

Announcement.

After several years of laborious work, in which the utmost care was taken by the historian, Gen. Simon G. Griffin, to render the following pages of great interest and value, they are presented to the public.

At the outset General Griffin submitted a proposition for the publication of a history of Keene, which bears date, February 16, 1895. On April 18 of the same year, a joint special committee of the city councils recommended that the proposition be accepted and, on May 2, following, the councils authorized the joint standing committee on public library to make a contract with General Griffin for writing and compiling a history of Keene, in accordance with his proposition and the report of the committee to whom said proposition had been referred.

A contract was accordingly made on the 4th day of June, 1895. At a meeting of the councils held on September 6, 1900, the supervisory committee of the history of Keene, Messrs. Lemuel Hayward, Bertram Ellis and Wallace L. Mason, reported that, as the history was not completed at the end of five years, as General Griffin had worked diligently upon the task, had read to the committee his manuscript up to 1860, had taken notes between 1860 and 1874 and had collected material for many of the illustrations, they thought he ought to be allowed additional time for the completion of the work. The councils accordingly authorized the supervising committee to extend the contract for the preparation of the history two years on the terms named therein.

Gen. Simon Goodell Griffin died on January 14, 1902. On June 19, 1902, the supervisory committee transmitted to the city councils the manuscript of the "History of the Town of Keene" as written by General Griffin, with photographs, maps and other subjects for illustration, and suggested the appointment of a new committee to attend to the publication and sale of the history, with power to make minor alterations and any additions thereto it thought advisable. As one of such additions the annals of the city of Keene, from the incorporation of the city to the date of publication, were suggested. On the same date Bertram Ellis, Wallace L. Mason and Frank H. Whitcomb were appointed a committee for the above named purposes and the councils appropriated the unexpended balance for contingent expenses. Bertram Ellis resigned and the other members of the committee advertised for bids and made a contract with the Sentinel Printing Company for the publication of the history, on October 27, 1903.

Events of interest in the history of the city of Keene, from 1874 to the present date, have been briefly noted and the sesquicentennial celebration, at greater length.

COMMITTEE.

Sketch of the Author.

BY REV. OCTAVIUS APPLGATE, JR., M. A.

The author of this history, Simon Goodell Griffin, brigadier and brevet major general, United States Volunteers, in the civil war, was born in Nelson, N. H., Aug. 9, 1824, to Nathan and Sally (Wright) Griffin. He came of a stock of more than ordinary strength of intellect and force of character. His grandfather, "Deacon Samuel Griffin, Esquire," was a member of the New Hampshire legislature, and both he and Nehemiah Wright, the general's maternal grandfather, were soldiers in the Continental army and fought in the battle of Bunker Hill. Nathan Griffin, the general's father, was of high ability and public service, but lost his health in early manhood, and the care of the family of seven children fell largely upon his wife, a woman of whom it is written, "She was one of the loveliest of her sex both in person and character, one of those sweet and noble women who bless the world by living in it;" a woman of singular beauty and especially gifted as a singer, with a voice of remarkable clearness and sweetness. She died at the age of ninety-four with eye undimmed and mind unclouded; and while the general owed much to her wise counsels and training, her temperament was her greatest gift to him.

Owing to the ill health of the father, the boy at the age of six went to live in the adjoining town of Roxbury with his uncle, Gen. Samuel Griffin. He too had a decided taste for military affairs, had been a volunteer for the War of 1812, though not called into active service, and had attained the highest rank in the state militia. His habit of discussing military affairs and of repeating descriptions which he had read of battles and campaigns made a deep and lasting impression upon the boy's mind.

He was a successful farmer, a man of energy and believed in industry and frugality as the means of success. Never after seven years of age could the boy be spared for school save for ten or twelve weeks in the winter, and this was all the formal schooling he ever received; but his natural ambition and thirst for knowledge carried him through such private reading and study as his leisure permitted, to his taking at the age of eighteen the position of school teacher, a vocation in which he attained marked success. Continuing his studies while teaching, and working on the farm during vacation, he mastered all the higher English branches, became proficient in Latin and French and covered a wide field of miscellaneous reading, making a specialty of history and the lives of military leaders. Thus by inheritance, early training and self education he was fitted for the special work that lay before him, and had cultivated that patriotic spirit and ability for military affairs which won for him his preëminence among the soldiers of New Hampshire, and made him one of the best volunteer officers in the War of the Rebellion.

In 1850 he married Ursula J., daughter of Jason Harris of Nelson. She died soon after the birth of a son, who did not long survive her. After this bereavement he began the study of law and while thus engaged represented his native town in the legislature, serving in his second term as chairman of the committee on education. Pursuing his study of law at Exeter and afterward at Concord, he was admitted to the bar in 1860 and had just entered upon his professional work when the war broke out. A recent trip to Washington had convinced him of the imminence of war and its probable long duration, so he promptly abandoned his practice, joined a company of young men then forming at Concord, and began the study of military tactics. He volunteered as a private, but was elected captain of the company, which, finding the first call filled, was mustered into service under the second call for three years or the war, at Portsmouth, June 4, 1861. This company was the celebrated "Goodwin Rifles," Company B, Second New Hampshire Volunteers, and by the exertions of Capt. Griffin and his friends,

who guaranteed the state against the heavy expense, was equipped with Sharpe's rifles, and was the first to leave the state with breech loading arms. The company under Capt. Griffin was detailed for skirmish duty at the first battle of Bull Run and "was handled with remarkable coolness and bravery though under heavy fire." Gen. Hooker's attention having been called to the effectiveness of the Sharpe's rifle, he obtained for Capt. Griffin leave of absence and gave him letters to the governor of New Hampshire with a view to having him raise a regiment or battalion similarly armed; but the state authorities with short-sighted economy again refused to incur the expense. Capt. Griffin was promoted to lieutenant colonel of the Sixth New Hampshire Volunteers on the 26th of October and immediately joined that regiment, then being recruited at Keene. The Sixth was assigned to Burnside's expedition to North Carolina and encamped first on Hatteras and afterward on Roanoke island, where Lieut. Col. Griffin found himself in command, with hard work before him in restoring the health of his regiment and improving its discipline and morale, which had been seriously lowered by sickness. So marked was the success which soon followed his efforts that this regiment became "one of the best drilled and disciplined in the service."¹ In April, 1862, Col. Griffin commanded an expedition of 600 men and effectively broke up a rebel rendezvous near Elizabeth City, N. C., capturing 74 men and a quantity of arms and ammunition. At the battle of Camden, N. C., April 19, Lieut. Col. Griffin commanded his regiment, nearly 1,000 strong, and gave conclusive evidence of his power as a disciplinarian and of his influence over his men. At a critical moment he was ordered to attack. "Moving forward now with full ranks against the enemy's right, with a well formed line and colors flying, the regiment made a formidable appearance and soon drew the fire of the rebels. A cannon shot came tearing through the lines near the colors and the line swung back in the centre until it left Col. Griffin standing as far in the front as his place was in the rear. Watching an opportunity when he could

¹ History Sixth Regiment, New Hampshire Volunteers, page 5.

be heard, he waved his sword and shouted, 'Forward, Sixth New Hampshire!' Every man turned to the front and the line came back as coolly as if nothing had happened. The regiment having advanced until within easy musket shot, the lieutenant colonel halted the line and gave the command, 'Ready, aim, fire,' and the regiment poured in a volley with all the coolness and precision of the parade ground, every musket discharging at the same instant. The enemy broke and fled without firing another shot."¹ It was reported that prisoners from the Third Georgia declared that "we didn't care much for those red-legged Zouaves, but when the regulars poured in *that* volley, we thought it time to git."

On April 22, 1862, he was commissioned colonel of his regiment and in July was sent with the Ninth corps to Gen. Pope's aid for the Virginia campaign, participating in the second battle of Bull Run. During this battle Col. Griffin and his regiment were almost surrounded in obeying an order to take and hold a wood, receiving a murderous fire in front and on flanks. Col. Griffin, thinking the Union troops were firing upon them by mistake, seized the colors and waved them in the direction whence the fire was hottest, but only to increase it; then he gave the order to retreat and brought off the remnant safe from capture, carrying the colors himself after four color bearers had been shot down. That the regiment in that short charge lost almost one-half of its number in killed, wounded, and missing is touching evidence of the men's courage and their devotion to their brave colonel. He did efficient service in the battles of Chantilly, South Mountain, and at Antietam, where, in command of his own and the Second Maryland regiment, he made a gallant effort to force the "stone bridge," and when the attack was reinforced his was the first regiment to form its line on the crest of the ridge beyond. For this instance of bravery and skill he was recommended for promotion by Gen. Burnside. Col. Griffin and his regiment did brave work at Fredericksburg, Dec. 13, the regiment losing one-third of its strength.

¹ History Sixth Regiment, New Hampshire Volunteers, page 45.

In 1863 he was placed in command of the First brigade, Second division, Ninth corps, and after minor operations in Kentucky was sent with his corps to the aid of Gen. Grant in the operations against Vicksburg, joining the forces under Gen. Sherman in his campaign against Gen. Joe Johnson. After the corps had returned to Kentucky, Col. Griffin was sent to east Tennessee in command of the Second division, and then, Gen. Burnside needing more troops, was sent to Kentucky for the balance of the Ninth corps, but Kentucky being threatened, he was placed for its protection at the important post of Camp Nelson in command of 9,000 men. While there his regiment reenlisted, and upon the reorganization of the Ninth corps at Annapolis, in the spring of 1864, he was assigned to the command of the Second brigade, Second division. That corps joined the Army of the Potomac near the Rapidan on May 5 and did good service in the battle of the Wilderness on the following day. During this long campaign the work of the brigade was so arduous and severe that it had to be continually strengthened, and its losses aggregated three hundred more than its original number, though Col. Griffin, always at the front, marvelously escaped injury. He won his star at Spottsylvania Court House, May 12, by bringing his brigade to the support of Hancock, whose troops had been left in broken formations after a successful charge and could only be saved from being overwhelmed in a counter charge of three rebel divisions by a bold and rapid movement of Col. Griffin's brigade, supported by the corps. "This movement its skillful commander was not slow to make, and the brigade, taking the whole column of the rebels in front and flank, received their terrible onset with indomitable obstinacy."¹ For this skillful and gallant action, "which without doubt saved Hancock's corps from being routed,"² Col. Griffin, upon recommendation of Gen. Grant and Gen. Burnside, was nominated a brigadier general of volunteers, and the nomination was unanimously confirmed by the senate without debate or reference to a committee.

¹ History Sixth Regiment, New Hampshire Volunteers, page 243.

² Wait's New Hampshire in the Rebellion, page 309.

Gen. Griffin and his brigade took part in the battles of North Anna River, Tolopotamoy Creek, Bethsaida Church and Cold Harbour; and did most efficient work in the operations against Petersburg, where, "in charge of his own and Gen. Curtin's brigade on June 17 he made an adroit and successful attack on the enemy's intrenched lines, carrying their works for a mile in extent, capturing nearly one thousand prisoners besides four pieces of artillery, more than a thousand stand of small arms and a quantity of ammunition. Gen. Potter, commanding the division, entrusted the whole planning and execution of this attack to Gen. Griffin and most skillfully did he carry out his part of it. He had made a wide breach in the enemies' lines and there was nothing to prevent our advance into the city had supports come up in time."¹ At the desperate battle of the Mine Gen. Griffin again distinguished himself, receiving orders through Gen. Potter to take command of the advance after Ledlie's failure, and push a column to Cemetery hill; Gen. Griffin forced his way through the mass of disorganized troops in the crater, climbed to the parapet on the farther side and called to the men to come forward, but the order had come too late. The fire from all directions was so hot that no troops could live there, and the few who bravely sprang to join the intrepid general were nearly every one shot down. He seemed to bear a charmed life; but at length, unhurt, was compelled to abandon his gallant attempt. The engagements at Weldon Railroad, Poplar Spring Church and Hatcher's Run soon followed and the operations at Petersburg culminated in the attack upon the enemies' lines at Fort Sedgewick ("Fort Hell") where the assault of the Second division of the Ninth corps was planned and led by Gen. Griffin, with Gen. Hartranft on his right. At the commencement of this action Gen. Potter was wounded and succeeded in the command by Gen. Griffin "who exhibited throughout the greatest activity, bravery and skill." For "gallant and meritorious conduct" he was breveted a major general of volunteers, a brevet won sword in hand on one of the most bloody

¹ Wait's New Hampshire in the Rebellion, page 309.

fields of the war. Maj. Gen. Griffin retained command of the division and joined in the pursuit and capture of Gen. Lee's army, and, the war over, was mustered out Aug. 24, 1865, and returned home, having attained the highest rank of any volunteer officer in his state.

His services had been active and honorable to a high degree. He was brave and of sound judgment, gallant and patient, persistent in purpose and yet knowing when to let go. He was a strict disciplinarian and firm commander, and yet beneath all had a tenderness which made him not only respected by his men but beloved and trusted. He took part in twenty-four great battles and scores of smaller fights and was always in demand at the front. He had horses killed and wounded under him in action and his clothing frequently cut by bullets, but he did not receive a scratch, and never lost in all his long service a day's duty from sickness, owing, no doubt, to his temperate habits. He was tendered a commission as major in the regular army at the close of the war, but declined the honor and returned to make his residence at Keene, where, in the early years of the war, he had married Margaret, daughter of Charles Lamson. He represented this town several times in the legislature, serving two terms as speaker of the house of representatives. Twice he received the Republican nomination for congress, but at each election his party was defeated. In 1867 the degree of master of arts was conferred upon him by Dartmouth college. For several years after the war he engaged in manufacturing near his home, and later became interested in the development of Texas, spending some years there with his wife and two sons.

Gen. Griffin was a member of the Massachusetts commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, was for two years its commander, and at his death was the only surviving member of his rank. He was also a past commander of the Order of Knights Templar. A devoted member of the Episcopal church, he was for years a warden in St. James' church, Keene, and delegate to the diocesan convention; and represented his diocese in the general convention.

His long life in Keene was constant in its service to the community. Of broad sympathies, earnest convictions and scholarly culture, he was ever active in its life, particularly in its educational, philanthropic, and historical interests. He was a public speaker of wide reputation, with good presence, erect bearing and a strong and resonant voice, and was often called upon for orations and addresses, which were always prepared with thoroughness and exhibited both clearness of thought and grace and vigor in delivery.

All the qualities of a true manliness that made Gen. Griffin of such value to his country in its crisis matured in his long life as a citizen, the usefulness of which always centered in his home city.

Gen. Griffin died Jan. 14, 1902, and funeral services were held Jan. 16 in St. James' Episcopal church, Rev. Daniel C. Roberts, D. D., of Concord and the writer, a former rector of the church, officiating. The burial was of a military character, attended by representatives of the Loyal Legion and the Keene Light Guards. It was one of the largest and most impressive funerals ever known in this place.