 1898; Sept. 10, 1899; June 17, July 15, 1900; Jan. 20, Sept. 8, 22, Oct. 27, 1901; July 20, 1902; June 21, July 5, 1903; May 7, 1905; June 17, July 15, Sept. 23, 1906; June 9, 30, July 7, Aug. 11, 1907; June 19, 1910; Aug. 4, 1912.

<sup>24</sup> Diary Aug. 3, 1878; Nov. 13, 1898; Dec. 24, 1899; Dec. 31, 1900; Nov. 23, 1902; Jan. 14, 1906.

that time of year eggs were apparently plentiful, and as a result the price was low; in the wintertime when eggs were relatively scarce their price was naturally high. For example, in January, 1899, Sarah Jane received twenty cents a dozen for eggs in Wyoming, and in February of the same year she "got good prices" for chickens, butter, and eggs. By April, when she took thirty-five dozen eggs to town, the price was down to ten cents a dozen. In April, 1901, the price was still ten cents; and in May, when Sarah Jane took seventy-eight dozen eggs to town, it was eleven cents. Once in July and again in August, 1901, she sold fifty-one dozen and forty-nine dozen eggs respectively, but she did not record the price received. By January, 1902, the price was back to twenty cents a dozen; in May it was down to fourteen cents. Five years later the price was still the same. "Just after dinner," wrote Sarah Jane in April, 1907, "E. E. Wright came for the eggs. We let him have forty dozen at fourteen cents per dozen." The next time Wright called, three weeks later, Sarah Jane "let him have 37 dozen at two cents less than the grocer's price which was 15 cents." By the end of the first decade of the present century egg prices were considerably higher than they had been twenty years earlier. In April, 1909, Sarah Jane received twenty-two cents a dozen for forty-five dozen eggs in Wyoming; and in January, 1910, she received thirty cents a dozen.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to carrying her share of the burden of daily farm and home chores, Sarah Jane found time to devote to other pursuits; four in particular gave her pleasure: raising birds, tending a flower garden, making interesting and artistic curios, and writing. She made something of an economic sideline of her canaries as she did of her chickens. Once just before Christmas she took three canaries to Hallett's drugstore and sold them to the druggist for eighty cents apiece. Another time she wrote: "This forenoon I let out my birds in my room and washed the big cage very clean. Afternoon I caught and put them in again. They seemed to enjoy their freedom. I have 24 birds in all now. I have had good luck hatching them." Certain birds became favorites quite naturally and were kept for years; one of these "got to having fits and I had to kill him this morning. He had lived nearly twelve years."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Diary, Mar. 30, 1890; July 11, 1897; Jan. 8, Feb. 26, Apr. 16, 1899; Apr. 21, May 5, July 21, Aug. 4, 1901; Jan. 26, May 4, 1902; Apr. 5, 1903; Apr. 7, 28, 1907; Apr. 25, May 16, 1909; Jan. 23, 1910.

<sup>26</sup> Diary, Dec. 18, 1880; Aug. 20, 28, 1881; Sept. 27, 1882; May 26, 1889; Jan. 6, 1901.

Taking delight in beauty and creativeness, Sarah Jane, as long as she lived, derived much pleasure from her flowers and plants. During the winter she studied seed catalogs and planned her orders so that her seeds and plants would arrive at the proper time. Frequently she placed orders in February and March. Thus, one cold day in 1877 she "put four letters in the P.O. one to Cole and Brother for seeds one to Detroit seed company. . . ." On another occasion she wrote to Leeds and Company for a catalog of plants, and by the 1890's she was doing business with the Henderson Company. As soon as the weather permitted she turned her attention toward the tasks of getting her garden ready for planting by spading, raking, and fertilizing it, and of taking her bulbs and plants out of the cellar where she had kept them over the winter. Usually she made a record of this activity. "Afternoon wanted to set out some of my plants from the cellar," she wrote in April, 1890. "Too much wind so fixed the foundation for my glass house [a sort of greenhouse built of old windows] and wheeled some dirt to fill up some of the holes on the lawn. . . . Saturday. . . . Afternoon put a lot of my roses from the cellar into the garden. . . . Wednesday I worked out of doors most of the day getting the rest of my plants out of the cellar and putting up my glass house. . . . I went to Ann's. She gave me some new kinds of flower seed." The next month she continued: "I went out and set out my geraniums in the garden that were in the cellar. . . . Got my plants in the mail. Got home at one o'clock and after dinner potted my plants." In another entry she recorded setting out petunias, and sowing phlox, sweet alyssum, and amaranths. Once in a while she was too eager and the temperature dipped low. Then she "went out and covered up my plants with crocks and shingles. I got very cold."

Garden activity, as can well be imagined, was not steady but had to be fitted in around other tasks that could not be left undone. It was work eminently worth doing in terms of the satisfaction it brought and of the beauty which resulted. It also enabled Sarah Jane to enjoy more fully neighbors' flowers and to exchange seeds, slips, plants, and bulbs with others sharing her interest. In the fall much of the spring work had to be done in reverse, always with an eye on the weather. "No frost yet to kill my flowers," wrote Sarah Jane during a warm October. "Chrysanthemums having a good chance." But frost was certain to come, so each year she prepared for it. "As the weather was growing cooler I moved my plants on the porch and in the woodshed," she related. "I moved my little green house under the west

porch and filled it with plants. . . . Covered up my plants in the garden." Then as time permitted she "took up some of my plants and put them in the cellar."<sup>27</sup>

In the winter, when Sarah Jane's artistic drive could not find an outlet in working with flowers, she spent much of her free time creating bric-a-brac and curios of one sort and another to decorate the home. This interest was especially reflected in the parlor, cluttered up as it was in the best Victorian tradition with ornate furniture, whatnots, elaborate picture frames, stuffed birds, figures of animals and people, a mirror with gilded frame, a stereoscope and slides on a table, fancy vases, rocks, shells, and numerous other knickknacks, much of it Sarah Jane's handiwork. "I've been busy lately," she said in 1881, "working at cutting out and stuffing animals." On another winter evening some years later she wrote: "Have spent most of my time in the evenings stringing corn. Finished it during the week. Also finished my Snow Palace. Wednesday and Thursday mother and I worked in the parlor and arranged things differently. I raised the east shelf higher. Put my Snow Palace by itself. Hung up my corn frame with the Corn Palace Picture in it. We took the couch out of the room as there was no room for it." Sarah Jane's creations were definitely dated, of course, but they testified to her fine craftsmanship and creative sense.<sup>28</sup>

Her diary itself is proof of Sarah Jane's interest in writing, but additional evidence is given by numerous poems and essays which she produced. Some of her titles follow: "The Sleighride and Spelling School," "To Carrie," "On Hearing Mary Blain Sing," "What I Saw and What I Thought," "The Capture of a Bird," "The Old Red Mill," "Cold Weather," "The Snow Storm," "Lines to an Absent Friend," "The Rain," "The Weather," "Thoughts," "Scraps of Affectionate Correspondence in Rhyme," "Kind Words," "Lines for an Album," and "The Mother's Sorrow." Even the titles have a Victorian ring, and the thoughts expressed were in the same romantic tradition. Highly sentimental and otherworldly, her literary creations seem amateurish and almost unbelievable today; nevertheless, they indicate that life on the farm had not destroyed her sensitive and artistic nature, and they must be rated by the standards of her time and place.

Just as Sarah Jane's poetry seems out-of-date today, so do some of the

<sup>27</sup> Diary, Feb. 21, Apr. 28, 1877; Mar. 23, 1879; Oct. 3, 1886; Oct. 20, 1889; Apr. 13, 20, May 4, Oct. 12, 1890; Mar. 29, 1891; Oct. 13, 1895; May 7, 1899.

<sup>28</sup> Diary, Mar. 10, 1877; Feb. 13, 1881; Feb. 7, 1892.

medical practices and home remedies of her time. All of the Kimballs, except Ellen and Ann, enjoyed good health and lived to be unusually old; still, illness did strike them occasionally. If the illness was prolonged or unusually severe, a doctor was summoned from Wyoming, but for less serious sicknesses Sarah Jane or her mother, aided by the much-consulted family medical book, did the doctoring. And always where sickness struck "very many of the neighbors" came in "with their offers of assistance." Physical ailments which invaded the Kimball, Conmey, and Bruntlett homes were sciatica, lung fever, cholera morbus, bilious colic, quinsy, catarrh, prostate trouble, "something like asthma," measles, colds, typhoid fever (which struck Gene while at college at Ames), rheumatic fever, bronchitis, and inflammation of the bowels. None of these proved fatal, although some of the illnesses were painful and serious, requiring injections of morphine and expert medical attention. The death of Mrs. Kimball resulted from a paralytic stroke and that of Mr. Kimball from the complications of extreme old age.

In the treatment of what might be termed everyday ills, mysticism and magic in keeping with the Kimballs' belief in spiritualism were at times appealed to. Thus, in 1875, Sarah Jane wrote: "Jennie had a severe headache and I tried to charm it away but could not." Perhaps the charm was massage; at least, when another friend had a headache, Sarah Jane "asked her to let me cure it by laying on my hand and she consented. In ten minutes her headache had gone." When charms failed, old-fashioned remedies were brought into play. To relieve Ellen, who felt sick before her daughter was born, Sarah Jane gave her "a good sweating with green corn then rubbed her good. Afterward she felt better." After Merrill was thrown by a horse Mrs. Kimball bandaged his cuts and bruises "with arnica and wormwood and in a little while he was easier." Then when Sarah Jane herself had a sore throat she "had sulphur burned in the room and put kerosene oil and salt on my neck." In a couple of days she felt much better.

Brandy was the standard remedy for anyone who was overcome by the heat in summer, and rosin was used for an aching back. Once when the schoolteacher who was staying at the Kimballs' had a severe cold Sarah Jane "give her some hoarhound tea and rubbed whisky on her throat and neck and bathed her wrists." The next morning the teacher was better. Sometimes even will power was utilized, as on an occasion when Sarah Jane had bronchitis; she wrote that she "used all my will power to drive it away

with the aid of water treatment and turpentine." On another occasion when she suffered with catarrh in her head and throat she found comfort in "Mrs. Lindsay's remedy — pie plant and peppermint." Again, the pain from a wrenched knee was stopped by wrapping the knee in wormwood and vinegar, a combination which was also used for neuralgia in the face. In addition to the use of herbs, spices, liquor, and other concoctions, patent medicines were frequently resorted to. Thus, Sarah Jane noted in 1880 the receipt of "my package of medicine from Dr. J. H. Mosely," the purchases of King's Discovery and Hood's Sarsaparilla for coughs and colds in 1890, and of Doan's Kidney Pills in 1907.<sup>29</sup>

Mrs. Kimball was much in demand as a midwife at the births of neighborhood babies, but Sarah Jane, as became her modest nature, gave only passing mention to this activity of her mother's. "Last night," she wrote in 1878, "mother was called out to attend Mrs. Pelky. Short work was made of it and now she has a fine boy." Another entry is even more cryptic: "Thursday morning Lamon Van came to ask mother to go and see Lizzie. Saturday very warm and afternoon I went to Shaffers awhile. Coming back I stopped in to see Lizzie Van and the new baby."<sup>30</sup>

Because of their excellent teeth, the Kimballs were spared frequent toothaches and visits to the dentist: only a few references to teeth are found in the diary, but two or three of these throw light on the degree of suffering which accompanied tooth trouble in the nineteenth century. In the summer of 1876, Sarah Jane "went to Dr. McGrew to get him to pull a tooth for me but he had no instrument. Then to Dr Calkins and he dont pull teeth. Then to Dr Perry and he said he would do it for me. I went to his office with him and he pulled it. It hurt me much but I was glad when it was out. I felt faint. . . ." Then in January, 1878, she "went to town with father to have a tooth pulled which has been bothering me lately. I went to Doctor McGrew and he said he thought the tooth might be saved by putting in creosote to kill the nerve. I resolved to try it and bought some." The

<sup>29</sup> Diary, Feb. 9, 1875; Aug. 11, 18, 25, Dec. 22, 1878; June 13, 1879; Feb. 29, Apr. 29, July 30, Sept. 14, Oct. 17, 31, 1880; May 8, June 12, Oct. 13, 1881; July 23, 30, 1882; Oct. 21, 1883; Aug. 31, Sept. 7, 1884; July 4, 1886; Aug. 19, 1888; Apr. 7, June 2, Sept. 1, 22, 29, 1889; Aug. 3, 10, 17, 1890; Jan. 11, 18, 25, Sept. 13, 1891; Aug. 21, Nov. 20, 1892; Dec. 17, 1893; Feb. 11, Sept. 9, 1894; Sept. 8, 1895; Dec. 2, 1896; July 16, Sept. 17, Dec. 31, 1899; Oct. 21, Dec. 30, 1900; Mar. 3, June 16, 1901; Aug. 21, 1904; Jan. 22, Feb. 26, 1905; Aug. 4, 1907; June 13, 20, 1909.

<sup>30</sup> Diary, Jan. 30, 1878; Dec. 28, 1886; Apr. 3, 1887.

treatment apparently did not help immediately because six days later Sarah Jane complained that she had "been having a hard time with my tooth. Seems as if I couldn't bear it much longer," but the next day she admitted that the tooth was a little better. Ann had a painful experience at the dentist's in 1885 which Sarah Jane reported in rather frightful detail. "We went to Hepler the dentist. Ann was too nervous to let him draw the tooth and finally when she did he only broke it and she was raving with pain," wrote Sarah Jane. "She cramped and we rubbed her and gave her warm water and after awhile she came to herself and had another drawn that had an ulcer in it. Then she laid down on the couch while we went to the dress-makers." Other comments in the diary relating to teeth are brief and commonplace, indicating nothing unusual about visits to the dentist. "I also went to Dr. Hepler to get my teeth filled" is a typical example.<sup>31</sup>

Methods of maintaining personal cleanliness are left pretty much up to the imagination so far as the diary is concerned. One chance remark, however, does throw some light on the subject: "After supper and Merrill had rested a little he thought he would take his usual bath in the kitchen." Undoubtedly this lavation was performed in a wash tub by the kitchen stove. Details of personal grooming are also omitted except for notations to the effect that either Mrs. Kimball or Sarah Jane cut the men's hair.<sup>32</sup>

One subject that receives about as much attention as any other from Sarah Jane is the weather, an element with which all farmers have very direct contact. Each winter brought cold, snow, winds, and blizzards; while the summers contributed extreme heat, occasionally drought, as in 1886 when pastures were "getting more and more rusty" and cattle were "getting hungry," and usually at least one severe storm. Some of the storms were rather terrifying as well as destructive. One in 1874 was typical.

Last night hot and sultry. Couldn't half sleep. . . . I went down stairs and looking from the west window saw a black cloud rising in the northwest. It came fast and looked threatening. Mother waked and got up. There had been no wind but now it began to raise. We shut all the windows and doors. The wind rose higher, the lightning flashed and the thunder sounded nearer. We were afraid of a big storm. Ellen Merrill and Father got up.

<sup>31</sup> Diary, June 21, 1876; Jan. 2, 8, 1878; July 19, Aug. 16, 1885; Sept. 26, 1886; Oct. 28, 1888; Oct. 30, 1892; Oct. 31, 1897; Feb. 25, 1900.

<sup>32</sup> Diary, May 9, Nov. 21, 1886; May 5, 1889; May 11, 1890; Nov. 1, 1896; June 1, 1902; Feb. 17, 1907.



Merrill went and shut the barn. Then the wind burst with all its fury upon us. The trees bent to the ground as we could see when the lightning flashed for it was very dark. The house was shaken by the force against it. Some of us went in the cellar but came up in a few minutes. We struck a match to look at the clock and it was 10 minutes to four. It was now raining very hard. The storm lasted  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour then stopped and we saw the daylight was coming. We waited until it was light enough to see out of doors then we went out to see what mischief the wind had done. The ground was covered with leaves and small limbs of trees broken off. The fences were torn down in many places and some trees broken and uprooted. Our henhouse was moved three feet from its foundation. The new cattle shed was blown down. Things looked dubious enough this morning. . . . The barnyard fence was blown down but not one of the cattle stirred until they saw us. . . . The sun rose bright and clear as if nothing unusual had happened. After breakfast Merrill and John . . . went to tell the neighbors that we would have a raising this afternoon to raise the shed.

Two years later even greater damage was done by a similar storm which tore off the barn and hogshed roofs, moved the henhouse, ripped up trees and fences, and blew down a neighbor's new house. But nature had its benign side, also, and Sarah Jane gloried in its beauty and wonder. A sunset which tinged the clouds "with the brightest golden tints" and reflected "a blazing yellow on the dark clouds in the east and on the trees grass and shrubbery on the ground" filled her with delight, as did the singing of the bobolinks in the meadow or the pageantry of her flowers in the garden.<sup>33</sup>

Naturally enough the subjects treated in Sarah Jane's diary are those of special interest and concern to a woman, a fact which in itself lends significance to the diary, since farm men were more apt to keep records than were farm women. Nevertheless, much information about male activity on the farm and farming practices can be found in the diary. Early in April or late in March Sarah Jane would write: "Merrill commenced work on the farm today." Then about the middle of April she would note: "Merrill finished sowing and dragging his oats." During the first half of May, a time of "apple, plum and cherry trees in blossom and lilacs showing the purple and

<sup>33</sup> Diary, June 8, 1874; July 5, 1876; June 2, 1878; June 12, 1881; Aug. 3, 1884; Aug. 8, 1885; May 9, July 18, 26, Aug. 8, 15, 1886; Aug. 14, Sept. 4, 1887; June 30, 1889; June 29, 1890; July 16, 1893; Sept. 9, 1894; June 20, 1897; July 14, 28, 1901; June 8, 1902; July 12, 1903; July 9, 1911.

white," Merrill prepared the ground for corn and planted it, often with "John Conmey helping him." In 1876, they "put in about a hundred acres." No description of techniques involved in sowing oats and corn is given, but we do learn that Merrill took a plow to Wyoming to be sharpened in the spring of 1885. Keeping the weeds down drew no comments, so the next farm operation to be recorded in the diary was haying, a July activity. Some years the season "was cool and good hay weather," but all too frequently intense heat made the work almost unbearable, and heavy rains threatened to ruin the cut hay. A particularly hot haying season came in 1885, when Sarah Jane wrote: "Merrill and Lewellyn stacking hay had to stop often to cool off in the shade. At noon mercury at 99°. Afternoon grew hotter until between 2 and 3 o'clock the thermometer stood at 105. The boys came in the house and were almost overheated. They waited awhile but could hardly cool off." Once in a while a heavy rain would come at night during the haying season; then Merrill would have to get out of bed and go outside to round off an unfinished haystack in order to save the hay from spoiling. In 1886, "a Mr. Jewett came to stay all night. He is introducing hayloaders." Three years later the Kimballs built a new haybarn, and thereafter hay was put in the barn rather than stacked or piled over the stables as had been done previously.<sup>34</sup>

As soon as haying was completed, and sometimes even before then, attention was directed to the harvesting of grain. In the 1870's the Kimballs raised wheat, but thereafter they concentrated on oats. Apparently the self binder was new to the Kimballs in 1886, for Sarah Jane wrote in that year: "Monday Alton Alden came to cut our oats with his self binder. Mr. A. was here and mother and I went out to see it do the work." Shocking was done by Merrill and John Conmey. In 1893 Charley Bruntlett cut the oats with his new McCormick reaper. "It runs like a daisy," commented Sarah Jane. After the oats were shocked and dried out somewhat they were piled into stacks to await the coming of the threshing rig. Threshing was done as a rule about the middle of August and it made additional work for the women, as we have seen. In 1890, Sarah Jane gave more notice than usual to the job of threshing: she wrote: "Just after dinner the machine came

<sup>34</sup> Diary, May 27, 1876; Apr. 9, 1877; May 18, July 23, 1884; May 1, July 29, Aug. 2, 1885; June 6, 1886; May 8, July 10, 1887; Apr. 15, May 20, 27, July 22, Aug. 19, 1888; July 14, 28, 1889; July 26, 1891; May 13, 1894; July 12, 1896; Apr. 10, 1898; July 15, 1900; May 22, 1904; May 24, 1908; May 15, 1910.

along the road and entered the field where the grain was. We watched it move along. As it was the first steam thrasher that had ever been on the place mother and I had the curiosity to see it work." By late October the corn was ready to be picked, and Merrill had to find men to help him with the work. "Merrill been husking corn all the week and had Fred Conmey and Hal. Smith to help him," noted Sarah Jane in 1889. After the task was finished, she would add that "his hands are bad."<sup>35</sup>

Most of the hay, oats, and corn were fed to the livestock on the farm, but the surplus was sold; thus, in 1891, several "men here buying hay at ten dollars a ton and hauling it off." Portions of both corn and oats were taken to town to be ground into feed for the chickens and pigs. The Kimballs always raised pigs for sale, and Sarah Jane usually noted the marketing of them. "Father sold 25 fat hogs and he and Merrill and Marshall drove them to Wyoming," she wrote in late 1874. "He received \$430 for them." A year later Mr. Kimball sold more hogs, getting \$6.40 a hundred for them; "John Conmey drove seven our folks drove 40," Sarah Jane reported. In November, 1877, and December, 1878, thirty-five hogs and eighteen hogs respectively were driven to town for sale, the latter drove bringing two cents per pound. By the middle 1880's Merrill, with the aid of some of the neighbors, hauled his hogs to Wyoming or Hale instead of driving them. The average weight of some he sold in 1890 was 532 pounds. In January, 1891, Mr. Kimball sold fifty hogs, and Merrill had to recruit four neighbor teams to help haul the hogs to town. In later years the Kimballs raised fewer pigs than they did before 1900, but they always had a few to sell. In October, 1898, Sarah Jane reported that their hogs were dying with cholera, but she gave no details regarding the numbers dying.<sup>36</sup>

The Kimballs after 1873 seemingly raised many more hogs for sale than they did cattle; most of the cattle they had were milk cows rather than steers. Nevertheless, some cattle sales were reported, though very sketchily. In July, 1885, "father and Merrill went and drove the six cattle from the pasture that were sold the other day; four cows and two heifers." Two

<sup>35</sup> Diary, July 21, 1878; Aug. 10, 1884; Aug. 1, Nov. 7, 1886; July 17, Sept. 4, 11, Oct. 30, 1887; Nov. 4, 18, 1888; Aug. 11, Nov. 10, 17, 1889; July 27, Aug. 17, 1890; Aug. 2, Nov. 22, 1891; Aug. 21, 1892; July 30, Nov. 5, 1893; July 28, 1895.

<sup>36</sup> Diary, Aug. 8, Nov. 21, 1874; Dec. 15, 1875; Nov. 16, 1877; Dec. 31, 1878; Feb. 22, 1885; Oct. 13, 1889; Mar. 30, June 15, Nov. 9, 1890; Jan. 18, Apr. 12, 1891; Nov. 20, 1892; Oct. 20, 1898; Dec. 17, 1899; Nov. 4, 1900; Jan. 11, 1903; Jan. 9, 1910.

years later, "a man came for the six heifers that had been sold." Only twice does Sarah Jane tell us the prices received: in 1897, "father sold four steers and the cow Beauty to Eb. Wherry. The steers brought four cents per hundred and the cow three cents;" and, in 1902, "we sold the cow Cherry to Levsen for \$47.52." Only once, in December, 1883, did Sarah Jane speak of disease among the cattle. "Evening Merrill noticed among the cattle one sick yearling steer and two calves," she wrote. "I went to see them. Think the calves have the black leg. The yearling we gave some slices of raw pork. Felt bad all night on their account." Both calves died, and John and Merrill skinned them.<sup>37</sup>

Horses were kept by the Kimballs for working and driving purposes, not for selling and trading. So far as Sarah Jane's diary is concerned, we find only one report of the sale of a horse by the Kimballs; this sale occurred in 1878 when "Squire Brownell came and bought the colt Beryl for 50 dollars." In 1881, John Conmey brought a sick colt to the Kimballs for treatment, but the colt died. "John will feel the loss," remarked Sarah Jane. When one of the horses, Merle, got sick, "Alton Alden came and after working over him he began to get better after midnight." Three months later, however, "Merle came in the stable as usual and while Merrill was doing the other chores laid down in his stall and died." The next month, January, 1904, Merrill purchased a handsome, ten-year-old mare for \$125. Six years later he purchased another mare for \$175.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to planting, cultivating, and harvesting crops and raising and selling livestock, the men on the farm had other jobs to perform. Some of these tasks, gathering in the garden truck and fruit in the fall, mowing the lawn, doing the daily chores, and making trips to town, were shared with the womenfolk; others, such as moving heavy stoves, hauling dirt and manure, cutting down trees, building fences and farm buildings, working on the roads, and shoveling snow, were generally performed by the men only. Winter was the easiest time of the year in many ways, because there was no work to be done in the fields; feeding the livestock, milking, and keeping warm were the main winter jobs. Still when there was much snow and drifting, these winter jobs were not easy. "Today . . . father and Merrill

<sup>37</sup> Diary, Dec. 16, 23, 1883; July 11, Dec. 20, 1885; July 10, 1887; Apr. 12, 1891; Aug. 15, 1897; June 11, July 2, 1899; Feb. 18, Mar. 11, 1900; May 4, 1902; Nov. 3, 1907; July 23, 1911.

<sup>38</sup> Diary, May 15, 1878; Apr. 3, 1881; Sept. 6, Dec. 6, 13, 20, 1903; Jan. 3, 1904; Jan. 2, 1910.

have worked nearly all day at shoveling snow so they could make it convenient to feed the cattle and hogs. The snow drifts are high and densely packed around the stacks and outbuildings," said Sarah Jane early in 1881. Four years later, after a severe blizzard, she commented again on the snow: "Afternoon the men dug snow out of the road so they could get to Wyoming."<sup>39</sup>

Remarks about the condition of the roads are frequent throughout the diary. In winter, snow made the going difficult and once in a while a vehicle became stuck; then it was necessary for the occupants "to get out and unhitch the horses and get the sleigh back where the traveled road was." When the snow melted or when it rained, mud was the problem, and at times the roads were "nearly impassable." Other times "mud flew all over us when the horses pranced a little." When it was too dry, dust was the result, and then Sarah Jane would write: "Carriages go by on the road enveloped in a cloud of dust." Occasionally the roads were in good condition, a fact which would move her to comment: "The roads were nice and smooth and Pet felt like going." In July, 1906, she first mentioned a vehicle that was to be largely responsible for the improvement of Iowa roads and those of all other states; she wrote: "Afternoon I went to town with Merrill and Esther. When near there we met an automobile and the horses were afraid. They were soon quieted and we moved on." A week later a similar episode occurred: "Coming home we met an automobile. Pet scared and we jumped out of the buggy. They stopped and we got by all right." As late as 1909 Sarah Jane remarked, obviously with a sigh of relief after a trip to town: "Didn't see an auto going or coming." Gradually both she and the horses became accustomed to automobiles, and when Charles Kimball visited the farm in 1912, Sarah Jane was willing to go for a ride in his car. "It was fine," was her reaction to the ride.<sup>40</sup>

It is intriguing to wonder whether Sarah Jane, as she stepped out of the auto after her ride, thought back to the time fifty-six years before when she wrote in youthful enthusiasm: "We expect to have a new house when we get rich and we think that day is not far distant. . . ." The new house

<sup>39</sup> Diary, Mar. 20, 1881; Oct. 16, 1884; Feb. 15, 1885; Nov. 14, 21, 1886; Nov. 6, 1887; Nov. 20, 1892; June 11, 1899; Jan. 7, 1912.

<sup>40</sup> Diary, Feb. 13, 1875; Jan. 16, 1877; Jan. 2, Feb. 23, 1878; Apr. 10, 1881; May 1, 1885; Apr. 18, 1886; Mar. 3, 1889; Sept. 3, 1899; Jan. 21, 1900; June 7, 1903; Nov. 26, 1905; July 22, 29, 1906; Sept. 19, 1909; July 28, 1912.

came and so did a new barn and many other items, including a very substantial bank balance, but so did countless hours of hard work and much self denial. Also, there had been some loneliness and at least one unfulfilled dream associated with a certain Joe whose name appeared periodically in the diary until 1885. Once in 1877 Sarah Jane confided: "I dreamed I was being married to Joe by O. E. Aldrich. It seemed so real." Still, all things considered, it had been a good life, full of achievement, satisfaction, and good fortune. Death did not make a break in the family circle for sixty years after Mr. and Mrs. Kimball were married, and there had been many happy times, described mainly in a succeeding article, to counterbalance the hard work. Sarah Jane's routine had not changed much, but the coming of the telephone and rural mail service in 1901 made her life somewhat more pleasant than it had been. Her father and Merrill had been more fortunate, having their burdens lightened considerably by the introduction of hay-loaders, riding plows, self binders, windmills, and steam threshers. Even the international picture had been bright, and only once had Sarah Jane reported on world affairs. After the Battle of Manila Bay, she wrote: "Good news was heard from Dewey fighting the Spaniards in the Philippine Islands and great rejoicing was had in town. Guns were firing and bells ringing." If highlights of her life such as these flashed through Sarah Jane's mind that day in 1912 she must have felt that her pioneer faith had been justified and that Iowa was still "one of the most beautiful of places."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Diary, Nov. 26, Dec. 5, 1875; Aug. 15, Sept. 4, 16, Oct. 27, 1877; Jan. 1, 1879; May 10, 1885; May 8, 1898.