

## PART VIII: 1841-1855

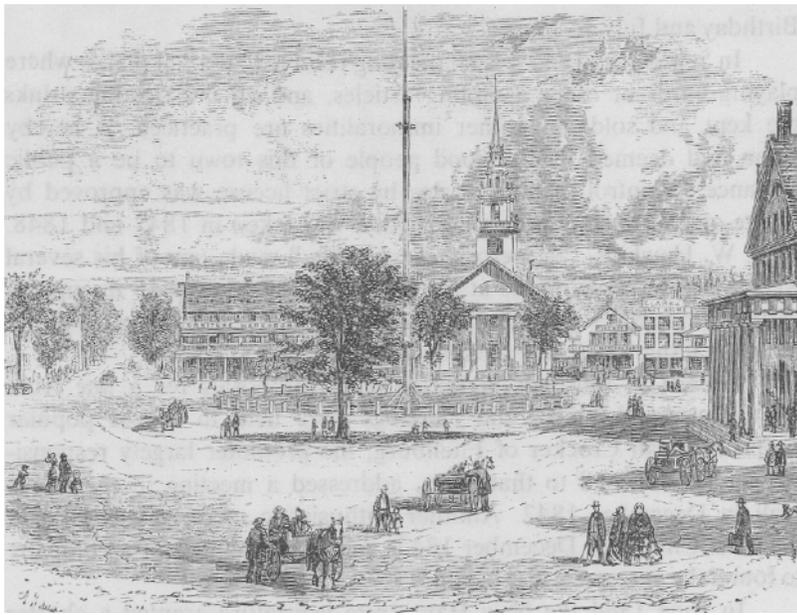
During the ten-year period between 1830 and 1840 Keene gained 236 inhabitants and its population rose from 2,374 to 2,610.

In addition to military musters, the annual election day ( at that time the first Wednesday in June which was also opening day of the legislature) became an event to celebrate in the life of the now mature township. Election Day in 1841 was observed with a gathering of nearly 1,200 people on the banks of the Ashuelot River for a feast, music, and speeches. General James Wilson Jr., who had been appointed surveyor general of the Wisconsin and Iowa Territories, was honored that same afternoon at a banquet and reception previous to his departure for the West.

Wilson was elected to Congress in 1847 and reelected in 1849, but he declined to run in 1850. Samuel Dinsmoor Jr., son of the former governor, was elected to that office in 1849 and served three terms.

During the political campaign of 1852 there was spirited rivalry in Keene between the Whigs and Democrats. Whig supporters raised a large flag bearing the names of their candidates, Scott and Graham, over the *New Hampshire Sentinel* office on the west side of the Square. They were answered by a larger flag, bearing the name of candidate Franklin Pierce, flown from the office of the Democrat-supported *Cheshire Republican* office across the street. The Whigs then raised a 30-foot pole which the Democrats topped by an 80-foot spruce from which flew the largest flag ever seen in Keene. The Whigs searched the whole region and found in Sullivan a tree 100 feet high. This they painted, fitted with a gold eagle finial, and by cutting a hole in the roof of the *Sentinel* office, raised a flagpole, from which they flew a flag 30 x 50 feet in size 91 feet above the rooftop. Surmounted by a colorful streamer, 100 feet long, flying proudly atop the building, this banner was a handsome sight. In windy weather the giant flag snapped with the sound of a rifle that could be heard for some distance. The Democrats were outdone in flag displays, but their candidates won the election.

The old Whig party was followed by the new Republican organization in the 1856 campaign, and the *New Hampshire Sentinel*, a Whig paper for many years, embraced the new party, while the *Cheshire Republican*, despite its name, was Democratic in politics. In September 1856 a flagpole in three sections was erected by the Keene Fremont Club in the newly-fenced Common. The first pole in



*Central Square—middle 19th century*

this area was about 180 feet high and remained in place until cut down as unsafe in June 1862.

Programs of civic improvement were fostered in town. A new road toward Newport up the valley from Gilsum to Marlow opened in 1841 and connected with the Beaver Brook Road, which had opened in 1837 from Keene to Gilsum. A stone highway bridge was built in South Keene in 1842. When it collapsed, just after completion, a rebuilding committee was selected. However, controversy arose over the liability of the contracts and nothing was done until 1846, when a wooden structure was put up.

Renewed interest in temperance was evident by the organization of the Sons of Temperance and the Washington Total Abstinence Society of 600 members formed in 1841, with Salma Hale as president. A temperance jubilee was held in Keene on February 22, and an impressive temperance celebration was staged on July 4, 1842, at John Elliot's grove on the banks of the Ashuelot River. Temperance societies, Sunday School groups, and others, numbering 2,000 strong, and headed by a military band, formed a procession from the Square. Later all enjoyed a banquet and heard speeches and choral music. Other such affairs were held to commemorate Washington's

Birthday and July 4.

In September 1845 a legal meeting resolved "that all places where playing cards or other gambling articles, and all intoxicating drinks are kept and sold, and other immoralities are practiced, is hereby taken and deemed by the good people of this town to be a public nuisance." Control of liquor sales by strict license was approved by a vote of 251 to 41, and similar action was taken in 1847 and 1848. J. H. W. Hawkins, "the reformed inebriate," made one of his several Keene lecture appearances at the Town Hall in May 1846 in support of the temperance cause; within a few weeks 1,500 out of a population of about 3,000 had taken the pledge.

Interest in railroads increased when proposals for a line from Boston were advanced, and meetings were held to arouse popular support. Alvah Crocker of Fitchburg, the promoter largely responsible for the railroad to that town, addressed a meeting in the Town Hall in December 1842. Another enthusiastic meeting was held in the First Church in December 1843, and the formation of a company to found the enterprise was begun.

In June 1844 the New Hampshire legislature granted a charter for the Fitchburg, Keene, and Connecticut River Railroad, but it was rejected by the incorporators. The charter of the Cheshire Railroad Co. was then granted on December 17, 1844, and the company's first meeting was held in Keene on January 10, 1845. Thomas M. Edwards, an active promoter of the railroad, was a strong leader of the new corporation. It was largely by his efforts that the line was completed and the railroad introduced into Keene. Edwards was active in all phases of local life, and served two terms in Congress, 1859-63, where he was appointed to several important committees and was frequently called upon to preside over the House in the absence of the speaker.

Among the construction workers employed on the line were many Irish immigrants whose conduct was sometimes the subject of local concern. Aided by the town's educational funds, the Ladies' Charitable Society organized a school for the children of the railroad workers, and teachers included, among others, the wives of local clergymen. While the contractors employed by the railroad were as a whole honorable and treated the men well, a few were less than prompt in delivering pay, and strikes were sometimes called. The new Americans were often inclined to be intemperate and unruly, and riots among the laborers broke out on several occasions. Much of the trouble was the result of rum sold by the wagonload in the work-

ers' camps by unscrupulous merchants.

Most of the rioting took place as the great work of cutting through the "Summit" was in progress. Hand drills were used, later supplemented by a few steam-powered machines, but most of the construction was accomplished by hand labor. The workmen stood in mortal fear of the military; when the militia was called to aid the sheriff in putting down disturbances, the rioters quickly scattered into the woods. The most serious rioting took place near the "Summit" in August 1848 as the result of a quarrel among the laborers, some natives of County Cork and others from Limerick. About 200 armed sons of Cork descended on the shanties of the Limericks and exchanged a variety of missiles and a few volleys of gunfire. One member of the attacking party was killed outright, and several of both factions were wounded and later died. The Cork men proved the stronger and drove the Limericks back, taking possession of their homes. Word was sent to Keene, and the Keene Light Infantry was dispatched to the scene but found all quiet upon its arrival, as the leaders of the fray were hidden in the woods. The dead were buried at Walpole. Later about 40 of the participants were arrested, of whom 21 were placed on trial; 16 were found guilty and jailed for disturbing the peace.

The Irish, the first important influx since settlement days, brought a new spirit to the community, a labor force for the developing industries, and a new dimension to the Yankee scene in Keene, as elsewhere throughout New England. The first local Roman Catholic Mass was celebrated by Rev. John Daley in 1845 in the cabin home of Patrick Burns, which was located four miles from Keene. Marriages were performed at the Eagle Hotel, and Mass was said in private homes and at the Town Hall by visiting clergy. The area was served by the pioneer Catholic parish, which had been established at Claremont, until 1856, when Rev. John Brady, Claremont's resident pastor, purchased a building on Marlboro Street in Keene and converted it into a church.

In 1844, the Forest Tree Society was given permission to plant trees and otherwise improve the appearance of the town. The first attempts to set out trees along Main Street had taken place in 1788. Trees were planted on Prison Street about 1823, and on Winter Street in 1842. The Walker Elm or "auction elm" at the head of Main Street, where the weekly outdoor auctions were held for many years, was set out in 1842 by Alvah Walker, then proprietor of the Cheshire House. The tree was removed in 1900, and the site was later occupied by the flagpole.



*1876 view of Walker Elm, planted 1842 by Major Alvah Walker*

In the fall of 1844 the Forest Tree Society reported that it had set out 141 trees along village streets. That same year permission was granted to the Society "to fence in and ornament a small central portion of the Common of such size and shape as the Selectmen shall deem compatible . . ." Merchants objected that their signs would be hidden from view and sales would suffer. Others objected that trees would impair use of the Common as a parade ground for military and civic reviews, as a market place for farmers and their teams, as a field for the village baseball game on Fast Day, as an open space for wood sleds in winter, and as a free area for all the activity of Court Week. Many also complained because they believed "it would give the town a countrified look, and people would cease to believe that we were metropolitan in fact, or in aspiration."

So great were the objections that threats were made to uproot any trees that were planted, and the Society was forced to postpone its planting. Finally, in June 1851, amid scowls of disapproval from the onlookers, a few of the more active members of the Forest Tree Society planted some trees brought from the "Statia" farm and enclosed that small section with a fence. It was soon found that one could still cross from one side of the Square to the other without difficulty and that trade remained brisk in spite of "the leafy concealment of the signboards." Demand now arose to enlarge the park, and this was done by creating an elliptical outline from the earlier so-called "Coffin Common" shape. In 1856 stone posts were set and gravel

walks laid out. The earliest picture of the Square appeared in Austin J. Coolidge's *History and Description of New England*, published in 1860.

The Center School was sold in 1844 to Eliphalet Briggs, who owned a nearby cabinet and furniture business, and a new brick school was erected on the north side of Church Street, a short distance from Main Street.

The Cheshire Bank (later Cheshire National Bank) put up its Main Street building in 1847, moving vault doors and locks from the former bank, which had been torn down to make way for a railroad depot.

The graceful stone arch railroad bridge at South Keene was built of Roxbury granite in 1847, under the direction of Lucian Tilton, chief engineer of the railroad.

Publisher Benaiah Cooke's periodical *The Philanthropist* was issued as a temperance paper from 1846 through 1848, and he then began the *Free Soil Palladium*, which had only a short life. Otis F. R. Waite, who purchased Cooke's other newspaper in 1848, continued it as the *Spirit of the Times* until 1850. Then it passed back to Cooke and was published as the *American News* from 1851 until his death in 1852. It was purchased at auction by Samuel Woodward and was joined with the *New Hampshire Sentinel* in 1855. Also published at this period was the *Homeopathic Advocate and Guide to Health*, an advertising journal issued by D. White in 1851 and 1852.

Beaver Brook Lodge No. 36 of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows was chartered on August 19, 1851, with six original members. Freemasonry, which had been inactive in Keene since 1830, was revived in 1856.

The location of the railroad station was the object of much discussion in 1846. Original plans called for its location near where it was finally built, but the amount of filling and grading necessary in the area (from early days it had been so low and wet that a bridge or causeway was once located there) made the site between Water and Marlboro Streets seem better suited. To induce the railroad to locate the station nearer the Square, a group of businessmen and citizens subscribed \$4,500 to purchase the Dorr land and presented it to the railroad as a station site. The property included land on West Street, where the Episcopal Church was later built, and an area which was long used as a circus and show ground and for open air meetings. Here on July 4, 1849, a crowd of about 4,500 men, women, and children attended a large celebration sponsored by Sunday

School children from the entire county, who were brought by special trains to Keene.

By failing to comply with the conditions of the gift of land upon which the Court House had been built, and by allowing it to be used for commercial purposes, the county lost its title to the property in 1847. This meant that the town also lost its public meeting place. In 1848 the present City Hall property was purchased and Charles Edward Parker of Boston, son of Elijah Parker and a native of Keene, was elected as architect for a town hall. The building was dedicated with a Grand Citizens' Ball on February 28, 1849. Kendall's Band from Boston played as 500 persons danced until four o'clock in the morning, inaugurating a "Citizens' Annual Ball" that was to be a local social feature for many years to come. The meeting hall was lit by gas for the first time in December 1859 for a gala concert by the Keene Brass Band, which had been organized in June 1855. The original building, still standing, has undergone remodeling several times, including the addition of a tower and interior renovations.

Railroad construction had pushed toward Keene where it was awaited with growing anticipation. The original locomotive (with one set of driving wheels), "Rough and Ready," was used during most of the construction and was the first to enter Keene, pulling work trains as the track was being laid. The line was opened to Winchendon and Troy in the fall of 1847 and to Keene the next spring.

May 16, 1848, was a gala day in the life of the village, an historic moment no one soon forgot. The weather was showery in the morning but cleared before noon. Roads had been crowded since dawn as hundreds of people poured into the village to view the new wonder. The first train from Boston was not scheduled to arrive until 1:30, and by that time nearly 5,000 had gathered around the new railroad station inspecting everything. Most of the people had never seen a locomotive before, and excitement ran at fever pitch. To signal its approach cannons were to be fired at prearranged intervals. A little before 1:30 stores closed; all business ceased while clerks and merchants joined the impatient throng. A hearty cheer was raised as the sound of the first cannon was faintly heard. Soon other shots echoed across the valley, each one louder, and all who were waiting turned their eyes eastward down the ribbons of steel. Suddenly the train, a doubleheader, came into view, a series of 15 cars drawn by two small puffing locomotives, their huge balloon stacks belching dense clouds of wood smoke. The cars were decorated with flags, banners, and evergreen. The brasswork of the engines, the "Cheshire" No. 5 and

the "Monadnock" No. 6, was brightly polished, and the whole spectacle was one of strength, power, and beauty. The crowd broke loose with wild hurrahs, church bells rang, artillery salutes were fired, and a band began to play as the train slowed, crossed Main Street, and entered the depot. The train was so long that it extended far down into the yards, where passengers who had ridden on the three open cars (fitted with improvised seats) dug the cinders out of their eyes and prepared to join the celebration. One old man who had waited many long hours raised his hands and looked toward heaven, exclaiming "Now, O Lord, I am ready to go!"

Among those who witnessed the first train was Mrs. Henry Ellis, 97-year-old widow of a Revolutionary War soldier. "What do you think of it?" she was asked by Dr. Amos Twitchell. "It beats everything I've ever attended, balls, quiltings, weddings and ordinations," was her reply.

The Suffolk Brass Band had come on the first train as volunteers for the occasion, and a procession was formed to the Town Hall for the railroad company's annual meeting. Headed by the band and the proud stockholders, the parade made its way up Main Street amid the cheers of the enthusiastic crowd. Following the business session, the procession wound its way back for a banquet served in the depot to about 1,500 people. Addresses were heard by Thomas M. Edwards and other leaders in the railroad enterprise, civic officials and honored guests, including Mayor Quincy of Boston. The train was turned around and left for Boston shortly after 5 P.M., as spectators applauded and cheered. In the evening the stockholders completed their business with a reception by Edwards, who was president of the railroad, while the town enjoyed the music of the visiting band.

In July two trains a day began regular service to and from Boston, leaving both places at seven o'clock in the morning and two o'clock in the afternoon, arriving at 11 A.M. and 6 P.M. The first passenger conductor was Gardner E. Hall, formerly a stage driver whose profession was all but wiped out by the railroad. On January 1, 1849, the railroad was opened to Bellows Falls. Problems of construction over some of the most difficult terrain in the state made the line one of the most expensive and one of the most thoroughly built in New England. Accidents were not infrequent, neither were landslides; one of the largest was a slide near Walpole, which closed all traffic for 10 days in March 1849.

Over the rails passed freight, travelers, and fugitive slaves, bound for freedom in Canada, who were aided in their escape by Northern

abolitionists. In September 1850, 22 cars of excursionists, bound from Boston to Montreal, passed through Keene, and 149 cars of cattle from the north heading for Boston passed through in July 1859. Many of those who left for California in search of gold traveled by rail; the local press was filled with advertisements of homes, farms, and businesses for sale during the gold rush.

The record run on the Cheshire line was made on November 23, 1849, as part of a contest between the Cheshire and Concord routes from Boston north. A single engine made the distance of 50 miles from South Ashburnham to North Walpole in 52 minutes.

Agitation for another railroad was begun as early as 1845, and the Ashuelot line was surveyed in 1847. Their charter was obtained in 1846, but difficulties and delay in raising funds prevented construction until 1850. Service was opened in 1851. John H. Fuller was the moving force behind the Ashuelot Railroad. (Fuller Park was named in his honor when it was opened in 1925.) The Ashuelot road never had its own rolling stock but was leased to the Connecticut River Railroad. This important link to South Vernon, Mass., gave to Keene the added distinction of being a rail junction.

The railroad repair department became one of Keene's major industries. The brick shop buildings were equipped not only to service the needs of the Keene-based Cheshire Railroad, but also to build locomotives, which was first done in 1859. In 1855 there were 60 employed in the repair work; before the close of the century the shops reached a peak of 487 employees.

A third rail line, the New Hampshire Union Railroad, (to run from Keene to Concord by way of Hillsboro) was incorporated in 1851, but the project was abandoned due to lack of business prospects for the road.

During this time the mercantile life of Keene saw the addition of several new concerns and the steady growth of those already established. The Cheshire County Bank (now Keene National Bank) was organized in July 1855, with offices on the west side of Main Street. A carriage and sleigh-making business under Jason and William French was moved to Keene around this time, and its products brought to the firm and to Keene a measure of fame. Aaron Davis established an iron foundry on Davis Street. Decorative cast iron work, stoves, gates, and fences were the products of George Holmes and Brother. The organ and melodeon firm of Joseph Foster was organized. In business from 1845 until 1857 with Charles F. Felt, and in later years with his brother Ephraim, Joseph Foster produced an instrument much ap-

preciated in its day. Foster, a Baptist deacon, provided that church with its first pipe organ in 1861. The melodeon business was located in its early days at the rear of the Winter Street Baptist Church in the "gunshop," erected about 1853, and was shared with Gilman Woodward and later George O. Leonard, makers of prize-winning sharpshooting rifles. Pianos were first advertised for sale in Keene by Eliphalet Briggs in 1843. They were the work of Lemuel Gilbert of Boston. Henry Pond employed 12 people in an extensive hat manufactory, which included not only tall beaver hats but also a wide variety of cloth hats and caps.

The industrial complex on Mechanic Street was begun about 1848 and had one of Keene's first power plants and steam engines. At South Keene pails were manufactured in increasing numbers. Mortising machinery, as well as some of the country's first woodworking machinery, was produced by J. A. Fay & Co. on the site of the present Washington School building. The firm moved to South Keene (sometimes called Branchville) where it developed so rapidly that plants were established in Connecticut and Ohio. Eventually the Keene factory was closed and the company carried on at Norwich and Cincinnati.

The photographic history of Keene opens about 1840, with the first experiments of Edward Poole, a jeweler and watchmaker. Poole's first daguerreotypes were made as a hobby. The earliest commercial photography in Keene was that of a traveling firm, Thomas & Marsh, in July 1841. Norman Wilson, another Keene jeweler, was the first local professional in the field, early in 1842. Samuel C. Dustin, who opened a studio in 1856, is responsible for most of the pioneer photographs made in Keene, along with Jotham A. French and Chester Allen, who started in the business in the 1840's.

**In** 1848 Edward Farrar carried on experiments conducting sound electrically by wire. He actually transmitted the music of a piano from his office across the Square to the Town Hall, but his work met with little support and, failing to secure permission to run more wire in town, he abandoned his experiments. The principles and some of the devices employed by Farrar were the same as those later proved commercially successful by the telephone.

In June 1851 authorization for a telegraph line from Burlington through Keene to Boston was granted, and the first message by telegraph was received in Keene on December 23, 1851.

The use of ether in dental extractions was pioneered by Horace Wells at Hartford, Conn., in 1844. Keene's first such operation took

place in April 1847 by **Dr. C. Stratton**, probably the first anaesthetic administered in Keene.

The Methodists, whose services had been held from time to time since 1803 in Keene, organized in 1835 and held meetings in the Town Hall until the congregation purchased land on the west side of Court Street and erected a small wooden building. Dedication services were held on July 15, 1852. The Baptists, on nearby Winter Street, were served by Rev. Mark Carpenter, Rev. Horace Richardson, and Rev. Gilbert Robbins as pastors between 1840 and 1857. Rev. Abiel A. Livermore was pastor of the Unitarian congregation until 1850 and then Rev. William Orne White served for 27 years.

Meetings of Millerites became frequent in the area as 1843, the year they believed would bring the end of the world, approached. In December 1842 they held a 10-day series of Keene meetings under Mr. Preble of Nashua, a traveling preacher. Reports that numbers of them, wearing white ascension robes, actually waited on the hills about Keene valley to be gathered up into heaven are probably true.

The missionary efforts of the Latter-Day Saints, the Mormons, began fairly early in this region. Lucy Mack Smith, mother of Joseph Smith, Jr., the prophet, was born in Gilsum, N.H., and her brother continued to live there after the foundation of the new church in New York State in 1830. Joseph Smith Sr. and his son John, father and brother of the prophet, preached in this area in 1836. Elders came about 1841 and converted 16 persons, and further church organization took place in 1857.

An 1844 survey of schools revealed that Keene maintained 14 buildings, nine of brick, though not all were plastered or properly painted. "All the rooms except one are warmed by stoves," the report observed, "which often produces too high a temperature, causing dullness and headaches. The floors are very cold, from the fact that there is no tight cellar or underpinning, the wind being allowed full sweep under the whole house. This tends to keep the feet cold while the stove keeps the head hot: a state of the human body not approved by our physicians."

Although equipment was sadly lacking, 610 scholars were enrolled. The high school was revived in November 1853, with 93 pupils and two teachers, and the Keene Academy building leased for its use. Under William Torrance, its first principal, public secondary education was finally begun. The first high school dramatic presentation was staged in November 1855 to raise money for the purchase of a

piano. Private education continued to be offered, but on a smaller scale, and for the most part confined to special subjects, such as the writing school of W. G. Spalding, from Worcester, in 1843, the singing school of William S. Hutchins in 1852, and instruction in piano, guitar, flute, and clarinet offered by J. S. Farina in 1848.

The Cheshire County Teachers' Institute, a training session to improve classroom teaching, was organized and held in Keene in April 1845. Another was held in the fall of that year, and two sessions in 1846, at Winchester and Dublin. The 1847 institutes were held in Keene and Chesterfield.

The extensive cabinet and furniture shop of Eliphalet and Warren S. Briggs on Washington Street and the old two-story school, used as a joiner's shop, with other buildings just above the Square, burned on a Sunday morning in February 1846. Rev. Livermore dismissed his congregation and went with them to assist at the fire. According to tradition, Rev. Barstow, with a different sense of duty, continued services as though nothing unusual were happening, although his own church was threatened by flames. Further efforts at fire protection had been furnished in 1845 by seven cisterns sunk around the business district and connected by long pipes to the central town well at the head of Main Street. It was, however, a meager effort, and fire lines, or bucket brigades, were still employed to assist the hand-pumped fire engines. Beyond the Square there was no protection except for nearby brooks and wells. The Ashuelot Fire Insurance Co. was organized in February 1853, beginning a business venture that was to last for half a century.

In 1847 the Keene Fire Society turned over to the town its two fire engines, leather hose, fire buckets, and engine house on Roxbury Street. The latter was sold at auction in 1851. In 1848 a third engine, the Deluge No. 1 (built by Hunneman fire engine makers) was purchased, and in 1852 uniforms for the firemen were adopted. The older hand pumpers received the names Lion and Tiger; the engine companies later became known as the Deluge and Neptune. The Deluge engine house was located on Court Street, near the site of the Barker Block. The Neptune engine house was situated at the rear of the new Town Hall on Washington Street. Musters for fire companies became popular. Streams were pumped for prizes, the mark being the flagpole in the Common. A firemen's ball became a feature at this time as a social event. The second annual levee of the Deluge and Neptune Companies, held at the Town Hall in December 1856, was a gala affair, marred only by a fire during the evening festivities.

The Deluge machine had been pulled upstairs and decorated for the event, and by the time it was dragged down and to the scene of the fire the buildings were a total loss.

A company of riflemen in West Keene was formed in 1842, and area units continued their rivalry in parades, reviews, and exercises, although the lure of military musters was on the wane. An encampment of 220 officers was held near the Emerald House (now the Hotel Ellis) in September 1847. Other military gatherings were held on Roxbury Street and on Beaver Street (where Woodland Cemetery was later located). A visiting company, the Mechanics' Phalanx of Lowell, paraded in Keene in September 1851, and the colorful uniforms attracted a large crowd.

Only a few soldiers from Keene saw service in the Mexican War. Captain Charles B. Daniels of the regular army, a native of the town, was killed in September 1847, while leading an assault at El Molino del Rey, and Captain Albemarle Cody, also of Keene, was wounded and promoted to brevet major for gallant and meritorious conduct. In June 1842 some 70 artillerymen from Plattsburgh, N.Y., passed by way of Keene to Rhode Island and service in the "Dorr Rebellion." The unsuccessful Thomas W. Dorr, who claimed the governorship of Rhode Island during a conflict of authority, fled to New Hampshire and lived for some months in Westmoreland, during which time he was a frequent visitor to Keene.

The military as a whole became less and less an attraction, and the last of the old-fashioned musters was held in 1850.

Public entertainment, in addition to balls, receptions, and society meetings, was provided by a number of traveling companies. J. W. Barrett displayed his "dioramic illusions," including the "Battle of Bunker Hill, Storm at Sea, the Garden of Eden and the Sunset in Paradise, made to imitate with surprising accuracy the movements of animate nature" in April 1842. In April 1849 a group of American Indians performed in the Town Hall with dances, songs, and illustrations of tribal customs. Welch's National Circus played Keene in May 1849, and was the first to be lighted by gas, which was manufactured in their own portable plant. The circus that came in August 1851 was said to be the largest in the nation, and consisted of 110 horses and 90 men. It also featured a gallery of life-size wax figures of Presidents of the United States. In September 1853 Spaulding and Rogers' Circus brought to Keene a 40-horse team driven four abreast, pulling "the world renowned" Apollonicon, a steam calliope, and featured musical, equestrian, gymnastic, and dramatic talent. When

the troupe returned to Keene in May 1856 they came by rail, the first railroad circus in the town's history. Another calliope performed for large crowds in Keene in September 1856, this one attached to a railroad locomotive and used to provide music for rail excursions. Mrs. Gibbs, a talented English vocalist, gave a "Soiree Musicale" in June 1841, an affair that was almost broken up by the noisy rehearsal of the local brass band nearby. The famed Hutchinson Family Singers, natives of Milford, N.H., performed in the Town Hall in June 1842 as part of their New England tour. The Swiss Bell Ringers, who were heard in May 1851, delighted the audience: "not only was it an entertainment attractive from its novelty, but also from its musical merits." Advertised as a "wonderful curiosity" and "the American giantess," the 19-year-old Rosina D. Richardson, born in Marlow, N.H., and famed fat girl who weighed 500 pounds, was the attraction at the Town Hall on December 7, 1852.

Although a successful cattle show had been held in Keene in 1843, agricultural shows had declined in the two decades prior to 1847. There was a revival of interest that year, when the Cheshire County Agricultural Society was formed and sponsored exhibitions. In 1849 its show attracted 60 pairs of oxen entered for premiums, with more than 100 pairs on display, while fruit and other produce, as well as fancy articles and manufactures, added to the general interest. For a number of years the high standards of this fair were matched in succeeding exhibitions. A private showing, by Paul F. Aldrich of Swanzy at the Emerald House in Keene, of an ox weighing 4,000 pounds and a six-year-old Durham heifer weighing 2,300 pounds attracted much attention in December 1847.

On October 3-6, 1854, the fifth annual New Hampshire Agricultural Society Fair was held in West Keene on land (now Wheelock Park) purchased as a fairground by prominent citizens. Special trains brought a record number of visitors, many of whom were transported to the exhibition in a type of early bus, a wagon built by a French firm of carriage makers. It seated 24, and bore the name "Experiment." In addition to the extensive agricultural exhibits and fancy articles shown in a building 100 feet long which had been erected for the occasion, two buffaloes from Nebraska were shown, a 1,200-pound Maine hog, and a moose. More than 200 pairs of oxen, 400 head of cattle, horses, and other stock drew large crowds. A gallery seating 2,000 had been erected, as well as barns and other buildings, and the event brought to Keene the governor, state officials, and visitors from a wide area. Local hotels were crowded with as

many people as had ever been entertained for a single event up to that time.

Archery enjoyed a period of popularity among both men and women in Keene, and at least one festival dedicated to the sport was held on the banks of the Ashuelot River in 1849. The XY Club was formed by a group of women in June 1854. Meetings featured discussions of fashions, current events, the manner of dealing with servants, and cultural topics, but gossip was barred according to club rules. Social events, excursions, and parties were frequently held by the club members. The ladies, with their husbands, made the journey to Bellows Falls in three double carriages in September 1855. Leaving Keene at 7 A.M., they traveled through Surry and Walpole whose "wild and varied scenery" was admired. The party dined at the famed Island House, viewed the falls—"to see the noble stream plunging and foaming over the huge rocks worn smooth by continued action of the waters for ages is truly magnificent"—and returned to Keene about 9 P.M.

A severe wind and snowstorm in December 1854 damaged fences, timber, and buildings, and toppled 50 chimneys in the village. Many trees were lost, including those on what had been known since colonial times as the minister's lot. The sawmills did a brisk business, but it took generations to grow trees again in some of the badly damaged areas.

Among the cultural activities in Keene were a social book club, formed in 1847, and the resurrected Keene Debating Club. Lectures by leading figures in American life were sponsored by the Keene Lyceum which had been established in this period. Wendell Phillips spoke on "The Lost Arts" in January 1854, and William Lloyd Garrison was the speaker at a series of anti-slavery meetings during October 1855. Others who spoke included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Ward Beecher, Charles Sumner, Josiah Quincy Jr., Bayard Taylor, and John Godfrey Saxe. Henry David Thoreau is known to have visited the native town of his mother, Cynthia Dunbar. Speaking of Keene's wide street in 1850, Thoreau wrote, "Keene Street strikes the traveller favorably, it is so wide, level, straight, and long. I have heard one of my relatives, who was born and bred there, say that you could see a chicken run across it a mile off. I have also been told that when this town was settled they laid out a street four rods wide, but at a subsequent meeting of the proprietors one rose and remarked, 'We have plenty of land, why not make the street eight rods wide?' and so they voted that it should be eight rods wide,



*Central Square in the 1860's*

and the town is known far and near for its handsome street. It was a cheap way of securing comfort, as well as fame, and I wish that all new towns would take pattern from this. It is best to lay our plans widely in youth, for then land is cheap, and it is but too easy to contract our views afterward. . . . Keene is built on a remarkably large and level interval, like the bed of a lake, and the surrounding hills, which are remote from its street, must afford some good walks. The scenery of mountain towns is commonly too much crowded. A town which is built on a plain of some extent, with an open horizon, and surrounded by hills at a distance, affords the best walks and views."

Another literary figure associated with Keene because of his birth in the village and who returned for visits was Charles King Newcomb, whose father served in the War of 1812, and who was the grandson of Judge Daniel Newcomb. Although he never fully realized the high hopes others held for him, no less an authority than Ralph Waldo Emerson praised him without reservation, saying his mind "was far richer than mine."

Traveling artists, painting portraits for their board, had visited Keene for many years. Several, like Horace Bundy, are identified as among the best of the American "primitive" school. A larger figure in the field of American art was Benjamin Champney, founder of the "White Mountain School," who was among those attracted in increasing numbers to Mt. Monadnock. During the summer of 1849 Champney visited his native New Hampshire and made sketches in the Keene area. He described the village as "that most delightful of New England towns," where he "made many pleasant friends." A picture he made from Beech Hill is among the earliest artistic representations of Keene. Reproduced as a lithograph in 1850, it had a

popular sale in Keene. The notables who doubtless visited Keene on their way to and from Monadnock included Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Ellery Channing, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Abbott H. Thayer, and Louis Agassiz.

Salma Hale's *Annals of Keene* saw its second and enlarged edition published by the Prentiss firm in 1851. The selectmen were directed to take 1,500 copies at a reasonable price. In 1853 the New York firm of Presdee and Edwards published a handsome wall map of the village.

As Keene approached its centennial of town government, the population grew to 3,392. Perhaps a sense of history was beginning to make itself felt in 1852 when a fireproof safe was approved for the protection of town records, although there was no office except the residence of whoever served as town clerk. The centennial anniversary of Keene under its New Hampshire charter was observed on May 26, 1853. A large tent was pitched on a flat space near the Square, but rain forced the exercises to be held in the Town Hall. Thomas M. Edwards was chairman of a committee of the town's leading citizens to plan the affair. An ode sung by a large choir was composed by the Baptist minister, Gilbert Robbins, and the oration of the day was delivered by Joel Parker, then a professor of law at Harvard. The rain having stopped, a procession was formed, led by the Boston Brigade Band under famed American bandmaster Patrick S. Gilmore, and marched down Main Street to a spacious tent where a banquet was served for nearly 1,800 people. Toasts were offered to the Centennial, Sir Benjamin Keene, the first settlers, the ladies of the community, the Ashuelot River, those of Keene who had left to seek their fortunes elsewhere, the house of Nathan Blake, Rev. Jacob Bacon, Captain Isaac Wyman and those who answered the Lexington alarm, the schools, and a number of the leaders in the growth of the village. Each toast was responded to by a short address and often a musical selection. The three fire companies, Deluge, Tiger, and Lion, made their first appearance in new uniforms, and escorted the celebration officers and clergymen. The meeting was adjourned for 100 years, and a band concert and reception were enjoyed by all.

Prominent among the unusual characters in Keene during this period was Anna Banks, who lived in a hut on Gilsum Street, not far from the glass factory. She was a wrinkled old crone who obtained her living largely by telling fortunes, and it became a popular sport for young people to consult her. Her appearance on the streets of the

village attracted attention, as she was a colorful personage, generally good-natured and allowing all manner of fun in her presence. The roof of her shack extended to the ground so that it was an easy matter to climb up to the huge chimney, where a view of a considerable portion of the interior could be obtained. A kettle of boiling water usually hung from a crane in the fireplace, and the boys thought it fun to ascend the roof quietly on a dark evening and drop sticks and stones into the kettle below. On one such occasion, her patience tried to the bone, old Anna seized a dipper and filling it with scalding water, flung it on those of the mischievous who were not quick enough to reach the ground and make their escape from her wrath. Anna Banks died in 1858 at the age of 76.

Justus Tozer, famous for his ready wit and ability to construct rhymes on any subject suggested, was another eccentric who also died in 1858. Although he was a harmless, good-natured old man who had lived to 70 years, it was said at his decease that he had not drawn a sober breath for 40 of those years. His quaint rhymes and witty remarks on all subjects made him a favorite with young people. During the summer months Tozer made his home in a barn or deserted house. In cold weather he was given shelter by some humane family, and paid his way by sawing wood and doing other chores. Once asked to concoct a rhyme about himself, he immediately rendered the following:

Justus Tozer is a poser,  
He's a drunken skunk;  
It takes a gill to wet his bill  
And a pint to get him drunk.

Of less popularity was "Sol" Sumner, a ragged, filthy, and extremely repulsive old man who prowled around town in search of means to keep himself in a little food and drink. He had none of the sociable characteristics which made Anna Banks and Justus Tozer tolerated with good grace.

Whether it was on Anna Banks' advice or not, one unusual occurrence in town at about this time shows how strong superstition and belief in fortune-telling were at this date. A young man in one of the families of the village was sick, supposed to be "in consumption." His friends were told by a fortune-teller that if they would disinter the remains of a relative who had been dead for some time, take out the heart and burn it to ashes, and give the ashes to the sick man, he would be cured. This was actually done, but the young man was buried in the old Washington Street Cemetery a short time later.