

*Diary of*  
*James Knickerbottom*

*Born Sept. 12, 1853*  
*Meford, Oregon*

January 13, 1870

My resolution for this new year is to write regularly in this journal. I'll put down my thoughts and ideas and tell about what happened in my days.

I'm not really sure what I will write about or if I have anything to say, but it's important to put all this information down somewhere, for posterity, if nothing else. I am 23 years of age now and it's time I started behaving like a man. In June I will be married to my darling Claire and I must be more organized

and less disreputable. She is a good woman, lovely and wonderful, and I vow to be a good husband to her.

January 25

So much for writing in this regularly, but nothing much has been happening. Weather is harsh, but I am working hard.

March 29

I have enlisted. The war is over, so I believe it is a safe enough occupation. I need to do something to ensure a

livelihood for Claire and I. I am scheduled to begin service May 1. I am not sure what this will mean for my engagement. We'd planned a wedding for June but perhaps it will have to be done earlier.

April 14

Tomorrow I be joined with Claire for life. In May I leave Fort Siskie for a month of training and then I'll be on assignment so Claire wanted us to be married before I leave.

We have been talking about this for

a long time and I am excited as well as frightened. What if I cannot provide for her? A soldier does not make very much money and the work is difficult and dangerous. I worry about our future.

April 28

Tomorrow I leave begin my journey to Fort Siskie. I will be gone for more than a month and already I am loathe to leave Claire's side. She is as loving a woman as anyone could want. I am a rich man, in love if

not in gold!

June 15

Training has been difficult. I am older than many of the new recruits, so expectations are higher for me. The officers are not kind. Their mission seems to be to make life so arduous that we quit.

However, I cannot do that. I have a wife now, and possibly children in the future, and I need this income. The Northwest is a beautiful land, but it is harsh and unforgiving,

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especially in the winter and for people like myself.

Dec 24

It has been a long time since I have written, but it is nearly Christmas and I am lonely. I was not given leave to visit home, so Claire and I are still apart. I wonder if I was foolish to join the army. I must serve at least four years, however. I just hope Claire has the patience to wait for my return.

May 3, 1872

It has been years since I've written in here. I have not lived up to my resolution. However, I do have an excuse in that I've been very busy. Life as a soldier has improved. I enjoy my work now, though it is not easy. We patrol the entire Northwest area, from California all the way to the Columbia. Daily life is mostly about the routine of living — eating, traveling, and sleeping, but it's mostly all about waiting for something to happen. I go out with



my patrol and we search for villains and outlaws, or we visit towns to assist the people with their needs.

This past winter was especially harsh and there were many in need.

We rescued a small boy lost in the Santiam area. It is a beautiful place. I should love to buy a farm and live there someday.

Sometimes there are troubles with the Indians. They are not happy to see us take over what they think is their land. They do not understand and sometimes attack innocent

homesteaders, though fortunately that is more and more rare.

We also hunt outlaws and occasionally life is very exciting.

Last summer we found a man named Grassmyer that had killed his wife and fled into the woods. It took has two weeks to track him and we finally cornered him in a cave. He shot at us and wounded one of my men in the thigh. It was a standoff for three days before one of my men managed to wing Grassmyer and I was able to take him down with

a shot to the temple. I received a commendation from Commander Baylor.

July 6

Two weeks off and it is bliss to be in my sweet Claire's arms again. We have celebrated two years of marriage though I have been too far from her for most of that time.

August 29

I have received word that I am to be a father! I cannot express my joy

and terror at such news. While wonderful, I worry about being able to provide for a family, though Claire assures me that everything will be fine and that my military pay, while meagre, is sufficient.

Dec 12

It seems I shall be lucky and be able to spend Christmas with my sweet Claire. I have not seen her nearly enough this past year, though my commander assures that will be change next year. He is pleased with

my work and has made arrangements for me to be transferred to a post closer to home. I am overjoyed, but worry that this is a false hope and that something bad will happen to change everything.

March 25, 1873

I am now the father of baby boy, Eli Grover Knickerbottom! He is vibrant and healthy and Claire is more beautiful than ever. We are both so proud. The birth was

difficult — the midwife was here for two days — but I am grateful that all are healthy.

It has been too long since I've written my thoughts here, but I shall try and be more conscientious in doing that now that I'm a father and have greater responsibilities.

My duties have increased, though now I am able to live near Claire.

I am stationed at Fort Santiam near Salem and I am allowed four days at home every two weeks. It is bliss and we are very happy.

I had thought I did not like being a soldier, but now that I am close to home and get to lead other men, it is not so bad at all. In fact, I enjoy it most of the time. The work is routine and there is little danger, though occasionally there's a skirmish with Indians or outlaws that involves gunplay. For the most part, however, just the presence of a military force is enough to dissuade anyone from violence.

April 9, 1876

I cannot believe it has been so long since I've written in this journal! So much for my resolution to be more of an adult and preserve my thoughts!

Much has happened since I last wrote here. I now have two sons and I've been promoted to sergeant.

Claire is still well, though our relationship is occasionally rocky.

I am still away too much for her liking and she feels the burden of raising two children on her own. Eli is growing so fast it is amazing! He



is up to my hip now and runs around like a whirling dervish, as active as a kitten. His baby brother, Thomas, is just beginning to crawl. I am blessed.

Sept 6

Tragedy has struck our family. Last month my wife's brother, Alan, grew ill with fever and this morning he has passed. We are in mourning. Claire was very close to her brother and he helped out around the house here often. Life will be more difficult for

her going forward. Once again, I am contemplating my life choices and wondering how we shall survive.

Dec 2, 1880

Again it has been far too long since I've written in this journal. I do not know why I find it so difficult to take the time. I do write long letters to Claire and the children when I am away, so perhaps that is where most of my thoughts go.

The boys are growing up wonderfully. I only wish I was here more to see

them. The life of a soldier is not easy. I often consider resigning my commission, but then how will I provide for my family? If only I could save enough to buy a small farm or some means of income. I've tried desperately to save, but there's always something — a new baby, clothing, an illness, repairs to the house, taxes — that comes along and the money must be spent for other things. It is frustrating. I have been given several income adjustments but it is never enough. The cost of goods keep rising! Just last year the price of

bread was a nickel and now Claire tells me it costs seven cents! It is a troubling trend.

August 17, 1881

Life may be changing soon. The news has come that my great-uncle William's health is dwindling. He is leaving me a small legacy that shall enable me, along with my pension, to secure land of my own and start my own farm. I am excited, though that may not happen for several years, at least hope is on

horizon.

May 3, 1883

I know it has been forever since I've written here, but something significant has happened and I must preserve my thoughts.

Last week I was sent to apprehend a villain named "Mississippi" Joe Mason. Two weeks earlier he murdered a sheriff who tried to arrest him and fled to the Santiam wilderness, but no one has been able to locate him.

Since that is my territory, I was commissioned to find him. Joe was wanted for piracy and murder for crimes in the mid-west where he robbed scores of ships on the Mississippi river. It was thought that he was injured in the shootout with the sheriff and he's considered extremely dangerous.

My men and I set out with a plan. I figured that a man of Joe's background would be most comfortable along a river, but he'd probably stay away from a more

populated area like the Willamette. I thought I'd try the North Santiam as that is not much traveled and it leads away from a populated area where an injured man would draw attention to himself.

For three days we explored along the river with no sign of the man. Even the dogs were useless. My men grew discouraged. This seemed a fool's mission as we had no idea which direction Joe had gone. Most of the men seemed convinced he would have headed north to Portland where he

could get on a freighter and leave the area, or perhaps go south to California. The knowledge that Joe was said to have thousands in stolen gold wasn't comforting, because it meant he'd be able to buy his way to freedom and as government employees, we weren't allowed to keep the substantial reward for Joe's capture like civilians.

I sent two of my most unhappy men home. The rest of us separated to cover more area.

It was perhaps just luck that I



noticed the blood. It was on a leaf of a low-hanging oak near a double sandbar. I suspect that Joe was wading in the water, perhaps bathing his wound, and he used the tree to pull himself from the water. I noticed the red leaf and thought that was odd as it is not fall. When I studied it, I realized the blood was no more than a few days old.

I grew excited and considered firing my rifle to alert my men, who couldn't have been more than a few miles downstream, but I hesitated.

I'm not sure why. Perhaps I didn't believe the blood was Joe's. Maybe I was already filled with gold fever.

I won't bore you with the details, but I found Joe! He was deep in the woods, holed up under a grove of small trees. He was lying in the shade. His skin was sallow and I knew instantly he'd suffered a mortal wound. He had a weapon, but didn't even have the strength to hold it. Nevertheless I approached cautiously and when I was close enough, I kicked the Colt away.

I shall never forget the cold blackness in those gaunt eyes. They were so intense and filled me with trepidation. He stared at me without speaking. He seemed to be waiting for me to shoot him, but though my rifle was trained upon him, I did not fire. There was no point. He was already dead.

I knelt near him. I recognized him from his picture so I didn't need to ask his name. But he had changed considerable from the photograph which was clearly years out of date.

He was old and worn out, his skin leathery and wrinkled. His beard was thick and matted, though still jet-black and as dark as sin. When he smiled at me, I saw many blackened and missing teeth.

"You're here for the gold," he said to me.

"No, I'm here for justice," I said boldly, though I'll confess my ears did perk up and my heart beat faster at the mention of gold. Had I subconsciously sent my men on their own for just this scenario? If I was

to capture Joe myself, who would know if I kept some of the gold?

Joe laughed at my response. His laughter turned into coughing and vivid crimson blood emerged from his mouth and splattered his clothes and trickled down his beard. He did not have much time left. I could see his waist was soaked with old blood.

His wound was festering. It was a miracle he'd lived as long as he had.

"You'll never find it," he told me. "I buried it."

*“There is no gold. You’re bluffing.”*

*He looked at me bayfully. He shrugged, the effort making him cough blood again. When the spasms stopped, he sighed. “I suppose it doesn’t matter. I’m not taking it with me.”*

*“The gold doesn’t matter anyway. I’m not allowed to keep it.”*

*“A loyal boy, are you?” He laughed, cough, and waved me closer. His voice was growing weaker. “There’s a map,” he muttered darkly.*

“A map?”

“I thought I’d be caught so I hid the gold. That was back before this” — he nodded toward his hip where the bloodstain was the darkest — “became infected and I assumed I’d survive. I made myself a map so I could find it again.”

I wasn’t sure I believed him, but I decided to humor him. “Where’s the map?” I demanded.

“Why should I tell you?”

“Why not?”

“Go to hell,” he growled.

“It can’t be on your person,” I said.

“That would be too easy. But in your condition, you can’t have gone far. If you hid the map recently, it would have to be around here close by.”

His eyes glowed briefly and I knew instantly that my reasoning was correct. My heart pounded faster.

“You’ll never find it,” he mumbled, his words slurring. Then his head slumped forward and he was dead.



Once I confirmed he was deceased I looked around the area for the map, but could find no trace of it. It was beyond frustrating, but I also had a duty. After an hour of fruitless searching, I fired my rifle three times to attract the attention of my men. I then made my way back to the river. Already an idea was forming in my mind.

May 7

It has been days since I found the body of "Mississippi" Joe Mason.

I was given a commendation and much applaud, but the financial benefits were an insult. A mere \$25 bonus was put in my account. The government saved the reward money they would have paid a civilian for finding the outlaw.

But a part of me doesn't care. I know Joe's secret. There was much fuss over what happened to Joe's gold. Many suspect he hid it, while others claim he was a terrible gambler and lost it all over the years. That is possible, but there was

something about the way Joe spoke to me when he died that made me believe him. Why make a map if there is nothing to hide? Of course, I still have to find the map, but I'm sure it can't be far from where he died. I'm so glad I moved the body before I brought the others.

May 15

I am so excited, but I dare not write the news even here! If someone finds this, my secrets will be out. But let's just say that my fortunes are about to

change!

Oct 22

So much has happened over the past few months, I'm not even sure where to begin. First, I should point out that my great-uncle William passed away earlier this year and this summer I received an inheritance. It was not as much as I anticipated, which was disappointing, but it was still enough for me to purchase some land of my own.

The land I bought... let's just say

it was inspired by Joe, if you get my meaning. No, I still have not found what I'm seeking — that damned paper is too vague to be of much use — but I am going to find it or die in the attempt. I know it must be on the property somewhere and I will find it!

March 3, 1885

Still no success at my ultimate quest, though my new farm is doing well enough. I tore down the old farmhouse and built a larger

and much nicer place in the same location. It is not an easy life and it chaffs me to have to work in the fields when I should be looking for my reward, but I won't stop until I find it.

July 29, 1888

I've made progress. I believe I've narrowed down my quest, but the final goal still eludes me. It is exasperating.

Nov 3, 1890

Claire and I fight constantly. Though I long ago resigned my commission from the army, I now wonder if that was wise. Our relationship was easier when we didn't live together!

She claims she does most of the work to keep the farm going. I suppose that is true, as I am spending more and more of my time looking for my reward. She does not understand and

*I dare not explain.*

*There are rumors and we occasionally hear about people in the area talking about Joe and looking for his gold.*

*Several times I've been approached by those asking me about him, as they've learned I was the one who discovered his body. Of course, I always point them in the wrong direction. I am patient. I will find it.*



Dec. 2, 1892

*I dare not write my secrets in here any more. They are watching me. Everyone is out to steal my treasure. I know it is here and I will find it. Claire says I'm obsessed and shouts at me. I rarely sleep in the house any more. I prefer the forest. I dig and dig and dig, but so far no luck. I will find it. I know I will. It is out there and I will find it.*

1895?

*I'm not sure what year it is. Time is funny. If you don't have a calendar, it does not mean much. Other than the seasons, I cannot know that anything has changed. The woods are so peaceful.*

*Other than a bad tooth that is paining me and a bad leg from a fall last winter, I am in reasonable health. I have roamed far from home lately. I have been learning more about Joe's last days and I believe I am very close to finding my reward.*

I am beyond certain I know within a hundred yards of where he hid it, but the last clue is so devilishly convex I cannot know if Joe's map is lying or if there's some other devious scheme. I will find it, however. I know I will.

1897?

I visited home today. Eli is a grown man now. I cannot believe it. I spoke with him at length. He was cold to me at first, resenting my long absences. Indeed, we are scarcely father and son. But I confided my

secrets with him and I told him about this journal and how important it is to keep it hidden. It contains everything one needs to find my reward. Look carefully inside it and you will find the answer.

My health is poor and if I cannot complete my quest, perhaps Eli shall do it for me. I know Joe's legacy is here and I shall find it.







