



Transportation

by Marium E. Foster

PART ONE

Railroads

The first idea of a railroad in Keene originated in 1829 when there was a discussion of building one from Boston to Brattleboro, Vt. Not until 1835, however, was a bill presented in the legislature for a charter, which was granted to the Keene Railroad Co. A meeting was held in Keene and a committee appointed to survey the land for a route from Keene to Brattleboro. Later in the year the Keene Railroad Co. met and accepted the charter, but as all proposed routes indicated prohibitive building costs, the project was abandoned.

The building of a railroad from Boston to Fitchburg, Mass., was discussed in 1842, and meetings were held to arouse interest in the importance of such a railroad. In January 1843 at a meeting in Boston, Thomas M. Edwards of Keene was elected one of the directors of the proposed railroad. By spring work was started on the line from Boston to Fitchburg. In December 1843, after a public meeting in the Keene Congregational Church, \$40,000 was subscribed in two days to influence the engineers to have the railroad pass through Keene en route from Fitchburg to Brattleboro. In the report of the engineers, however, the Fitchburg road was favored through Greenfield instead of through Keene. In 1844 the New Hampshire Legis-

lature issued a charter for the Fitchburg, Keene and Connecticut Line. The charter was accepted, but on the report of Benaiah Cooke, the agent appointed to arrange for the land, the claims and the amount of money involved in securing the land were not satisfactory, and the charter was not accepted by the incorporators.

On December 17, 1844, the New Hampshire Legislature issued a charter for the Cheshire Railroad. The first meeting of the organization was held on January 10, 1845, and the charter was accepted. Salma Hale was chosen president and Cooke, clerk of the corporation. A local committee consisting of Thomas M. Edwards, Samuel Dinsmoor, John H. Elliot, and four others from surrounding towns, was appointed to secure a charter from Massachusetts and to make plans for the railroad. On March 21, 1845, the books of the Cheshire Railroad were opened, and at the end of April \$900,000 had been subscribed. All shares were sold by the end of May. Three directors were from Keene: Thomas M. Edwards, president, Salma Hale, and Benjamin F. Adams.

By August 1845 the engineers, W. S. Whitwell and Lucian Tilton, had been chosen, and the grading contracts were made for the road between Keene and Winchendon. The land damages were less than \$7,000. The land around Main Street in Keene was very low, and the expense of filling in the lowlands led to the decision to build the new depot near lower Marlboro Street. Finally the Dorr lot of six acres (now the Gilbo Avenue area) was offered provided that the new depot would be built on it. The Cheshire Railroad accepted this offer, together with \$4,500 which was raised by public subscription. Josiah Colony deeded over the property on October 1, 1846. The old Cheshire Bank was moved, and the new depot was built in the summer of 1847.

The Cheshire Railroad was started in South Ashburnham, Mass. and built to Winchendon, thence to Troy, where Keene connected with this line by stagecoach. Finally, in the spring of 848, the Cheshire track was completed, with much credit given to the chief engineer, Lucian Tilton, for the fine roadbed and splendid bridges. The rails of the Cheshire Railroad were purchased from Gray's establishment in Boston and were considered superior to the imported rails. The arch bridge in South Keene, a span of 90' and 60' high, was called one of the finest of its kind in the country. Tilton became the first superintendent of the railroad.

The Cheshire Railroad was opened to Keene on May 16, 1848. The first train to arrive was from Boston, a doubleheader with two



*Mural by Barry Faulkner of the opening of the
Cheshire Railroad, Keene, in 1848*

engines, the Cheshire No. 5 and the Monadnock No. 6. The train was decorated its entire length with flags and evergreens. As it came around the curve from the Water Street crossing and into the depot, cannons roared and bells rang amid the cheers of over 5,000 people. The train brought Mayor Quincy of Boston, Alvah Crocker of Fitchburg, and other prominent men to the celebration. The Boston Suffolk Brass Band volunteered for the occasion and led the procession of stockholders from the depot to the Town Hall for a business meeting, after which the band led the stockholders back to the depot where, in the waiting room, four rows of tables were set up for a bountiful repast.

By July 1848 there were two regular trains a day, leaving Keene and Boston at 7 A.M. and 2 P.M. and arriving at 11 A.M. and 6 P.M., except Sunday. When trains began running on the Cheshire Railroad, objection was made to the blowing of the engine whistles. The noise was not only an intolerable nuisance, many said, but it would frighten the cows in the pastures so they would not give milk!

The building of the railroad to Bellows Falls through the "Summit," with rock cutting and drilling, was one of the great engineering feats accomplished in New England, taking three years for completion. The work was done by several hundred men, mostly Irish immigrants, who lived with their families near the "Summit." The first train to carry passengers to Bellows Falls left Keene on January 1, 1849, as a private excursion trip, while on January 8 regular passenger and freight train service commenced.

The building of the Ashuelot Railroad had been contemplated in 1845. It was through the efforts of John H. Fuller of Keene that the land was surveyed in 1847, and the charter given in 1848. Fuller

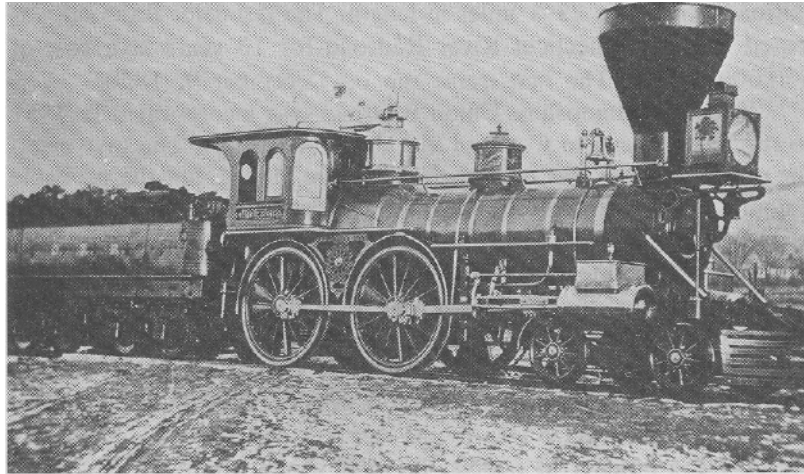
invested \$50,000 and became the first president of the corporation. In January 1850 work was started; there were 920,000 cubic yards of earth and 20,000 cubic yards of rock moved in the building of the railroad which was $23 \frac{3}{4}$ miles in length. The Ashuelot Railroad was leased to the Connecticut River Railroad for 10 years at a cost of \$30,000 a year. The first trains ran on December 9, 1850.

The New Hampshire Union Railroad was incorporated in 1851 to run from Keene to Concord via Hillsboro Bridge. The first meeting of the grantees was held at the Cheshire House, but the probable amount of business did not warrant the cost, and the enterprise was abandoned.

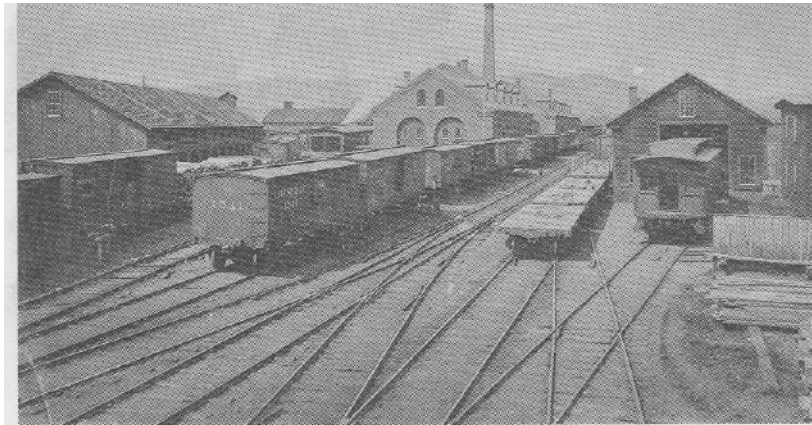
The Manchester and Keene Railroad was chartered in 1864. The line was surveyed in 1865 by James A. Weston, civil engineer, who later became governor of the state. The corporation was organized in 1868, but it was not until 1874 that the city voted for bonds to help build the railroad. The first contractors failed after \$50,000 had been paid. This was a great loss to the farmers and traders and greatly prejudiced a number of people. In 1875 a new charter was granted with T. H. Wood as president. It took nine years of negotiation to build the railroad from Keene to Hancock, but on December 1, 1878,



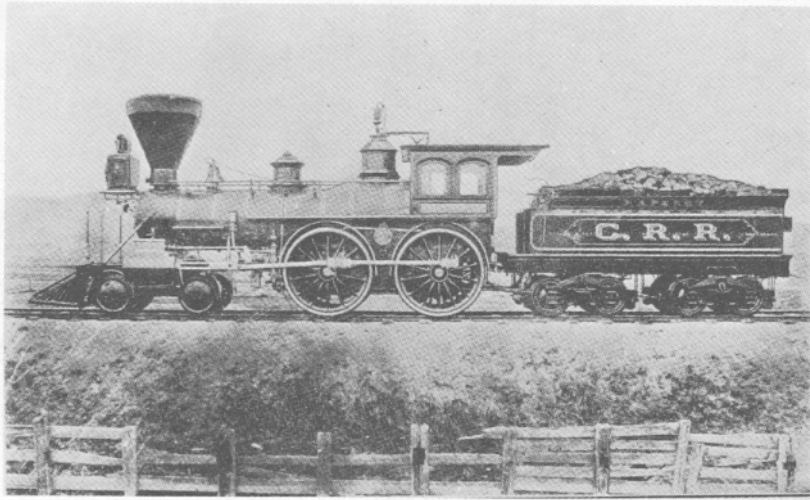
Viaduct of Cheshire Railroad at South Keene



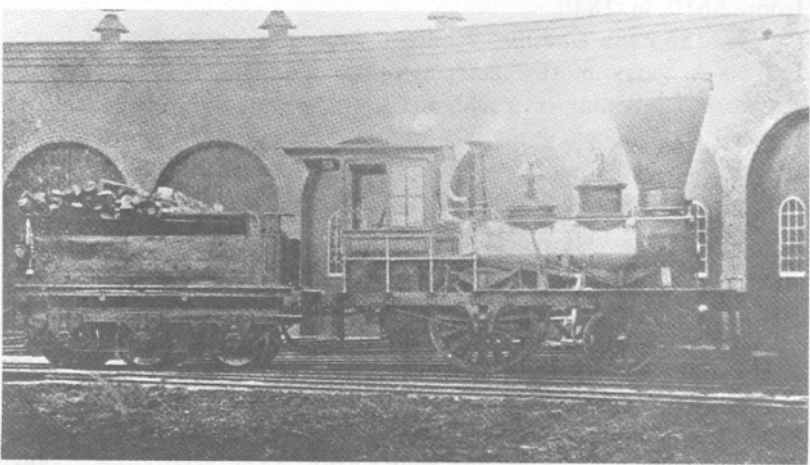
The George W. Perry (circa 1863)



Cheshire Railroad Repair Shops



The F. A. Perry (circa 1870)



The Rough and Ready



Samuel W. Hale drove the last spike at a ceremony held on Eastern Avenue. The original plan for the cross-over into Keene had been changed, and the bridge over Eastern Avenue was built after much opposition. The first car ran over the railroad on November 30, 1878.

The advent of the railroads in town, with the advantages of direct connections for passenger and freight service to Massachusetts, Vermont, and New York, brought an influx of new industries. By 1860 great progress had been made, and Keene was the most important town in Cheshire County. It had a population of 4,320, an increase from 2,610 in 1840.

In 1866 the Cheshire Railroad built the Keene Repair Shops. Francis A. Perry, master mechanic, drew the plans and superintended the work. Consisting of a machine shop, blacksmith's shop, and carpenter's shop, it was built in a continuous line, although each shop was distinct and complete in itself. The first locomotive to be built in the brick shops was the "Murdock" in 1868. It was named for the president of the railroad. In 1870 the "F. A. Perry" engine was built with plans and specifications by Francis A. Perry. New engines were built and others rebuilt, among them the well-known "Cheshire," the "F. H. Kingsbury," named for Frederick H. Kingsbury, treasurer of the Cheshire Railroad, and the "David Upton," named after the master mechanic in charge of the "Rough and Ready" during the construction work in 1847. It was the custom to name the engines for prominent local citizens and well-known local geographic points. There was one exception: the "Rough and Ready" (the first engine

to run into Keene) which was purchased by the Cheshire Railroad in June 1847 to be used as a switching engine during the construction of the railroad. Built in Lowell, Mass., in 1842, the "Rough and Ready" served until 1870 when work in the Keene yards became too heavy for it. It was then sold to a New Hampshire lumber company where it was used on a strap railroad for lumbering operations.

On March 30, 1875, the first letter box was placed at the depot. The first Sunday train arrived in Keene from Boston on May 5, 1878, with the newspapers.

By 1885 all Cheshire Railroad engines had been converted from wood to coal burning. That same year the Ashuelot Railroad built a new engine house on Main Street. On November 3 all passenger cars were equipped to be heated by steam connections from the engine boiler.

Keene was a railroad center by 1890. The Cheshire Railroad, with the Keene Repair Shops, employed 250 persons. Passenger coaches and postal cars were repaired, in addition to building and rebuilding of locomotives. The Keene Repair Shops finally shut down on June 19, 1940.

On October 1, 1890, the Cheshire Railroad consolidated with the Fitchburg Railroad, which ran from Boston to Fitchburg, and the



Old covered depot-1847-1910

Cheshire Railroad became the Cheshire Division from South Ashburnham, Mass., to Bellows Falls, Vt. The Ashuelot Railroad consolidated with the Connecticut River Railroad in 1890 and in 1893 was taken over by the Boston & Maine Railroad.

A notice dated June 30, 1900, was posted in the old covered depot in Keene, stating that the Boston & Maine Railroad, having leased the Fitchburg Railroad and assumed control of the same, would operate it as the Fitchburg Division. The Fitchburg Railroad executed a lease of the railroad and property to the Boston & Maine for a term of 99 years from July 1, 1900.

During the summer and fall of 1910 a yellow brick railroad passenger station was built to replace the old depot. The dedication was held January 24, 1911, with the railroad officials coming in a private car attached to the afternoon train from Boston. The officers of the Commercial Club met the guests on arrival and escorted them to the Cheshire House, where an elegant full-course dinner was served in the high style of "Jud" Reynolds' famous Cheshire House dinners.

On April 27, 1911, the automatic semaphore signal system was installed on the Cheshire Branch between South Ashburnham and Bellows Falls for the safe operation of passenger and freight trains. In 1926 the automatic train stop came into use as a great safety device, and in 1928 a new centralized control system speeded train movements. The first completely air-conditioned trains appeared in 1934.

The railroad suffered great damage from the flood of 1936, with the result that rail service was discontinued between Keene and Nashua, N. H., and service in Keene was also interrupted by the hurricane and flood of 1938.

The "Cheshire Streamliner" service between Keene and Boston was inaugurated on December 10, 1944, the first streamliner train of any railroad in the country.

The 100th anniversary of the first passenger train into Keene was observed on May 15, 1948, with a dinner served at the Hotel Ellis and attended by railroad officials from Boston and citizens of Keene. A bronze plaque was presented on behalf of Keene citizens and the Cheshire County Historical Society commemorating the running of the first train into Keene by the Cheshire Railroad. This 100th anniversary tablet at the passenger station was unveiled by Marium E. Foster, who went to work for the B & M Railroad in the ticket office in 1917, and remained with the company until 1957.

January 5, 1952 saw the last gasoline passenger motor car oper-

ated on the Ashuelot Branch from Keene to East Northfield, Mass., and by 1957 all steam engines were replaced with Diesel locomotives.

In the evening of May 31, 1958, the last passenger train left Keene for Bellows Falls, a trip which ended 110 years of service in Keene. Freight service, however, continues to the present time.

PART TWO

The Keene Electric Railway

The first attempt to establish local public transportation in Keene was in 1887. Seven local residents formed the Keene Street Railway Co., and a charter was granted on July 28, 1887, from the state legislature. This company never got into operation, and a new corporation was organized by 15 prominent Keene and Swanzey citizens in 1893.

The Keene Electric Railway received a charter from the legislature on March 31, 1893, and the charter of the earlier Keene Street Railway Co. was repealed at the same time. The new corporation was authorized to construct, maintain, and operate an electric street railway from Central Square to any point in the city, and from Keene through Swanzey to South Keene.

No more was heard from the Keene Electric Railway until late 1895, when the company petitioned the New Hampshire Supreme Court for authority to extend from South Keene into the town of Marlborough. The petition was referred to the Railroad Commissioners and, following a public hearing at the Cheshire County Court House on January 29, 1896, the Commissioners approved the petition. In June of that year Keene City Council approved the proposed location of the electric railroad.

Efforts to raise construction funds locally met with failure, and on January 3, 1900, the incorporators of the Keene Electric Railway met to discuss a proposed agreement with Thomas T. Robinson of the Boston Industrial Co., which offered to construct the road. After some discussion the incorporators voted to sell their interests in the Keene Electric Railway to Robinson or to any other person who would build the road and to endeavor to sell \$15,000 of the railway's mortgage bonds in Keene, to be issued after completion of the line.

Shortly thereafter Robinson announced that the first line to be built would extend from Wheelock Park in West Keene through Park Avenue and West Street to Central Square, down Main Street to



*Two modes of early 20th century travel
stagecoach and trolley line*

Marlboro Street, and out Marlboro Street to South Keene and Marlborough.

Reorganization of the Keene Electric Railway took place on May 2, 1900. Under the direction of John H. Jennings, construction began the same month, when workmen laid the foundations for a combined carhouse and power station on the north side of Marlboro Street in South Keene. Grading surveys started at Central Square on May 25, and on the following day the first of the rails arrived in Keene.

The route of the Keene Electric Railway, as constructed, began on Park Avenue at the intersection of Arch Street near the entrance to Wheelock Park, and continued along the east side of Park Avenue and the north side of West Street to a point opposite the Faulkner & Colony Mill, where it swung to the center of the street and continued on to Central Square.

Turning right at the Square, the tracks continued down the center of Main Street to Marlboro Street, curving left and running through the center of Marlboro Street as far as the Beaver Brook crossing. Here they swung to the north side of the street, continuing on the same side to Eastern Avenue, where they crossed to the south side of the highway.

Continuing along Marlboro Street, the tracks crossed to the north side again at Thompson Road, South Keene, and remained on the

same side all the way to Main Street, Marlborough Village.

Turnouts were provided on Main Street between Central Square and the Boston & Maine crossing and at Eastern Avenue and Branch Road on Marlboro Street. In addition, sidings were constructed at the West Keene and Marlborough Village terminals.

All construction work was done by manual labor, with wagons and teams handling rails, ties, and overhead materials. Progress was slow, and it was not until late August that the road neared completion. One of the causes for delay was the construction of two new bridges, one at South Keene and the other over the Ashuelot River on West Street.

On September 8 the first car ran from South Keene to Central Square. Two days later regular service began.

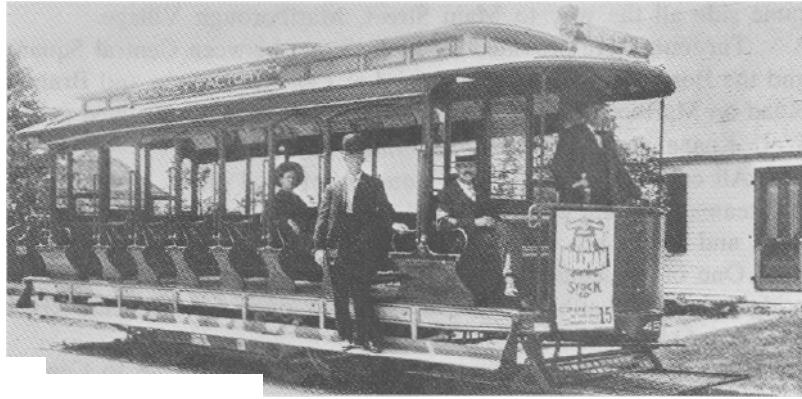
Late in 1901 the Keene Electric Railway received permission to build from Keene to West Swanzey via Swanzey Factory and Swanzey Center, and construction began the following spring. Due to lack of funds, work proceeded slowly, and by July 1903 the line had been completed only as far as the top of Cemetery Hill. By spring of the following year the tracks reached Swanzey Factory and here was their final terminus, although ties had been distributed all the way to West Swanzey, and the abutments for one bridge had been completed.

The proposed lines on Court, Washington, and Gilsum Streets were never built, nor was the once-planned extension from Swanzey Factory to South Keene.

As of June 30, 1904, the Keene Electric Railway owned and operated 8.34 route miles and had .24 mile of siding and turnouts.

In 1911 the Keene Electric Railway purchased a sizable tract of land on the shore of Wilson Pond in Swanzey near the end of the trolley line. Here the company erected a dance hall and outdoor theater, creating the Wilson Pond Recreation Area. The "Rec" became a popular spot for Keene and Marlborough residents during the summer months, when a wide variety of events, including boxing, was held at the outdoor theater. There were frequent dances, and the water of Wilson Pond was ideal for bathing. Many outings were held at the "Rec," and at the opposite end of the trolley line in West Keene, city-owned Wheelock Park was a popular site for Sunday school and church picnics. All of these events, of course, promoted riding on the electric railway.

There was one major difficulty with the Keene Electric Railway; it was a financial failure. Only the first two years, when the road was new, were profitable. A loss of about \$2,800 was reported for the



Keene Electric Railway

year ending June 30, 1903, and, except for 1905, deficits in varying amounts were incurred annually through 1910. Because of the operating losses, maintenance of tracks, overhead, and equipment had to be neglected. The Railroad Commissioners, in their annual reports for 1908 and 1909, noted the poor condition and cited the need for extensive repairs.

Basic cash fare during the early years was five cents. A single fare was collected on the West Keene-Swanzey Factory route, and the Keene-Marlborough line was divided into two zones, the first from Central Square to South Keene, and the second from South Keene to Marlborough Village. Passengers arriving in Central Square on the Marlborough route, were entitled to free transfers to either West Keene or Swanzey Factory, while transfer passengers from West Keene or Swanzey Factory could ride to South Keene without paying an additional fare.

With a gross deficit of some \$16,000 on the books as of June 30, 1910, the company raised its cash fare from five cents to six cents, with tickets being available in strips of seven for 40 cents and books of 100 for \$5.25. The higher fare proved effective for about four years, but a \$2,413.70 deficit was incurred in 1915, and by 1918 the railway was deep in the red again. The cash fare was increased to seven cents on March 18, 1918, ticket rates being raised in proportion, but this brought only temporary relief, and a loss of \$2,397.49 was reported for the year ended December 31, 1920.

Rather than effect another fare increase, the management decided to return to the original five-cent fare and increase the number

of fare zones. These new zones remained in effect until 1926.

The electric railway's share of maintaining the Main Street grade crossing was reduced from 50 to 10 per cent in 1919, and during that same year, taking advantage of a new state law providing relief for financially-distressed street railways, the company applied for and received exemption from taxation. Similar exemptions were granted from 1920 through 1926. Thanks to the tax exemptions and the new fare zones, the railway operated profitably every year through 1926, except for the year 1925.

In 1926 the Keene Electric Railway was authorized to abandon the rail lines for motorized buses. The company continued to operate until December 31, 1929, when it was succeeded by the Cheshire Transportation Co., organized by Clarence L. Wyman and Louis N. Harper. Clarence Wyman was one of the original conductors of the Keene Electric Railway and had succeeded John Jennings as superintendent in 1909.



Five modes of travel on Keene's Main Street: steam train, electric car, wagon, sleigh and auto

PART THREE

Aviation and Keene's Airport

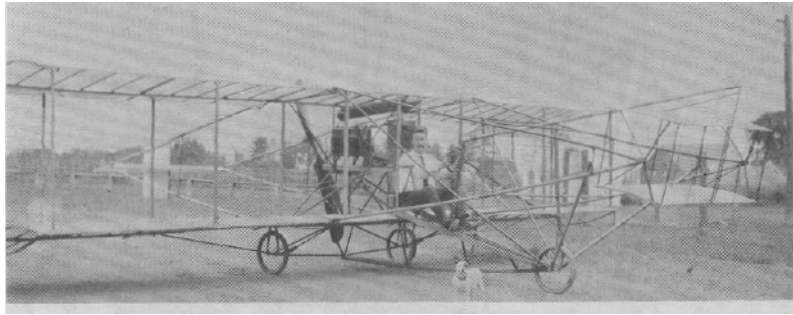
Date of the actual beginning of aviation in Keene is not known. Balloonists appeared for a number of years at the old fair grounds in Edgewood, thrilling crowds of spectators. Sometime before World War I an unknown adventurer succeeded in taking a flying machine off the Safford Park Grounds, but the flight was not wholly successful. An eyewitness at the historic occasion later said the plane "got high as the fence" before crashing back to earth.

Flying came into its own during World War I, and Keene's first interest in aviation was probably sparked by the returning veterans of the Army Air Corps. Local air enthusiasts in the post-war period were Paul W. Shedd, Ralph D. Smith, William C. Coughlin, and Edward C. Sweeney.

The first planned flight into Keene occurred in the early 1920's. Alexander J. Drexel Biddle of Philadelphia landed his plane on a strip of land between the railroad tracks and the house at 700 West Street. He was assisted by Shedd and Sweeney, who selected the landing site and staked down a cloth tee indicating wind direction.

Keene became an air port-of-call, and the Chamber of Commerce appointed a committee to study the possibilities of the city's aviation future. In addition to Shedd, Coughlin, and Sweeney, the committee included Fred A. Putnam, Milan Dickinson, Wallace L. Mason, and Richard L. Holbrook. An airport engineer advised the committee that a 165-acre plot in the rear of the Bracq home in West Keene was the most suitable location for a landing field. The site of the present Dillant-Hopkins field was rejected because of possible complications of divided town ownership. A group of Keene businessmen underwrote the venture, and a new flying field was put into operation. It boasted one 1,800 foot and one 1,200 foot runway, each 300 feet wide; there was room for eventual expansion to 3,000 x 600 foot strips.

The opening celebration of the Keene Airport was held on September 21-22, 1928, and coincided with the 175th anniversary of the granting of Keene's charter. The dedication attracted several thousand people, and the committee arranged for stunt flying units of the Navy and Marines to appear at the ceremony and for New Hampshire's first aviatrix, Dorothy Putnam, to give an exhibition. There was stunt flying, parachute jumping, air races, and passenger rides.



Reported to be Keene's first airplane, circa 1912

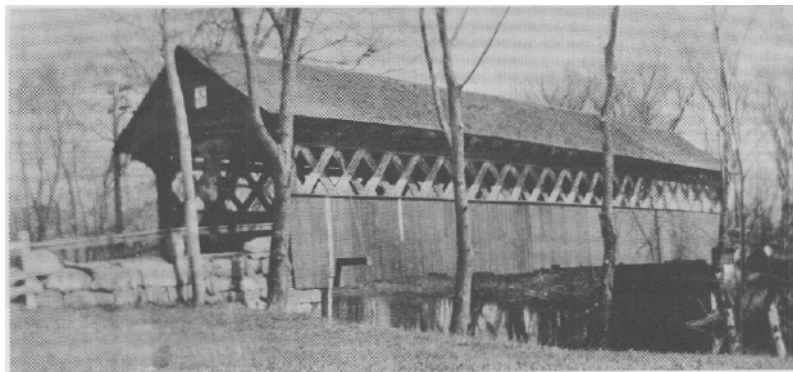
This celebration marked the real start of aviation in Keene.

For the next several years the airport served its function without much publicity, kept alive by private owners of planes and those who gave flying instruction.

The Keene airport was not the only local scene of activity for the fledgling fliers. Jimmie Laneri established an air field and flew passengers from the present site of the Monadnock View Cemetery and Winding Brook Lodge. Laneri continued his venture until the Depression. Earlier such colorful aviation greats as Roy Ahern, Mal Dixon, and "Kitty" Barrows had operated out of a field in West Keene, across from the Barrett stone house, and from a field then located near the corner of Bradford Road and Arch Street.

Among the barnstorming pilots who had participated in the opening of the Keene airport was a Manchester Scotsman, George G. Wilson. He learned to fly with the Royal Air Force in 1918, and later came to the United States. Richard L. and Sidney W. Holbrook, who were interested in the commercial possibilities of the new airport, talked Wilson into staying in Keene as manager of their new venture, Twin State Airways. The following year he came to Keene permanently and began his duties, which included instructing prospective pilots. Wilson's work did not keep him from barnstorming in the next few years. Those were lush times, and it was an unusual Sunday when he failed to realize \$350 for a day's work in any town from "Maine to Martha's Vineyard." Wilson and the Holbrook brothers helped to dedicate many airports which sprang up throughout New England, and put on the White River Junction, Vt., dedication ceremony themselves.

The Depression proved a hard blow to local aviation, and it was not until late in the 1930's that its prospects began to brighten. In



Former covered bridge on Winchester Street—built 1851

the fall of 1940 Lee D. Bowman brought his Bowman Flying Service, one of the oldest flying businesses in New England, to the Keene airport. He set up a civilian pilot training program which turned out fliers who later aided in the aviation program during the Second World War. In 1941 the U. S. Navy set up a naval aviation cadet program in Keene, and Bowman supervised the training of some 750 young men in elementary and intermediate flying instruction. He was assisted by Merton T. Goodrich, who was the ground school instructor. During the period of the war training service in* Keene 40 instructors, using 30 airplanes, flew students a total of 50,000 hours without a single accident. The program turned out 650 navy pilots.

At this time the city was considering a new airport. Photographic surveys from the air showed that there was only one logical location providing adequate runways in quartering directions on high ground without prohibitive problems of drainage and excavation, and with room for future growth, and Keene's municipal airport began to take form in the fall of 1942. The U. S. Army Engineer Corps was designated to prepare plans and supervise construction.

On October 31, 1943, the \$1,100,000 Dillant-Hopkins Airport, named for two young men who gave their lives early in the war, was formally dedicated. The men in whose honor the airport was named were Thomas David Dillant of Keene and Edwin Chester Hopkins of Swanzey. An estimated 5,000 persons witnessed the dedication and air show, and taking part in the ceremony were Governor Robert O. Blood, the New Hampshire Congressional delegation, representatives of the Army and Navy, and officials of Keene and Swanzey. The main speaker was Senator Styles Bridges.

With the return of Keene's servicemen at the end of World War II local aviation made further strides. Bowman, who had leased Dillant-Hopkins Airport in 1944, now prepared to serve the many ex-GI's who were taking advantage of the "GI bill" to learn to fly.

Keene became a Northeast Airlines stop in November 1946, at which time airmail was first officially flown out of Keene. Starting with two trips each day between Keene and New York, with a stop at Springfield, Mass., the airline later curtailed operations to one flight per day, and in January 1948 suspended operations completely. Service was resumed in May of 1948, and air freight operations were added to the passenger, mail, and express service already being offered.

The Dillant-Hopkins Airport is one of the greatest assets of the Greater Keene area. Air service to and from the local airport is excellent. Currently two commercial carriers, Northeast Airlines and Mohawk Airlines, use Dillant-Hopkins Airport and provide for freight and passenger needs. The field is also used extensively by private planes. However, in 1967 major improvements were recommended, including a new terminal and runway extension.



Sun Tavern—built circa 1780—a haven for early travelers