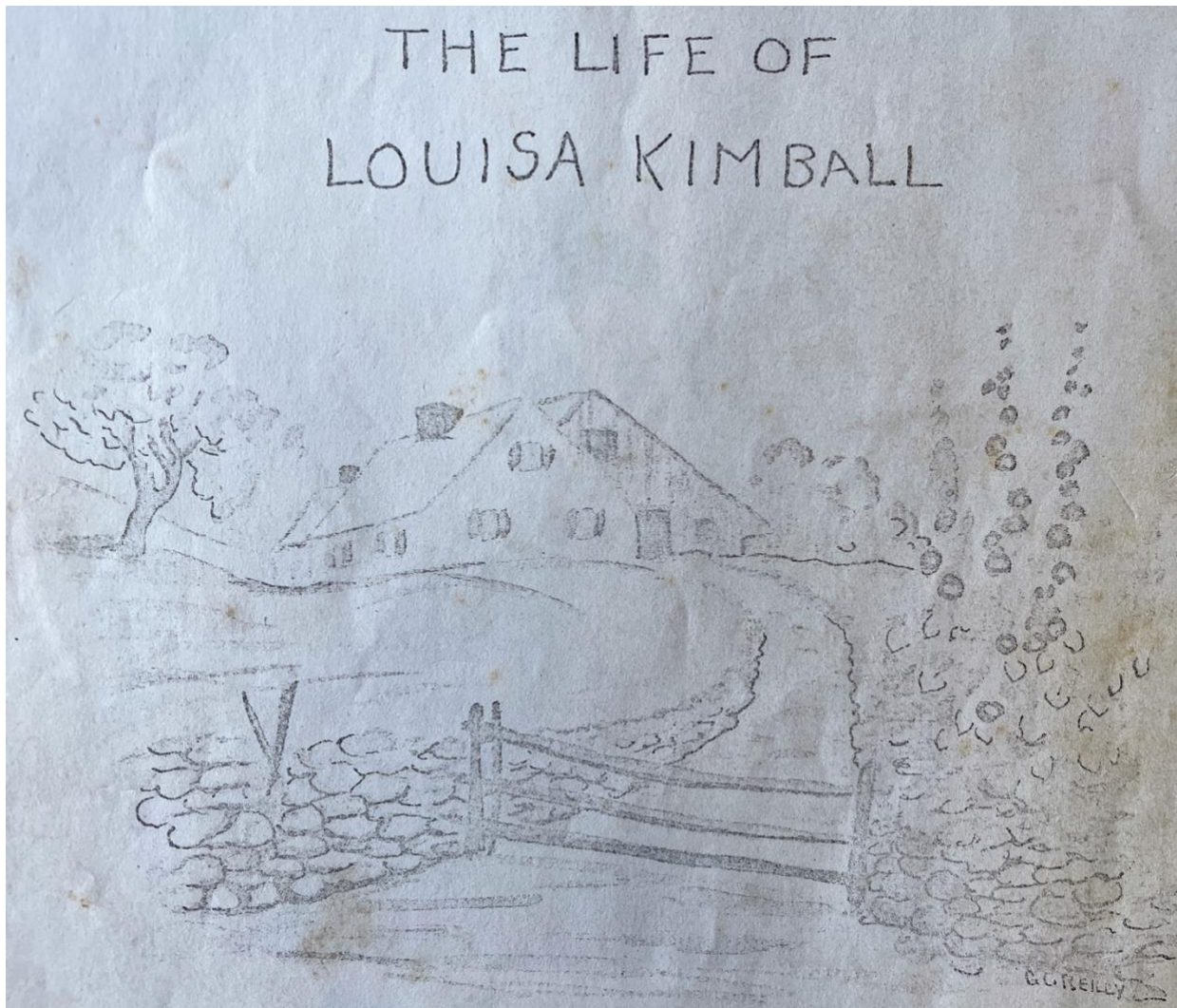


Life of Louisa Bowman Kimball Comins

Birth September 4, 1826
Death December 12, 1894

Manuscript written September 4, 1877 and finished in later years
Great-great-grandmother to Abbie Coffin White





Introduction by Grace Maria Comins Reilly

Birth October 6, 1888

Death August 8, 1996

Grace was a talented and prolific artistic for more than a century

This quaint manuscript, written by my Grandma Comins, was found and saved after she died in 1894. Later, in 1936 when my father, her youngest child, died, it was discovered in his belongings, though none of us eleven children had ever known of its existence.

When it was read, the story of her early existence proved to be such an interesting one that it was passed around and enjoyed by all the grandchildren.

After all these years I have only a few outstanding memories of Louisa Kimball Comins, my paternal grandmother. These go back to before I was five years old, the year she died. The most pleasant recollection is of visiting her one day when she lifted her voluminous black skirt and reached into her black petticoat pocket and took out some raisins and gave them to me to eat. Such a treat! Grandma walked with a cane, for she was quite lame, having fallen some time earlier and broken her hip. Then the day of her funeral comes

back vividly. Entering by the kitchen door, a neighbor who carried a tiny bouquet of heliotrope held it to my nose to smell.

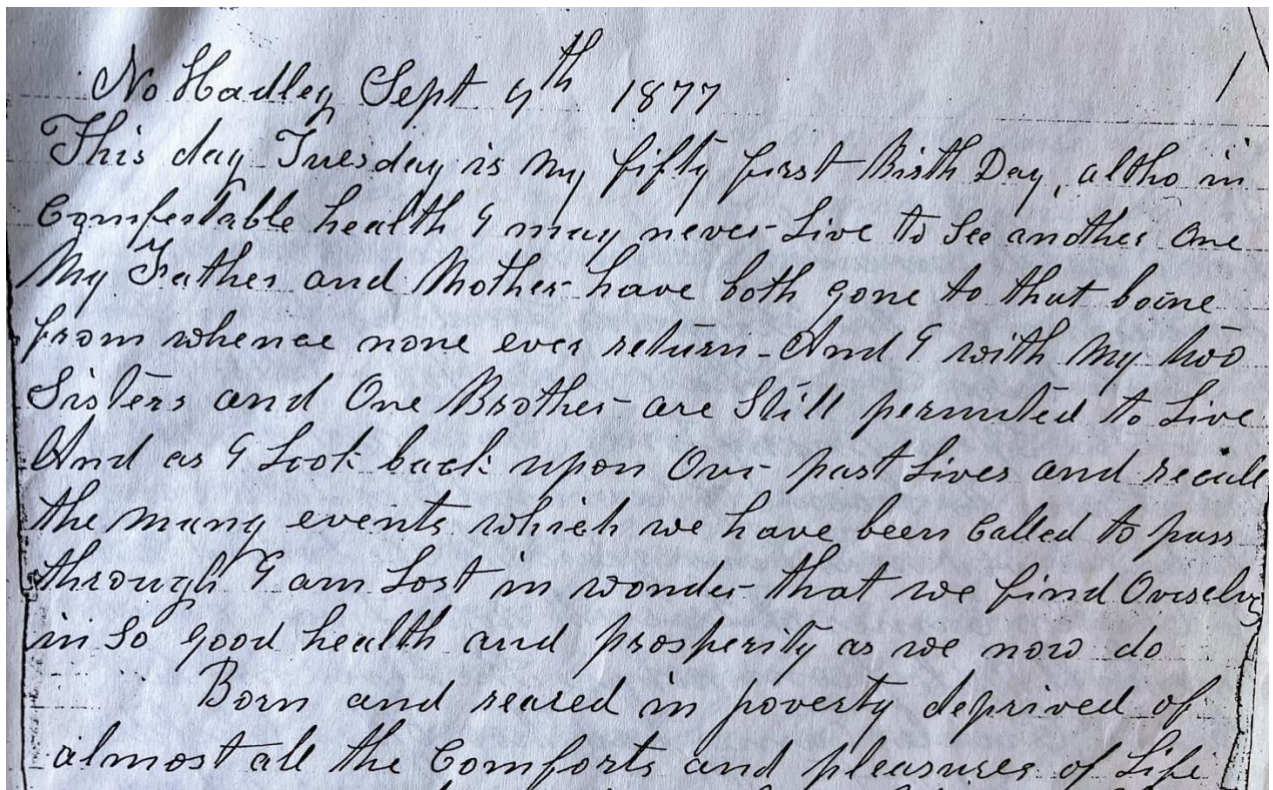
Ever since that time, the sweet, fragrant scent of heliotrope has brought back the memory of that event of so long ago. The same day, my father, while weeping convulsively, lifted me up to see Grandma in her coffin. I felt bad for him, for I'd never seen him cry before.

The story of her life is sad. We can only wish we could reach back and help her through those hardships. She has written it in a manner strange in this day and age, and with a charm that is almost fascinating (at least to me).

In copying, it was typed verbatim, as we thought it would lose a great deal by editing. It shows her just as she had been. We can thank God she found a good home and husband with security and respectability. No mother was ever held in higher regard than my father's mother, my Grandma Comins.

Grace Comins Reilly February 15, 1957

Retyped and reprinted by Stewart Coffin in 1993. Revised and reprinted in 2003, and again in 2005, with addition of end notes and photos. [This version was downloaded by Abbie from Comins.org on July 6, 2023. Additions noted with blue and green text.](#)



No Hadley, Sept 4th 1877
This day Tuesday is my fifty first Birth Day, altho in comfortable health & may never live to see another one My Father and Mother have both gone to that boine from whence none ever return - And I with My two Sisters and One Brother - are still permitted to live And as I look back upon Our past lives and recide the many events which we have been called to pass through I am lost in wonder that we find Ourselves in so good health and prosperity as we now do Born and reared in poverty deprived of almost all the comforts and pleasures of Life

The Life of Louisa Kimball Comins

No. Hadley Sept. 4th, 1877

This day Tuesday is my fifty-first birthday, although in comfortable health I may never live to see another one. My father and mother have both gone to that borne from whence none ever return, and I with my two sisters and one brother are still permitted to live. And as I look back upon our past lives and recall the many events which we have been called to pass through I am lost in wonder that we find ourselves in so good health and prosperity as we now do.

Born and reared in poverty, deprived of almost all the comforts and pleasures of life, reared away at a distance from school and church, forced to go two and one-half mile to school whilst thinly clad and poorly fed, our lives at the best was one of peculiar trial.

Our native place is in the town of Leverett, Franklin County, Massachusetts; in the eastern part of the town, we were born. My father David Kimball was born in Shutesbury Feb. 4, 1799, in a house that used to stand near the one owned by Luther Bruce or on the street that runs west from the cemetery. He lived there but a short time when his parents separated and his mother whose name was Judith Hunt was left with three little children, David my father and Ebenezer and a sister Rebecca, my grandmother being obliged to support her three small children all under five years. She lived for a while in a log cabin in the woods now bordering on the highway leading from Leverett to Shutesbury somewhere near John Gill's grave. Here she spent many lonely hours not knowing what was to become of her and her little ones.

When David was four years old, she bound him to Charles Eames of Leverett who lived about one-half mile from where she lived in her cabin. Charles Eames had two other children indentured to him, one Susan Broad whose father lived just south a half-mile from the above named cabin, and still another boy whose name was Silas Morgan of Northfield. All these were very young when bound out; all lived with the said Eames and his wife until of age, they having no children of their own. David was sent to labour out as soon as he could command wages, which the said Eames was particular to control.

It indeed was no enviable place for a poor child to be placed in, being obliged to suffer many hardships, being poorly clad and eating only bean porridge for breakfast, this with no one to cheer his lone and desolate life, his nature became hardened and callus.

David after coming of age began to think of some way by which to maintain himself. This he finally did by settling down on a poor and stony place just one-half mile north of the said Charles Eames place and owned by him but promised to David if he would locate there, all of which the said Eames failed to fulfill soon as the said David got well settled with a family, he having to pay all the place was worth to the uttermost farthing. After becoming acquainted with one Mary Gould Bartlett from the town of New Braintree and after a courtship of two or three years he married. She came to Leverett some three years

before with an Aunt by the name of Hill to visit a cousin by the name of Rachel Hill Maynard who than lived west of where the said David and Mary lived about one hundred rods distant.

After David married he set himself about clearing and burning over his land as he settled in an almost unbroken wilderness. After burning his wood into charcoal he used to draw it of and peddle it as people now do their produce, getting some seven and eight and ten cents a bushel. This with day or month labouring out for other people, with what he could raise upon his clearing, sufficed to support his family. Whilst with the greatest economy and perseverance together with himself and family he managed to pay for his home.

After paying off the said Charles and owning the place he lived on, was not content to live in so narrow a compass. Accordingly he purchased considerable more land, some of which he bought of Abner Gilbert of Leverett, all joining the old place and heavily wooded with white pine, chestnut and oak, some of which he bought of parties living in.

Soon children were born to him, the first a daughter who he called Mary Lucy born Oct. the third, eighteen hundred and twenty-four, and the second one Louisa born Sept. the fourth, eighteen hundred and twenty-six, the next a son David Dwight born Aug. the fourteenth, eighteen hundred twenty-eight and lived but two years and one mo. only, the next a daughter named Nancy Bartlett born June the second, eighteen hundred thirty, the next Albert born in eighteen hundred and thirty-four, the next a son born in eighteen hundred and forty-four (Mar. 7th) named Alden Bradford, making six in all, three sons and three daughters, the youngest dyeing when but four months and sixteen days old, this comprising all the children of David Kimball.

After laboring hard together with his family for twenty-three years, he finds himself possessed of a comfortable home for himself and family without a single debt to encumber him. And now possessing a home unencumbered by debt or mortgage he sees his way clear to prosperity, but no, he is shortly doomed to see his companion of so many years cut down in the prime of life and born away to her last resting place. She who had shared his joys and sorrows and had been a help.. (?)... to help gain as she often expressed it a home for herself and her children. Yes, and how many privations she endured living away from all her kindred except her own family and how bitterly she felt it with no parents near to console her in her many lonely hours which she was obliged to pass, her father Luke Bartlett dieing some few years before she married, her mother coming to her aid in her direst necessity and a good mother she was indeed. Long shall we her grandchildren hold her in grateful remembrance, for alas she passed away some too...

And now as we go to view the last resting place of our mother our mind turns back to the days of our youth when we were all gathered around that old fireside, Father sitting in his accustomed corner of an evening reading his favorite book or newspaper, yes and always reading by the light of a pine torch which he took especial pains to prepare before dark to burn in a fire place, not allowing himself or family the luxury of a lamp or candle only on special occasion.

He owned some one hundred and fifty acres of land, some seventy-five to one hundred of it heavily wooded. He resorted to burning it into coal and many is the places I could now point out where he has burnt wood into coal, places called coal beds, one of which where they now have their garden. Many a coal pit has been burnt upon it.

Living so remote from society, not infrequently they lost the day of the week; twice in 23 years, they kept Saturday for Sunday until the close of the day when perhaps they would learn their mistake.

Once my oldest sister wandered away after Father when she was a mere infant and twas some time before she was discovered some distance from home wedged between a couple of rocks. Many are the adventures which we have passed through in growing up as we did surrounded by wood and rocks. One Sabbath Day, my mother being left alone, Father away to Church, a tramp came out of the woods and came to the house and demanded food which was given him, than a fine comb was called for. After using it he took his departure. What in her lonely condition with no one nearer than half a mile she felt she was in some danger of encountering company who were not always agreeable to her.

Often in our necessity have we children gone to a cupboard which stood in the kitchen and taken there from a cold potato by which to satisfy hunger.

We lived in a very poor house for about six years after Father and Mother were married. It stood about ten rods south of where the old home now stands. The house was once moved from off the hill west about a half-mile. It consisted of two rooms and a pantry, one the living room and the other the north room always so called because it was. There was an immense large stone chimney in the center of the house, with an ash hole and an oven where we done all the bread baking, and the pudding and beans when we had any. Some part of the house was sealed up with boards, especially the north room, but nowhere was the least bit of plastering, and therefore we were obliged to keep up a good fire in cold weather to keep from freezing. Once Father, on building a fire in the morning, left to go to the barn when Mother, whilst dressing, smelt smoke of linen. On looking towards the fireplace did not see anything wrong until glancing up to the pole in front of the fire discovered her week's ironing to be on fire, which she soon extinguished by the free use of water, of which they had a plenty which run from a spring some twenty rods north of the house and fell into a large trough near by.

Father kept no horse for a number of years, was obliged to do his work with cattle. He kept sheep one year, but laurel was so plenty they soon ate so much they all died. Geese to they used to keep until they strayed away to the neighbors by the name of Eames, when they would kill them and bring the feathers to Mother for her consolation.

Sister Mary and myself were sent to school two and one-half mile away to Leverett village. The first day we went, Father and Mother went on foot with us to the nearest neighbor, so to go with their children by the name of Nancy Jessie and Daniel Leonard. Mary went with them, but I after going a short distance turned and ran back to Father and Mother,

who took me home with them. I afterward went, but oh so weary for my slim body to walk so far, cruel. Miss Emily Heminway was teacher and a good one too. She afterwards became Mrs. Elijah Montague, his second wife. Many of the scholars than are now scattered abroad whilst some have gone never to return.

Now in describing the old house, I forgot to state that the only egress to the old house was by pulling a latchstring which always hung on the outside. The kitchen was lighted by day by one window each on three sides of the house. Only one was made to be hoisted. There was a capacious hearthstone as well as one for a door stone. Directly in front of the house stood a pear tree which is still standing there, the fruit of which I have partook this season 1877. Probable this tree is all of fifty or sixty year standing. Another attraction of the old place was a stone wall which surrounded the garden in which stood a number of apple trees and an ash house made of boards.

The barn, the only other building, stood just east of the old house, and the only way to drive in with a load of hay was by going through the barnyard. Whilst east of the barn lay the pasture where grew innumerable whortleberries, where we often resorted to gather the berries for pies and to dry. In this same pasture may be seen a large flat stone on which myself and little brother Dwight piled a lot of other stone. I call him little, for we both were when we done it, not being yet four year old myself, which is now forty-seven years ago. Still east of this pasture lane a vast tract of woodland which the owners used to set on fire some seventy years ago to procure better feed for their cattle which used to run wild and common without any fencing. This burning the land over presented at night a magnificent sight all ablaze as it was for miles around.

After living in the old house about seven years, Father concluded to build new. He therefore commenced to dig a cellar and a drain to it. This he did about the year 1830, locating it about 50 or 60 yards from the old one. Building in those days was not as expensive as at the present, but the cellar was rather the worst part, having to dig amongst rocks which made the job rather irksome. Father, having no one to help him in those days and but little capital, done all he could within himself, often working late at night by the light of a pitch pine knot to dig his cellar. Getting his lumber to mill off his own land for to build his house with, after getting up a frame, he hired a man by the name of Briggs and another whose name was Goodnow to build the chimney - one stack as it is termed, with two fireplaces, a oven and ash hole. Than he hired two carpenters by the name of Augustus Barton and Jabez Lathe, who partitioned the house off into four rooms, one east room with a fireplace, another west one without any convenience for making fire in it. In the center of these two was the living room, still another back room opening into a woodshed, all very convenient considered, than a pantry opened from this living room, as also a place called the pot hole, whilst above there was two chambers for sleeping in summer and for storage. One was principally used for spreading corn to dry.

In the woodshed was never failing water which runs from a spring nearby. The next thing was to procure a mason to plaster the house, two rooms and a pantry. The thing being impossible, Father just done it himself. Being unacquainted with the business, he made

rather bungling work of it. It coming cold weather, soon some froze and soon came of , that in the east room all most all. This we girls used to cover with old newspapers to keep out the cold. Thus we lived for years.

We moved into the house before there was any plastering put on or any doors save two, these being the outside ones. My parents often became discouraged and well they might, for their little family increased so rapidly they were put to their wit's ends for to care for them, all four little ones coming to them in the space of ... Accordingly, the day we moved into the new house Mother seemed utterly cast down, having shortly before buried her only son a little more than two years old. Thus born down with grief and with sickness, she sat in the chimney corner with her cloak thrown around her, weeping. When Father told her the house was ready to move into, this seemed to revive her spirits in as much that she helped to get ready, with the help of us children, to move what goods they would need to use for to make them comfortable through the night.

There were three girls of us now, Nancy being only five months old, but we older ones always remembered moving, and what we had for supper after, which consisted of hearty pudding and milk. This fare we felt perfectly content with, so long as we had got into our new house, which to us and our poor mother seemed almost a palace compared with the old one. Fruit trees soon began to spring up around about the clearing, so in a few years we began to realize some profit from them as they afforded a better living.

Shortly after leaving the old house, Father rented it to one John Jucket and wife with two children, whilst soon after their moved in another family by the name of Josiah Kentfield, a brother-in-law of Jucket, who lived their through the season.

Living very remote from school, our parents with others concluded to hire a room in the dwelling of Daniel Leonard for the purpose of having a school nearby. This they accordingly did, hiring one Judith Jucket to teach it. There was about 18 or 20 scholars to attend. There was a school kept in this place about four years. Once twas taught by Julia A. Reed of Shutesbury. She afterwards became the wife of Moody Cook of So. Amherst. Another Miss Hannah Williams, now Mrs. Marcus Dickinson of No. Amherst, and the one Judith became the wife of one Silas Kentfield of Enfield. Some of the time in the winter season when the roads were drifted, Father would harness up an old horse he had by the name of John into a vehicle called a pung or jumper and carry us to and from school. There we learnt to read and spell as also to write some. Mother, with what help we could render, bought our clothes and books.

Those were the days when hat braiding was all the rage. All who could count to ten was put to hat braiding. My oldest sister Mary and myself both learned to braid hats when we were four year old, Mother engaging one Sarah Torry who lived two miles over the hill called Brushy Mountain to come and learn her how to make hats. She came and staid two or three weeks, or until Mother could make a hat.

Card setting used to be the chief employment before hat braiding came around. Mother used to do all she could of it before and after marriage until other machinery supplanted it.

Hat braiding is at a very low ebb at the present and has been for some time as other material comes in to supplant it, and the scarcity of the palm leaf of which they were made.

Good palm leaf hats bring about 12 cents a piece, some sell as low as four cents a piece, whereas they used when first introduced to bring fifty cents when finished. This tended to help poor people to get along more comfortable, as every child, boy or girl, would be seen when not otherwise employed braiding either coarse or fine hats. I never kept an account of what I have made, but I know they could be counted by the thousands. Mother and we girls, when in a pinch to finish some hats or when in want of a few groceries or some dry goods, have often braided long into the night by the light of a pine torch. We thought we were happy then, and indeed we were, with our mother to steer. But after a season when we began to go to school at the village again and were older, we began to be more sensitive and to realize how very poor and shabby our clothes were in comparison with our more prosperous neighbors. Then it was our troubles began, for there was a set who looked upon us as inferior to themselves. The names of a few whose sole delight it was to aggravate us poor children, the first I will say, was the children of Capt. Ransom Adams and those of Aaron Mathews, and also those of Lewis Moor and Rufus Putnam and Luther Broad and Porter Nutting. All these and many more contributed to make our school days as miserable as possible. Many of our teachers being so easily swayed on to the side of popularity, yes I say to many, whilst the parent has helped to influence the child at their own fireside and at their board to treat the humble and the poor with contempt.

Often have we rode home from school when our father would call at the schoolhouse for us in a coal cart, he having been off to sell coal. Then as soon as we got home we must go to braiding hats to procure clothes to wear and books to use and groceries for the family supply, whilst up again early in the morning and prepare to go two and half mile to school with scanty clothing and cold feet and hands.

Many is the time when not in school or braiding hats my sister and myself have worked out helping Father on the farm or been in the very dirty business of quenching chair coal. Sometimes it would be picking up stone or apples or potatoes or turning grindstone. In fact there was no work our Father thought to menial for us to do. How often we have tied up the cattle at night and done the same in the morning, besides cleaning out stables after milking the cows, Father seldom ever milking at all. Either our mother or ourselves done it. This was indeed a hard lot for us poor children and our parents, Father often being up all night to attend to his coal pits, as they were termed.

In the course of this time, a new brother put in an appearance. Him they christened Albert. Then it was my mother seemed delighted. She now had a son to take the place of the one who only a few years before she lay to rest in the silent churchyard. As he grew up, how he helped to cheer her on in the many cares and trials she had to encounter. He seemed the one on whom she delighted and looked forward to, to comfort and cheer her as she advanced on the downhill of life.

After a while, Father rented the old house to a man by the name of Nathaniel Felton. From

him he realized a little help on his farm, and still another by the name of Zebrina Pratt of whom he realized but little profit, they living near two seasons and going away in a flurry. The house remained unoccupied for a long time until one Silas Kentfield came there to live and staid through the season. The next to live there was Francis Nourse and mother. The next and last was Ephraim Marsh who lived there through the season. After that the old house was taken down by Silas Kentfield and moved down to the January Road so-called and set up for a dwelling for himself and family. So there is nothing left now to mark the spot where my parents and myself lived for 6 or 7 years. Only in our memory can we now distinguish the place that gave us birth.

After my sister and myself arrived at the age of 13 and 14 we were kept from school through the summer to help do the haying and other things necessary to be done on the farm, Father thinking it too expensive to hire only a few days work after we girls arrived at an age sufficient to rake, tread and mow away hay, which we were compelled to do. It sometimes taxed our feeble strength to the utmost to be compelled by our father to labour in the hot sun until very near exhausted, Mother the meanwhile doing her work alone with the care of a family of 6 and 7 besides tending a dairy. These were the days when every child's help and every adult was called upon to assist along, that my parents might pay all encumbrance upon the farm, besides supporting the family and supplying money for taxes, and some for Father to lend to one Silas Morgan, which was no small amount in a long run, he borrowing of Father, unbeknown to our mother at the time of borrowing, sums innumerable repeatedly. This, together with what was spent for books and papers, amounted to considerable in the course of a year, all of which, or part, should have gone to contribute for the comforts of our family. Neither Mother nor us children were ever allowed the first penny for our comfort, braiding hats being our only way of obtaining our clothes and all the groceries which supplied the family. Sometimes however we would pick chestnuts to get a few dollars, all of which our father would safely put under lock and key for protection if we happened to get money for them.

Mary at the age of 13 or 14 went to work for Uncle Apelton King in Amherst on Flat Hills so-called, and there she earned some few dollars. Then she went to a Mr. Robert Cutler's and there earned a few more dollars, and again to a Mr. Wm. Hubbard and to James Fletcher's, where she was obliged to take cloth in part pay for her wages, about all of which Father appropriated to himself, she braiding hats to clothe herself. She afterwards worked for Mr.

Peter King of So. Amherst, and afterwards for one Capt. Fay of New Braintree. After this, at the age of 18 years, she concluded to wed one Edwin Pratt of Shutesbury, and all the furniture she received from Father was a bedstead worth 4 dollars. All the rest, which consisted of a set of chairs, some bedclothes, set of crockery, and a few more articles besides her wearing apparel she furnished herself. She had a bureau but no bed, only a tick. She going to the church to be married, having no other accommodations whatever after this, we leave her settled in a home of her husband in the south part of Shutesbury.

Now, about the old home again, which was moving on in the same tenor, except after the lapse of about 10 years another son was born to my parents. This sad and I might say joyful event turned the whole current of our lives into an entire new channel. Never can I

reflect back upon it without the saddest thoughts of my whole life. Than it was we all was brought to real sorrow, Mother living only two weeks after the birth of this son, whom she named Alden Bradford before she died. Her strength and constitution not being sufficient to endure after all the privations and hardships she had passed through, she sank beneath the burden, poor Mother. Never can we forget that death bed scene, a mother struggling to live for her children, for well she foresaw their destiny after being left to Father and the mercy of a cold world. I often find myself wondering at all the transactions of this life. Can it be God is responsible for all our actions here? I don't think it is so in all cases. My mother tried to live a Christian life, and joined the Congregational Church in Leverett in 1823, soon after she married and moved to Leverett. She never was robust and healthy any length of time after or before marriage. She being sick two whole years before these, she was unable to baffle the storms of life as she was compelled to after leaving her home and mother.

After the death of Mother, I being the oldest at home, my sister marrying some 2 years before, I was obliged to take upon myself the responsibility of caring for the household and the little baby brother. This myself and sister done, she being 12 years old. The little babe sickened and died in four and a half mo. after Mother died. Now when I think how little experience I had in taking care and doing for the sick, how could Father be so penurious as to put all the care of Mother and the babe upon me, besides doing and caring for a family, I being 17 years old at the time.

In about 8 months, Father after prospecting about lit upon a widow of five months standing, her name being Delana C. Montague, nee Glazier, who once was the wife of Mr. Glazier of No. L. She lived with him five years. He being a great hunter and wrestler received such injuries in so doing as to cause his death. After Father's marriage to this widow he seemed to have obtained the one suited to journey through life with, who seemed calculated to banish all his troubles except the care of a family, this so far as they were very serviceable only. She tried to banish from him and his affections also, which she was in a great measure successful in doing. But alas for the frailty of human life, time flies swiftly away. 33 years have sped away as I now write this since my dear mother passed away, and I where I am I will tell before finishing this narrative.

Soon after the new arrival, I commenced to go to school in a schoolhouse standing in East Leverett, near by the road that leads to Shutesbury and standing near the residence of Sumner Gunn. This was taught by Joshua Everett. After going to school through the winter and braiding some hats to get me some clothes, I went out to work for 1.25 cents a week at the house of John Bell of Old Hadley. Here I staid until exposed to the measles, than returning home expecting to have them but did not at that time.

After being at home for a short time (for I hardly dare to say home) I went away to the Amherst House, a hotel kept by one Albion T. Howe in the town of Amherst. Here I lived over five months, working very hard meanwhile and receiving all manner of abuse on account of my ignorance of matters and things which I had had no means to acquire. After leaving this place I spent a few weeks at home, than went to So. Amherst to work for

David Bartlett, staid as long as they wished to hire me, all the while receiving 1.50 a week. The next place I went to was to Albert Hibbard's of No. Hadley. Here I staid as long as I could endure, being 8 weeks just prior to Thanksgiving, consequently house cleaning and fall's work a plenty, with 12 and 14 in family. Here also twas only 1.50 per week.

Than after staying at home sufficient time to repair and make clothes, I went to work for Thomas Reed of So. Amherst, staid through the winter 3 months, did not work very hard, only 5 or 6 in family 1.50. Again I went out, to live in the family of L. Noble Granger. Here I lived from early spring until late in the fall, 1.50 as usual a week. Tired and worn by being jaunted from place to place, I again sought refuge in the old home of my mother, and as often found I was not an acknowledged guest, being no better than a stranger in a strange land.

Again I went to the same Noble Granger's to work, and oh how hard I did labour, they taking advantage of my friendlessness. Yes, how many the weary and sad times have I felt I had no friends, only One who sticketh closer than a brother. Yes, all through this tiresome journey have I had this same Friend to sustain and guide my erring steps through scenes both dark and drear. After living here another season almost through I again sought refuge under the old roof, free only to spend one night when my services was again sought for to take care of a sick girl by the name of Adeline Stockwell. Here I spent a week of untiring love and devotion nursing her back from the very brink of the grave to life and health. This I done gratuitous, not receiving anything.

Finally, after spending a week here I again went to work for one Levi Adams of Plainville, Hadley. Here I received the enormous sum of two dollars pr week, staying here 8 weeks. I again went to work for Mr. Edwin Cook of Amherst. He being a day labourer, I asked only 1.50 per week, the family consisting of four persons. After living here a few weeks, in mid winter I went direct to one Benj. Adams in Hadley. Here I agreed to stay a year, which to my regret in after years I fulfilled. The family consisted of 14 and 15 members almost the whole year. Round here I received the stipulated sum of 1.67 pr week a year all through being obliged to arise in the morning at the tinkle of the bell, not being allotted any more time or privileges than the American slave was bound to respect or enjoy.

After staying my full time specified, I again sought rest at the old place my mother toiled so hard to make home for herself and children. Here again I was called for to go to work for a cousin who lived in No. Leverett by the name of Aaron Dudley. Here again I worked three months throughout the hottest weather of the season and received 1.75 per week. Here again my strength was taxed to the uttermost, there being a sick woman to take care of besides cooking and making cheese and having 8 and 9 in family to do for. Here I received injuries in my hand which kept me from work a week, suffering both night and day exceedingly. After the space of about three weeks, I again went out to work for a Dr. Asa B. Strong of Leverett village. There again as ever I received 1.50 a week, staying six months until he married one Aurelia Adams of the same place. My task here was not as irksome and heavy as at the farmer's establishment, altho there was a continual round of company. Here it was I renewed old acquaintance with one whom it seemed to be my

destiny to spend my days with thus far on in the journey of life. His name is James Comins of No. Hadley. He once lived in Maine at Ea. Eddington. From thence whilst very young his parents moved to East Leverett. Here he lived several years, attending the same school with myself. They afterwards moved to No. Hadley. Here he lived when renewing our acquaintance, which after two years resulted in our mutual agreement and marriage.

Meanwhile, after completing my stay at the Dr. I went to spend a few weeks taking care of my younger sister, who was married and living in Montague, she having one child than, and that a girl by the name of Flora Ann. I again bent my way homeward for the last time, thanks to fortune. Here I staid a few months getting ready to commence house cleaning and housekeeping, but failing to get a set of buildings built as soon as expected, I once more was sought after to take care of an old lady by the name of Mrs. Joseph Adams of Hadley. Here I lived six weeks when this old lady died at the age of . I afterwards remained at the same place one whole year working for myself and receiving 50 cents a week for doing the work for the old gentleman, when at the expiration of a year I went to a Rev. Geo. E. Fisher of No. Amherst and was united in the bonds of matrimony to James Comins. From there we spent the night at my father's, David Kimball's in Leverett. A snowstorm coming on and clearing of in the night did not retard my husband and father from coming to move my goods in the morning. Than it was we set up housekeeping for ourselves in our own house and home, after being tossed up and down the Connecticut valley and vicinity for the space of seven years. Being very industrious and frugal, I had accumulated enough to commence life with without the aid of anyone, my father not even making a wedding for me or giving me a single dollar. Our family soon numbered five after our marriage, we taking two boarders and keeping a chore boy whose name was James Murphy, being adopted by one Rev. Nelson Jones of Prescott.

Now I must go back to my ancestors once more. My great grandfather's name was Jonathan Gould (I mean my mother's grandfather) who resided in No. Brookfield for a long time when he bought a farm in an adjoining town named New Braintree. There he lived until he died sometime in 18 hundred, I cannot exactly tell when. My grandmother Gould lived many years after, arriving at the advanced age of 99 years, six months and some odd days. She lived just about a mile east of the church of N. B. She drew a pension for a long time prior to her death. Her daughter Mrs. Luke Bartlett lived with her and took all the care of her until death, she being my own grandmother.

Grandmother Gould was so old that she decreased in size so much so she was not much larger than a girl of ten or twelve years. She was rolled from one room to another in a chair made expressly for her and was so blind as to be obliged to eat with her fingers. A gravestone erected to her memory now stands just south of her residence about 50 rods. Her maiden name was Abigail Howe, and a sister of Samuel and Jonathan Howe. Her brother Samuel was the famous almanac maker and a rhymester, one of which runs thus -

The chief end of man is
To gather up riches and cheat all you can

Surely not a very exemplary one but howsome ever it is characteristic of this wicked world or the people who live in it. My own mother and her three sisters lived there with grandmother Gould, my grandfather Bartlett dying sometime in the year 1822. Here my two great uncles lived also, one whose name was Jonathan, the other Daniel Gould. Another one lived nearby whose name was Geo. Gould. He married a Barnes of No. Brookfield and they had seven children, one of which married a Theodore Tyler, one a Liberty Rice. The rest lived single except Thomas, who married a Taft of No. Brookfield. Betsy and Mary Ann Gould lived single, Betsy weighing over two hundred and the sister only about 70 or 80 pounds. Another sister of grandmother Bartlett married a Frost, Jonathan Frost. He lived in Oakham and had four children, all of whom are now dead as far as I know, two of which, Daniel and Bradford, lived in New York and were extensively engaged in the straw bonnet business. Jonathan married a Robinson and left two children, Charles and Clara, she marrying one Moses Fay of Braintree.

My grandfather Bartlett I never saw and knew but very little about, only what my mother told me. My grandmother had other brothers and sisters, one by the name of Jeddiah and Jonas, both enjoying single blessedness.

My mother's two sisters, Mehitable and Abigail, both married after my mother did to two brothers by the name of Charles and Seth Wetherbee of Brookfield. They both went to Maine to live, and both they and my aunts are now dead and have left children, Seth leaving four and Charles five. One of Seth's, Calvin by name, went to the war, contracted disease that terminated his life. Wm. Hilliard and Alden now live in Warren, Me., their native town. Sarah, the youngest, married Joseph Wood Jr. of New Braintree and she has one daughter now 15 yrs old.

Aunt Abigail Wetherbee left five sons, Charles, John, Geo., Liberty, and Lewis. One lives in Belmont (Charles), two in Newton Lower Falls, the other, Liberty, in Plymouth, Me. Lewis drowned himself in a spring. My mother's youngest sister, Nancy Field Bartlett, died 43 years ago, she never being married. She worked out and laboured so hard she contracted a disease called consumption of which ended her days aged 22 years.

Now in regard to my father's kindred I have but little to say. My grandfather Kimball, whose given name was David, I never saw nor don't know of his originality. I only know he married my grandmother whose maiden name was Judith Hunt, but so far I never knew of her origin, but I knew she had one sister by the name of Lucretia Hunt who married one Artemus Pratt, and they as far as I know had three children, one Nancy, who married Cheney Nutting of Leverett, and another Zebrina, and another who lived in Guilford, Vt. My grandfather had a brother Samuel whose descendants live scattered about, some of which now live in Hadley by the name of Erastus Kimball, another Frank in Easthampton. I never have traced out the descendants of my ancestors very thorough, therefore cannot give a minute account of them. My grandmother had a brother Ebenezer Hunt and another Thomas who got his living by going from house to house a begging, a clever, filthy, lazy fellow who finally died being an old man of 60 or 70, supported by the town of Shutesbury. My father's mother lived with a second husband whose name was Daniel

Juckett for, their home being in Shutesbury not far from Cooleyville so-called. They owned a home and several acres of land by which they supported themselves comfortably until their son Leonard became of age, when he took to himself a wife whose maiden name was Eliza Barr of New Braintree. 'Twas then he persuaded the old people to give up their home to him, which they did and very soon found themselves wanderers. Finally when old age overtook them they come upon the town of Shutesbury, dyeing at an advanced old age. Grandmother's children otherwise than by her first husband were Oracy Morgan, who married Apleton King of Amherst, Flat Hills, another by the name of Abigail, who married one Geo. Ayers of Leverett, who has now living 3 girls and 2 boys. The aunt who married a man named King has three children, Peter who married Emma Root of Enfield, and Dency who married Geo. Morton of Hadley, another, Luthera who lives with her father and mother, who now reside at North Hampton. Another half-sister by the name of Judieth Juckett married Silas Kentfield of Enfield, they having one daughter by the name of Judieth Martha Kentfield, who died some six years ago shortly after her mother's death. Aunt Abigail is still living with her children in the town of Monson. Her oldest daughter Sarah and another, Elizabeth, never married, but one Caroline she married one Miles Frederic but does not live with him now as I understand, they having no children. Another daughter whose name was Susie Aurelia married one Morse, she having two children, one girl and one boy, afterwards went into consumption and died about one year ago, aged 33 years. One of the sons married and the other is not. Now for about 25 years I with my husband have occupied this same place where we first settled, which is situated between No. Amherst and Sunderland on the direct road from one to the other. Here we built a new set of buildings in 1852, and in the autumn of the same year we came here to reside and have here lived ever since, 25 years. Within the space of eleven months, a son was born to us who we named Geo. Lester. He the joy and delight of our lives came to cheer and comfort us thus far, being ever a dutiful truthful son, which after procuring what education he could at school went to live with his grandfather and grandmother Simon F. Comins who reside nearby.

Here he still resides, content to look after the interests of the old people with an interest which few would care to assume, this being the sixth or seventh year stay. Some sad and strange experience he has been called to pass through however. His grand sire and grandmother becoming somewhat enfeebled in body and mind became ensnared with their son-in-law Edward P. Hibbard, lent to him the sum of three thousand dollars. Afterwards the said Hibbard became bankrupt which when things came to a crisis was found to be in a bad condition, he owing some 60,000 dollars. This reduced them to penury. Father Comins having pity bought for them the house once owned by Levi Adams of Plainville and gave it to his daughter Martha and her heirs after her. This and other matters in view enraged his (Hibbard's) creditors to such a degree, they came, as is suspected, about two o'clock of night in May, eighteen hundred seventy-four, and set fire to his (S. F. Comins) barn, which was all consumed, together with corn house, hog pen, ice house, carriage house, sheds, most all the farming tools, sleigh, harnesses, mowing machine, fanning mill, grindstone, harrows, two fat hogs, pigs, and by the greatest exertion the house was saved, all the furniture being moved out, some in a damaged condition. Many who exerted themselves to save the house received such injury by being burnt they did not soon

recover, especially the old gentleman himself, who was so burned about the face and on one arm it troubled him for weeks afterward. This, with the shock this fire gave him, soon terminated his life.

The trouble of building a new barn soon fell upon my son and his father, with what help his grandfather could render, was indeed more than they ought to have done. But ere this was complete, Grandfather sank beneath this load, was prostrate almost three weeks with disease of the heart when on one Sabbath eve his life went out without a struggle. Consequently double duty developed upon Geo. my son. He it was who cared for everything and completed the barn. He still cares for his grandmother and the farm, not without some hindrance from those who see fit to try to make trouble however.

Now I will go back to the birth of a daughter born March third 1855. She we called Maria Louisa who is now the stay of my life and my daily companion, who helps me to care for the family and is with me always, only when on a visit to some relative. Yes, may she outlive her mother, for a better nurse in sickness I could not wish, for many the time has she ministered to me in affliction as no other earthly friend could do for me.

Now I will leave her, as still another little stray waif makes an advent into this uncertain world, who we call Nancie Etta. She always a little busybody came to claim a share in our affections which she with the other two always had and always will as long as they have parents to cherish them.

There being but eighteen months difference between these three children, consequently without any help, with all of the household duties devolving upon me, I had both hands full. My husband being obliged to keep hired help kept a lad through the summer. He, with a little boy we adopted by the name of Barney Daurity, serve to do the work on the farm. This boy served eight years which added much to my cares and anxieties. Now my little ones are growing, and I with a tender regard are watching their development from day to day. Whilst they increase in growth their minds must be trained in the way useful to themselves and others.

One little circumstance I will not omit to mention, that is the lightning striking our house when my children were small. It came down the chimney to the roof and followed two lead gutters down to the eaves, entering a post and finally brought up in the cellar. This caused no little trouble besides the shock it gave us. We had considerable repairing to do afterwards, for about every room in the house showed some signs of being affected by electricity. It caused a general shake up. Our looking glass and molasses jug were demolished, besides breaking window glass considerably.

The next year after this event, about or nearly the same time of year, July the fifth, I became a mother the fourth time, this to a son, a large, healthy baby boy who we call Charlie Lowell. My youngest than being almost seven year old, this baby brother was the delight of their life. They would tend and rock him continually. He is now fourteen years old, and short and thick set, and plays the flute and violin, wants his pets, has his rabbits

and doves, likes to take his gun and go hunting pretty well, besides going fishing occasionally. Would be a carpenter if applied to it.

Well, thus far I have said little about my husband. He was born in East Eddington, Maine. His parents, Simon F. Comins and Nancy T. Sweet, were married in the year 1827 and commenced housekeeping in the State of Maine. Here they had two children born to them, one a son James and another daughter Nancy, just fourteen months between their ages. After this event, one day wishing to visit some friends, they took the children and left some neighboring children to keep house, who in those days used to cook by an open fireplace, in some way through carelessness set fire to their dwelling, which was laid in ruins, the children being off to school the meanwhile. This was a drawback to their prosperity which turned the current of their lives perceptibly. This was to change their location from Maine to Massachusetts, which they did in mid winter, moving all their affects on a one-horse sled all the way from Maine to Mass. This today would indeed seem a tedious affair.

They than located with his father, who lived in the town of Leverett, East Leverett so-called, his father's name being James Comins and was called Capt. many years. His native place was in the town of Charlton, Mass. Moving to Leverett he bought real estate extensive, owned the house and lived where Robert Fitts once lived after Capt. Comins died. His first wife died several years before he died. Her maiden name was Nancy or Annie Rider, who died at Leverett July 24th, 1817, age 48 yrs. Capt. Jas. Comins died May 31, 1833, age 67. Afterwards Nancy, his oldest daughter, died at her brother Simon's at No. Hadley July 4, 1842, age 46 years, she being totally blind for many yrs. Another son of Capt. Comins died from wounds received whilst reaping rye and in consequence had a limb amputated at the knee and died Oct. 30th, 1820, age 22 yrs. Another son of Capt. _ whose name was Asa Comins, who once lived in Leverett and married a Nancy Smith by whom he had two children whose names were Coolidge and Saphronia, died at his brother Simond's in No. Hadley. His brother Simon died at No. Hadley, he leaving three children, the eldest son bearing the name of James, and a daughter Nancy, the wife of R. M. Montague. She died some five years prior to her father, June 25, '69, aged 40, she leaving six daughters, one a babe five days old.

Another son Capt. J. Comins has now living in the town of Erving. His name is Stephen Decatur, he having 3 children now living, 1894, two daughters dying of consumption, the youngest after going to the region of California to regain her health returns to her home to die. Her name was Clara Bell. Still another daughter afflicted with the same disease, after going to the same climate, returns to her father's house to die, she baring the name of Arabell A. Comins. The three children of Stephen D. who now survive are John S. who with his wife Lettie live in Holyoke, Mass., another who lives in Erving by the name of Herbert Geo., Stephen by profession a Dr. Dentist married a Miss Helen Hubbard, they have 3 children, Helen, Fred, and Roxy. Still there is one daughter Isabell who cares for her father in his declining years.

Asa Comins, who lived with his first wife a few years, was called to part with her by death

at the age of 25 yrs. He afterwards married a Miss Delia Noble by whom he had 3 more children, one son James Comins choosing the profession of M. D. now living in N. Y. City and living with his third wife, his first wife still lives (had one son Frank Comins) and married to L. B. Fish, a daughter also now being widowed bearing the name of H. N. Simonds lives in the town of Gill. She has two sons, Nelson M. and Jessie C., the first or eldest being married to a widow Bemis. They have one daughter Susie 9 months old. Jessie lives at Greenfield with a Mr. Alonzo Graves at Pine Grove. Another daughter of Asa is married to Marshall Brown. They have only one daughter Maud and live in the town of Chelsea, she being a M. D.

This Simon Comins had four children in all, the next to Mrs. Nancy Montague being a son Henry Campbell who married H. Helen Smith. She died two years ago, leaving one son Willie who married a Miss Myra Ball, had one son Chas. and was divorced. He married again to Miss Cornelia Lombard of N. Y., now has two children, Henry E. 2 years old and _ Thy live in Hadley.

Another daughter of Simon is Martha Ann, married to Ed Payson Hibbard, who now live at_. They have only two children living, having buried two little_Martha and Chas., who was scalt so he died _Frank, the next oldest, married a Miss Clara Brooks of Bernardston, now lives at Worcester, having buried his wife three years ago, she leaving two children. Mary, the daughter, married Geo. Crafts of Hadley. They have two children, son whose name is Paul Crafts.

Notes by Stewart Coffin

Since the original manuscript contains practically no punctuation, I have added a few marks to improve the readability. There are probably some mistakes, as the photocopy of the manuscript that I have is faint and hard to read. This is now stored on computer, so corrections are easily made.

Although begun in 1877, evidently Louisa's last entries were made in the year 1894, shortly before her death at age 68. I do not see any change in her handwriting, which remained strong.

The last I knew, the house that David Kimball built still stood at the north end of Number Six Road in Leverett. It was owned by the Elder family of Amherst and used for a weekend camp. The surrounding land, on the southern slopes of Brushy Mountain, is nearly as wild now as it was back then, and one can easily imagine little Mary wandering off to become lost and wedged amongst the rocks.

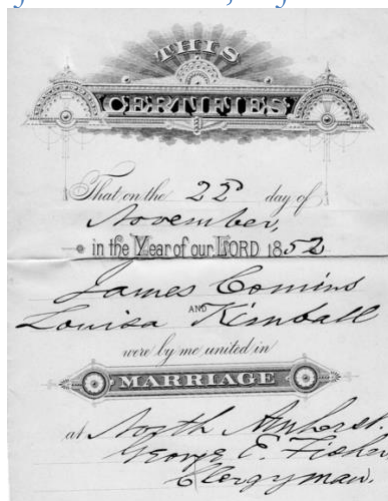
The farm where Louisa and James took up housekeeping, and where my mother's generation grew up too, is unrecognizable today, but the old house still stands at 56 Comins Road in North Hadley. The Simon Comins house also still stands, about a half-mile away on the River Road.

Concerning the family genealogy, that is a subject too large to go into here, so I will confine myself to only a few comments and corrections. The graves of Louisa's great-grandparents, Jonathan and Abigail (Howe) Gould are in the churchyard in the center of New Braintree, and the old Gould Farm east of the church one-half mile was most recently owned by W. E. Loftus.

David Kimball's father was probably Ebenezer, not David, who in turn was the son of Boice Kimball of Shutesbury. Prior to that, the Kimball family genealogy is well known and published. The ancestry of Judith Hunt, David's mother, remains a mystery which perhaps could be solved with a little research. David and his second wife Delana are buried in the East Leverett Cemetery.



The view of the old Comins Farm was taken in 1890 and shows, left to right, Nancy, Louisa, James, and the hired boy. [Second daughter Nancy Etta Comins, b. September 30, 1856, d. April 04, 1936, Husband James Comins, b. June 23, 1827, d. March 01, 1921](#)





Louisa Photo from Reprint by Abbie's grandfather Robert Leighton Coffin



Youngest child Charles Lowell Comins, b. July 05, 1863, d. December 06, 1936,
Abbie's great-grandfather



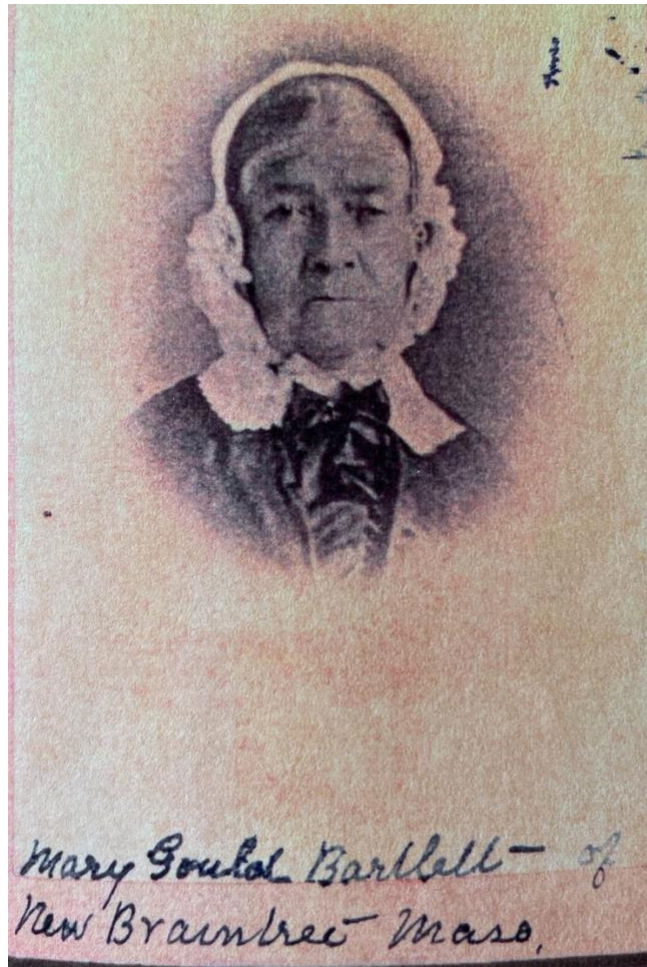
Oldest child George Lester Comins b. September 28, 1853, d. June 26, 1932



Louisa's daughter Nancy



Parents of Louisa's husband, Nancy Tyler (Sweet) Comins b. March 13, 1803, d. October 9, 1879
and Simon Forbes Comins b. February 12, 1803, d. December 12, 1875



Mary Gould Bartlett - of
New Braintree Mass.

Photo is labeled "Mary Gould Bartlett," in Aunt Nancy's handwriting, which I assume to be Louisa's grandmother in very old age, and not to be confused with the maiden name of Louisa's mother. I cannot find any photo of Louisa's first daughter Maria, nor of either of her parents. [My father's reference to Aunt Nancy is likely meaning Louisa's second daughter.](#)



The Kimball Place in Everett

This story was written by Abbie as a 2022 literary contest entry for the Hardwick Community Fair based on Louisa's autobiography and genealogy records from Ancestry.com. Louisa's manuscript can be viewed at Comins.org on the web page titled Life of Louisa Bowman Kimball Comins. Louisa is Abbie's great-great grandmother on her father's side.

My Life Story for My Grandson Roy and His Descendants

My message to you as your grandmother is to keep your head high and not give up hope that there will be a better tomorrow. Do not let bullies and mean people bother you. You have value and importance in this world. Looking back in your old age, you will be proud of your inner strength and patient endurance. There is a Good God that will provide for you despite terrible circumstances.

My full name is Mary Lucy Kimball Pratt. I am the oldest of six and was born October 3, 1824. I was raised in poverty in the middle of the woods. My school and church in Leverett center were two miles away. I wore thread bare clothing and was often hungry. Sometimes I would satisfy my appetite by eating a raw potato.

My father's main income came by clearing land. He converted fallen trees by controlled burning to charcoal. He delivered charcoal with a cart pulled by oxen to villagers and earned seven to ten cents per bushel. He was away from home in the forest or on the road for many hours of the day.

Life was difficult in isolation from neighbors and community. My parents related how I wandered away as a toddler and was not found for two days. My body was wedged between large rocks near our hay field. My younger brother David Dwight died one month after his second birthday from pneumonia in 1830.

An Enfield based palm-leaf hat industry offered home based work to nearby towns including Leverett. Like many poor children, I learned how to braid palm leaves when I was four years old. The income helped pay for school supplies and clothing. Best quality hats could earn as much as 12 cents. Some sold for only 4 cents. I did not keep track of how many I made. However, I believe the number is in the thousands. I liked making hats with my mother and younger sister near our cooking hearth in our primitive cabin. I felt loved and happy inside my home.

My positive self-image was shattered by my schoolmates. I felt the sting of poverty when wearing my shabby clothes. I was teased for being dirty when my father picked me up at school for a ride home in his empty coal cart. At home the work and chores were often overwhelming. The most pleasant work was braiding hats late into the night with a torch burning knotted pitch pine. Outside chores included loading my father's cart with coal, milking cows, leading cattle to and from pasture, removing field stones, picking apples and

chestnuts, digging potatoes, and grinding grain. I was scrawny and tired quickly from many tasks demanding stamina and muscles.

When I was 14 years old my father kept me out of school to help him harvest hay. I was much cheaper and more subordinate than a hired hand. At the end of summer, I was offered a job as a live in housekeeper. In the beginning housekeeping was humiliating and confusing since I knew very little about refinement and cleanliness. For example, my family stuffed old newspapers in wood wall cracks to keep out cold and vermin. The use of a feather duster on plaster walls and ceilings needed to be explained to me. Cleaning and polishing dinnerware until spotless seemed at first like a waste of time and water.

After being trained as a housekeeper and having my very own bedroom, I never returned to live in my childhood home. Without the obligation of working for my father, I attended church every Sunday. I made friends and began to fit in better with civilized society. I used my money to buy myself proper clothing.

I met your grandfather Charles Edwin Pratt at a church supper and married him at age 18. We lived in his family home in Shutesbury. Your grandfather continues to be a skilled brick layer and farmer. I loved the comforts of my new house and the company of my husband's parents. I thank God that I found a good home and kind husband. I had security and respectability.

Despite my comfortable circumstances, I was burdened with worry for my siblings and parents. With sadness and hopelessness, I grieved the steady decline of my mother's health. My father was callous and provided very little care nor sympathy. My teenaged sister, who you know as your Great Aunt Louisa, nursed my mother, and took care of the household chores. Your great grandmother Mary Gould Bartlett Kimball died two weeks after giving birth to a sixth child at age 42. The baby boy Alden Bradford died four months later. This very sad event was not mourned by my father for long. He married again soon to a young widow, Delana Montague. My father and his new wife made me feel unwelcome during visits. I could sympathize with my younger sister leaving home abruptly to become a housekeeper and earn her own living.

Your grandfather and I became parents to a baby in 1846 and named her Mary Lovina Pratt. Aunt Mary never married and takes wonderful care of me in my old age. Your father, Rector Montague, was born in 1852. In 1872 your father married your mother, Marie Kendall. You were born a year later.

As mentioned in the beginning of my story, my childhood was difficult. I recall many situations of cruelty and hardship. You, my grandson, bring me great joy. Your presence reminds me that my past sadness and deprivations have been replaced with present happiness and fulfillment. My wish for you is a bright future. I hope that your descendants will remember their ancestors with pride and gratitude.