

PART XV: 1929-1938

Beer went on sale in Keene on May 23, 1933, New Hampshire joined in repeal of the 18th Amendment of the United States Constitution on June 20, and the Prohibition Era came to a close. The state liquor store on Roxbury Street was established in 1934.

Problems of the Great Depression were felt in Keene although the city did not suffer its effects as seriously as did other less diversified industrial centers. On March 6, 1933, all banks in Keene, as across the country, closed by order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and on March 11 there was no cash for payrolls for the first time in the history of the city. Local banks reopened on March 15 after the bank holiday.

To combat the depression federal assistance was begun, an employment agent was assigned to Keene, and highway projects, as well as other public works and improvements, were inaugurated. A CCC camp was established in Swanzey, and in November 1933 the city applied to the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works for loans. A water extension and sewerage disposal project was undertaken in 1934, and park improvements, as well as other developments under federal auspices, were carried out. The various city departments charged with highway, water, and maintenance were combined in 1938 as the Public Works Department of the City of Keene.

With state aid, cement surfacing on the Chesterfield and Concord Roads was laid in 1929; the last bucket of cement on the Concord Road project was poured by Mayor Forrest L. Carey in November. The Dartmouth College Highway was a 1930 project, jointly sponsored by city and state, and the Marlboro Road was another in 1933.

The city received funds from the Lane family in 1934 for beautification of Keene, playground equipment, and welfare purposes. The cultural life of the whole region was greatly enriched through programs made possible by the Fuller-Bartlett Fund, the earlier bequest of Mrs. Helen Bartlett Bridgman in memory of her grandfather, John H. Fuller, and her brother, Theodore Bartlett. The income from more than \$100,000, administered by the Union School District, at first brought outstanding speakers, musical talent, and cultural programs to Keene. Currently (in 1967) the income is being used for Keene High School scholarships and assembly programs. Mrs. Bridgman was

an author and world traveler, the granddaughter of a Keene merchant, railroad official, and industrialist, John H. Fuller, for whom Fuller Park was named.

A reservoir pond was authorized in City Park adjoining Robin Hood Park on Beech Hill in June 1929, and a wading pool at Wheelock Park in 1931. Swimming facilities were popular with children and a main feature of the summer park and recreation program. The octagon reservoir at Robin Hood Park was cleaned and seeded for use as an amphitheater and site of music concerts in 1935. A cement water main from the North Cemetery to Sylvan Lake (as Goose Pond, the city water supply, was sometimes called) was replaced by iron pipe, and construction of the Dakin Reservoir and Babbidge Dam in Roxbury was undertaken in 1931. The latter project was named in honor of Paul F. Babbidge who was superintendent of the water department from 1888 to his retirement in 1938.

Keene's first traffic signals began operating in Central Square on December 12, 1929. The problem of parking beyond "a reasonable time" was discussed in 1937 and began to be a concern in the business district and nearby areas. Street snow plowing operations were inaugurated in 1937; sidewalk plowing had begun in 1935.

Former City Engineer Samuel Wadsworth, who died in 1931, left a significant historical manuscript which was published by his children for the benefit of the Historical Society of Cheshire County. *Historical Notes With Keyed Map of Keene and Roxbury* covered land and owners in a large area of Keene, Roxbury, Gilsum, Marlborough, and Harrisville, and represented a major achievement in research.

The mayoralty election of 1930 was a close one, won by John J. Landers with a plurality of only 275 votes. In 1935, on the other hand, Mayor George F. T. Trask was the candidate for reelection, nominated by both parties. Arthur R. Jones, three times mayor, was chosen president of the New Hampshire Senate in 1931. A nine-man Planning Board was formed in Keene in 1939, one of the first in the state, with responsibilities to create a master plan of municipal development and to promote city interests. Other community programs were continued by the Chamber of Commerce and the Keene Development Co. which helped to bring many and varied industries to the city. Interests of the wider Monadnock Region were organized in 1933 by 24 area communities which joined the Monadnock Region Association. This was further strengthened in 1937 with full-time executives. More than 20,000 people visited the Monadnock Region exposition held in Keene in August 1938.

St. Joseph's Parochial School on Wilson Street was opened in 1930. A mechanic arts building was added to the high school in 1929. In 1930 Frank A. Wright left a full-tuition college scholarship fund to enable a deserving graduate of Keene High School, who is also a resident of Keene, to attend a college of his choice. This award is made every four years to an outstanding student who might otherwise find it difficult or impossible to continue his education. A new Fuller School was erected in 1936 replacing a much older wooden structure at the corner of Elm and Spruce Streets. Enrollment in Keene schools in 1931 was 2,914. In May 1935 the Keene Teachers' Association was formed and the first president of the group was Elwin Damon, a veteran Keene High School teacher.

At Keene Normal School a library in the former Ball house on Main Street was dedicated on June 14, 1930. The three-year course of studies became obligatory for all new students in 1934 as preparation for elementary school teaching certification, and the local school was accredited by the American Association of Teachers in 1931. Clarence H. DeMar, famed seven-time winner of the Boston Marathon and Olympic runner, taught printing at Keene Normal School for some 10 years, beginning in 1929. The institution was described in 1937 as one of New England's largest state normal schools and had an enrollment of some 400.

Mrs. Doris Foote gave land adjoining Ladies' Park in May 1931 as a memorial to her father, Dr. Burton C. Russell. At Wheelock Park a monument honoring the memory of Adolf W. Pressler was unveiled in 1937, and an award cup was named in his honor by the American Legion in 1936. Pressler's work with Keene youth inaugurated several programs associated with the recreation activity of the city and included a junior fire brigade equipped with a hand-pumped fire engine. Hickey-Desilets Park, at Winchester and Island Streets, was dedicated to the memory of two Keene soldiers who died in World War I. City officials and members of the American Legion joined in the ceremonies on Armistice Day 1939.

Sunday sports were a subject of controversy after Mayor Forrest L. Carey ruled baseball on the Sabbath illegal in 1930. An old ordinance was unearthed to test the law, under which Mayor Carey himself was arrested for riding in an automobile on Sunday. A statute relating to Sabbath activities was passed by a vote of 1,643-863 in 1931, making many sports lawful in the city on the Lord's Day. Motion pictures, lectures, concerts, and theatrical performances were allowed only after 6 P.M. on Sunday.

A new *Sentinel* building on West Street was occupied by the printing and publishing firm in the spring of 1930. The GAR Hall on Mechanic Street was opened in 1929. A new City Hall heating plant was installed in 1932, and a sprinkler system was added to the building in 1934.

Keene's first murder in many years took place on December 20, 1930, when storeowner Paul C. Kazanas was shot and killed during a Marlboro Street robbery, the sixth in a series of armed robberies in about an hour's time. Although rewards were offered for the capture of the criminals, they were never apprehended.

The Cheshire House closed in 1934 and its fixtures were sold at public auction. The historic building, dating from 1837, was torn down in March 1934 (except for the wing on Roxbury Street). Stores replaced the hotel in a unit called the Cheshire House Block.

A marker was placed on the post office in 1930 by the Historical Society of Cheshire County to commemorate the site where Deacon Josiah Fisher was killed and scalped by an Indian in July 1745. From March 1935 to December 1937 Clifford C. Wilber conducted a daily newspaper column, "The Good Old Days," of historical information, answers to questions, and sketches from local history. The Historical Society of Cheshire County published its *Collections* from April 1930 to July 1931, and in 1937 the organization was presented by John P. Wright with a portrait, hung in the public library building, of Sir Benjamin Keene, for whom the city was named. The Hampshire Press "Old Timer" calendar was inaugurated in 1933, featuring each year a scene from the Keene of former days.

Automobile traffic through Keene increased as touring became more popular, turning New Hampshire into a resort mecca. On July 21, 1931, some 2,800 automobiles from out-of-state passed through the city within a few hours. In 1938 a tourist information booth was established in the center of Main Street, just south of Emerald Street. National championship motorcycle races were a Keene event on July 14, 1935, as hill-climbing contests of the machines had been at Cole's pasture on Beech Hill in November 1924.

Mrs. LaFell Dickinson, a leader in many projects including the first cancer-detecting clinic in Keene in 1937, served as president of the State Federation of Woman's Clubs in 1930. A Keene Woman's Club Chorus was organized in 1929, and a Garden Club was formed in 1934. The Fortnightly Club gave aid to a Normal School student fund, and became sponsors of the National Honor Society at Keene

High School in 1933. In 1934 it became associated with the state federation. The Keene unit of Business and Professional Women joined the national federation in 1923, and aided various civic causes, making crippled children's drives their special charity. The Keene Emblem Club, a women's affiliate of the Elks, was organized in March 1930. The Keene Lions Club was organized by 20 charter members in August 1937, sponsored by the Lebanon Lions. The club became active in aid to the blind, eyesight research, and sight programs for the schools.

The Woodward Home, a private home for older residents of Keene, was established on Maple Avenue in West Keene by the bequest of Harry S. Woodward who died in 1924. In 1932 the Home was incorporated and eight years later purchased its present residence on Court Street.

In 1929 the work of the Keene YMCA was combined with that of the Cheshire County "Y" organization, which had been formed in 1913. Under the leadership of Oscar L. Elwell programs in Keene and at Camp Takodah were expanded and youth services strengthened.

American Legion activity in Keene included sponsorship of a drum and bugle corps, formed in October 1929, and the national motorcycle races which were held in 1935 and 1936. During times of disaster the Legion assisted those in need. In 1934 it presented an iron lung to the Elliot Community Hospital. The Keene Post Veterans of Foreign Wars was established in 1936 with 15 members. The Keene Girls' Drum and Bugle Corps, Boy Scouts, and various public service projects became part of their work, which also included aid to veterans' hospitals. John Kononan was the first commander of the organization, which purchased the former Fuller School building on Spruce Street as its headquarters in 1943. The VFW Auxiliary was established and became active in hospital and other service projects. A fun group, the Military Order of the Cootie, was formed among 18 VFW Post members in 1947.

Interest in aviation continued to spread in Keene. Jimmie Laneri established a field and flew passengers from a meadow called the Granite State Flying Field Park (now Monadnock View Cemetery and the site of Winding Brook Lodge). Colorful aviation figures Roy Ahern, Mal Dixon, and "Kitty" Barrows operated their box-like biplanes and World War I vintage machines at a field across from the Barrett Stone House and from another field at the corner of Bradford Road and Arch Street. In those days airplanes could be operated from almost any meadow. Flying was also established off Marlboro

Street (where Keene Industrial Park is now located) and at other points in the city's outskirts. Probably the first flight from the present site of Dillant-Hopkins Airport was made by Ray Bolster. Richard L. and Sidney W. Holbrook, who were interested in the commercial possibilities of a new airport, persuaded George G. "Scotty" Wilson, a New England "barnstormer," to become manager of their venture, Twin State Airways. Many Keene citizens had their first flight after 1929 with Wilson at the controls. Wilson and the Holbrooks helped inaugurate many of the airports that were springing up in northern New England. The depression put a stop to much aviation activity, and progress among the flying fraternity was slowed for a number of years.

Summer theater in Keene was launched in 1935 when the Repertory Playhouse Associates of New York changed the location of its summer activities from Putney, Vt., to Keene. Professionals began annual summer productions under the direction of Herbert V. Gellendre in the large barn adjoining the Bradford Inn. Royal Beal, a Keene resident, who became well known to theatrical and television audiences, brought his professional skill to the first year's ventures. Beatrice and Alfred Colony, who were associated with the enterprise, became "regulars" over the years as performers, directors, teachers, guides, and champions of Keene dramatic performances. Mrs. Colony, a descendant of John Wilkes Booth and one of the nation's most celebrated theatrical families, came naturally by her interest and talent. The summer theater was located in the barn of the Colony home, Captain Daniel Bradford's elegant residence dating from the early 19th century. World War II brought a cessation of activities after the 1941 season until 1946, when for more than a decade longer the summer theater brought Broadway productions to Keene. The Keene Chorus Club continued until 1931. For several years there was also a municipal orchestra in the city, the Keene Orchestral Society.

A total eclipse of the sun took place on August 31, 1932, visible for the first time in many years in Keene. There was an earthquake on November 1, 1935. The flooding of March 1936 which caused considerable damage, cutting rail and bus lines and interrupting electric and telephone service, was one of the worst in Keene's history. Local churches sheltered 250 refugees, and recovery efforts were aided by Red Cross and American Legion units. The Nashua branch of the Boston & Maine Railroad, inoperative since 1934, was so completely washed away that it was never rebuilt, and soon afterward the rails were taken up.

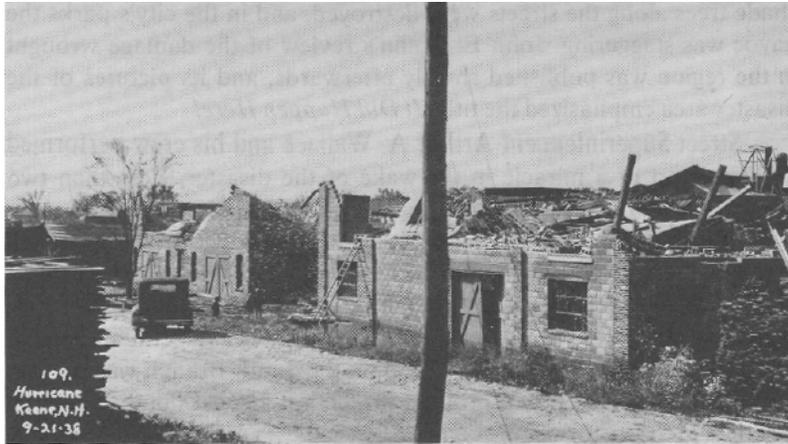
The worst natural disaster in local history was the hurricane which visited much of the Northeast on Wednesday, September 21, 1938. Preceded by several days of rain, high water had already given credence to fears of the worst flooding since 1936. Several landslides caused by the rains blocked rail lines into the city, and soon practically every road was closed by high water or washouts. Bridges were out at several points, and Keene became virtually isolated by noon of September 21.

The Red Cross Disaster Committee, headed by Homer S. Bradley, swung into action, and an American Legion emergency unit promptly followed suit, as electric power lines, gas, and telephone service faltered. As the rain fell, so too did the barometer whose readings were so low that many residents suspected their instruments were faulty. By late afternoon the wind was rising and southeast gusts swiftly gained momentum. Flying slate broke windows, roofs tumbled, and trees toppled. By 5 P.M., as workers were finding their way home, the wind increased until it averaged 90 mph. At the height of the storm the spire of the First Congregational Church crashed through the roof, barely missing the pipe organ.

Throughout the storm the Red Cross, American Legion, and other volunteers continued their rescue work, forgetting the danger to their own personal safety. Beaver Brook and the Ashuelot River had risen so quickly that they flooded adjacent areas in a matter of hours. Many sections of the city were rapidly inundated as the wind swept with a fury none living could recall. By 9 P.M. it had ended. Local sightseers flocked to Main Street, while the work of rescue continued throughout the night. Many families in low areas were evacuated by boats and were housed temporarily in churches and private homes.

Keene lost nearly 1,000 elm trees; homes were damaged by falling branches and other debris. Water flooded houses and caused heavy loss at manufacturing plants and shops. In West Keene the Country Club was heavily damaged, as was Wheelock Park. The Dinsmoor Woods on Maple Avenue were mowed down, leaving none of the giant pines which once completely shaded this section of the Five Mile Drive. No part of the city was spared wind and water. Keene probably suffered greater damage than any city or town in the region, the worst in its entire history.

The combined efforts of all were mobilized in the huge recovery program launched under the direction of Mayor Richard L. Holbrook. Street clearing operations began the morning following the storm.



Carey Chair Mfg. Co. hurricane damage

Printed signs warned against fires, unboiled water and milk, and the clogging of streets by automobiles. Blankets and other bedding were urgently requested. For nearly two days after the hurricane Keene was marooned and completely isolated. David F. Putnam installed his short wave radio at the high school and, powered by the generator of Laurence M. Pickett's sound truck, sent messages to the outside world, including an appeal for aid to the President of the United States from Harry C. Shaw, chairman of the Keene Chapter, American Red Cross. News from outside came into Keene via battery-operated radios broadcasting from the steps of the Sears Roebuck store in Central Square.

Railroad lines were soon repaired, but passenger service was not resumed until October 7. The *Sentinel* staff rigged up a washing machine motor (operated by a gasoline engine) to a small commercial press and issued, on Friday, September 23, a tabloid-size two-page newspaper, the type set entirely by hand. The following day a power lawnmower engine was pressed into service to publish a four-page paper.

Almost all telephone lines were down over a wide area, and crews arrived from as far away as Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Minnesota to restore them. More than two weeks elapsed before electricity was returned to the majority of homes. In the meantime flashlights, candles, and kerosene lamps were at a premium, and owners of oil ranges and cookstoves suddenly found themselves popular neighborhood figures.

Storm damage was estimated at about \$1,000,000. Nearly 1,800

shade trees along the streets were destroyed, and in the city's parks the havoc was staggering. John E. Coffin's review of the damage wrought in the region was published shortly afterwards, and its pictures of the disaster area emphasized the title, *It Did Happen Here!*

Street Superintendent Arthur A. Wallace and his crew performed nothing short of a miracle in the wake of the disaster. Less than two days after the hurricane all principal streets and roads were open. As a direct result of this hurricane and the floods of 1927 and 1936, control studies were carried out by army engineers, and measures were taken to prevent any recurrence. Surry Dam was authorized, begun in 1939, and completed in 1942, as a major check of the drainage in an area of some 100 square miles. Another dam on the South Branch was recommended in the plans which brought protection against flooding for the first time in the history of the community.