

PART XII: 1887-1898

Among the favorite recreations for Keene citizens and visitors to the city in the "Gay Nineties" were the Five Mile Drive in West Keene, which passed in part through the unspoiled beauty of the Dinsmoor Woods on Maple Avenue, and Horatian Park on Beech Hill, where a wooden 35-foot observation tower was constructed and scenic drives laid out by Horace L. Goodnow in 1890. Sunday afternoon rides to Beech Hill and a climb to the top of the tower fast became a popular pastime. Below was spread out a scene of busy prosperity: "In front are the distant meadows, the amphitheatre of hills, and in the background, the peaks of the Green Mountains. On the right are the seven church spires of the shady city, and the turrets of the high school building, court-house, city hall, and more distant jail. Obtruded upon one's notice, also, are the tall chimneys of the shops and mills—Faulkner's, Colony's, Woodbury's, Mechanic's, Railroad, Beaver, and new shoeshop, while a solitary chimney marks the site of Governor Hale's furniture shop. Still more to the right, under the hill, are the dark pines which shade Woodland Cemetery."

Main Street and the growing network of avenues, "generally laid out at right angles or parallel with Main Street, so that the street system is symmetrical without being precisely of the checkerboard pattern," made the city a well-planned community.

Much of the orderly development of the city was due to the energetic and dedicated efforts of far-sighted men such as Samuel Wadsworth. A clever mechanic and watchmaker, as well as an ardent naturalist, Wadsworth served as city engineer during a formative period of city planning. In 1887 he drew detailed sketches of every street and public way for the purpose of assigning house numbers to assist postmen in the mail carrier service to be introduced on January 1, 1888. Three carriers were to cover 25 miles daily. Some 1,400 numbers were affixed to buildings on a plan that allowed for the growth and expansion Wadsworth believed would come to the city. Appointed in 1892 as the city's first cooperative weather observer, he continued the record of Keene's weather begun in 1886 by Henry S. Mackintosh.

Through the efforts of George A. Wheelock, Keene paid its first serious attention to recreation, parks and public lands, and the preservation of the natural beauty of the city. The gift of park land was among Wheelock's many civic contributions: in 1886 the old West

Keene fairgrounds, the Beech Hill property called Children's Woods in 1889, and Robin Hood Park in 1897. He was Keene's first park commissioner when that post was created in 1888.

In 1887 through the efforts of Miss Caroline Haskell Ingersoll, who raised donations mainly from the ladies of Keene, a pine grove in West Keene was preserved from destruction. The area was named Ladies' Wildwood Park and added to the park system. A rustic arch was constructed over the entrance in 1890, replaced by two Beech Hill boulders in 1912. In memory of her brother Allan she contributed funds for a fountain which was erected in Central Square Park in 1896.

The county commissioners added a pond to the upper Washington Street jail lot in 1888, and in 1890 Henry O. Coolidge donated Coolidge Park to the city (site of the Keene Junior High School on Washington Street) as well as a fund for recreational purposes.

Central Square Park was slightly enlarged in 1892, with concrete walks and granite paving around it, though the street itself remained unpaved, to the distress of all who had to cross it in wet weather. Municipal sprinkling operations were commenced in May 1895 as a means of partial relief during the hot, dusty summer months.

The first granite paving stones were laid on Roxbury Street in July 1889, and the first macadam pavement on Court Street in June 1891. West Street was so paved in August 1892.

In May 1888 Keene hotels were closed by their proprietors in protest against the rigid enforcement of liquor laws, and about 150 guests were accommodated in private homes under sponsorship of the Keene Temperance Union. The Women's Temperance Union was responsible for the barrel of water, iced in summer's worst heat, which was located near the bandstand at the head of Main Street and served by a single tin cup attached to a chain.

Mercantile business in Keene was, on the whole, good, and cash registers made their first appearance in local stores late in 1888. The first overhead cash system was installed in William P. Chamberlain's store in February 1889.

With the rest of the eastern United States. Keene shared one of America's most famous storms, the "Blizzard of '88," in March of that year. Snow, accompanied by gale winds, fell for almost three days and drifted into banks 12 to 15 feet high. During the storm a citizen making his way along West Street from School to Colorado Street was 10 minutes covering the distance. All roads were blocked and streets soon became impassable. Telegraph lines were down, and the railroad and stage lines were stranded. Most trains began operations after three

days, but no mail arrived for five days. On the second day a city team managed to open a narrow passage through Vernon Street and down Court to Main Street, but little business was carried on until the snow was removed. Some houses were isolated, and snow tunnels to front doors were not uncommon sights. The great storm of December 1839 was reported to have been a blizzard of even larger proportions, but the "Blizzard of '88" became the popular standard against which all later storms were measured, as it passed into legend.

Other disasters included a serious Beaver Mills fire in March 1889 and another there in late 1893, total destruction of the Clipper Mowing Machine plant at South Keene in June 1891, and a fire at the Impervious Package Co. works in January 1893. By far the most serious calamity was the boiler explosion at Beaver Mills on May 22, 1893, in which five boilers were wrecked and three men lost their lives. Had it not been the noon hour when many workers were away at lunch, a far greater loss of life might have resulted. There was a serious fire at the Keene Furniture Co. in June 1896 and one in Colony's Block the following March. A diphtheria epidemic struck the city in 1889 and 15 died before the disease had run its course.

The United Order of Pilgrim Fathers, Monadnock Colony No. 107, was established in March 1888. The Ancient Order of United Workmen, an early labor organization, was formed in March 1889. On March 27, 1888, Cheshire Grange No. 131 was organized with 45 members. Agricultural fairs were sponsored by this group at the Keene Driving Park (now Edgewood), where parades of decorated floats were among the prominent features. Prizes for livestock, vegetables, and handiwork were awarded for a number of years at these exhibitions.

In this period the Rural Improvement Society sponsored the planting of shade trees along Keene streets. In 1887 the Society supervised the setting out of 88 trees, and nearly 100 in 1894. It also led in improving sidewalks and encouraged citizens to beautify their yards. The Keene Odd Fellows organization moved their meeting place to Lane's new building in 1895, and the Ashuelot Chapter No. 320 of the Daughters of the American Revolution was organized with 12 members in January of 1896. Mrs. Simon G. Griffin was the first regent of the local branch of this organization which, on April 21, 1897, dedicated a tablet to the memory of Keene's Revolutionary soldiers at the old Wyman Tavern on Main Street. The Keene Board of Trade was formed to promote the interests of the community in 1888.

Around this time bicycling was a popular sport, about 2,000

wheels" being in use in Keene. The Cycle Club was most active, and a local meet was held in July 1895. A bicycle factory was established locally about this time. A cycle path was made along Court Street in 1897, and another from Pearl Street to Maple Avenue was constructed in 1898

The Keene Toboggan Club was responsible for the first toboggan slide in Keene, located on Grant Street and opened in January 1887. The chute was 40 feet high, 12 feet wide, and 175 feet long.

In addition to the GAR post, the Union Veterans' Union Commandery No. 7 was organized in October 1890. Roaring Brook Lodge of the Knights of Pythias became active in 1893, the Cheshire Fish and Game League was also formed that year, while a local chapter of the Companions of the Forest was organized in 1895, and a chapter of the Foresters of America by 1897.

The Keene Country Club was established on April 12, 1897, and during its early years leased Wilson Pond property. The group laid plans for golf, croquet, and tennis grounds soon after its organization. In 1896 a Good Roads Association was formed.

The Monadnock Club was organized in 1892 and incorporated in 1895. The Colonial Club was instituted in October 1896, and the Keene Fortnightly Club was started in 1888 by a group of ladies who met to read the works of Dickens and enjoy a social hour. Originally known as the Reading Circle, the group took its later name in 1894. The Granite Club was formed among ladies of West Keene in 1897.

The local chapter of the YMCA raised funds and erected a three-story building on West Street, one of the first "Y" buildings in the state. The site of the new building was that of the old Richardson Tavern built about 1773 and razed for the new construction. The cornerstone was set on August 10, 1893, and the building was dedicated on September 28, 1894. Membership totaled nearly 300, and there were active programs of events, a reading room and library, and classes in penmanship, bookkeeping, business English, and associated subjects. In addition to offering gymnasium facilities, the organization sponsored a lecture series and concerts during the winter months. An attraction of 1891 was the Hungarian Gypsy Band.

Many of the products of Keene's growing industries were shipped to different parts of the country as well as abroad. Chairs, wooden pails, buckets, and cloth were among the best known items. Keene had become a trading center for not only other communities in this part of the state, but for some of Vermont as well. Buildings "almost invariably large, finely equipped, brilliantly lighted and highly attractive in ap-

pearance within and without" were doing a brisk retail and wholesale trade on terms as favorable as those of any larger commercial outlet in New England, and in 1889 a second post office was established at South Keene.

When the old A. & T. Hall's store was being demolished to be replaced by the Buffum Block in 1890, Keene Light Guard equipment and military stores were discovered; helmets, belts, and knapsacks dated back some 100 years.

Statistics of Keene for 1890 show 23 industries and factories with 16 or more employees. The largest was the Cheshire Railroad, giving work to 250. Between 70 and 90 in each firm were employed by the Keene Furniture Co., Lancaster Shoe Factory, Beaver Mills, Woodbury's Pail Factory, and Faulkner & Colony's.

In 1889 Dr. William H. Eaton resigned as pastor of the Baptist Church and was honored by the parish and community for his 17 years of service.

The Bethany Hall Mission opened at the former Methodist Church on Vernon Street on October 5, 1889, founded by Frank L. Sprague and a committee of the Methodist Church. Elm Street was extended through to Vernon Street in 1892, and the church building was turned to face Vernon Street. Soon independent, the new church took the



A Saturday street auction in the 1890's

name Bethany Mission and was federated with the Union Evangelical Churches. In 1897 under Sprague and S. W. Fessenden it united with the Association of Pentacostal Churches in America.

The Sturtevant Chapel in Keene grew from a prayer meeting group formed on March 10, 1894, at the home of George A. Hildreth, No. 101 George Street. Under the sponsorship of Rev. William G. Poor of the First Congregational Church and dedicated laymen, the George Street Chapel was organized, and in 1897 moved to Washington Street, where it remained for 16 years.

As a result of years of planning and work, including events such as the church fair held at the armory in November 1889 at which the Edison phonograph was a feature attraction, local Roman Catholics erected St. Bernard's Church on Main Street in 1890. The substantial brick building was dedicated on November 20, 1892, with imposing ceremonies conducted by visiting clergy and parish officials. St. Bernard's was designed in Romanesque style by C. J. Bateman of Boston and seats 800 persons. The two bell towers are 90 feet high and 16 feet square. Parochial school classes and social organizations of the parish were soon expanded.

St. James Episcopal Church commemorated 25 years in their church building in 1889, and the vested choir first assisted in services of worship in June 1891. Rev. Octavius Applegate Jr. was installed as rector in 1896. Golf as a sport was introduced to Keene by Rev. Applegate, who had learned the game in England.

The Unitarian Club was formed in 1889, the first laymen's club of its type in any Keene church. In 1892 the congregation purchased a Washington Street lot and began the removal of its Main Street building in 1894 after more than 68 years in that location. The historic Revere bell was hung in the new church, the cornerstone of which was set on July 11, 1894, and dedication services were held on January 24, 1895. The public clock from the Main Street church was placed in the steeple of the church in Dublin. F. W. Woolworth's later built on the former Main Street site of the church.

Although spiritualism was never an organized sect in Keene, it had its followers, and a seance was held at Liberty Hall in Clarke's Block in June 1889. Various communications from the spirit world were claimed to have been received by the medium, but most people looked upon it as public entertainment rather than a serious movement. Frank P. Gleason was for many years a clairvoyant and trance medium in Keene who, before his death in 1943, was credited with remarkable abilities which he used to assist individuals and police authorities in the solution of problems.

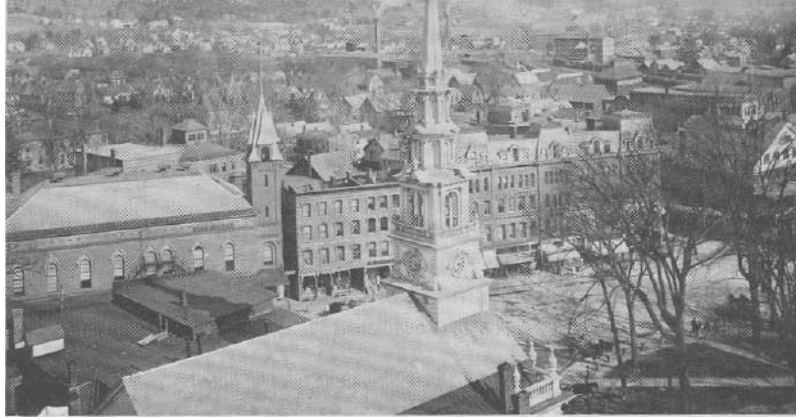
In 1892 the Union School District authorized the erection of a school, which was named in honor of George Tilden who had died in 1888. Tilden had come to Keene in 1817, where he learned the book-binding trade and later established G. H. Tilden & Co., which is still in business today (1967). Among his other civic offices and services, Tilden had been a member of the school committee for over 40 years.

Former Governor Samuel W. Hale died in 1891. John T. Abbott, once city solicitor and an attorney of note, was appointed by the federal government to be minister to the Republic of Columbia in April 1889. Dr. George B. Twitchell, who began practice in Keene in 1843, was honored in November 1895 for his many services to the community, including the establishment of Keene's hospital. Dr. Twitchell died in 1897, ending a long career during which he performed much of the surgery in southwestern New Hampshire.

Keene's 1890 population was 7,446, an increase of 660 from the 1880 report. A notable legal event in October 1889 was the trial for libelous publication in the *Cheshire Republican* brought by Hamilton J. Spofford, an ex-policeman and night watchman. It was alleged that the newspaper's articles charging Spofford with improper conduct while on duty were untrue, but a jury ruled in favor of the newspaper after hearing lengthy testimony. The Spofford libel case excited considerable interest in the community.

At least two from Keene joined in the last American gold rush, that to the Klondike in 1897; one of the men, J. Fred Whitcomb Jr., was accidentally shot and killed and was buried in Alaska.

The *New Hampshire Sentinel* changed the size of its pages from large folio to a smaller quarto form in January 1889. Keene's first daily newspaper, the *Daily Tribune*, issued from a Church Street office by Webster P. Huntington had a short life, from June 15, 1889, to September 8, 1890; the *New England Observer* ceased publication in January 1890, when it was purchased by and united with the *Sentinel*, leaving Keene with only two newspapers, the *New Hampshire Sentinel* and the *Cheshire Republican*. A third newspaper in the form of a daily, the *Keene Evening Sentinel*, was launched on October 20, 1890, by the *Sentinel* interests. This newspaper and printing firm moved in 1893 from the Bank Block to a new building on Main Street, just north of the railroad station. The Howard Company street clock, erected at this time in front of the newspaper office, became a fixture, running at one point for 15 years without need of repair. Minor publications which had short lives during this period included the *Keene Blizzard* issued in



View of Keene at the turn of the century

August 1890, and the *Press and Printer* published from 1887 to 1888.

The 400th anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus was commemorated in Keene schools and by the contribution of student work for display at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Text-books were furnished free to students for the first time in 1890. At the high school a student publication the *KHS Enterprise* was begun in November 1895, and is still issued by undergraduates of Keene High School.

The Bliss Business College was established in the Cheshire House Block in September 1897 with an enrollment of 44. It became the Keene Business College and later Tiffin's Business Institute.

Beedle's piano and music store was opened in 1892 by Charles C. Beedle, and for three generations the Beedles have played an active part in local musical affairs. Both Beedle's Orchestra, formed in October 1891, and their military band, organized in 1899, became well-known over a wide area. An original operetta by Karl R. Beedle entitled "Pym" was staged on April 13, 1898, for the benefit of the Monadnock Cycle Club. Another talented musician was William P. Chamberlain, composer and professional performer in his youth, but better known locally as a leading merchant with branch stores located in three states. Composer and bandmaster Edwin Eugene Bagley made Keene his home after 1893, and became associated with local bands. His "National Emblem March" is among the most

popular of American military marches. For some years Bagley was the leader of the Keene Military Band, which was organized in 1896 to furnish music for parades, picnics, and other local functions.

A boy who grew up in Keene during this period and who later achieved a leading position in American industry was Nathaniel Leverone, chairman of the Automatic Canteen Co. of Chicago. Successful in one of America's great metropolitan centers, he has never lost a love and appreciation for his native New Hampshire and his alma mater, Dartmouth College.

The Elliot Community Hospital was established on April 7, 1892, with the gift to the city by John Henry Elliot of the Elliot mansion on Main Street. Funds for outfitting hospital rooms were raised among individuals and the city's fraternal societies. Dedication of the 18-bed facility was held on September 21, 1892. The Elliot City Hospital was placed under its own Board of Trustees in 1895. The Hospital Aid Society was formed in 1892 to assist in the work of the institution, and a Men's Hospital Benefit Club was organized in 1898. In 1897 a horse-drawn ambulance was added to the hospital's equipment. Five students graduated from the two-year nursing course inaugurated a year after the hospital was established, thus beginning the history of nurses' training in Keene. Local physicians formed the Cheshire County Medical Association in 1889, led by Dr. George B. Twitchell, who was also a moving force in the hospital enterprise and became its first president.

Improvements continued to be made in the city water and sewerage systems, including storm drains on Roxbury and Water Streets, and new iron pipes at various locations. A second steam fire engine, built by the Button firm (their no. 216) was purchased in 1890. Jean P. Howes made an automatic fire alarm register for the fire station which was installed early in 1897. Weekly Saturday "test box" signals were being rung for inspection of the nearly 20 boxes then in the system. The mechanical alarm weight in City Hall tower fell into the basement of the building in 1889, but fortunately no one was hurt.

Rev. Edward A. Renouf presented \$500 to initiate a firemen's relief fund in February 1888, and a Fireman's Relief Association was formed soon afterwards. New and improved stable arrangements were made at the fire station in 1894, with harnesses so placed that they could be dropped into position more quickly in response to alarms. The old Deluge Hose Company house was sold in 1892, and the Neptune Hose house on St. James Street was sold by the city in 1894. Operations of the department had been centered in one location since the end of 1892.

In 1890 the state erected a building for use as a fish hatchery at the Beech Hill Octagon Reservoir Park, called City Park and now a part of Robin Hood Park. Officers of the night watch on police duty appeared in uniform beginning in March 1892. A police signal light was installed at the lower side of Central Square late in that year to be operated by the central telephone exchange. Main Street was widened and improved in 1892, and again in 1894 and 1895. West Street was widened 15 inches along its north side from the Square to Colorado Street in 1893, and the South Keene Railroad underpass was constructed in 1894 to avoid a dangerous grade crossing. A municipal dump on lower Main Street was established by city authorities in 1894.

The Keene Gas and Electric Lighting Co. plant at Spragueville on Wilson Pond was opened in 1895, and two additional generators were placed there within a few years. In November 1895 the generating plant chimney, 85 feet high and weighing 150 tons, was moved 200 feet without incident, a remarkable engineering feat. It was moved again about 20 feet in 1897, also without difficulty. The first commercial incandescent electric lights in Keene were installed at Nims Brothers Market on West Street in August 1898, although similar lighting seems to have been in use at Beaver Mills as early as 1891. The Keene telephone exchange was moved to Lane's new building in June 1895, and the changing of 138 circuits interrupted service for only a few moments. The exchange remained on the corner of Church and Main Streets until 1908.

Among the varied and increasing social events of Keene in this period, perhaps the cat show of 1894 was unique. Held at the Winter Street Armory in March, a total of 28 cats was entered in the event, with prizes distributed liberally among proud owners. A rather notorious stage play was presented by a traveling company in 1887. "The Black Crook," once considered scandalous and often censored, had by this time earned a measure of toleration, although several local clergymen issued dire warnings against witnessing the performance, which probably did as much to fill the house as any of the advertising posters displayed on the Cheshire House and Elliot Building boards.

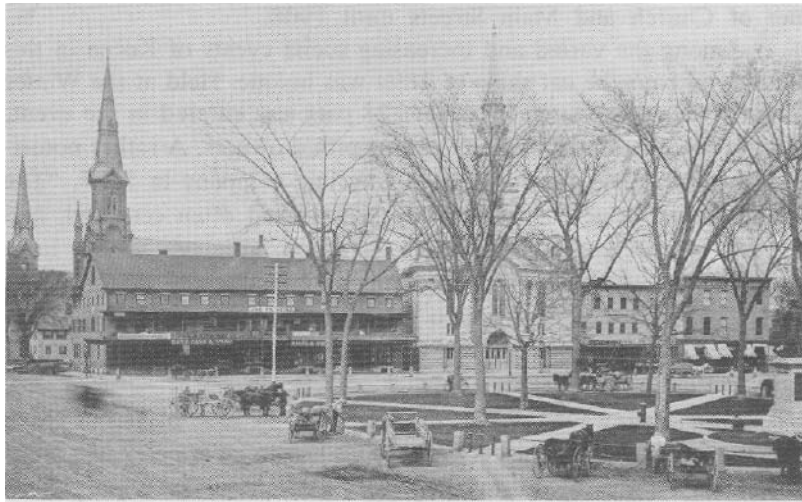
Mme. Fanny Janauschek, the celebrated actress, played in "Meg Merrilies" at City Hall in February 1890 before an appreciative audience, and a company of traveling glass blowers at the armory were quite an attraction in the same period. John L. Sullivan, the former

boxing great, made his second Keene appearance in March 1894 as the star of the traveling show, "The Man from Boston," a poor play badly reviewed and hardly advanced on artistic merits by the great athlete.

The kirmess staged in June 1887 was among the most elaborate local events of this or any time. The entire house and garden at No. 87 Main Street were transformed into exotic settings for a pageant and costume party. Admission fees and receipts from booths went to the local WCTU. Among the novel sights were leading Keene citizens dressed in American Indian costume in a simulated frontier camp and guides dressed as leading figures of history, literature, and the arts. The affair attracted throngs to admire the colorful flags and lanterns and shop at a Spanish mart, Turkish bazaar, gypsy camp, art studio, and Chinese, Dutch, Swiss, and French booths. Refreshments were served at a temperance café.

The circus continued to be a major professional show in the city each summer season. Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show played in Keene upon a number of occasions. Famed sharpshooter Annie Oakley appeared at the Appian Way show grounds, along with Indians and troupes of trick riders. Lecturers, singers, magicians, and musical groups performed at City Hall while organ grinders, peddlers, and medicine shows played in the streets for curious crowds.

The first motion pictures shown in Keene were exhibited by



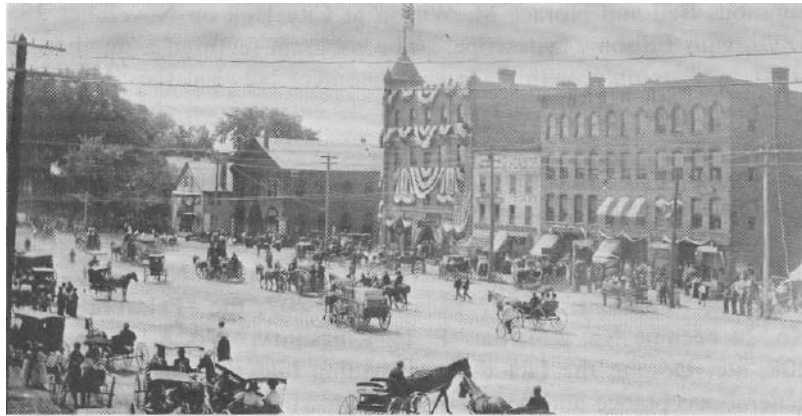
North end of Central Square—late 19th century

Emmons Ball and Horace M. Wilson at City Hall on November 23, 1896, with Edison's "vitascope." The program featured a number of short subjects only, with stage entertainment between the films. The feature-length film had yet to make its entrance on the American scene.

In October 1890 the Cheshire Railroad finally bowed to economic necessity and was consolidated with the Fitchburg Railroad Co. Locomotives owned by the Cheshire Railroad were renumbered by the Fitchburg line in their 200 series: the "Jaffrey," No. 17 became No. 217; "Vermont," No. 7 became No. 207; the "Peterborough," No. 24 became No. 224; the "F. H. Kingsbury," No. 8 became No. 208, etc. Despite the fact that railroading had never enjoyed more general acceptance and popularity, the growth of larger rail networks was fast driving smaller lines, once found in every part of New England, out of independent business or into consolidation. During its last years of service the Cheshire Railroad carried a total of 217,483 passengers and 859,384 tons of freight. Stone columns of the covered railroad depot's doorways were replaced by iron posts in June 1895, as larger freight cars experienced difficulty passing through the station. The railroad repair shop, which constructed locomotives as well as some passenger and postal cars after 1881, was one of Keene's largest employers. Regular arrival of the payroll, either as a special pay train or by pay agents, was an exciting event for many Keene families, and the railroad was a major factor in the city's economic life for almost a century.

In May 1895 the city accepted proposals for a history of Keene, the first such formal attempt since Salma Hale's *Annals*. Author of the work was General Simon Goodell Griffin, brigadier and brevet major general, United States Volunteers, during the War between the States. Born in 1824 in Nelson, N.H., Griffin made his home in Keene after the Civil War. He represented the town in the state legislature and served two terms as speaker of the House of Representatives. He died on January 14, 1902. In June 1898 the Council voted to accept the offer of the Henry Colony house on West Street as a public library building. The donor was Edward Carrington Thayer, an industrialist with varied interests and a benefactor of the YMCA, the hospital, and a library in his native Massachusetts. His gift of one of the city's most impressive homes for a library building was among the most significant public gifts Keene has ever received.

In 1887 the Keene Street Railway Co. was formed with proposed horsecar lines throughout the city, although no track was actually laid.



*Cheshire County Grange Fair Coaching Parade
Keene, September 7, 1898*

Permission to locate electric trolley tracks was finally granted by city authorities in 1896. Keene's first bus line was opened on December 1, 1896, by Fordyce L. Wood, with a closed horsedrawn vehicle which could be switched to runners during the winter months. Lettered on one side of the wagon was "Keene Street Car" and the seats ran lengthwise. Regular trips around Keene along prescribed routes were announced by a timetable, and the fare was 10 cents. The project failed and service was discontinued in January 1897.

The first "horseless carriage" to appear in Keene was a maroon-colored 700-pound Duryea exhibited as a part of Barnum & Bailey's Circus on July 11, 1896. It was equipped with two three-horsepower engines, had four speeds up to 20 miles per hour, and was steered by means of a tiller, the up-and-down motion of which regulated the speed.

The end of the era and, for all practical purposes, the end of the 19th century was signaled by America's first armed conflict since the Civil War. The Spanish-American War was touched off by the destruction of the battleship *Maine* in Havana harbor on February 15, 1898, with the loss of 260 lives. On May 7 half the town turned out to see the first company of the Keene Light Guards answer the call for service. Under command of Captain Paul F. Babbidge, Company H, escorted by city officials, GAR veterans, and school children carrying flags, marched from the armory to the railroad depot. The Keene Military Band and the High School Drum Corps furnished the music. Although the men were ordered to Cuba twice, and all were eager for

a part in the military action, their orders were canceled each time, and hostilities ceased on August 12. The only battles the Keene unit fought were those against typhoid, dysentery, fever, and the other ills of the poorly equipped camps of the period; at least one Keene soldier died from the conditions that prevailed. On the evening of September 13 the return of the soldiers was greeted by 5,000 happy citizens. Although the train was delayed, the crowd waited patiently, losing none of its enthusiasm. Bonfires were lighted as a signal that the train was finally arriving. Fireworks were immediately set off, and before long the town was ablaze with light. The gaiety was climaxed by a hot supper served at the armory.



*Early 20th century, after the trolley tracks
had finally made their appearance*