

Mary Pride Knight

Presented by Jean Hankins

I'm Stephen's youngest child, Mary Pride Knight, born in 1811. I'm probably also the most important woman Otisfield ever produced. How come, you say? No, I didn't serve in Congress or build monumental bridges. My great accomplishment was my life-long personal diary recording everything, large and small, occurring in Otisfield during my long lifetime. My own life has been very long but pretty humdrum, not always happy. Born on Bell Hill Road, in the house my father built next to the town pound, I learned to read and write at the Bell Hill School and even taught school myself, for a few years, in the Gore section of town. During those years I boarded with a family living there. The teaching didn't go very well, but it was how I met my husband, Frederick Brackett, whose family lived in the Gore.

I started the diary about 1836, right after my father Stephen died. Since then I have lived mostly in the house my father built, along with my youngest sister and my mother. In the diary I wrote about comings and goings in town. I recorded who married who, and what I thought about them. When someone died accidentally or, like my cousin Mark Knight, tried to end his own life, I wrote about that, too. My personal life wasn't always good – three of my four children died young, and there was the dreadful 2-year period when Frederick was off logging down East, without a word home. I still write in the diary, almost every day.

I kept the diary because I wanted a way to remember some of the high points in my life. Bear with me while I read one short excerpt to give you some idea of what's there. This excerpt is my effort to describe a religious revival, known as a camp meeting, back in 1837:

"September the 14 [1837] it is a very fine morning but rather cool but I feel on hand for camp meting I am a goin with FB [Frederick Brackett]. Now we are redy I am dressed in white and he is in blew a good hors and chaise to go in we rode over plains and valey and on the whales back through woods and ricks. . . till we come near the meting and the[n] they were a goin to the meeting in high stile we went to the tavern and put the horse up and then we went down to the ground where they were O how strange it did look to me to see the tents there it made me think of the Arabs and then to look into the tents and see the straw o how boggy it did look I could not stay there I [k]now O how dirty and nasty it was all around the group there was 17 tents and 12 ministers they preached well and sung beautiful but they had a prar meting a[t] noon a[nd] what a noise they did make it was confusion there were a grate many there but I never saw so many hombley faces in my life. . . I had a very agreeable time."

Mary died in 1896, aged 85. Her husband Frederick died a year earlier. The 8 or 10 hand-sewn little booklets making up her diaries then became the property of Sibyl Knight Lamb, daughter of Mary's brother Stephen. After Sibyl's death, the diary passed on to Fred Pottle, who about 1965 donated it to the Maine Historical Society. Since then it has been microfilmed, and a transcript made by Jean Hankins which is available at the Otisfield Historical Society.