

# A day in the life of an earnest youth

## Chores, church and laborious reading

By June W. Kennedy  
Staff Correspondent

**A**lbert E. Davis lived on Depot Street in the home now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Peter Shestok. His father was a victim of the Civil War; his mother carried on a millinery shop in her home in order to support her family and help send her son, Albert, to college.

Davis, himself, tutored two sisters from Littleton and contracted tuberculosis from them. Although he did graduate from Westford Academy, Harvard College and served as preceptor of Westford Academy, he did not live a long life due to his illness.

In this first of a two-part series, Davis' diary affords a glimpse into the everyday social, political and religious life in Westford, life at Harvard College, as well as insight into his own personality and thoughts:

*Friday, Nov. 13, 1857* — "Very mild and somewhat rainy. I arose about half past five and studied until 6½ o'clock. I read 20 pages of Latin and it was easier and more interesting; have only 30 pages more to read about the Junger-thirim War. I whisper a great deal and Mr. Long thumped me once or twice for my disobedience and I ought to do better."

(Mr. Long was the preceptor of Westford Academy in 1857. He later became the governor of the state of Massachusetts.)

"In the evening went down to Miss Rogers' room and spent the time very pleasantly. Wm. Parker, a scholar, was in also. She seems to feel bad at leaving the scholars...is coming back the first of next term to help organize and thinks of returning next spring.

"I enjoyed her company and she invited me to visit her again before her departure. It was very dark when I went down but when I came home, the stars were clearly seen and towards the north a bright fire as if a burning of tar for a bonfire. It is pleasant to contemplate the works of nature."

*Saturday, Nov. 14, 1857* — "The ground froze considerably last

night; very cold today. I husked corn in the forenoon and had to work fast to keep warm. In the afternoon we got in corn and gathered turnips.

"When night came I felt tired and not much like study; read the papers and translated six pages of Latin.

"The papers are full of the cries of 'hard times' and, indeed, they are; many 'poor people' will suffer this winter for want of means to live comfortably."

*Sunday, Nov. 15, 1857* — "Pleasant but very cold. I did not rise this morning until after the sun was up and it is rather late for me. Was going to church but father said he wanted me to help move the stove, so staid at home.

"Got a chance to read the Boston Cultivator and was much interested in the different articles, more so than usual; also studied my Sunday lesson and gained much information. In the afternoon Warren Read (the Reads lived in the Drew, now Moulton, farmhouse) came up to see me, and we had a familiar chat about worldly affairs, and in the barn too, as he would not come in.

"Then helped father carry our turnips, apples and pumpkins down cellar, for he was afraid they would be frozen tonight. In the evening studied my lessons and wrote.

"Can I take a retrospective view of today and feel that I have done right? Mother urged me to go to church and I think that I ought to have gone. The thought often strikes me that I am not doing right in not preparing my address for examination as Mr. Long requested me."

*Monday, Nov. 16, 1857* — "Very pleasant in the morning, cloudy and appearance of rain. I wanted to rise early this morning and was awake at 5 o'clock, but did not rise until 6 for I was most too sleepy. The school room was cold and smoky, therefore I could not study much. Read about 15 pages of Latin and at noon Mr. Long asked for my salutatory address and was sorry not to receive it; told me that I must learn some Latin out of Cicero or speak an old piece as it was not fair for me to back out, for they would expect something of me.

"In the evening, studied until 7, then as I determined to try, wrote over two pages of papers in

imitation of a salutatory; retired at 10½ o'clock."

*Thursday, Nov. 19, 1857* — "Cloudy but very pleasant and comfortable. Gave my 'oration' to Mr. Long for inspection and he said it would do very well. Read 20 pages of Latin and found it interesting."

*Tuesday, Nov. 22, 1857* — "Cold and cloudy all day. I did not read examination but my declamation. There were not many in this forenoon and the classes recited well. We met again at 2 o'clock for the exercises of the exhibition and the hall was crowded.

"As the salutatory address of course is first, I went upon the stage very well and without fear. The declamation, compositions and dialogues were interesting and well recited.

"In the evening, I and Ellen went to the L'eeve and during the eve, the present was given to Miss Rogers and she briefly responded. There was music and songs, supper of which oysters formed a good part, and dancing the last of the evening.

"I was invited to dance but chose not to, but Miss Rogers and Mr. Long enjoyed themselves in this way most of the time, I presume, for I came home at 1 o'clock. Mr. Long said I had done well this term and should not have to study hard this winter. I bid them both good bye."

*Monday, Feb. 22, 1858* — Pleasant and warm for the season. I arose with the sun but that was not early. Did enough for exercise and had a delightful walk to the depot with two cans of milk which were not very light."

*Wednesday, March 1858* — "Pleasant and good sleighing; all seems beautiful but I felt disagreeable on account of my cold. In the afternoon helped get up wood and seemed to feel better after exercise of this kind."

*Sunday, March 1858* — "Cloudy and mild with threat of a storm. In



Albert E. Davis

the morning read history and went to meeting all day. There was a meeting at the Unitarian church and Mr. Willard preached. The house was well filled on account of the organ, as they have got a new one.

"Thus it is with the fashionable world and everything is sacrificed to the God of Fashion if we deign to imitate the ancients — in the multiplicity of deities. I was delighted with the tones of the new instrument and suppose all were, as that was what they came for and I like the sermons, too, and especially in the afternoon when he spoke upon the morality of Westford."

*Thursday, April 15, 1858* — "Pleasant and beautiful day for any pleasure or labor. As it is the annual Fast-Day, there is no school."

June W. Kennedy is a Westford resident and author of "Westford Recollections," a series of historical vignettes and photos.