



Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill, Maine: Commerce, Culture, and Community on the Eastern Frontier

Kevin D. Murphy

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This book examines the life of Jonathan Fisher (1768–1847), a native of Braintree, Massachusetts, and graduate of Harvard College who moved in his late twenties to Blue Hill, Maine, where he embarked on a multifaceted career as a pioneer minister, farmer, entrepreneur, and artist. Drawing on a vast record of letters, diaries, sermons, drawings, paintings, and buildings, Kevin D. Murphy reconstructs Fisher's story and uses it to explore larger issues of material culture, visual culture, and social history during the early decades of the American republic.

Murphy shows how Fisher, as pastor of the Congregational church in Blue Hill from 1796 to 1837, helped spearhead the transformation of a frontier settlement on the eastern shores of the Penobscot Bay into a thriving port community; how he used his skills as an architect, decorative painter, surveyor, and furniture maker not only to support himself and his family, but to promote the economic growth of his village; and how the fluid professional identity that enabled Fisher to prosper on the eastern frontier could only have existed in early America where economic relations were far less rigidly defined than in Europe.

Among the most important artifacts of Jonathan Fisher's life is the house he designed and built in Blue Hill. The Jonathan Fisher Memorial, as it is now known, serves as a point of departure for an examination of social, religious, and cultural life in a newly established village at the turn of the nineteenth century. Fisher's house provided a variety of spaces for agricultural and domestic work, teaching, socializing, artmaking, and more.

Through the eyes of Jonathan Fisher, we see his family grow and face the challenges of the new century, responding to religious, social, and economic change?sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing. We appreciate how an extraordinarily energetic man was able to capitalize on the wide array of opportunities offered by the frontier to give shape to his personal vision of community.

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