

PART V: 1801-1815

In 1801 the village of Keene contained about 100 houses and shops, a meetinghouse, a court house, a jail, and a population of 1,645. A traveler passing through Keene in 1800 wrote, "We came into the beautiful compact town of Keene; I was pleas'd with the new prospect; it is composed of elegant houses neatly finished and painted. There is a large Congregational meetinghouse and a court house in this town, the land good and very level for some ways round."

Central Square had not yet taken full form, but with the Meetinghouse at the head of a broad and grass-grown street, often called simply "Keene Street," the prospect could not but attract comment. **In** 1793 Rev. William Bentley of Salem, Mass., was impressed "by the appearance of trade and prosperity" in the village but considered that the lack of uniformity in building gave the business section a scattered appearance. Most of the buildings were small wooden structures, with a few more impressive ones of brick beginning to make their appearance. A store operated on the east side of the Square by 1800, but most business was located further down Main Street beyond the Chandler House.

In the spring of 1799 the first known veterinarian, Cyrus Palmer, a Negro, visited Keene and advertised that he would attend sick and disabled horses for a few weeks. As early as 1793 Michael Bird advertised as a barber, but around 1807 Adolphus Wright became the town's first permanently settled wigmaker and hairdresser, although powdered wigs had gone out of fashion for men and were never very popular in rural districts.

Local craftsmen made and sold a wide selection of goods including rakes, scythe-snaths (handles), chairs, clocks, books, saddle and leather goods, nails, spinning wheel parts, furniture, and iron utensils. Many storekeepers sold tickets in one or another of the lotteries, then a popular way to raise money for bridges, canals, and even Harvard College.

Keene had at least three who were called "doctor" to look after the health of the population as much as their limited training permitted. Patent medicines, herbs, and remedies were sold in local apothecary shops. A proposed hospital, sponsored by Dr. Jonas Prescott in 1792, was turned down by the voters who remembered their unfortunate experience earlier during the smallpox epidemic of 1776.

Along the brooks and streams were tanneries as well as numerous saw, grist, and fulling mills, powered by water wheels. Before the days of quick transportation each town usually produced just about everything it needed. The exchange of produce for purchases was common practice. Keene was as self-sufficient a community as any in New England, although several general stores provided goods not available from local craftsmen.

It was still the custom to allow horses, cattle, and hogs to run at large; the long expanse of Main Street was sometimes called "Keene long pasture" and was even used as a race course. The town pound provided a valuable service holding stray animals of every description rounded up from the business district. A town law forbidding livestock to run free was put into effect in 1809, after complaints were aired on the condition of the street and Common, but it was nearly 20 years before the situation was fully corrected. Many civic services were still lacking, although "Fire Wards" were appointed in 1794, as well as an inspector of measures. The principal streets in town included Main Street, or simply "Keene" or "Town" Street; Pleasant, later Mill Street (West Street); Prison or sometimes Jail Street (Washington Street); Walpole Road (School Street, and later part of Court Street); Packersfield Road (Water Street); Frog Lane (Church Street); Cross Street (laid out in 1787), and the Boston Road (Baker Street). Almost none of the others now known had yet been opened.

As the new century commenced many signs of progress appeared in Keene. The Third New Hampshire Turnpike Corporation, chartered in December 1799, held its first meeting in Keene in February 1800, and planned a highway to run from Boston by way of New Ipswich, Jaffrey, Marlborough, Keene, and Walpole, through to Belkows Falls. It opened an important communications link to the village, coming into Keene by way of the older Walpole Road along Court Street, which was opened at its present entrance to the Square in 1808. The Court House was moved back to stand on the west side of the present Central Square. Also the course of the Boston Road was altered to open the present Marlboro Street through to Main Street, with one of the toll gates located at the intersection. Mail service along the new highway improved, as did travel conveniences. Another highway, the Branch Turnpike, a new route toward Boston by way of Troy and Fitzwilliam, was projected in 1803. As a part of its construction the first permanent bridge was erected across the Branch at the lower end of Main Street and financed in part by the town. In 1805 this road was opened to the north through Surry, Drewsville, and

Charlestown along the Cheshire Turnpike. Beginning in 1803 a stage line operated from Boston twice a week, and the village found itself one of the crossroads of two important highways. One-day stage service from Boston was a great advance in 1807. The stage left Boston at four o'clock in the morning and arrived in Keene at eight o'clock that same evening.

However, even with the new highways, during "mud season" and after a heavy rain roads and village streets were all but impassable. In 1803 a plank walk, the first sidewalk in town, was laid along Pleasant Street from the Meetinghouse to the mill sites owned by Luther Smith, where Francis Faulkner and Josiah Colony later established a woolen mill in 1815.

The Cheshire Bank received its state charter in December 1803, and the following May the corporation was organized with Daniel Newcomb as president and Elijah Dunbar as cashier. Keene's first bank opened in Dr. Edwards' tavern, but a brick building, one of the first such structures in town, was soon erected on Main Street (near the present railroad crossing). The upper floor was used as a hall and occasionally as a school. Though the bank was never robbed, there were several attempts made on the vault—in June 1816 by unknown persons, in August 1822 by two men who broke jail soon after their arrest, in June 1825 by a pair who later tried to burn down the jail, and in July 1847 shortly before the brick bank was removed to make way for the erection of the railroad station.

Each Fourth of July was celebrated by a military review, a parade, an oration, religious services, and a banquet climaxed by the drinking of many toasts. The Ashuelot Cavalry was organized in this period, and the Keene Light Infantry was formed about 1804. Companies of militia in the region became proud participants at musters and reviews. Colorful uniforms and standards added a festive note at civic celebrations and as honor escorts for the governor and other important visitors to the town. The annual muster became a regional holiday, with a sharp spirit of competition between units. The Westmoreland Light Infantry and Keene's company were especially brisk rivals. At the 1810 event a 14-piece band provided music, the first recorded military band to appear in Keene.

Business was good in Keene during the first years of the 19th century. Farms were widely cultivated and frame houses were replacing earlier cabin homes. The course of the Town Brook was altered to flow into Beaver Brook rather than across Main Street at the old causeway, and **the work** of covering it **commenced. Still, at** about this

time, Harry Willard, riding in a huge potash kettle, could paddle across Main Street from a point near the present Newberry Block. In 1806 Samuel Euers established carriage and chaise-making as a local industry. A road running toward Beech Hill from the Common was finally authorized, and after the incorporation of Roxbury in 1812 it became known as Roxbury Street.

William King advertised in February 1806 that he was in town for a few days to take "profile likenesses" (silhouettes). Except for traveling artists no pictures or portraits were possible, although a few of the prominent citizens traveled to Boston to sit for painters.

The Keene Engine Company was formed in 1808, the first organization of a fire-fighting unit in town equipped with a fire engine, although a similar company had been proposed in 1806.

Captain William Wyman, fifth son of Revolutionary soldier and tavern keeper Colonel Isaac Wyman, returned about 1805 to Keene from the sea with a fortune, and built the brick store, now the southern part of the Eagle Hotel Block.

Clockmaker Luther Smith built the northern end about 1806, and the two sections were later connected. The local Masons had their meeting place in the building for a time. North of his father's tavern Captain Wyman built of native brick, around 1810, one of the finest homes in Keene. Just before the work was completed Captain Wyman died, and tradition claims that his ghost once haunted the home he never lived to enjoy. Another local ghost was reported in Captain Daniel Bradford's elegant home erected about this time in West Keene (now No. 70 Bradford Road). Samuel Dinsmoor, a prominent lawyer and civic leader, had come to Keene to study law under Peleg Sprague, who advised him to make Keene his permanent residence. In 1811 Dinsmoor was elected to Congress and was governor of the state at a later time. Elijah Parker began the practice of law at Keene in 1813. His son Charles Edward Parker, a Boston architect, later designed several Keene buildings.

Cultural activities increased. The Social Library, a subscription organization in which borrowers paid for the privilege of membership, was incorporated on **June 12, 1801**. The price of shares was set at four dollars in 1808. Rev. Aaron Hall served as librarian, and the collection was housed at the parsonage on Pleasant Street (site of the present Keene Public Library). Small circulating collections were also operated by religious societies, as well as by **John Prentiss** at his bookstore, where terms were six cents per volume for one week and two cents a day thereafter.

A traveling wax-works show visited Keene for a few days in July 1797, and in September 1801 there was another show in town displaying tableaux, foreign curios, pictures, a musical clock, and historical figures and scenes. **In** July 1808 a company of professional players presented an evening of recitations, comic and serious, called the "Festival of Reason."

Dr. Amos Twitchell, who studied under Dr. Nathan Smith, head of the medical school at Dartmouth College, and who became his assistant, moved to Keene from Marlborough in 1810. His skill as a surgeon was proved by a rare operation in 1807 during which he tied the carotid artery, perhaps the first such operation in the nation. In 1811 Keene doctors joined in the formation of the Western District of the New Hampshire Medical Society organized at Charlestown. Not every physician was qualified, however, and one who advertised in Keene during 1815 was a quack who was hauled into court to answer for his so-called "cures."

With few outside contacts, local events added drama and interest to village life. When several of Keene's "gay blades" stole one of the historic cannon of colonial days from Walpole's Main Street in the spring of 1807, it raised the indignation of that town against Keene, and the affair was followed by all with avid interest. As only Chesterfield, Westmoreland, Walpole, and Charlestown could boast such ordnance and fired them triumphantly on days of public rejoicing such as the Fourth of July, inhabitants of nearby towns which had no such relics were jealous of this privilege. Return of the cannon was demanded by court action. Attempts to arrest the culprits proved unsuccessful and only added to the general excitement. One of the Walpole citizens aiding the sheriff had a good idea of the identity of the person for whom he was looking, and concealed himself to await his quarry's return home. Dr. Daniel Adams, a respected physician, noticed the hidden watcher, and discovering that he himself had been seen but not recognized, led the pursuer a merry chase through woods and swampland to his own doorstep, thus preventing the real culprit from being captured. In the end several of the guilty were arrested and brought to court, but the judge ruled that the cannon was not the exclusive property of Walpole, and set the defendants free. The cannon was immediately drawn up before the Court House and fired. "May it please your honors," Lawyer-for-the-defense Vose said as the echoes reverberated through Keene Valley, "the case is already reported."

Walpole was not so easily defeated. Two years later, learning

that the cannon was hidden in a granary near Main Street, a group laid an elaborate plan to restore it to Walpole. About 30 young men ventured into Keene late on the night of July 4, 1809, but as the first movement of the cannon made a terrible noise, the church bell was rung and an alarm raised. Men began to gather in the street as the Walpole party worked desperately to procure the heavy cannon. Finally, after lifting the piece to their wagon, the Walpole invaders made their escape and were greeted as heroes by their fellow townsmen at daybreak with the ringing of the church bell. The members of the Keene posse, riding after the fleeing wagon, might have overtaken it had they not turned off on a wrong road; whether by accident or design was never determined, though the rumors of deliberately following the wrong road were hotly denied. Rivalry between towns on this and other occasions kept local spirits high and a subject for conversation always fresh at hand.

Although isolated in a large measure, Keene was not unaware of happenings in the world at large. It shared with the whole eastern United States the wonder of a total eclipse of the sun on June 16, 1806, and the terror of two minor earthquakes in 1817. After the establishment of *The New Hampshire Sentinel* in 1799, Keene people could read of national and international events even though information traveled slowly and might not reach the columns of John Prentiss' paper until weeks or even months after the event.

In late 1799 the threat of war with France excited the nation, and Keene became a recruiting station once again. During the summer of 1807 outrages committed against American seamen by the British so aroused the citizens of Keene that as soon as the President called for 100,000 militia to be raised and held in readiness, the independent military companies and Ashuelot Cavalry voted unanimously to volunteer in a body.

The effects of President Jefferson's policy of "nonintercourse and embargo," which forbade American ships to trade in foreign ports, had strong reaction throughout New England. Prices of imported goods rose, and many articles which had come to be looked upon as necessities of life could not be had at any price. Along the New England coast the active shipping industry was temporarily ruined. During September 1808 a six-horse wagon, carrying an estimated \$50,000 in gold and silver, passed through Keene on its way from Boston to Montreal to purchase bills of exchange on London. In six months' time about \$1,500,000 was transported to Canada, and the effect of so great a drain on financial resources brought virtually all business in

New England to a standstill. People in Keene, as elsewhere, had to make for themselves many articles formerly imported.

Discontent ran high. The embargo and its policies encouraged development of the woolen and other textile trades, such as that organized at Swanzey Factory in 1810 to produce cotton yarn. In Keene it was the chief cause leading to the establishment of a glass industry.

Town meetings were called in many places to address petitions of complaint to the government. One held in Keene on January 26, 1809, forwarded a long series of resolutions asking for redress of grievances against the embargo policies. Military spirit heightened as the threat of war increased, and new state laws were passed requiring that every town be constantly supplied with 32 pounds of powder, 64 pounds of musket balls, 120 flints, and equipment for soldiers in the field. The tools of war had little changed from Revolutionary days. War with Great Britain was declared after continued harassment of American shipping, and enlistment headquarters were set up again in Keene, this time at Benoni Shirliff's tavern. Bounty offered was \$16 and upon discharge three months' pay and 160 acres of land. Samuel Dinsmoor was quartermaster general of the state, and others from the town held militia commissions.

Among the reform organizations established to encourage patriotism and discourage smuggling and sedition was the Washington Benevolent Society, which had active branches in almost every town in Cheshire County. Keene's Society was organized in February 1812 and included many leading citizens. Each member was given a small volume containing a portrait of Washington, a copy of his Farewell Address, and the Constitution of the United States. Active and vigorous, these societies held conventions and observed the Fourth of July in 1812 in Walpole with a grand parade accompanied by banners, and leading the procession 70 young ladies dressed in white. A similar celebration was held in Keene the next year, at which the oration was delivered by Phineas Cooke, and a dinner was held in the lower part of the Court House.

The martial spirit fostered by the war and the influence of these patriotic societies was evident at the annual muster in 1813, when some 3,000 men assembled with over 20 companies and eight cavalry units in full uniform. This colorful parade was witnessed by thousands of people, in Keene for the holiday.

A military expedition advancing on Montreal passed through Keene in April 1813 and camped about a mile above the Square, on Fisher Brook near the Widow Leonard's tavern (since known as the

Kate Tyler place, near the corner of the present Court and Elm Streets). Two of the men, natives of Maine, died there and were buried near the camp. In February 1814 a large number of carpenters passed through Keene by the same route on their way to Lake Champlain to build the vessels with which Thomas Macdonough won his signal victory in the waters off Plattsburg. In May of that year loads of 32-pound cannon balls were hauled from Boston to Vergennes, Vt., by way of Keene. News of the burning of Washington shocked Keene as well as the rest of the nation. Answering the governor's call, the Keene Light Infantry and the Ashuelot Cavalry, with other units, readied themselves to march to the coast, which had been threatened for some time by British ships of war. Several from Keene were in the companies ordered to the defense of Portsmouth. The announcement of Andrew Jackson's victory at New Orleans on January 8, 1815, did not reach Keene until the Boston stage arrived on February 14, when the news was greeted with great jubilation.

During and just following the War of 1812 the revenue taxes imposed on pleasure carriages, iron, leather, paper, beer, candles, salt, and other articles proved a source of constant irritation. Property was often sold by the sheriff to insure payment, and the burden of taxes caused widespread business failures. Consequently there was violent opposition to President Madison's administration. The local paper even called upon him to resign. Despite his support of administration policies, Samuel Dinsmoor was reelected to Congress in 1812, although his friends and supporters fearing the wrath of the electorate had formed a protective guard for him upon his return to Keene in 1811.

Keene continued to grow in population, business, and wealth. Justus Perry came from Marlborough in 1812 to begin his business life in a store on the east side of the Square. He erected a fine home on Prison Street, just beyond the Square on the present site of Keene Junior High School. Perry collected a fine private library and was active in civic and military affairs. His son Horatio J. Perry, born in Keene in 1824, was later an important member of the American legation to Spain. He married a talented Spanish lady, and proved of particular service to the United States during the Civil War, while he was in charge of American affairs in Madrid.

Aaron Appleton arrived in Keene from nearby Dublin, N.H., in 1814 and went into business partnership with John Elliot. In 1815 they erected the St. John's Block on the corner of Main and Pleasant (West) Streets and their monogram still decorates the brick structure.

Here was located the combined printing office and bookstore of John Prentiss in 1816. Salma Hale came to Keene in 1813 when the office of the clerk of the County Court was moved from Walpole. Born in Alstead in 1787, Hale was clerk of the courts in Cheshire County for about 30 years.

A post route to Concord was established through Weare, Deering, Hancock, and Packersfield, and in 1814 four-horse coaches began to run from Boston through Keene and on to Burlington, Vt., arriving in Keene three times a week. The arrival of the stage became a great event, for it brought, in addition to visitors and mail, important news fresh from Boston.

Stoves with sides formed by slabs of soapstone were first advertised for sale in Keene in 1812, and their use reduced house-warming expenses. Cooking was done before the open fireplace until the introduction of cooking stoves in Keene in 1817. Ownership of a stove soon became a mark of distinction.

On May 1, 1814, Miss Catherine Fiske opened her celebrated young ladies' seminary on the east side of Main Street. After 1824 it occupied the Main Street house built by John G. Bond about 1805 (since 1909 the house of the president of Keene State College). Assisted by several teachers, Miss Fiske attracted pupils not only from Keene's leading families but also from nearly every state in the Union. Her school won a wide reputation for excellence and was the first such boarding school in the state. During its career probably 2,500 pupils received a high degree of instruction in languages (French, Italian, Latin, and English), mathematics, history and geography, as well as painting, drawing, and ornamental needlework. The first piano in Keene was for use at the school, and William Willson is reported to have built the town's first pipe organ for the school. Carriages were owned for excursions, and a resident milliner was kept busy by the girls. Miss Fiske promised parents that her school would "pay all possible attention to the improvement of the manners, morals and minds" of the students placed under her charge. A remarkably efficient teacher, Miss Fiske also taught some special classes for boys of the town, invited for lectures several of the best-informed gentlemen in the vicinity, and conducted a strict yet progressive educational program which won wide attention. One of the students was a niece of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was impressed by the school's curriculum. After Miss Fiske's death in 1837 the school was continued until 1844 by her assistants.

The New Hampshire Glass Factory, later known as the Keene

Window Glass Company, began in 1814, and was located on the present Washington Street Fuller Park lot. Lawrence Schoolcraft was brought from the management of a glassworks in New York State to be superintendent of this window glass manufactory.

A second glass factory was established in 1815 by Daniel Watson, Timothy Twitchell, and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, son of the superintendent at the Prison Street factory. Bottles and flasks formed the principal output from the Marlboro Street firm, which was in operation until the early 1840's. The factory was located on the north side of Marlboro Street east of Beaver Brook. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft left Keene in 1817 and later became a famed authority and writer on the American Indian.

Some of the demoralizing influences of the war, corruption in politics and deterioration of morals, led to the calling of a convention from 12 Cheshire County towns at Keene in November 1814 to consider measures that might be taken for the preservation of religion and righteousness. The delegates passed a series of resolutions recommending the formation of local societies to promote a stricter observance of the Sabbath, tighter enforcement of the law, and men of the highest character as tithingmen. In accordance with these recommendations a county society was formed, the General Monadnock Society for the Promotion of Morals, and local tithingmen met to consider methods of suppressing drunkenness and disorder in public houses on Sunday and issued a stern warning to the public, as did their brother officials in neighboring towns.

Rev. Aaron Hall died in August 1814, in the 37th year of his ministry in Keene. He was one of the most respected of the clergy in the entire region. Rev. David Oliphant was settled over the Keene church in May 1815, but desires for a less rigid approach to doctrine were beginning to make themselves felt. Baptists from Westmoreland had come to Ash Swamp, where meetings were held in a schoolhouse at the settlement near the corner of the present Hurricane Road and were led by Rev. Charles Cummings of the Sullivan Baptist Church. Rev. Luther Rice, a pioneer Baptist foreign missionary and companion of Adoniram Judson, the first American foreign missionary, preached in the village church in October 1814, perhaps encouraging independent thought in matters of religion.

Traveling shows and attractions, less frequent during the trying years of the War of 1812, resumed performances after the peace treaty was signed. One show in August 1815 at the old Ralston Tavern featured the first elephant ever exhibited in Keene. A few boys

decided to see the elephant without paying for the privilege. When it was learned that this star attraction of the show would enter Keene by night along Prison Street an elaborate plan was concocted. A bonfire was laid near the glass factory (at the present Fuller Park) and young sentries stationed themselves along the route to signal when the animal approached. To assure the elephant's cooperation a trail of apples was laid along the highway leading to the bonfire. The first watcher was so amazed by the huge animal's long trunk and great ears that he forgot to give the prearranged warning. However, the elephant refused to cross the Beaver Brook bridge and had to be driven around to ford the stream, thus giving time for the signal to be passed to those waiting to kindle the bonfire. The great animal could not be swayed from the trail of luscious apples and so gave an unscheduled performance which, in the flickering light of the bonfire, must have been even more spectacular to the wonder-struck boys.