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Remembering our History

June 2019

Rev. Jonathan Fisher: A Frontier Minister who made a Difference

In 1762, a handful of New Englanders settled in what eventually became Blue Hill, Maine, a harbored spot just east of Penobscot Bay. After the Revolutionary War, the New England frontier moved northward from the Boston area and by the first US Census in 1790 there were 274 residents in Blue Hill. The local Congregational Church managed with part-time clergy for nearly 20 years, but finally in 1796 they called a pastor named Jonathan Fisher (1768-1847) who served Blue Hill for forty years.

Fisher was born in New Braintree, Massachusetts in 1768 and grew up in the home of his uncle who was a minister. As a young man he explored several vocations, but his intellectual gifts led him to study for ministry at Harvard in 1788.

He was “*industrious almost beyond belief, and possessed of an unflagging physical vitality, he relieved his omnipresent poverty and increased the few hundred dollars of his meager salary by farming his own acres, concocting medical remedies, braiding numberless straw hats, sawing out buttons from the bones of farm animals, and even of dead household pets, painting names on vessels or painting sleighs (at \$2.50) each, making pumps, chairs, chests, hair-combs, tables, bureaus, bedsteads, cradles, even drumsticks for the local militia (at 25 cents a pair), and by repairing much of the shaky furniture in Blue Hill. And, with all these labors, he found time to write many poems, and several books.*”

Fisher was a student of science, botany, the arts, classical language and Calvinist theology. He wrote sermons and sketched and painted. In 1917 his scientific notes on sunspot activity in 1816-17, attracted the attention of modern scientists at the *American Geophysical Union* a hundred years later. Throughout his ministry many young men who were unable to afford formal education, lived in the Blue Hill parsonage and studied with Fisher. His impact on churches in Maine was significant.

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