



Old

Prison Street

Cemetery.



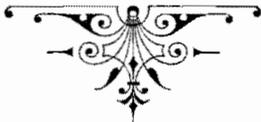
Exercises and Address,

April 14, 1904, Keene, N. H.



FRANK H. WHITCOMB

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KEENE, N. H.



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Prison Street

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Exercises at the House of

Miss Frances M. Colony

Keene, New Hampshire.

Held by the

Daughters of the American Revolution,

April 14, 1904.

ASHUELOT CHAPTER, D. A. R.

A large number of the members of Ashuelot Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, were very delightfully and hospitably entertained on Thursday afternoon, April 14, 1904, at the home of Miss Frances M. Colony, 143 West street. She was assisted in receiving by the regent, Mrs. Fanny Blake Colony Barrett. There were about fifty members present, and the exercises were of unusual interest.

The report of the Memorial work committee, relating to the old cemetery on Washington street, was received, and on motion Mrs. Horatio Colony, action deferred until the next regular meeting.

After the regular order of business had been disposed of, Mr. Frank H. Whitcomb delivered an address on the "Old Prison Street Cemetery," and Mrs. Henry C. Allen read a delightful account of the lineal descendants of Israel Putnam of Danvers, where she formerly lived, and in that vicinity, where there is so much of historic interest.

After the exercises, a delicious collation was served, Mrs. Horatio Colony

presiding in the dining room and being assisted by Mrs. H. H. Colony, Mrs. A. L. Wright, Miss Mary Tuttle, Miss Annie Hubbard and Miss Margaret Whitcomb.

MR. WHITCOMB'S ADDRESS.

Old Prison Street Cemetery.

Madam Regent and Members of Ashuelot Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution:

The principal object of your society, is "To perpetuate the memory of the spirit of the men and women who achieved American Independence by the acquisition and protection of historical spots and the erection of monuments, and by the preservation of documents and relics and of the record of the individual services of Revolutionary soldiers and patriots." When it was announced that the Daughters desired to improve the appearance of the Washington street cemetery, no great surprise was occasioned. The community, now well assured of their interest in, and devotion to, the primal object of their organization, inquired,

“What will not the Daughters do next?”

Briefly stated the public acts of Ashelot Chapter, which have won the admiration of our citizens, are as follows: April 21, 1897, a tablet was placed upon the house of Mrs. Susan K. Perkins on Main street, where the soldiers met, April 21, 1775, to start for Lexington; May 30, 1900, the second burial place of the early settlers of Keene, a part of the Henry O. Spaulding farm in West Keene, was re-dedicated, and a boulder erected; April 21, 1902, a large granite boulder was unveiled at the corner of Main and Baker streets, to mark the road taken by the patriots on April 21, 1775, in response to the Lexington alarm; September 19, 1902, a bronze tablet was unveiled at the Thayer library building, erected to the memory of the soldiers of the American Revolution from Keene.

The old Prison street (now Washington street) cemetery, which may have been somewhat neglected, but not wholly desecrated like the first place of interment at the lower end of Main street, contains many monuments of great historical interest, besides the stones that mark the resting place of several Revolutionary heroes. Any labor performed by the chapter to improve the condition of this yard is therefore most appropriate. This spot has been used for the burial of the dead since the year 1795. Mr. W. S. Briggs said in his mortuary articles published about

twenty years ago, that it had been used as early as the year 1788, but the town records definitely settle the date. At a town meeting held on the twenty-fifth day of May, 1795, it was voted to raise eighty pounds to purchase and fence burying grounds in the several districts. At this time the town was divided for the sake of convenience into five districts for burial purposes. Previous to 1795, the burying ground used by the people living near the centre had been the original one at the south end of Main street, but during the spring of that year, the new yard on Prison street was opened for burial. The exact date may be determined by inspecting a grave stone erected over the first body interred there. It was that of John Holland Johnson, the seven years old son of Moses Johnson, who died April 22, 1795. His grave is a short distance southeast of the entrance. There are earlier records on the stones. Eliphalet Briggs died Oct. 11, 1776, of the small pox and was buried at the foot of the hill, on the road leading to Roxbury; Mrs. Sarah Wilder died March 8, 1780; but the body of Sarah Wilder was probably removed from the old cemetery on Main street. Grave stones in that yard giving an earlier date than 1795 are those marking the resting place of bodies removed from other places or erected as memorials.

On the fifth day of January, 1796, Thomas Edwards conveyed to the In-

habitants of the town of Keene a certain parcel of land in Keene bounded as follows, to wit: "Beginning at the southwest corner of land I deeded to Anson Briggs on the east side of the road leading from the Meetinghouse in said Keene to Sullivan; thence southerly on said road ten rods; thence easterly parallel to said Briggs' south line upon the division fence between him and me as the fence now stands twenty-eight rods containing one acre and three quarters; the same being for the sole use of the Inhabitants of the First Burying District in said town and to be used as such, and further respecting said bounds at the end of the aforesaid twenty-eight rods easterly as above mentioned; thence running northerly to said fence, being twenty-eight rods from said road where it strikes said fence; thence on sd. fence on the line aforesaid to the first mentioned corner."

The witnesses were Bela Hall, Noah Cooke, and the deed was acknowledged before Jeremiah Stiles, a Justice of the Peace.

The deed was not received for record until July 4, 1797.

As early as the year 1789, the town had appointed a committee with power to call on their neighbors to turn out and fence the several burying places, without pay. At first the new cemetery was surrounded with a stone wall, the same kind that farmers used to build on almost all the hill lands. There was a small building in the back

part of the yard, painted black, for the storing of tools and the biers. It was used later for a place in which to store the old town hearse. There were two biers, one for adults and one for children. During the year 1795 the town voted to buy a pall cloth, the first one ever used in town. At a funeral the coffin was placed upon the bier, and the black pall cloth spread over it. Eight pall bearers were appointed, four to carry the bier and four to assist. The mourners and friends followed on foot. The meetinghouse bell gave notice of a death in the community. It was tolled on the morning of a funeral, and, also, during the march of the procession from the meetinghouse to the grave. After the general ringing of the bell, the sex of the deceased person was struck—if for a male, one blow; if for a female, two; then followed the number of blows to correspond with the number of years the person had lived.

About the year 1830, the tombs on the west side were built, and those on the south side of the enclosure, a few years later. In 1853 through the efforts of the late Dr. Z. S. Barstow, the tombs were put in good condition, and, in 1847, the old wall was removed and a fence constructed around the yard, at the expense of the town. The old black hearse house has long since been removed. Many bodies have been removed from the present Washington street to Woodland cemetery in more recent years, but, about twenty years

ago, Mr. Briggs published a list of 533 inscriptions which he then found upon the grave stones in the yard.

Under the direction of Ashuelot Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution, the tombs (from which the bodies have now nearly all been removed) were again repaired in the year 1903.

Plans have been filed in the office of the city clerk, which record the burial places of 695 persons. Mr. Briggs says (mortuary records): "I remember almost everyone that has been interred here in the last fifty years, and the number is between two and three thousand." There are evidences that all the vacant spaces have been used for burial purposes, and that the present record contains the names of less than one-fourth of the bodies which have been buried there, the rest having passed into oblivion.

In this small cemetery, not far from the centre of the town, were erected, between the years 1800 and 1835, several plain and unostentatious headstones to the memory of Revolutionary soldiers. They bear the names and dates which follow:

Samuel Bassett, died November 8, 1834, aged 81 years.

(Town records, aged 80 8-12 years.)

Noah Cooke, died October 15, 1829, aged 80 years.

Major Davis Howlett, died February 23, 1817, aged 79 years.

(Town records, aged 80 years.)

Samuel Osgood, died July 11, 1828, aged 71 years.

Josiah Richardson, died February 20, 1820, aged 74 years.

(Town records, February 25, 1820).

In memory of Capt. Jeremiah Stiles, Esq., who

died December 6, A. D. 1800, aged 56 years.

(Town records, December 5, 1800.)

William Woods, died March 23, 1818, aged 83 years.

(Town records, aged 84 years.)

In memory of Capt. David Wilson, who died December 5, 1818, aged 70 years.

Capt. John Leonard, died April 27, 1829, aged 76 years.

The remains of Major George Ingersoll, late of the United States Army; born at Boston, Mass., April 2d, 1754, died at Keene July 16th, 1805, aet. 51 years. Thus sleeps a brave and honest soldier, His virtues live admired Anon he rises to eternal life.

And the remains of at least two Revolutionary soldiers were buried in graves not now designated, viz., Nehemiah Towns (Towne), died May 2, 1820, aged 72 years (Town records;) Samuel Heaton, died April 1st, 1830, aged 70 years (Town records.)

Samuel Bassett was born at Norton, Mass., in 1754 and came to Keene before he was twenty years old. He was a member of the militia company in 1773; one of the 30 patriots who marched under Capt. Isaac Wyman on April 21, 1775, serving as a fifer; in the battle of Bunker Hill with Capt. Stiles; on the Massachusetts rolls as a "freemer"; in the regiment commanded by Col. Paul Dudley Sargeant, 1776; in Washington's Army in the company of which John Houghton of Keene was captain, at the battle of White Plains; in May, 1777, in the company of Capt. Davis Howlett of Keene, at Ticnderoga. After the war he married Martha, daughter of Samuel Belding of Swanzey, and lived near where Hon. R. H. Porter now resides.

Noah Cooke was born at Hadley,

Mass., in the year 1749. He graduated at Harvard College in 1769. He served as chaplain of the American forces in October 1775, at Winter Hill and was commissioned as chaplain on January 1, 1776, in Stark's regiment; from 1777 he was chaplain in the hospital, eastern department, with the rank and pay of a colonel. After the war he came to Keene and read law with Daniel Newcomb, Esq., and was admitted to the bar January 1, 1784. In the year 1790 he bought the Cooke place on Pleasant street (now West street) and built the well known Cooke house now standing, which would make a fine home for Ashuelot Chapter. In 1872 his son, Noah R. Cooke, died at the old homestead in Keene, but the elder son, Josiah Parsons Cooke, died at Boston, Mass., in March, 1880.

From a book now in the possession of Mr. Wallace L. Mason, it may be inferred that Major Davis Howlett came to Keene as early as 1768. The above mentioned account book is entitled, "Davis Howlett His Book Living in Keene." The charges lead one to suppose that he may have been a shop keeper; a shoe maker, a harness maker, or a carrier of leather and perhaps all three. The date of his settlement in Keene must be nearly correct, as an infant child of his was buried in Topsfield, Mass., Oct. 6, 1766. This is the last record of his family there. He was a descendant of the Howletts who built Howlett's Mills in Topsfield and came

to Keene from that town. He served in Col. Isaac Wyman's Regiment at Mount Independence, November 5, 1776; as Captain of a company raised out of Col. Ashley's Regiment, in service at Ticonderoga, May 7, 1777; and again at the same place in June of the same year. He was a selectman of the town of Keene in 1779 with Capt. John Houghton and Thomas Baker. His last days were made comfortable at his homestead on Beech Hill, where later his son, Cornelius Howlett, was cared for by John Lawrence, who afterwards owned and occupied the premises for many years.

Samuel Osgood was in the Northern Army under Capt. Samuel Wetherbee, in Col. Isaac Wyman's Regiment, 1776; at New York in Capt. John Moody's company, 1776; in Capt. Wetherbee's company, Nov. 5, 1776; at Ticonderoga in June, 1777, under Capt. Davis Howlett. William Woods, who came to Keene in 1762, was also in Capt. Davis Howlett's company for a time and elsewhere in service, and with Capt. Elisha Mack's company, which joined the Continental Army at Saratoga, July 22, 1777. I have heard that Mr. Woods was twice wounded in battle.

Capt. Josiah Richardson was born at Leominster, Mass., in the year 1742, and is mentioned in our town records as early as 1770. He kept a tavern in Poverty Lane, in rear of the Lamson block. He purchased land on the west side of

upper Main street, extending from the railroad to Hon. Horatio Colony's and northerly to the old Sun Tavern and what is now Mechanic street and including a large part of Central Square. He built a new tavern, which we remember as the Bill house, which stood where the Young Men's Christian Association building has been erected. In this old tavern, we are told the Duke of Kent once tarried for a night. Capt. Richardson fought in the battle of Bunker Hill; was Lieutenant in Capt. Mack's company, in 1777, at the battle of Bennington. Edward Joslin's mother, Rebecca, was a niece of Capt. Josiah Richardson. His name and the names of Joseph and Rebecca Dorr (the latter the captain's daughter) appear in many early conveyances of land, and at his death his real estate was worth a fortune, for the times.

Capt. Jeremiah Stiles was born at Lunenburg, Mass., February 23, 1744, and came to Keene in his youth. He marched from Keene on April 21, 1775; commanded a company at Bunker Hill; was transferred from Gen. Stark's to Sargeant's Massachusetts regiment in which he served eight months. He was a Justice of the Peace and a land surveyor. He served this town nine years as selectman, five years as town clerk and nine years in the New Hampshire Legislature. He lived on the corner of Cross and Prison streets. He was prominent as a Freemason, having been an officer of Rising Sun lodge.

On the day of his death the lodge met in special communication and with a large concourse of his fellow townsmen attended the funeral, at which the Rev. Laban Ainsworth officiated.

It was frequently asserted by Mr. Briggs that his great-grandfather, Jeremiah Stiles, drew the crayon portrait of Town Clerk David Nims, from which the oil portrait now in the Thayer Library building, was afterwards painted. Mr. Briggs may have erred in saying further, that Jeremiah Stiles painted the portrait in oils, also. It is probable, however, that Jeremiah Stiles, junior, whose picture I am able to show at this time, and who was a painter, was the artist.

David Wilson was a corporal in Col. Samuel Ashley's Regiment, and served 26 days at Ticondroga in 1776; and in Capt. Davis Howlett's company at Ticonderoga, engaged on May 7, 1777; and 12 days in June of the same year in Col. Benjamin Bellows' Regiment; at Saratoga in Capt. Mack's company, Stark's Brigade, 2 months and 2 days.

Of Capt. John Leonard's military history no data appeared in my hasty search.

His widow died at an extreme age and is said to have journeyed in the cars to Boston after she had passed the 100th anniversary of her birth.

"Betsey Nurss Leonard, wife of Captain John Leonard, born April 27, 1755, died Dec. 7, 1855, aged 100 years, 7 months and 10 days."

Capt. John Leonard joined Rising Sun lodge of Masons in Keene on December 7, 1796.

The dates of his birth and death appear in the history of Swanzey. The Sentinel of May 1, 1829, contains the following notice: "In Swanzey, on Monday evening last, Mr. John Leonard aged 76. (Printers in Mass., R. I., and Vt., are requested &c.)" The Sentinel of December 14, 1855, contains the following interesting article: "Died, in this town on Friday last, Mrs. Betsey Leonard, widow of the late Capt. John Leonard, aged one hundred years, nine months and ten days. On her birthday, last April, many friends called and presented tokens of the kindest feelings. In May, she journeyed 100 miles. She retained her accustomed vigor and cheerful countenance until a few weeks ago, when it became evident the oil in her lamp of life was nearly exhausted. Her final exit was hardly perceivable. She had her 'three warnings,' yet in a very good degree her hearing and sight were preserved as well as the use of her limbs. One other person in this town, the widow Wheeler, attained her great age. Mr. Nathan Blake carried captive by the Indians to Canada, in the early settlement of this town, reached 100 years within a few months; and the widow of Henry Ellis reached about 98."

From the memorial of Caroline Haskell Ingersoll we learn that Major George Ingersoll, in the course of a

chance visit to Keene, took a fancy to a fine house at "Ash Swamp" which he afterwards purchased. To this house which is mentioned in Madam Ingersoll's diary as "Whitebrook" and which still stands, the house west of the Country Club grounds, almost unchanged, at the junction of the Chesterfield and Westmoreland roads, he removed with his family in May, 1805. He was, however, permitted but a brief enjoyment of his new possessions, for he died, after a short illness, on July 16 of the same year.

Major George Ingersoll was private and sergeant in Gridley's Regiment, Massachusetts Artillery, June to December, 1775.

Sergeant in Knox's Regiment, Continental Artillery, December, 1775, to November, 1776.

Second Lieutenant of Steven's Battalion of Artillery, 9th November, 1776, which became a part of the 3d Continental Artillery.

First Lieutenant 10th June 1779 and served to June, 1783.

Lieutenant Artillery, Battalion United States Army, the 4th of March, 1791.

Captain 2d of April, 1792, of the Artillerists and Engineers, 9th of May, 1794, Regiment of Artillerists, 1st of April, 1802.

Major, 8th of July, 1802, and resigned the first of December, 1804.

Nehemiah Towns (Towne) was born at Topsfield, Mass., October 15, 1748.

He married Lucy Towns (Towne) December 31, 1771. Removed to Rindge, N. H., and while living there was one of 54 men who went to Cambridge in Capt. Nathan Hale's Company, at the time of the Lexington fight, April 19, 1775. He signed the Association Test at Rindge, in 1776. He was in Capt. Abijah Smith's Company, Col. Nahum Baldwin's Regiment, mustered September 21, 1776, dismissed early in December of the same year. He was with Gen. Washington on Long Island and in the vicinity of New York, and at the battle of White Plains, October 28, 1776. He removed to Keene in 1780 and was in service from Keene from July to December 31, of that year. He lived on the old road to Walpole, now known as School street.

Samuel Heaton, son of Seth and Thankful Field Heaton, was born July 23, 1759 at Keene. He married Sally Boynton, June 10, 1782. In December 1776, Samuel Heaton of Keene was Corporal in the company of Capt. Francis Towne of Rindge in Col. David Gilman's Regiment and marched to join Gen. Washington's army and participated in the battles of Trenton and Princeton at the age of 17 years. He was mustered into the service December 5, 1776, and discharged March 12, 1777, having marched 480 miles. He was paid as corporal the sum of 12 pounds, 7 shilling and 11 pence. The first house of Seth Heaton was burnt

by the Indians in 1746, and he next built on the other side of the street, the house now occupied by Mrs. Ellen S. Heaton, and it was here that Samuel Heaton was born and died. The house has always belonged to his descendants, is numbered 500 Marlboro street; and is thought to be the oldest dwelling in town.

The noble part these men and hundreds of others performed in aid to the cause of Independence merits more conspicuous monuments and the most exacting labor of a historian, but at this late period the Daughters must content themselves with scraps of history, and in the performance of such work of public utility as they find themselves able to accomplish with the means at hand. Any progress which they may make or cause to be made, in the improvement of this or any sacred resting place of our ancestors is most praiseworthy. Although their work is performed in modest ways and in peaceful places; although the results of their labors are not always heralded abroad with the flourish of trumpets, it must not be supposed that they have here "Labored in vain." Work of this nature unselfishly performed for others, for the city, the State and the Nation, counts, and their recompense will be the finding of satisfaction along with the performance of their self-imposed task.