

## PART XIV: 1915-1928

For many years one of Keene's most famous institutions, and among the most renowned in New England, was the Cheshire House. The fine art of good plain food, established by host Morgan J. Sherman in the 1880's, was carried on by Judson A. Reynolds after the turn of the century. Thomas A. Edison, Henry Ford, and Harvey Firestone were among the celebrities who enjoyed the matchless fare of this Keene hotel. Another patron of the hotel was President Calvin Coolidge who, with his party, passed through the city on July 1, 1925.

To the rear of the massive mahogany desk of the hotel was the maroon-tinted dining room where sturdy square tables, the sheen of soft linen, and heavy china set the scene of an older, more leisurely life with its solid, substantial New England fare. The traffic along Main Street and the noise of the Square were forgotten here, where steaming dishes and the clatter of heavy silver created an oasis from a hectic world.

The menu over the years reflected the uncompromising appreciation of quality: tomato juice, cherrystone clams, choice of cold tomato bouillon, beef broth or vegetable soup to begin a meal, and no less than 25 various fish dishes. While the art of cooking fish was highly refined, New England boiled dinner, corned beef and cabbage, boiled calf's head with brain sauce, sirloin steak smothered in onions, or roast native veal with dressing proved adventures in good eating. The breakfast menu, described by the *New Yorker* magazine as the longest in the world, offered a variety of standard fare plus venison, pickled pigs' feet, and duck.

Upstairs there were parlors with comfortable furniture, flowered carpets, and high ceilings, and the annex had a ballroom and banquet hall. The building was three stories high with a double range of attics in its gable and it was topped by a cupola as big as a house. Another feature of the Cheshire House was its population of 40-50 cats who mounted guard from its vast cellars over extensive stores of food. George R. Miller came from Boston to work in the Cheshire House. Later he became manager of the Latchis Theater and has served there for over three decades.

Storm clouds of the war in Europe cast their shadow in Keene, and funds for Belgian children were collected at Christmas time in

1914. The New Hampshire League for National Defense was formed in August 1915 with public meetings and programs held at City Hall, and citizens followed news from abroad with increasing dread.

Supporters of Woodrow Wilson and Thomas Marshall for the offices of President and Vice-president in 1916 proudly displayed campaign buttons reading "War in Europe, Peace in America, God Bless Wilson." However, the United States could not long remain neutral. After war was declared against Germany in April 1917, Keene young men registered for the army in June, and New Hampshire men were mobilized at Camp Devens, Mass., on September 19. More than 600 people from the community served in the war "to make the world safe for democracy," and 25 died. Private First Class George Dilboy became a Congressional Medal of Honor winner by the heroic sacrifice of his life at Belleau Wood in northeastern France on July 18, 1918.

The first military action involving Keene soldiers on foreign soil was not the war in Europe, however. In answer to President Wilson's call in 1916 for the National Guard to serve in Mexico, where a long-simmering border problem had boiled over, the First Infantry Regiment New Hampshire National Guard left Keene in July amid patriotic ceremonies and prayers. Mayor Orville E. Cain notified the aldermen and city councilmen of his intent to be absent from the city to serve with the troops on the border. About 70 men from Keene saw service at this time, and the returning soldiers were given a grand welcome on February 19, 1917.

The First Infantry Regiment New Hampshire National Guard entered federal service on July 25, 1917, and a majority of its personnel was transferred to the 103rd Infantry Regiment in August. It was redesigned as the First Army Headquarters Regiment in February 1918 at Camp Green, N. C., and was demobilized at Camp Devens in June 1919.

Most Keene factories geared for the war effort. Faulkner & Colony produced not only uniform fabrics, as they had done for the government since before the Civil War, but also fuse cloth which was used in high explosive shells. At the Brattleboro Overall plant uniforms were produced for the armed forces. The nation's railroads passed under federal government control during the war, including the Boston & Maine's Cheshire Division, with restrictions and regulations imposed on unnecessary travel.

During the war restrictions were placed on the use of automobiles, and "gasless Sundays" in September 1918 became a voluntary

patriotic response to the U. S. Fuel Administration's appeals. Rationing was not imposed, but certain foodstuffs became scarce, including flour. Barrels for collections of valuable scrap and peach stones were set out in Keene during war-time drives. Liberty Loan bond campaigns were conducted and received enthusiastic support. The War Chest Association was formed in 1918, and when the Disbursing Committee was disbanded in May 1920, it reported outlays of \$75,182.70.

The news of peace on November 11, 1918, was greeted by 5,000 people in the Square. Ex-Mayor Charles G. Shedd, returned from the war, addressed 1,200 at City Hall on November 12. Servicemen coming home to Keene were greeted by a temporary war memorial erected near the railroad tracks on Main Street and set up in April 1919. Atop a wooden column was placed the historic gilt eagle, once the sign for the Eagle Hotel and carved around 1827 by Amos Holbrook for Colonel Stephen Harrington.

On May 27, 1919, 30 veterans joined in the formation of an American Legion post, which was named Gordon-Bissell Post No. 4 in honor of the first Keene men to give their lives in the conflict, James H. Bissell and Grant H. Gordon. Joseph B. Saunders was chosen as the first commander. The organization received its charter on June 29, 1919, and was incorporated in October with 357 members. In 1921, it secured the Gerould property at No. 43 West Street for use as a headquarters. Funds were raised at a field day held by veterans on November 1, 1919, at which the governor was a special guest. The Post was assisted by the Keene War Chest, the Elks, other social and fraternal groups, and the city. Renovations of the West Street building took place in 1925.

The Cheshire County Voiture of the 40 and 8 was formed in June 1924 by 19 legionnaires. The American Legion Auxiliary was organized in 1920 with 166 charter members, and in 1940 this group gave the honor roll tablet which is located in front of the American Legion building. The city dedicated a flagpole as a war memorial at the head of Main Street on November 9, 1924, amid impressive ceremonies. Armistice Day in 1925 was celebrated by a crowd of 10,000, and the next year on November 11, 1926, a captured German cannon was installed as a memorial at Fuller Park. The same year the state erected an armory at the upper Washington Street location. It was dedicated on November 11, 1927. The former Winter Street armory was fitted up for commercial purposes and occupied by stores.

Municipal authorities had taken over not only the direction of

the Fourth of July celebrations, making the "Safe and Sane" 1915 parade the largest in the city's history, but also other public festivities. The annual Christmas tree and "Bridge of Joy," with gifts for needy children, were sponsored by the city with the help of civic groups. Public playground programs were inaugurated in the summer of 1915, and in August 1920 some 2,000 children were entertained at Wheelock Park. Concerts in the Square, along with street dancing, became popular beginning about 1916, and in 1928 Charles A. Jones left a fund for the continued support of organized band concerts.

The perambulation of city boundaries, carried out every seven years, was made in 1920. In 1923 Miss Mary B. Dinsmoor gave a 13-acre area (the Dinsmoor Woods) on Maple Avenue to the city for public use. Land was also given by the Faulkner & Colony firm for public and recreational use. John A. Drummer's bequest of 135 acres of pasture and woodland, which was placed under the park commissioner in April 1920, created a fund to aid the city's aged. Fuller Park was purchased and developed in 1925, and furnaces once used at the glass factory on the site were uncovered during work there in 1928.

Cement sidewalks were laid. road construction continued, and bridges rebuilt. A city-owned incinerating plant was erected in 1916. The city purchased street-paving equipment in 1928, and operated a quarry as a part of its expanding street improvement program. A new bridge over the Ashuelot on Island Street was authorized in 1920, and the City Hall, sometimes called the Opera House, was redecorated with new scenery and stage equipment in 1922.

Motorized highway and water department trucks began to appear by 1919. Eugene B. Riley, who became the first paid permanent fire chief in 1922, spent 44 years in the service of the department, 24 of them as chief.

When the Keene fire station burned on Sunday morning, March 14, 1926, the disaster canceled nearby Baptist Church services at which Rev. W. Douglass Swaffield was to have preached his farewell sermon. The station, rebuilt with improvements, including a circuit-breaking regulator clock for the alarm system, opened again in May 1927.

To combat pine blister rust an appropriation was made of city, state, and federal funds in April 1919 and spraying operations to control the elm tree beetle were also carried out. A new water main on Marlboro Street was laid in 1924, and 14,179 feet of pipe cleaned in programs of the growing water system. Water storage res-

ervoirs and filters were constructed in 1925 and pipe extensions laid to more sections of West Keene. In 1926 there were 2,587 meters in service by the water department throughout the city. Zoning ordinances were adopted which took effect on January 1, 1927.

One of the city's greatest municipal celebrations was held on Armistice Day, November 11, 1925, with the inauguration of a new street lighting system, "the White Way," and the occasion was marked by a parade, band concert, speeches, and prizes offered by merchants. A throng of 10,000 witnessed the christening of the new illumination, heralded by whistles and church bells. Officials of the Westinghouse Co., which installed the new lights, declared no city in the country had a similar system, and there was no better illuminated civic center in New England. New York's Broadway had nothing over Keene that night as crowds moved about the business district and attended a special midnight theater showing at the Latchis Theater which included 10 vaudeville acts and an augmented orchestra.

A serious railroad shop fire in 1918, labor problems, a six-months' strike in 1922, and changing management conditions threatened the industry, and most of its activities were transferred to shops at Billerica, Mass. Damage to the rail line was caused by the floods of November 1927, but Keene escaped the ravages widespread along the Connecticut River. Aid to flood sufferers in Vermont was sent by the American Legion and other Keene groups.

Local organizations flourished in the second and third decades of the 20th century. In October 1915 the Cheshire County Farmers' Association for boys and girls held a convention and exhibition at City Hall, and the State Grange convention was held in December. The annual convention of the state Firemen's Association was an event of September 1917, and among other gatherings in the city was that of Union veterans in September 1925. The Odd Fellows and Shriners were greeted by gala decorations, ceremonies, and parades in October of that same year. The New Hampshire Horticultural Association staged lectures and exhibits on October 25-27, 1916, and an organization of farm women was begun that year. The county's first agricultural agent was Floyd N. Darling, and an office in Keene was opened about 1920. The Cheshire County Fish and Game Club was formed in 1923 with 30 members, and programs to combat water pollution, promote safety, and improve fishing through stocking lakes and ponds in the area were inaugurated.

Revival meetings, by the celebrated evangelists J. Wilbur Chapman and Charles M. Alexander, were conducted during May and June

of 1916 in a tabernacle erected on Roxbury Street at the corner of Norway Avenue and seating 2,300. During the period of these union evangelical meetings regular Sunday church services by many Keene congregations were omitted.

On December 20, 1920, the Cheshire Royal Arch Masonic organization took possession of the former Henry Pond West Street house, built in 1859. The cornerstone of a Masonic Hall was set, with appropriate ceremonies, on May 29, 1924, and the remodeled building was dedicated on April 13, 1925. Among the additions was the memorial gift of an Estey pipe organ.

A new country club site was opened in 1924 at West Keene where a clubhouse was dedicated on August 1. Boy Scout troops, associated with several churches and sponsored by the American Legion, continued to expand their work, and Girl Scouting began with 12 girls in 1915, sponsored by the Park Department. In 1922 a group was organized under the leadership of Mrs. Oscar L. Elwell. and a troop at the Unitarian Church was formed in 1927. Camp Takodah in Richmond was begun as a project of the Cheshire County YMCA in 1918. Oscar L. Elwell became the county "Y" secretary in 1921.

Court Josephine. Daughters of Isabella, of Keene was formed by 50 women in June 1917. In 1921 it joined the Catholic Daughters of America organization, and in 1927 the state convention of the society was held in Keene. The local chapter was named Court Josephine in honor of Sister Mary Josephine, first Superior of the local Convent of Mercy in Keene.

The American Red Cross organized locally in April 1917 with war work activities. This Keene branch of the state organization withdrew from the New Hampshire society to become a separate chapter under the New England Division of the national society in October 1917. The Keene Woman's Club was formally organized in the spring of 1920, and became actively associated with municipal Christmas programs, the setting out of shade trees, hospital work, the improvement of local motion picture programs. and other community projects. A drama workshop was formed in 1922, a music department in 1923, and the Fresh Air Children sponsorship was begun in 1924. The Keene group was the largest club in the state federation in 1926.

Women achieved full political status in 1920, and became an increasingly vital force in civic, social, and political affairs. Five city council chairs out of 15 were occupied by women in 1920, and the superintendent of cemeteries chosen that year was a woman, Laura E. Mason.

The Keene Rotary Club was begun in 1922 by 25 business and professional men under the sponsorship of the Claremont organization. The club raised money for the hospital, crippled children, scouting, and youth work. It also assisted Keene High School's band, which was formed about 1925.

The most serious epidemic in Keene for many years was that of Spanish influenza which had broken out in 1918. Local health officials were on the alert because of its serious proportions in Massachusetts, but in spite of all precautions the disease struck Keene on September 16. Despite a quarantine, the epidemic spread rapidly, especially among young people, and in a week's time 100 cases were reported. Stores soon closed for lack of clerks, telephone service was affected by lack of operators, and within 10 days schools were closed. Churches gradually suspended their activities, and all meeting places were closed. To keep the air clean, bonfires of leaves were forbidden in the city. The public was urged to observe strict sanitation and to stay out of crowds.

Due to the war and to priorities placed on coal and wood, many homes were improperly heated during the duration of the contagion which followed. Two weeks after the outbreak of the disease the hospital was filled, its staff unable to admit more patients. A special hospital was established at Fiske Hall on the campus of Keene Normal School, and volunteers aided the overworked medical teams. Government medical and public health advisers touring the state's epidemic-gripped communities visited the city and gave officials such help as they could. In October the turning point was reached, and while 300 cases of influenza remained, deaths from the illness were less frequent. St. Bernard's Church held an open-air Mass, other churches resumed activities, schools opened on November 5, and the emergency hospital closed. People began going back to work, bans on meetings were lifted, and community life was resumed. During the 11 weeks of the epidemic there had been thousands of cases reported, with 153 deaths in the city.

A milder influenza epidemic hit Keene at the end of January 1920. Public meetings were canceled and measures taken to combat the disease. Heavy snows and a blizzard hampered transportation and also made the work of doctors and nurses more difficult. An emergency hospital was opened in the Elk's Home on Roxbury Street, and volunteer helpers were requested. Over 200 cases were reported by mid-February, and 12 deaths resulted from the epidemic, which had reached its peak by the middle of March.

During the crisis the Board of Health itself was torn by dissension, and members resigned over differences in matters of policy. Since no one could be found who was willing to serve, the resignations were not accepted, but a new Board of Health was organized soon afterward. Keene learned the value of modern health measures and was willing to aid the hospital in its expansion efforts. It also supported regulations on sanitation, quarantine, and all matters pertaining to public health. A municipal health officer was appointed in 1921 to assist the Board of Health, and the Keene District or Visiting Nurse Association was formed in March 1920. It received its own automobile in 1921. The local hospital was renamed the Elliot Community Hospital in 1921, and after a successful building drive erected an addition in 1922. The older building was remodeled in 1924 and 1925. A clinic for the detection of tuberculosis was organized in 1920 through the efforts of Dr. Ira J. Prouty, and the Visiting Nurse Association began sponsorship of a Well Baby Clinic. The Cheshire County Dental Society was formed by a group of dentists in 1925.

Parent-Teacher groups developed out of Mother's Clubs, which had been formed about 1915, and the PTA was established in most of the city's schools by 1924. The country club lands on Arch Street were sold to an alumni group of Keene High School, and Alumni Field was established there in 1924. Games once played at the grounds located off Emerald and Island Streets shifted to West Keene, and an avid football rivalry with Brattleboro brought high excitement to students and all Keene as well. In May 1928 700 cadets of the University of New Hampshire ROTC unit held an encampment at Alumni Field.

Basketball as a regular team sport was established at Keene High School in 1924, organized by Harold F. Drew of the faculty and coaching staff, although it had been played for years on an informal basis. The addition to the Washington Street high school building was dedicated in 1925, and included not only more classrooms but also a gymnasium, where Arthur D. Mulvaney was soon turning out basketball teams of merit. An Athletic Club for the encouragement of winter sports was formed in 1923, and soon attracted an enthusiastic membership.

At the high school a senior class annual yearbook, the *Salmagundi*, was established in 1924, and a high school band was organized with the aid of Karl D. Beedle and the Rotary Club about 1925. Robert T. Kingsbury, mayor of Keene for three terms, became a member of the State Board of Education in 1927. This organization



had direction of Keene Normal School since a reorganization of the state's education department in 1919.

The first male student at the Normal School was accepted in the fall of 1919, and Blake House was added to the campus in 1923. This historic 1833 brick residence occupied the site of Keene's first log house erected in 1736 by Nathan Blake, and was acquired from his descendants. By 1925 the enrollment of Keene Normal School had climbed to 568. Spaulding Gymnasium was dedicated in 1928. Several buildings and cottage dormitories were added to the campus, and the school's progress was determined with expanded study opportunities, organized athletics, the formation of two fraternities, and increased student activities. A dining hall was opened in 1916, Huntress Hall was dedicated in 1926, and vocational arts, commercial studies, manual training, and home economics were incorporated as regular programs. The four-year course for preparation in high school teaching was inaugurated, and its first graduates were awarded the Bachelor of Education degree in 1928.

The first transcontinental telephone call from Keene was made to California on June 30, 1916. The event took place at City Hall before a group of invited guests. It was the first such call in New Hampshire history. In February 1920 William E. Wright attached wires to City Hall tower from his jewelry store below and was able to receive wireless time signals from Arlington, Va. In 1928 he vacated the store he had occupied for 52 years, and City Hall was remodeled, the stores being replaced by city offices. At this time also public rest rooms were installed, and the sidewalk canopy was removed from the building.

The Colonial Theater Block was built on Main Street in 1923 replacing the Peleg Sprague house which had been on the site since 1795. When the new theater opened in January 1924, about 6,000 people were entertained at free premieres. The Latchis Theater, with a seating capacity of 1,070, was opened on November 21, 1923, by Demetrius P. Latchis. The Scenic Theater suffered a fire in 1927, but was rebuilt. The Majestic Theater on Church Street closed and was finally torn down in 1937.

The circus continued to visit the city. Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus was especially popular and played its last local engagement as late as 1940. The major summer event, however, was the Chautauqua, which brought a week of lectures, concerts, plays, and youth programs popular with all citizens. The 1924 offerings, for example, included light opera, a Shakespeare play, and junior Chau-

tauqua each morning. These annual events came to be a tradition in Keene.

The Commercial Club suggested that the name of Main Street be changed to a more distinctive title. Columbus Avenue, Barstow Avenue, Broadway, Ashuelot Boulevard, and Dinsmoor Avenue were suggested, but Main Street it remained.

In 1921 an interesting pothole stone, drilled through by the action of water in the long geologic past, was brought to Keene from East Sullivan and set up in front of the high school building. An Ascutney boulder, known to have been brought from Vermont by the glacier, was also placed in the school yard. This geological relic had once been displayed in the yard of the Winter Street school building but was buried after a child broke an arm while playing on it. It was exhumed through the efforts of George A. Wheelock for display at the high school.

The *Repertory*, a publication on local history, was issued by Clifford C. Wilber from December 1924 to June 1927. Its articles included the Abner Sanger Revolutionary diary and writings of the late William S. Briggs. It also offered pictures of Keene and its citizens of the past. This was the first significant local historical publication since Griffin's *History*, and the first by one of the city's most prolific historians. Wilber, Frank B. Kingsbury, and Mrs. Ella E. Abbott were instrumental in the formation of the Historical Society of Cheshire County in June 1927. Samuel Wadsworth was the first president of the organization, which took over some of the objectives and collections of the older Keene Natural History Society.

An indication of the development of the automobile was the levy of a city auto registration tax authorized by the state in 1919, and the establishment of motorbus service to replace the electric railway in 1926. The electric car tracks were removed late that year, but the ties remained and created rough rides for motorists driving over their asphalt coverings. A public information booth in Keene was visited by the occupants of 14,000 automobiles in 1927, and 15,000 in 1928.

Aviation came to Keene after World War I, when returning servicemen, some with flight experience, promoted the new sport. Charles A. Lindbergh, the "Lone Eagle" who fired imaginations with his solo flight from New York to Paris in May 1927, flew over Keene, circled several times, and dropped greetings on July 27, 1927. He gave added incentive to local aviation progress, and airport facilities were soon planned. The first Keene airport, in West Keene near the Wyman

Road, opened on September 21, 1928, on the 175th anniversary of the granting of Keene's charter, and was attended by 15,000 interested, curious, and enthusiastic onlookers. Stunt flying was shown by navy and marine aviators, and the state's first aviatrix, Dorothy Putnam, was on hand to give a demonstration. A Ford tri-motor airplane, one of the largest then made, offered many people their first experience with flight, and an official predicted, "Keene will become a major link in the system of national defense." Tragedy soon came to the activity, however, when a training plane of the Granite State Flying School crashed in November killing its student pilot.

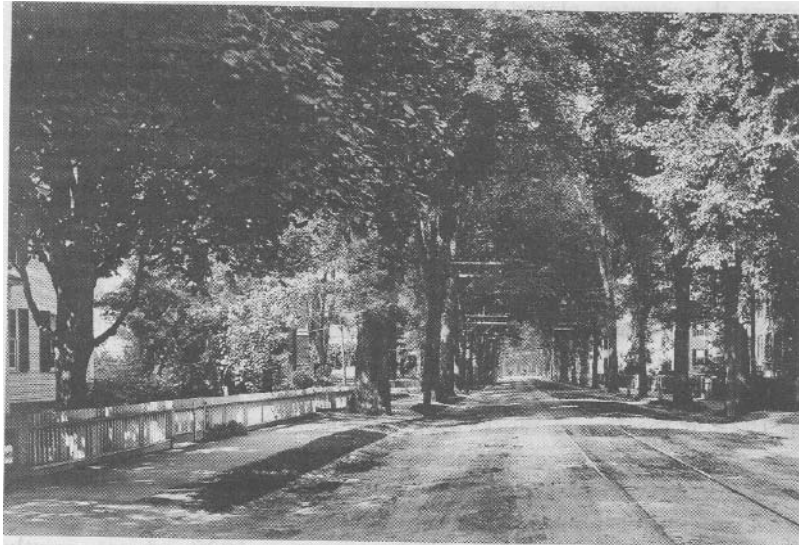
Vice-President Thomas R. Marshall was a Keene guest in April 1916 when he gave a lecture for the People's Institute in City Hall. While Rudyard Kipling was living at "Naulahka" near Brattleboro, it was his custom to take the train to Keene regularly on Saturday for a plate of baked beans at Marion's Restaurant, now the Crystal Restaurant.

A native of Keene whose research discoveries won for him a place in American industrial history was Carleton Ellis. His interest in science was fired when as a small boy he received a gift of a simple box camera. Valedictorian of Keene High School's class of 1896, he studied at MIT and entered independent research. In 1913 Ellis received a patent for a method of making a cheap but good oleomargarine, far superior to any then known, which became the basis for the margarine industry today. The research work carried on by Ellis in New Jersey, and his service as consultant for oil companies, brought him 753 patents, the third largest number awarded to any individual. He was the author of several books and many articles on chemistry.

Author Sewell Ford, who made Keene his home for many years, produced humorous writings including the "Torchy" and "Shorty McCabe" series, several stories which were made into motion pictures, and a number of popular articles. He died in 1946.

Describing Keene of the late 1920's a tourist folder stated, "There seem to be more huge elm trees in Keene than anywhere else in the world; these and the spaciousness of the main street impress the visitor at first. Keene is a city of 13,000 people most of whom own their homes and are proud of it. An economist would be interested in the widely diversified industries of the city by which labor troubles and business depressions are avoided." The Chamber of Commerce proudly pointed out that Keene had almost 100 miles of streets, 12.08 miles paved; a fire department of 5 men, 60 on call, and 7 pieces

of apparatus, 9 men on the police force; 8 church buildings; 10 parks and playgrounds; an 80-bed hospital; assessed valuation of \$20,517,-222 and tax rate of \$25.60, and the world's widest paved main street, 172 feet from curb to curb. "You'll like Keene," the Chamber confidently announced.



*Some of the trees that established Keene as the Elm City  
West Street, looking west*