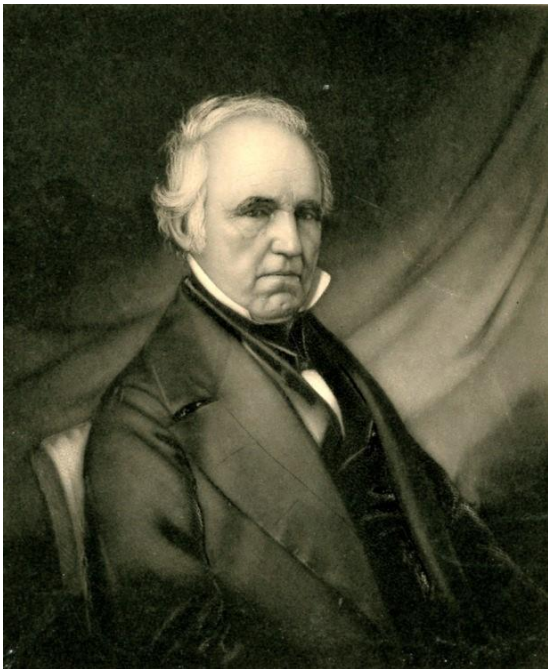


## What is a Hero? by Alan F. Rumrill

There has been considerable discussion of coronavirus “heroes” in recent months in connection with the current pandemic. From doctors and nurses to policemen and grocery store workers, many have been rightly hailed as heroes during the dangerous months of the epidemic. But what is a hero? Formal definitions suggest that a hero is a person who is admired for courage, ingenuity, strength, or outstanding achievements. Some definitions add that these traits are demonstrated in the face of danger. The word hero originated from an ancient Greek word that means “protector” or “defender.”

Keene has been the site of heroic actions or the home of true heroes in the past. Three historic examples will illustrate the courage, strength or achievements of some local heroes from the region’s past. These three people are remembered for their feats as a doctor, a soldier and a heroic brother.



Amos Twitchell was born in Dublin, New Hampshire in 1781. He grew up on the family farm there and attended the village school until he went to the New Ipswich Academy to prepare for college. He went on to receive both his M.D. degree and an M.A. from Dartmouth in 1805.

Two years later Dr. Twitchell was living and practicing in Marlborough, New Hampshire when he was called upon to attend to a young militia member named John Taggart who had been wounded in a mock battle at a militia muster. A pistol had been discharged too close to his head and the discharge of the gun had caused considerable damage to the bone and muscle on the right side of his neck and face. Twitchell found that Taggart’s external carotid artery had been damaged, but was not bleeding heavily. The external carotid artery supplies blood to the neck and face.

The doctor treated the man for several days, by which time he began to recover. After several more days of treatment and healing, there was only a small wound of two or three inches in diameter. The carotid artery lay at the bottom of the wound and Dr. Twitchell feared that it might rupture. He warned the young man’s mother of this possibility when he visited the house one day. As Twitchell was leaving the yard that day, the mother yelled that her son was bleeding badly.

Twitchell returned to the house and found that the artery had ruptured; blood was spurting three to four feet in the air. He stopped the flow by using his left hand to hold the artery against the base of the skull. The doctor then removed the damaged portion of the artery and was able to suture the blood vessel. It leaked a bit thereafter, but Twitchell packed the wound

with a sponge. When the packing was removed a few days later the artery had healed. The wound itself healed and Taggart eventually recovered.

Twitchell was not performing a procedure that he had read about in a textbook or learned about in class, because only two other doctors had performed this surgery successfully a short time before and neither one had published their methods. The young doctor had successfully performed a delicate and difficult new procedure with the help of only the poor man's mother. Three years later Dr. Twitchell moved to Keene where he practiced and lived the rest of his life. He became one of the state's leading physicians, pioneering or improving upon numerous medical procedures.

More than 100 years later a young Keene resident, George Dilboy, enlisted to serve in World War I. In July of 1918 he found himself fighting in a major offensive in northeastern France. On the afternoon of July 18 Dilboy and his commander had advanced to a railroad embankment where their platoon was trying to gain some ground along the front. They were fired upon by a machine gun 100 yards away. Dilboy stood up, fully exposed, and opened fire upon the machine gun position. Not having success, he rushed through a wheat field toward the gun. When he was 25 yards from the gun he fell with several bullet wounds, his right leg almost severed above the knee. He was not defeated, however, as he continued to fire at the machine gun from a prone position, killing two of the enemy and dispersing the rest of the gun crew.

Dilboy died a short time later, having sacrificed his own life to save his comrades. George Dilboy was the only New Hampshire resident to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor during World War I. The Medal of Honor is the country's highest military award for valor.



It was less than 16 years later that another Keene resident acted courageously on the spur-of-the-moment to save a life. On the morning of April 13, 1934 the Keene fire alarm rang. The top floors of the Bank Block, at the corner of Roxbury Street and Central Square, were engulfed in smoke and flames.

Twenty-two year old Addie Carter lived on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and rushed into the corridor to warn others in the building about the fire. She then tried to escape down the stairs, but they were ablaze. With burns to her arms, back and hair, she returned to her room. She went to the window and screamed for help. She climbed out onto her 4<sup>th</sup> floor ledge to escape the approaching flames. The fire department did not have a safety net or a ladder long enough to reach her.

Many people on the street heard her cries and rushed to the scene. One of those people was Addie's brother Wright Carter who had been on Main Street when the alarm rang and came to investigate. As he arrived on the scene Addie was hanging from her window ledge, with the crowd screaming encouragement to her. A few seconds later she lost her grip and hurtled toward the ground, and almost certain death four stories below. Her brother positioned himself below the window and tried to catch her as she fell. Both of them crumpled to the ground when she struck. They were rushed to the hospital. Addie was treated for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree burns, but neither she nor her brother were injured by her fall from the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. The top floors of the Bank Block were destroyed, but Addie Carter survived and her brother Wright was hailed as a hero.

Amos Twitchell, George Dilboy and Wright Carter were only three of many local residents who have carried out heroic acts in the history of the region. They fit the very definition of the word "hero" by demonstrating courage, ingenuity, strength, or outstanding achievement, and they all acted quickly in a time of urgent need. When we consider these traits, it is obvious that many local heroes have stepped forward and displayed similar characteristics during the coronavirus pandemic to help their fellow citizens in a time of need.