

Keener, Walter Ney ^[1]

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by C. Sylvester Green ^[2], 1988

2 Aug. 1880–25 Nov. 1931

Walter Ney Keener, newspaper editor, was born in rural Lincoln County ^[3], the son of Elijah Washington and Rhoda Caroline Loftin Keener. After attending local schools, he entered Wake Forest College ^[4] from which he was graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in 1902. Returning to Wake Forest for another year, he received the bachelor of laws degree in 1903 and passed the state bar examination in the late summer. In his home county he opened an office in Lincolnton, and in the fall purchased the *Lincoln County News* in partnership with A. L. Quickel; he edited the paper while establishing his law practice. In 1906 he bought his partner's interest but sold the paper in 1907 when he formed a law partnership with Walter Feimster. In the legislative session of 1907–8, Keener represented Lincoln County in the North Carolina House of Representatives ^[5].

In 1909 he abandoned the law in favor of journalism and was in succession city editor of the *Raleigh Times* (1909–11), managing and city editor of the *Durham Sun* (1912–13), city editor of the *Charlotte Chronicle* (1913–14), editor of the *High Point Enterprise* (1914–16), and editor of the *Wilmington Dispatch* (1917–18). In 1918 he returned to Durham to become editor of the *Durham Morning Herald*; when the Durham Herald Company acquired the afternoon newspaper, the *Durham Sun*, he became editor of both papers, a post he held with distinction until his death.

Keener was noted for his pertinent and incisive editorials, and for the comprehensive coverage the papers gave all areas of news. An editorial comment in the Raleigh *News and Observer* ^[6] described him as "a man of inquiring mind, ready decisions, strong opinions, and as an editorial writer [he] expressed himself forcefully and effectively—Walter Keener was frank, independent, and courageous, with a deep aversion to sham and pretense wherever it appeared."

He was a member of the First Presbyterian ^[7] Church, Durham, and participated in many of its lay programs; a Mason ^[8]; and a charter member of the Kiwanis Club of Durham, of which he was secretary for six years. For a number of years he served on the executive committee of the North Carolina School for the Blind and Deaf. ^[9] Although an active Democrat, he never ran for political office after beginning his newspaper career.

On 2 Feb. 1904 Keener married Mamie E. Dunn of Wake Forest, and they were the parents of two sons, Walter Ney, Jr., and John Washington. She died in 1918. Four years later he married Ruth Duhling of Durham and they had one son, Edward Bruce.

Keener died in Durham at age fifty-two and was buried in the cemetery at Wake Forest.

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Subjects:

Biographies ^[10]

Lawyers ^[11]

Newspapers and magazines ^[12]

Public officials ^[13]

Writers, journalists, and editors ^[14]

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