

Walter Ney Keener

Walter Ney Keener started out to be a lawyer and a politician but gave up law for the editorial office and wound up working in a half-dozen North Carolina editorial offices. Few journalists saw as much of North Carolina as Keener.

Keener graduated from Wake Forest College with a law degree and went into the newspaper business, co-owning the hometown paper, the weekly Lincoln County News in Lincolnton. He edited the paper on the side while building up his list of law clients. He served a term in the General Assembly as representative from Lincoln County.

In 1909, bit solidly by the newspaper bug, Keener abandoned the law. He first went to the Raleigh Times, where he worked as city editor for two years before moving for a year to the Durham Sun as both managing editor and city editor

He moved to Charlotte in 1913 to become city editor of the Charlotte Chronicle, and, only after a few months, he was on the go again, this time to the High Point Enterprise as editor. After another two years, he went to yet another North Carolina newsroom, taking a position as editor of the Wilmington Dispatch.

Keener's whirlwind nine-year tour of the state's dailies ran its course in 1918, when he returned to Durham and the editorship of the Durham Morning Herald. When the company acquired the afternoon paper, The Durham Sun, he became editor of both newspapers, a post he held until his death 13 years later.

A man of wide interests and strong opinions about his community, Keener put the Durham newspapers firmly on the side of economic development, improved education and modern local government. His editorials were described as "forceful and effective." Raleigh's News & Observer said, "Frank Keener was frank, independent and courageous, with a deep aversion to shame and pretense wherever it appeared."

Keener was an active civic clubber and a devoted alumnus of his alma mater in nearby Wake Forest. When he died at 51, he was buried in the Wake Forest Cemetery.

By Roy Parker Jr.

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