

PART II: 1749-1774

Hostilities between France and Great Britain ceased in 1748, but it was some time before news of this reached America and even longer before the frontier was safe from raids. A company of soldiers continued service in the Keene area, billeted half the time at Northfield and half at Upper Ashuelot, after some of the proprietors had returned to the settlement in the spring and summer of 1749. Several cabins were rebuilt that winter, and life was resumed along the frontier with more settlers coming to establish neighboring townships.

Application for incorporation as a town was made to the governor of New Hampshire early in 1750, with Captain Jeremiah Hall and Benjamin Guild as agents for the proprietors. Governor Benning Wentworth was petitioned again in 1751 for a charter of incorporation, but it was not until April 11, 1753, that New Hampshire answered the petitions and delivered a charter for the township to Ephraim Dorman and others. In granting the New Hampshire charter Governor Wentworth reserved the right to name the settlement; he also claimed a tract of land for himself and collected fees for his services, as well as those of his assistants. The name Keene was chosen out of gratitude to and admiration for Sir Benjamin Keene who, when British minister to Spain, had used his influence, though unsuccessfully, to help Wentworth obtain payment for timber delivered at Cadiz. The new territory of Keene was slightly enlarged over the former Massachusetts grant.

Among the provisions of the charter granted by King George II by the "advice of our Trusty & wellbeloved Benning Wentworth" to "Sundry of our Loveing Subjects" was permission to open a weekly market when the settlement numbered 50 families, and authorization to hold town meetings and elect officers. The pioneers were required to cultivate at least five acres within five years and to continue the clearing and improvement of the place, but the Crown reserved the pine trees for royal navy masts on penalty of loss of the grant. A rental fee of one ear of Indian corn for 10 years and after that one shilling for every 100 acres was levied on the settlers. The governor reserved 500 acres, one-sixth of the town, for himself and also set aside land for support of a minister and the English church as glebe land.

The first town meeting was held May 2, 1753, in the rebuilt

fort. Official posts were filled and community government organized under Ephraim Dorman, Michael Metcalf, and William Smeed, selectmen. David Nims was named first town clerk, as well as treasurer. His portrait, painted by Jeremiah Stiles Jr., probably Keene's first painter, is the only known picture of a Keene pioneer settler. Hog reif [hogreeve—whose duty it was to impound stray hogs], fence viewers, field drivers, and surveyors of highways were also selected from among the incorporators. Payment to those who had been in-



BENJAMIN KEENE
Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Philip V of Spain.
From the painting in the Master's Lodge, Pembroke College, Cambridge.

strumental in obtaining the charter was authorized, and steps were taken to survey and establish property lines. The first perambulation of the town boundaries was made in 1760, and at regular intervals thereafter.

A temporary meetinghouse of slabs, with a dirt floor, was hastily erected near the site of the present Saint Bernard's Roman Catholic Church. A minister was sought in cooperation with the town of Swan-

zey. Rev. Ezra Carpenter was chosen by the town and was ordained on October 4, 1753. The sermon was delivered by Rev. Ebenezer Gay, who had journeyed from Massachusetts to help install his friend at Keene. The sermon, *Jesus Christ The Wise Master-Builder*, was published at Boston that same year. When Rev. Carpenter brought his household to Keene it included probably the first Negro slave in the region. Rev. Carpenter served as minister of both towns for seven years, each town paying half his salary, and saw military service as chaplain to New Hampshire troops at Crown Point in 1757.

The rebuilt town was located where the first settlement had been planted on lower Main Street. That section eastward of Central Square was in part a bog, the same in which the Indians had hidden a few years before. Near the present railroad crossing on Main Street was a depression where the Town Brook ran and over which a causeway was constructed. The floor of this bridge was several feet below the present street level, and the depression was so deep that a man could stand erect under the causeway. During high water this section was flooded and abounded in fish, especially horn pout. A pond surrounded by alders, down Main Street near Davis Street, was frequented by wild ducks. A small rise, known as Meetinghouse Hill, was located on the street near this spot, and it was to this area that the early meetinghouse was moved before the Indian attack and where the second meetinghouse was constructed.

In the spring the road was a sea of mud, due to the brooks and ponds, and all travel was difficult. Changes were effected by deepening and clearing out the brook and Ashuelot River channels, and by filling in the land to improve the condition of the street. In later years the Town Brook was completely piped underground, emptying into Beaver Brook after running under the buildings on the east side of Central Square and Main Street.

In 1754 a new meetinghouse to serve as a court house and town hall was commenced a little east of the present Soldiers' Monument. It faced south on a height of land that sloped down to the causeway, the street rising again to the other hill. It was not completed until 1760, and became the first building in the vicinity of Central Square.

To the east, where City Hall is now located, were clay pits owned by the town and rented annually for brickmaking. A new road to the sawmill, later Washington Street, was opened in 1761, and West Street (called "Piety Lane") was begun in 1773. To the west of the present Square was meadow land.

Peace was short-lived between England and France, but at the

outbreak of hostilities in 1754 the New Hampshire settlements were more firmly established and better able to meet the threat of war than in earlier years. More strict regulations concerning the organization and conduct of the militia, including a company formed in Keene, made defense easier and more sure, New Hampshire and Massachusetts forces manned positions in the Connecticut River Valley, including Keene, with the assistance of the local military units. Fort Number 4 at Charlestown was attacked in August 1757, and fear quickly spread through the entire region. News of raids caused Keene people to post guards and push rebuilding of their fort. Soon the stockade enclosed a number of small buildings in which the settlers could find safety in case of attack.

Additional raids on unprotected cabins and farms along the Connecticut River drove many who had settled beyond easy reach of a fort to towns which were better protected. Several families who had gone to what is now Surry turned to the fort in Keene. An attack was made at the fort on June 30, 1755, but the enemy forces were beaten off.



Artist's version of Keene, circa 1770

Ebenezer Day, who had settled on the Surry line, being told of approaching Indians, returned in haste to his home and, saddling his horse, warned his wife of their need to reach the fort at once. The father, with his four-year-old daughter in his arms, placed his wife

behind him on the horse. She clung to her husband with one hand and with the other grasped a meal sack into which their year-old baby had been hastily dumped for greater convenience in transportation. The fort was reached in safety, but after alighting from the horse they opened the sack, which had dangled beside the animal the entire journey, and found the baby with her head downward. Fortunately no ill consequences resulted from the four-mile ride in that upside-down position, and the little girl grew up to marry Nathan Blake Jr. and become the mother of eight children.

Westmoreland people, discovering the signs of Indians at about this time, fired a signal heard in Keene. A body of men was sent out but found no sign of the enemy. However, Indians were in the area, and the following day captured Benjamin Twitchell at Ash Swamp. Taken to Canada, Twitchell met Josiah Foster and his family, who had been captured at Winchester. The Fosters were ransomed, as was Twitchell, but the Keene man died of illness before he could return to New Hampshire.

A month or two later a party of Indians was discovered at Swanzev, and Keene again sent out a force to aid her neighbor. Indians were seen in Keene several times but did not attack again. News of General Braddock's defeat at Fort Duquesne and delay in the Crown Point expedition, coupled with raids and scalplings along the Connecticut River, greatly discouraged the settlers, and hindered their farm work. At Walpole the heroic defense of his house and family by John Kilburn against a force of almost 200 Indians in August 1755 increased the fears of all in the area. Keene, however, which in the earlier hostilities had been at the edge of the wilderness, was by now protected by other settlements and escaped a major attack.

The settlers suffered from want of food and clothing during the trying years of war, yet maintained themselves in the besieged frontier towns. All farm work had to be carried on under guard; attendance at church, social calls, and all common tasks were under the supervision of armed protection.

Keene furnished a share of the 5,000 men who served in the armies from the Province of New Hampshire during these colonial hostilities. This was at a time when New Hampshire's population was only 40,000. Quebec was taken by British forces in September 1759; and the village of St. Francis, from which so many Indian war parties had been let loose on New Hampshire settlements, was reduced to ashes soon afterwards. Under a more vigorous war policy on the part of the English, Canada was finally brought under her control in 1760.

Troops returned home, prisoners were released, and the fear of Indian attack faded. After some 15 years of terror the New Hampshire pioneers were at peace, their townships safe, and once again they could turn their attention to farms and homes. Grim years of war had taught settlers the arts of defense, and the military training afforded them was soon to serve well in the conflict already brewing with the mother country.

Several returning settlers had replaced their crude log cabins at Keene with more substantial homes. The oldest is Seth Heaton's house on Marlboro Street, No. 500, begun in 1750. David Nims's house, formerly on Washington Street, was moved in later years to No. 29 Page Street. Ephraim Dorman's house, on the street later named Baker, near Thomas Baker's tannery, was another early one in town and was built at the resettlement of Keene or shortly thereafter.

Among domestic projects considered in the period following the French and Indian War were the erection of saw and gristmills, completion of the meetinghouse, and authorization for roads and bridges. The Rev. Clement Sumner accepted a call to the Keene pulpit and was ordained on June 11, 1761, over a reorganized church of 14 male members. The pastor's salary was paid in wheat, beef, pork, corn, firewood, and other supplies at stated prices. Unlike his predecessors who were Harvard men, Rev. Sumner was a graduate of Yale. He served until 1772, when he was dismissed, though he continued to live in Keene. The church membership was about 75 at this time.

The old Westmoreland Road, later called the Hurricane Road, was laid out in 1760. In September 1761 the town voted to build a house for sick soldiers. A second cemetery, which may have been in use earlier, was authorized at Ash Swamp in 1762.

The first merchant in town was Ichabod Fisher, who would journey to his native Wrentham, Mass., on horseback once a year to replenish his stock of calico, ribbons, pins, needles, and other such basic necessities of housekeeping. His store stood on the older road to Ash Swamp, known as "Poverty Lane," near the corner of what is now School Street. Captain Isaac Wyman opened his tavern in 1762 in the elegant house he built for that purpose on Main Street, now No. 339. It was at Captain Wyman's tavern that Dartmouth College was launched with the first meeting of the trustees on October 22, 1770, under the college's founder and first president, Rev. Eleazar Wheelock. The site was chosen as the most convenient meeting place for the board members, whose homes were scattered from Connecticut to northern New Hampshire. Thomas Frink had formerly operated a

tavern just below the location chosen by Wyman. Frink's was possibly the first public house in Keene. Josiah Richardson, Ziba Hall, and Sarah Harrington also ran early taverns in the village. The Richardson Tavern on West Street, erected about 1773, stood until 1893, when it was removed for the construction of a YMCA building.

The first notice in the town meeting records of a school in Keene appears in 1764, although lots assigned for this purpose had been among the original conditions of the Massachusetts grant. Six pounds sterling was the first recorded appropriation for education in Keene, and Priscilla Ellis was the first known teacher. Her salary was three pounds thirteen shillings and one penny. In 1768 the town voted 10 pounds for the school, but classes do not appear to have been kept continuously. Four school districts were established in 1770 and others in 1771, showing the rapid growth and development of the town whose 1773 appropriation for education was 40 pounds. A bequest of one-half of his estate to the town from Amos Foster who died in 1761 was the first gift to the community, and in 1766 a legacy from Captain Nathaniel Fairbanks was allotted for educational purposes.

In the Meetinghouse, pew space was assigned according to the taxes paid by each proprietor. If the individual failed to build his pew within six months his space was given to the next highest taxpayer. A pew was provided by the town for the minister's family, the gallery and pulpit were completed, and the house fitted for use. Town meetings were held at the Meetinghouse, although often adjourned to one or another of the taverns.

The Rev. Jeremy Belknap, who passed through Keene on a journey from Dartmouth College in August 1774, was invited to preach in the local church. "The congregation pretty large and very attentive," the minister recorded in his journal. "Two prisoners in chains attended meeting; they are here under confinement for murder," he further noted. Rev. Belknap was the guest of Nathan Blake during his brief visit to Keene.

In 1766 the town had appointed Benjamin Hall as its agent to see about naming Keene as the shire town of a county division then being considered at Portsmouth, and in 1767 Josiah Willard was chosen as lobbyist. The distance being so great, and travel difficult, proposals to create smaller administrative divisions within the province culminated in the creation of five counties in 1769, among them Cheshire County, named for the British shire, and then including the territory which is now Sullivan County. Keene and Charlestown became shire towns jointly of the new division.

The first regular Keene census was compiled by order of New Hampshire authorities in October 1767, and showed a population of 430. Upon that figure and the valuation of local property, taxes were assigned from Portsmouth. Captain Josiah Willard's election as representative to the New Hampshire General Court in May 1768 was the first Keene participation in the legislative assembly of the province, 15 years after the granting of the New Hampshire charter to Keene. In 1773 the town's population was 645.

Although county divisions were established in 1769 with a sheriff and solicitor, the act did not go into effect until royal consent was secured in 1771. "His Majesty's Superior Court of Judicature" was held for the first time in Keene in September 1771. The Inferior Court of Common Pleas was first held in October, followed by the "Court of General Sessions of the Peace." The latter body with certain legislative functions was abolished in 1794. At Keene, sessions of court were held in the Meetinghouse, with the temporary removal of some of its fixtures. Terms also sat at Charlestown. A recorder of deeds and real estate was appointed, and county affairs launched although the offices were not all located in Keene itself for some years.

Typical of the pioneers who settled in Keene were Henry Ellis and his wife Melatiah, who came on horseback through the wilderness from Mendon, Mass., about 1770. They located on a partially-cleared tract in Ash Swamp with neighbors no closer than a mile away. Ellis trapped a bear on his farm soon after his arrival, and Mrs. Ellis sold her satin wedding slippers to purchase apple trees for an orchard. She was an energetic woman; she planned the home built by her husband, and in one room she kept spinning wheels and a loom where the women of the family manufactured woolen and linen cloth, table covers, and towels of various patterns. In more than one instance Mrs. Ellis wove the material for a Keene girl's wedding dress. When Farmer Ellis had the misfortune to break the metal point of his plough in the hard virgin soil, his wife saddled a horse and journeyed to Massachusetts for a new one, no small undertaking for a woman to travel the forest trails. Typical of the period, the Ellises raised a large family, some of whom moved to other settlements, while others remained in Keene. Years later when Mrs. Ellis returned to visit the first Keene homestead which she had helped her husband carve out of the wilderness, she stopped in the dooryard and, leaning on her cane, observed, "Many anxious hours I've spent upon this spot caring for my children while my husband was away to the wars," but there was no word of complaint or regret.

New Hampshire people, like those of other colonies, came to resent the special taxes and other unwelcome administrative decisions from London, especially as their communities grew and prospered and British authorities sought more financial aid in the form of taxes on sugar, molasses, legal papers, and finally tea. Schooled by experience in the French and Indian wars, colonial military companies had been maintained since at the expense of the citizen soldiers themselves. In Keene there was a unit of 117 officers and men, with an alarm list of the older and not fully able-bodied men numbering 45. Colonel Josiah Willard of Winchester commanded the military regiments of the province in the region, with Benjamin Bellows of Walpole as lieutenant colonel and Josiah Willard Jr. of Keene and Breed Batcheller of Packersfield (now Nelson) as majors.

Keene, with her neighbors, was determined to resist the newly-imposed taxes, especially the hated one on tea, although no such drastic demonstration was staged as that by the people of Boston in December 1773 at the "Boston Tea Party," when a cargo of tea was dumped into the harbor. However, tea which arrived at Portsmouth in June 1774 could not be unloaded for fear of the people's reaction and had to be shipped on to Halifax. Committees of Correspondence or Committees of Safety were authorized by the New Hampshire Assembly in 1773 to protect local interests and keep in touch with the other colonies. The result of these actions was a general congress held in Philadelphia in 1774 to consider the condition of public affairs and recommend measures upon which all could act in concert.

John Wentworth, who had succeeded his uncle Benning Wentworth as royal governor, labored to prevent appointment of Committees of Correspondence in New Hampshire and dissolved the Assembly when it refused to be subject to his will. The delegates met by their own authority despite threats from the governor, and called on all towns to send delegates to a convention at Exeter to select representatives to the Continental Congress. Lieutenant Benjamin Hall was Keene's representative to the Assembly, but he was a Loyalist, and Keene does not appear to have been represented at this First Provincial Congress.

Colonists were requested to cooperate in boycotting goods imported from the mother country, and the local committees in each town watched the conduct of all persons and businesses in their areas. Keene voters in September 1774 chose to await word from the Continental Congress sitting at Philadelphia before joining in such actions. However cautious they may have seemed in open opposition

to the Crown, the voters did authorize at this time a stock of ammunition and powder for the local militia.

Fearful of increasing colonial resistance, London issued orders prohibiting the exportation of gunpowder and military stores to America. Portsmouth patriots captured vital supplies at Fort William and Mary late in 1774, adding to the fears of Loyalists and royal officials. On the whole, Keene citizens were patriots and applauded the actions of their bolder countrymen; however, several community leaders were inclined to the Loyalist cause and used their influence to temper rebellious enthusiasm in Keene. Elijah Williams, the town's first lawyer, who had been appointed a "Justice of the Peace" by Governor Wentworth, instituted a suit against a Keene citizen in the King's name, but was compelled by a show of force from a large number of people, many of them from surrounding towns, to drop the action. The town voted in January 1775 to cooperate with the recommendations of the Continental Congress, and chose a local Committee of Inspection headed by Captain Isaac Wyman. He was also chosen to represent the town at Exeter for the selection of delegates to the next Continental Congress, and represented Keene at the Portsmouth General Assembly as well.

A convention of delegates from the various Cheshire County towns was held at Keene in late December 1774 to prepare recommendations to the Boards of Selectmen urging patriotic action.