



NEWSPAPERS

by Grace B. Prentiss

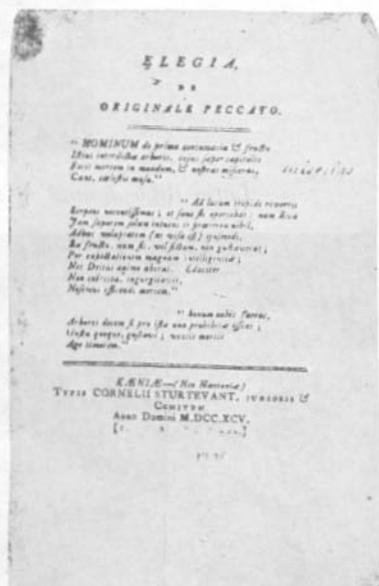
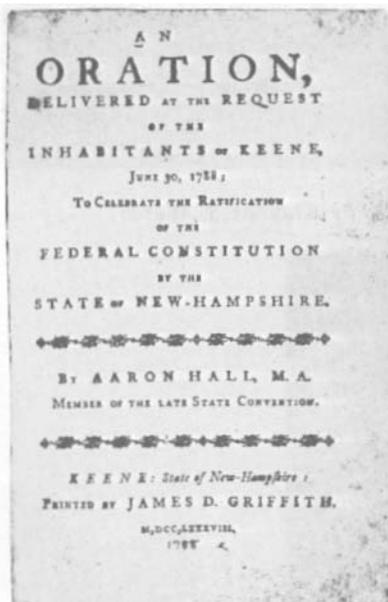
The small town newspaper is one of America's greatest heritages. Keene traces its daily paper back to March 23, 1799, when it began publication as a weekly issue. First called the *New Hampshire Sentinel*, it has been published continuously since that date. It added a daily in 1890, with the inauguration of the *Keene Evening Sentinel*, although the weekly publication continued until 1957. According to the best source of information, the *Sentinel* is the ninth oldest newspaper in the country.

However, four weeklies preceded the *Sentinel* between 1787 and 1795. The first, *The New Hampshire Recorder and Weekly Advertiser*, was established on August 7, 1787, by James Davenport Griffith. Influenced by "95 public spirited" citizens who clamored for a press in their growing community, Griffith left Boston (where he encountered difficulties over a tax on advertising and was forced to discontinue *The Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*) and set up a printing office in a small one-story wooden building on Keene's Main Street. Early the next year he was advertising "with reluctance" that those "95 public spirited customers" had yet to pay the cost of one paper. He then issued his paper in a smaller format to cut expenses. A temporary suspension of the newspaper from November 27, 1789 to March 18, 1790 failed to overcome financial troubles and he reluctantly ceased publication with the March 3, 1791 issue. Griffith had

ing the price of subscriptions; most important, newsprint had to be bought a great distance, in those days a major task as roads were almost impassable in certain seasons. Through his articles in the *Advertiser*, Griffith constantly prodded the public, reminding them that it was most important for the good of the town to establish a paper mill in the vicinity. It is believed that some credit must be given him for the establishment of a paper-making industry in nearby Alstead in 1793. But this was too late. By the end of 1792 Griffith called a halt to his second publishing venture. The next year he left Keene.

The third Keene paper, the *Columbian Informer or Cheshire Journal*, was established by Henry Blake & Co. on April 4, 1793. Henry and William Ward Blake were associated in the new firm until Henry's death on March 9, 1795. William continued the newspaper until summer, when he sold it to Cornelius Sturtevant Jr., a journeyman in his employ. With Elias Sturtevant and Abijah Wilder, the new owner formed the firm of Cornelius Sturtevant Jr. & Co., and commenced publication of *The Rising Sun* on August 11, 1795. The firm also carried on a printing trade and in 1795 brought out the only known foreign language book to be published in Keene, the 14-page *Elegia, de Originale Peccato* (17 lines of Latin quotations).

The Sturtevant Co. later branched out with a publishing and printing business in Putney, Vt., and on April 7, 1798, the Keene office



was placed in the hands of Elijah Cooper, who at one time had been an apprentice with a printing company in Walpole, N. H. Apparently the business failed to prosper, for late in the same year John Prentiss, then associated with his older brother in printing work in Leominster, Mass., heard of the situation and in February 1799 came to Keene to purchase the hand press and equipment of *The Rising Sun* from Abijah Wilder for \$250.

On March 21, 1799, his 21st birthday, young Prentiss began setting type for his first newspaper, which he named the *New Hampshire Sentinel*, a title retained for the weekly publication until 1957, when it was combined with the *Keene Evening Sentinel*. The first issue of the *Sentinel* came off the press on March 23, 1799, and was distributed to 70 subscribers at \$1.50 a year. The cash capital of the new firm was just \$5. Within six months 250 subscribers had been attracted and in two years' time the number became 500.

On the front page of that first edition of the *New Hampshire*



Latin Bible bound in Keene by Thomas S. Webb



Sentinel, under the headline "Important State Paper," was part of the report of the Congressional Committee "on the petition against the Alien and Sedition Laws." Inside there were dispatches about "peace" in Germany, "renewed war in Italy," the surrender of Malta to Nelson, a bad fire in Norfolk, Va., and an alleged poison murder case. In a single column given to advertisements appeared the offers of "two grist mills under one roof, situated well for custom," "a sawmill," "a small farm of 45 acres of land on the road leading to Westmoreland," "a good dwelling house with four rooms, good cellar, well of water and small barn—on the Boston road one mile and a half from Keene Meeting House." In the "wanted section" were requests for a "journeyman tanner and currier," "a postrider wanted immediately to circulate the *Sentinel*," and an apprentice to the printing business, 14 or 15 years of age, well recommended with a good school education "for the *Sentinel*."

It was nearly two weeks before news of the death of George Washington reached Keene to be published in the weekly paper. With the remarkable wire service developed over the years, today's news is received immediately. In 1897 the *Sentinel* became a member of a national news service, the Associated Press, but in 1965 the owners changed to United Press.

The *Sentinel* had six different homes or locations for business before the company built its own building at 55 Main Street in 1893. The paper was published from this location for 37 years. In 1930 the owners built a brick building at 60 West Street, where the *Keene Evening Sentinel* has been published since its issue of May 21, 1930.

The daily paper, the *Keene Evening Sentinel*, sold for 2¢ a copy or \$6 a year, at its inception, but the price has gradually increased to its present (1967) cost of 10¢ per copy. The number of columns in the paper has remained the same, but the amount of pages varies each day. At present Wednesdays and Thursdays offer the largest issues because of the great bulk of advertising on these days.

From its founding in 1799 to 1847 John Prentiss guided the publication. For two years (1819-1821) his brother was associated with him and from 1828 to 1834 his son, John William, worked with him. Four years later (1838) John William again joined the firm and the name J. and J. W. Prentiss was reestablished. When the founder retired in 1847, his son took in Albert Godfrey as a partner. Following the retirement of John William Prentiss in 1853 owing to ill health, Albert Godfrey, George S. Woodward, and Samuel Woodward owned the paper for six years, when Samuel Woodward's place in the part-

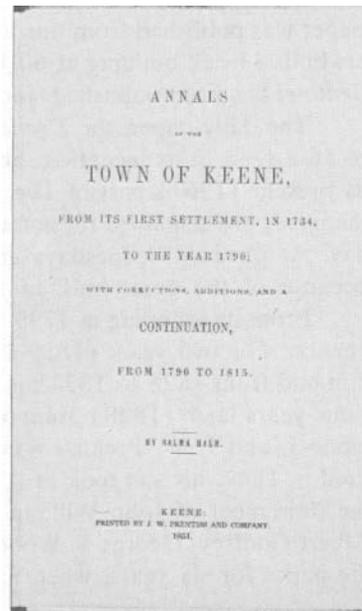
nership was taken over by Thomas Hale and Thomas C. Rand. Samuel Woodward, proprietor of the *American News*, a weekly published in Keene, agreed to unite that paper with the *Sentinel*.'

From 1865 to 1872 there was a period of unsettled ownership. Finally Clement J. Woodward bought the holdings of O. I. French and George Ticknor. In 1880 William H. Prentiss, grandson of the founder, became part owner and assumed the duties of city editor. When the business became a corporation in 1893 Bertram Ellis, William Prentiss, Thomas Rand, and Samuel Woodward were the stockholders.

In 1912 Rand sold his holdings and six years later Ellis disposed of his. From 1918 until the death of William H. Prentiss in 1923, the company was owned in equal shares by Prentiss and Woodward. With the death of Mrs. William H. Prentiss in 1935, half the ownership passed to John W. Prentiss, great-grandson of the founder. Woodward died in 1927 (Prentiss became president that year, a position he held until his death) and Woodward's shares went to his son, Paul, of Connecticut, who sold his interest in 1945 to John E. Coffin. Prentiss and Coffin were co-owners until the sudden death of Prentiss in 1953. In October of 1954 Mrs. John W. Prentiss, with her son, William H., and John Coffin, sold the newspaper to James D. Ewing and Walter C. Paine, the present owners and publishers. However, Mrs. Prentiss and



*Typical Keene bindings—
Scholar's Arithmetic, 1821
and New Arithmetic, 1827*



her son retained the commercial printing business, founded by John Prentiss in 1799, the same year that he had established the newspaper. This printing business had met with early success. In 1803 Prentiss earned \$800 for a psalm and hymn book; in 1807 he secured the copyright to Dr. Daniel Adams' *Scholar's Arithmetic*, which had seen three editions printed elsewhere. Becoming one of the most popular school texts of the era, as many as 100,000 copies were sold by Prentiss in some years. The arithmetic ultimately went into some 60 editions and reprints. A little-known fact about the school book concerns the recently highly publicized novel *Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, which has never been out of print since 1749, and for years was a "forbidden book." It seems that Isaiah Thomas of Worcester, Mass., obtained a copy of the work from London with the intention of publishing it. However, after prudent deliberation he decided against the project and rather than waste expensive paper, he had it marbled over and sold a portion of it to John Prentiss, who used it in making some copies of his eighth edition of the *Scholar's Arithmetic* in 1813. But the schoolboys of the early 19th century never did learn that the board covers of their textbooks could have taught them something other than long division.

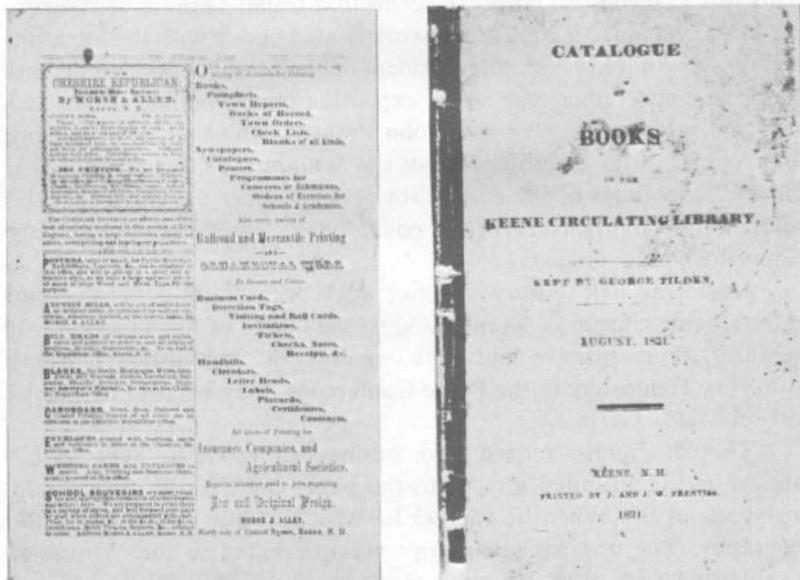
During his half century of active work, John Prentiss became one of the leading citizens of Keene, holding the offices of town clerk, town treasurer, representative and state senator. He was also a delegate from New Hampshire to the Peace Conference of 1850, held at Frankfurt-on-Main, Germany.

Though Prentiss retired from business in 1847, he kept up his interest and contributed articles to the paper until his death in 1873 at the age of 95. When he was 93 he wrote, in long hand, his autobiography. The original manuscript was presented to the Worcester Antiquarian Society by his great-granddaughter, Mrs. George Pierce Baker.

Through the years there have been a number of local shortlived periodicals and newspapers, but one paper lasted for 86 years. The *Cheshire Republican* moved to Keene from Walpole, N. H., where it had been established under a different name in 1793 and had failed twice. The first Keene issue came on November 17, 1828, under Nahum Stone as editor and proprietor. In 1831 Stone had a circulation of 730 against Prentiss' 1,150. In 1834 the paper, for a short time known as the *Cheshire County Republican and Farmer's Museum*, was owned by Benaiah Cooke, who sold it to Harvey A. Bill in 1844. Horatio Kimball purchased it from Bill in 1852. In 1865 he, in turn,

sold it to Julius N. Morse and William B. Allen. In 1878 it came under the control of its final owners, Joshua D. Colony and Sons, including Ormond E. and Oscar L. The father assumed the chief editorial work and management. It was, in spite of its name, a strong Democratic party voice, the only one in the county, and it survived until 1914.

Before his death in 1852 Benaiah Cooke, at one time publisher of the Cheshire Republican, owned several other publications, including the Cheshire Farmer, 1838-1840, a monthly paper concerned with agriculture; American Silk Growers & Agriculturist, 1836-1840, a semi-monthly; and the *Philanthropist*, 1846-1848, a temperance paper. This latter publication was purchased in 1848 by Otis F. R. Waite,



Job printing advertisement 1867

Early library catalogue

who carried it on under the name of *The Spirit of the Times* until 1850, when he sold it back to Cooke, who re-named it *The American News*. It was known as a "free soil and temperance" paper. After Cooke's death the paper was sold at auction to Samuel Woodward, who published it from 1852 to 1855. In that year it merged with the *New Hampshire Sentinel*. Another of Cooke's short-lived publications was the *Free Soil Palladium*, a weekly that began and ended in 1848.

There are two papers currently published in Keene. One is the *Keene Evening Sentinel* and the other the *Keene Shopper News*. The

latter was established in 1959 by Gabriel M. Shakour of Shakour Publishers, Inc., and is primarily an advertising publication. With a controlled circulation of over 18,000, the *Keene Shopper News* is delivered weekly without charge to every family residing in Keene and 42 surrounding towns. It began as an eight-page paper and has grown to approximately 36 to 40 pages, featuring local and county news. In 1967 the National Association of Advertising Publishers granted it top award as the most improved paper over nearly 300 competing publications.

At the present time the *Keene Evening Sentinel* is published six days a week by James D. Ewing and Kenneth F. Zwicker, assistant publisher. The paper averages 14 pages a day and is an eight column 15½ x 23 inch page. The circulation is 9,194, with 96 newsboys who deliver the paper in Keene. There are eight truck routes which cover the towns in Cheshire County and a few towns in Sullivan and Hillsboro Counties. The company employs approximately 48 people, seven of whom are reporters or staff writers under Ralph W. Newell, editor, and Frank Barndollar, managing editor. There are seven linotype machines in use every day and the paper rolls off a Duplex Tubular Press printed from stereo-type plates.

Over the years the *Keene Evening Sentinel* has won both national and regional awards, including prizes for typographical excellence, front page makeup, and editorials. In 1961 it received an Award of Honorable Mention in the Svellon Brown Award competition for "meritorious and distinguished service to its public."